

University of Strathclyde
School of Applied Social Sciences

**Learning lifelines: a study of learners' perceptions of participation
in and progression from community based adult learning in
Scotland**

by

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**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

2011

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Acknowledgements

My thanks go to:

the learners who gave their time so willingly to this research. Without their enthusiastic participation, this study could not have been completed. I am grateful for their contributions and the interest they took in this study;

my supervisors, Dr Rowena Murray, Dr Ian Finlay and Dr Graham Connelly. I am grateful for their constructive feedback and advice, and I acknowledge their helpful contributions;

my colleagues in the Community Education section for their encouragement throughout this long process;

my parents; and my sons, Neil and Craig, whose love and support have been unwavering;

and especially Ken, for his endless patience, support and love.

Presentations and publications related to this work

McIntyre, J. (2006, November). *Progression from community based adult learning in Scotland*. Presentation as part of teaching exchange to Sköndal University College, Stockholm.

McIntyre, J. (2007, June). *A study of learners' perspectives on progression in community based adult learning*. Paper presented at Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning Conference, Stirling.

McIntyre, J. (2008). Community based adult learning: learners' perceptions of participation and progression. *Concept* 18(2): 11-14.

McIntyre, J. (2008, March). *Community based adult learning: researching progression in the context of learners' lives*. Paper presented at SERA Conference, Perth.

McIntyre, J. (2009, March). *Whose knowledge? Learners' perceptions of progression from community based adult learning in Scotland*. Paper presented at ESREA Life History and Biography Network Conference, Milan.

McIntyre, J. (2009, June). *Community based adult learning: policy, practice and progression*. Paper presented at the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning Conference, Stirling.

McIntyre, J. (2009, June). *Community based adult learning: policy, practice and progression*. Poster session presented at the University of Strathclyde Research day, Glasgow.

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ABSTRACT

Learner progression is important in UK and Scottish policy and practice, and a role to support progression has been identified for community based adult learning (cbal). However, little is known about cbal and its potential to support progression, nor have participants' views been included in debates about the potential contribution of cbal to their progression. This study investigated the role of cbal in the context of learners' lives and explored learners' perceptions of progression.

I undertook two semi-structured life history interviews with 10 cbal participants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and I analysed the data in three stages. First, I created life stories for each participant. Next, I searched the data for themes for each learner. Then, I wrote commentaries for individual participants, which acted as a bridge to the third stage, the identification of cross-cutting themes.

The study revealed participants' diverse perceptions of progression, some of which matched the goals of policy, while others suggested broader interpretations of progression, linked to learners' personal and social lives. Analysis of the life stories showed that cbal supported the development of forms of capital, as well as health and well-being for some learners, and the recovery of lost capital for others.

The findings point to cbal as a form of "lifeline work" that supports learners' progression and is closely connected to their lives. The Life History Progression Analysis developed for this study provides a new approach to measuring what matters to learners in order both to evidence progression and take account of learners' contexts in decisions about cbal provision. This study suggests the need for further research in three areas: possible connections between ill-health, recovery and participation in cbal, the potential for cbal to support learners experiencing transitions and the experiences of disadvantaged learners.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Community based adult learning

Community based adult learning (cbal) is an important form of adult education provision. There have been several definitions of cbal over the last two decades (Communities Scotland, 2003), but in 2003 a report published by the Centre for Community Learning and Development, and Adult Literacy and Numeracy within Communities Scotland provided a useful definition which was based on three earlier definitions of this type of learning:

Learning opportunities (mainly targeted at excluded/disadvantaged groups and individuals) provided in local communities, developed substantially in negotiation with participants (both in terms of content and delivery), and which empower them to address relevant issues in their lives, and that of their community (p. 9).

In Scotland, community based adult learning is organised and offered as part of Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision.

Background and context

Policy

CLD is defined in policy as: “learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities using a range of formal and informal methods. A common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants” (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 7). This area of work is seen in Scottish policy as having a crucial role in contributing to Scottish Government priorities of lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship (Scottish Executive, 2004).

Lifelong learning, the recognition that learning is a continuous process throughout one’s life, was established as a central strand of educational policy in the UK in the mid 1990s, when the concept first came to the attention of governments in Europe

and the UK (Tett, 2010). Since that time, a key role has been identified for lifelong learning in Scotland, also. Within Scottish policy community based learning opportunities for adults are described as being part of the post-compulsory “learning system” in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2007c, p. 21), and this type of adult learning is acknowledged as contributing to the lifelong learning agenda (Scottish Executive, 2003, 2004; Scottish Government, 2007c; Scottish Office, 1998b, 1999). In the Scottish context, community based adult learning is provided alongside work with young people and community work, and contributes to lifelong learning.

Progression is a central concern in Scottish lifelong learning policy, and there is recognition of the importance of a “range of progression pathways” for learners (Scottish Government, 2007c, p. 24). In Scottish policy documents, progression from informal to formal learning or enhanced employment opportunities is emphasised (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007c).

In the last decade, there has been an increasing focus in policy on the outcomes of CLD (Tett, 2010), and this affects community based adult learning, as part of this area of work. The Scottish Government has been concerned to ensure that there is measurable impact in relation to their stated priorities, in return for the allocation of resources (Scottish Government, 2007c). However, as cbal is developed in dialogue with participants to meet their identified needs, the outcomes of participation can be long-term and difficult to measure (Communities Scotland and Scottish Executive, 2007). This means that in the context of increasing accountability for public expenditure and potential cuts to funding, there is a risk that the value of cbal and its potential role in supporting learner progression will be overlooked in policy.

Research

As well as being important in policy, community based adult learning has been an area of interest for researchers and commentators in recent years. In some studies, cbal has been addressed as part of the range of learning opportunities for adults (Blair et al., 1993; Gallacher et al., 2000; Schuller et al., 2004). However, there are relatively few in which community based adult learning was the focus of the analysis. The research that has been undertaken into this area (Communities

Scotland, 2003; McGivney, 1999, 2003; Morrell et al., 2004) has highlighted important outcomes for learners as well as the need for further research. Furthermore, recent Scottish studies have drawn attention to the need to investigate learners' perspectives in order to enhance understanding of the potential role of adult learning in learners' lives (Communities Scotland, 2003; MacLachlan et al., 2008).

Professional experience

In my current professional role as a lecturer in community education at the University of Strathclyde, I teach the student elective courses on community based adult learning. The reading that I undertook in preparation for this responsibility raised my awareness of contrasting perspectives on the role of this type of adult learning, as well as the need for more research. However, my interest in cbal had been established earlier, in my work as a professional community educator, based in a variety of geographical locations in the West of Scotland.

Prior to becoming a lecturer, I worked for sixteen years in various posts in community education. Much of this work was in the field of community based adult learning, developing and delivering learning opportunities in local communities, especially in geographical areas identified in policy as priorities for funding. As a practitioner I had seen the important role that participation in cbal can play in learners' lives and I had worked to support learners' progression towards their goals. However, part of my experience as a practitioner was that I felt sometimes that this important work was marginalised and underfunded. Despite being described as "the third main sector of publicly-funded learning" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 27), the proportion of Government resources directed towards cbal was small in comparison with other types of adult education.

Rationale for the study

The background and context that I have outlined above underpinned the rationale for this study. I identified four reasons why it was important to undertake research into cbal in Scotland. The first reason was rooted in my professional interest in cbal, and this was the starting-point for my study. As a practitioner I had a sense that there were important outcomes of participation in cbal for learners and that these were not

always recognised by policy-makers and funders of provision. However, this was a perception based on personal experience and, at that time, did not come from systematic research.

The second reason was that the academic literature pointed to the need to know more about cbal. As very little research had been undertaken in which cbal was the focus of the investigation, there was a need for a study that facilitated an in-depth examination of participation in cbal, as well as the potential for cbal to support learners' progression in the context of their lives.

My reading of recent research and my professional experience combined to provide the third reason for this study. McGivney (2002) highlighted that learners' views were missing from debates in policy and research about the role and potential contribution of cbal. However, in my experience as a community educator, many learners had been able to describe the role that cbal had played in their lives. There was a need for a study that explored participation in and progression from cbal from the learners' point of view in order that their perspectives could be added to considerations about this area of work. Their perception of the role that cbal had played in their lives was important in the sense that cbal was developed and provided with and for them.

Current UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning provided the fourth reason for this study. My initial analysis suggested that the contribution of cbal to the lifelong learning agenda was recognised in policy. However, there was a need to investigate cbal in the context of the increasing focus in policy on the outcomes and impact of publicly-funded provision. Although not easy to measure, it was important to explore participation in and progression from cbal, especially in light of its potential vulnerability in policy, as one part of CLD. This was necessary in order to ensure that the contribution of cbal to policy priorities continued to be acknowledged.

Thesis summary

In chapter one, I review UK and Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning, as well as the academic literature, in more detail, in order to provide the background to this study. I argue that, although there has been much research on a range of adult

learning opportunities in the UK in recent years, not enough is known about the specific role played by Scottish cbal in learners' lives. In this chapter, I describe the aims of the study: to examine the potential role of cbal in the context of learners' lives, to explore learners' perceptions of progression, and to investigate learners' experiences of participation in cbal in relation to Scottish policy on lifelong learning and CLD.

In chapter two, I describe the interpretive approach that I adopted in this study and I discuss the constructionist epistemology that underpinned the research. I examine the lessons learned from a pilot study that I undertook, and I argue that a life history approach was an appropriate method for the main investigation into learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal. In this chapter I explain how I prepared for each stage of the study, and I describe the steps I took in the collection of the data over a period of one year. I developed Life History Progression Analysis in this study, an innovative approach to data analysis. There were three stages of analysis, which I carried out over two years, and these are described in detail. The chapter includes an explanation of the decisions I made about methodological and ethical issues as they arose.

In chapter three, I present the life stories that I created from the lifelines and learning diagrams in the first stage of the data analysis. The life stories are an integral part of the study in the sense that they were created in collaboration with the learners and had been checked and agreed with them. They are presented in their entirety in order to show how the learners defined the role of participation in, and progression from cbal. Furthermore, understanding the context of the learners' lives is central to the argument of this thesis, in that it was important for readers to know about the learners' lives in order to understand the next stages of analysis. The life stories are accompanied by a postscript that is a record of information provided by the learners after their stories had been agreed with them.

In the next three chapters, I move from the learners' individual life stories to common themes in the learners' descriptions of their participation in cbal, and I present the main findings of this study. In the chapters I discuss the themes of human and social capital, health and well-being, and progression that I identified in the

bridging commentaries, developed in the second stage of the analysis. The three chapters are linked. For example, the thematic analysis in stage three of the analysis process suggests that participation in cbal can support the development of forms of capital for some learners. In some instances increased social capital can contribute to a sense of well-being. This is explored in the next chapter. The knowledge gained about the role of cbal in relation to forms of capital and health and well-being underpins the analysis of the theme of progression in the sense that learner progression is explored against the background of these outcomes of their participation.

In the thematic analysis in chapter four I investigate the themes of accreditation and qualifications, as well as the theme of social relationships identified in the chart that I created at the start of the third stage of analysis. These themes are analysed in relation to definitions in the literature on forms of capital, and I examine the extent to which cbal supported the development and recovery of human and social capital for some learners in this study. In this chapter the interrelationship between forms of capital is discussed in the context of Coleman's (1988) work in this area. In this chapter I argue that participation in cbal can support the development and recovery of forms of capital for some learners. Social capital has been linked to subjective well-being in the literature on adult learning (Schuller et al., 2004), and this is investigated further in chapter five.

In the thematic analysis in chapter five, I investigate the themes of health and well-being in depth. The learners' life stories and bridging commentaries suggested that many of the learners in this study had experienced ill-health, and that this was linked to their participation in cbal. This is discussed in relation to components of health and well-being identified in the literature on adult learning. The chapter includes analysis of the learners' descriptions of some negative aspects of their participation in cbal, and concludes with a discussion of the links between social capital and health and well-being for the learners in this study, as well as implications for practice and research.

In chapter six, I build on the knowledge gained from the thematic analysis about the role of cbal in the learners' lives in chapters four and five, in order to enhance

understanding of progression as defined by the learners. Increased or recovered capital, as well as improved health and well-being were linked to learners' progression in the context of their lives. In this chapter I undertake progression analysis, in order to explore in depth the learners' perceptions in relation to four types of progression: economic, educational, personal and social. I consider the extent to which the learners progressed towards their goals during the one-year period of my contact with them. The study uncovered perceptions of the four types of progression that were closely linked to the learners' personal circumstances. In this chapter I introduce the concept of "learning lifelines" to show both that cbal can support learners to move beyond limiting personal situations, and that it is lifeline work that is connected with learners' lives.

In chapter seven, I move from the learners' descriptions of participation in and progression from cbal to a discussion of the findings of this study in relation to UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning and CLD. In order to explore cbal and policy in depth, I draw on the life story of one of the learners in this study, chosen because of its potential to highlight both commonalities and contrasts between learners' perspectives and those of policy-makers. In the last part of the chapter I consider the extent to which progression in policy, defined as moving to formal learning or into paid employment, was achieved for the learners in this study.

In chapter eight, I examine the approach I adopted for the study, and discuss what the learners told me about their experiences of participating in the research. In the first part of the chapter, I assess the influence of my experience as a professional community educator on the methods I used, and I evaluate their effectiveness in collecting useful data. In the second part, I explore the experiences of participating in the study described by some of the learners. I developed an original way of undertaking life history research for this study in order to capture the complexities of learners' experiences of cbal, and I argue that it can be an effective approach to researching community based adult learning.

In the final chapter, I draw conclusions from the study. I make the case that this study contributes to knowledge about cbal in three main ways. First, the learners' perspectives on progression in this research contribute to the work of MacLachlan et

al. (2008) who defined progression in their study of adults' literacy learning primarily as moving forward in learning. In this study the learners' perceptions were of moving forward in their personal and social lives. Second, it confirms for cbal what has been established for other types of adult learning (Schuller et. al, 2004) in relation to the first aim of the study. Specifically, it shows that cbal has a role in supporting social capital and health outcomes for learners. Third, this study builds on what is known about progression from cbal (McGivney, 1999, 2003). It introduces the concept of cbal as a "lifeline" that supports learners' progression. Furthermore, this study shows that cbal is integral to "learners' lifelines" in the sense that participation in and progression from cbal are bound up with learners' lives.

In addition, the innovative approach to the analysis in this study offers a new way of providing evidence of the role and contribution of cbal, as well as progression for learners. The approach that I developed for this study, which I have called Life History Progression Analysis, suggests a way of measuring what matters to learners in cbal, at the same time as meeting the demands in policy for evidence of outcomes and progression.

In this chapter I also examine the limitations of the research. The study is small in scale, and therefore it is not possible to make generalisations about cbal from the findings. However, this potential limitation is off-set by the rich data that I was able to collect through my close involvement with the learners over a period of one year. Furthermore, I checked the final versions of the life stories with the learners in order to ensure that my interpretations were trustworthy to them. The study is interpretive, and so the data are always open to further interpretation, but I have worked to create an account of cbal that is convincing to readers and useful to policy-makers and practitioners.

In the last section of this chapter, I consider the implications of this study for policy and practice. This study suggests the need for broader interpretations of progression from cbal in policy. The study shows that, although the learners' perceptions of progression might focus on personal and social progression at one stage in their participation, they might move towards the goals of policy in terms of formal learning and paid employment at later stages. However, this does not mean that the

principle of progression from cbal should be deferred. As this life history study shows, cbal can support learners' progression from their own starting-points, however basic, or advanced these might be.

In relation to practice, the study emphasises the continuing need to be alert to potential barriers to participation and progression experienced by learners. However, the learning environments that were the focus of this study were effective in supporting learners towards their goals. This study suggests a way for practitioners to demonstrate learner progression, defined in learners' terms, as well as outcomes of participation in cbal that matter to learners. Finally, I suggest three areas for future research into cbal: health issues, learners living through transitions, and 'hard to reach' learners, experiencing disadvantage and exclusion.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature on community education, later Community Learning and Development, and lifelong learning in order to place my study in the context of policy and other academic work in this field. I show how community based adult learning has been affected by two strands of policy development over the last three decades, and I identify contrasting perspectives in the literature on the role of adult learning. I argue that, although there has been much research on adult learning in recent years, relatively little is known about the specific role played by cbal in learners' lives. Finally, I outline the aims of this study.

For the initial search for this review, I used three abstract databases: International ERIC, which includes the British and Australian Education Indexes, as well as the index of theses for both countries; Cambridge Scientific Abstracts, using ERIC, which produced literature from the USA, and the social science section of the Web of Knowledge. Key words used for the search were adult learning, community learning and informal learning. These were used in a variety of combinations with progression, outcomes and impact. The studies included in this review were selected on the basis of their relevance to my study, either in relation to the topic of community based adult learning, or the methods to be used.

In addition to searching abstract databases, I accessed information concerning current research through attendance at conferences and seminars (see Appendix A). At these events I learned from other researchers about their studies of adult learning, which I followed up afterwards. For example, I searched the review of the work of the Centre for Research into Lifelong Learning (CRL) in Stirling (CRL, 2007), and read the publications that were related to my study. Also, I checked the websites for the Learning Lives Project (www.learninglives.org) and the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (www.esrea.org) regularly to ensure that I remained abreast of adult education research.

In addition, I read relevant academic journals. These provided information on current research, and the authors' reference lists led in turn to further material.

While much has been written about the broad area of adult and lifelong learning, the literature specifically on cbal in Scotland is limited. For this reason I have engaged extensively with the work of Tett (2006, 2010; Tett & MacLachlan, 2007) because the questions, methods and discussions in her work are especially relevant to this study, which focuses on Scottish community based adult learning.

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first places my study in the context of international, UK and Scottish policies on community education and lifelong learning. In the second section, I discuss contrasting perspectives on the role of community based adult learning, and establish the theoretical perspective that underpins this study. Finally, in section three, I examine related research, and set my study in the context of other empirical work.

Section one: community based adult learning, progression and policy.

In this section, I set community based adult learning in the context of international, UK and Scottish policies from 1975-2010. Policy decisions have affected adult and lifelong learning in other countries. For example, Slater (2009) pointed to the risks for adult and community education (ACE) in New Zealand of a policy development in which all adult learning provision has become part of one integrated system. Others (Alheit & Dausien, 2002) have discussed the development of the concept of lifelong learning across Europe. However, in this review, although the influence of policy developments in Europe is included, the main focus is the UK, especially Scotland. The reason for this is that it is this area of policy that has affected the type of learning opportunities that are at the heart of this study. As Martin (1996) observed, community education "has developed in a distinctive way" in Scotland (p. 131). This is as a result of policy developments, described in detail below, that mean the way in which adult education is organised, funded and delivered as part of community education is specific to the Scottish context.

Educational policy, like all government agendas, is affected by the ideologies, priorities and commitments of the administration at any given time. As governments

have changed during the period reviewed here, policy as it affects cbal has evolved. In this section I consider varying UK perspectives on the roles of cbal, as well as definitions of progression in policy.

In common with other parts of education, cbal is influenced by many policy agendas (Edward & Coffield, 2007). In particular, cbal is affected by policy on the economy, social inclusion, citizenship, further education and health. However, cbal lies between two main strands of educational policy in Scotland, and I examine the role of cbal provision identified in policy documents related to these.

Cooke (2006) traces the history of adult education in Scotland from 1707, when religious considerations provided the impetus for organised education for adults (p. 15). During the nineteenth century, a tradition of radical education for working-class adults was established (Barr, 2007), alongside a “respectable tradition” in which adult education was provided by the wealthy to provide a skilled workforce and encourage discipline among the poor (Tett, 2010, p.7). Since then, across the UK, opportunities for adults to learn have been provided by a wide range of organisations. These include the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), and the University Extension Movement, as well as local authorities and voluntary organisations. However, Martin (1996) noted that, in Scotland, university extramural departments and the WEA were dependent on local government funding, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the UK, where they had been granted Responsible Body status, entitling them to direct government funding. This highlights the role of local government in supporting adult education in Scotland, and shows that the development of adult education in Scotland was distinct from that in England and Wales as a result of structural differences in the funding and delivery of provision.

Community Education in Scotland

Adult education therefore, has a long and varied history and tradition. However, in order to ensure that this review of policy is relevant and manageable, and to place cbal in the context of current policy, I chose 1975 as my starting point. This was the year that the Committee of Inquiry, chaired by Kenneth Alexander, reported on its review of adult education in Scotland (SED, 1975). Two aspects of this Inquiry make

it an appropriate starting point. Firstly, the remit of the Alexander committee was limited to non-vocational adult education provided by local authorities (Martin, 1996) – the type of learning opportunities that are the focus of this study. Secondly, it was as a result of the Committee’s report, commonly known as the Alexander Report, that CEBAL, as I have defined it in this study, came to be organised and delivered as part of community education (Tett, 2006).

The committee chaired by Alexander was charged with considering “the aims appropriate to voluntary leisure time courses for adults which are educational but not specifically vocational” (SED, 1975, p. vi). It was to review adult education, and make recommendations for future provision. Within the report, four aims for adult education were described. The first of these was to provide opportunities for adults to “develop their capacities for a full and rich personal and social life” (p. 26). Helping adults to access information such as consumer and health information was another aim. Encouraging acceptance of “dissenting groups” (p. 26) in a pluralist society was a third aim, and the final aim was that adult education should support change by encouraging adults to become involved in decision-making processes (SED, 1975). In relation to this, a clear role for adult education was identified as part of the community development process, although it was acknowledged that up to that point the youth and community service had been more involved in community development work than practitioners working in adult education had been. This represented a move for adult education provided by local authorities from traditional evening class provision, typically attended by the middle classes, to a “more relevant and locally based enterprise” (Tett, 2010, p. 17).

Within the report, progression from adult education was not mentioned specifically. However, in a discussion concerning the motivation of adult learners, continuing to learn was seen as a desirable outcome of participation (SED, 1975).

The Alexander report argued for the expansion of targeted learning opportunities for adults. In particular, it noted that “those to whom adult education should be of most value are least involved” (SED, 1975, p. 15). The committee identified specific groups of adults for whom provision should be made. These included young mothers, the elderly and adults who worked unsocial hours. Other groups were identified as

“disadvantaged” (p. 40) and unable to participate in existing provision. Adult education that more closely met the needs of these groups was to be established (SED, 1975). Furthermore, one of the recommendations was that in decisions about the allocation of resources, priority should be given to “areas of multiple deprivation” (p. 44).

Two themes in the Alexander report are important in relation to my study. The first is the report’s focus on meeting the needs of adults who had not participated in adult education previously, with resources to be targeted to those experiencing hardship. This established a role for adult education in developing learning opportunities for specific groups in order to address inequality and disadvantage (Tett, 2010). The second theme is the importance of providing adult education that addressed the concerns of groups with identified special needs. In this the emphasis was on a move away from subject-based provision to adult education that reflected the needs and concerns of learners, identified by practitioners and potential learners through the community development process.

Another aspect of the Alexander report that is important for this study relates to one of its recommendations. The Committee recommended that adult education should be “regarded as an aspect of community education and should, with the youth and community service, be incorporated into a community education service” (SED, 1975, p. 35). The intention of the recommendation for a new community education service was to strengthen adult education by linking it with “a much better staffed and resourced youth and community service” (Cooke, 2006, p. 159). However, one effect of this was that local authority adult education became isolated from other types of provision such as the WEA and University extension classes, as it was drawn, along with youth and community work, into a generic community education service (Martin, 1996). The recommendation for the new integrated service coincided with reform of local government, and it was implemented by the majority of the new local authorities. Community based adult education, alongside educational work with young people and community work, was established as part of a new community education service in Scotland that remained in place until the reorganisation of local government in 1996 (Milburn, 1999).

One consequence of this was that, from 1975, the organisation and delivery of cbal in Scotland was influenced by policy as it has applied to community education. For example, two reports which addressed training for those working in community education (SED, 1977; SCEC, 1984) were published. These emphasised the characteristics that the youth and community service and the adult education service shared, and suggested the need for generic training for community education workers, with adult education and youth work as optional specialisms (Martin, 1996). In 1990, the Scottish Office established the Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe) committee whose main function was to maintain standards for the training of community education staff (CeVe, 2002). The CeVe committee also undertook to define community education, describing it as:

A process designed to enrich the lives of individuals and groups by engaging with people living within a geographical area, or sharing a common interest, to develop voluntarily a range of learning, action, and reflection opportunities determined by their personal, social, economic and political needs (SCEC, 1990, p. 1).

This definition applied to cbal, as part of community education and it emphasised the process of engaging with adults to identify needs, as well as the outcome of provision (Tett, 2006). In addition, this definition identified a role for those working in communities to develop opportunities for action, as well as learning. The role for cbal, therefore, related to collective action for change, as well as individual growth and development.

Following local government reorganisation in 1996, the large regional councils, along with district councils were formed into 32 authorities. Many of these experienced a reduction in funding, and the effect on community education services has been described as “dramatic” (Milburn, 1999, p. 844). In some areas the numbers of staff were reduced and community facilities were closed. By 1997, there was concern that these cuts to services had resulted in a reduction in the numbers of adults participating in community education (Tett, 2006).

In 1998, the report of a working group, set up to consider the future of community education, and chaired by HMSCI Douglas Osler, was published (Scottish Office, 1998a). Called *Communities: Change Through Learning*, it identified three issues that were important in relation to the organisation and delivery of cbal, as part of community education. The first was that the group considered community education to be “an approach to education, not a sector of it” (1998a, p. 17). In particular, community education was seen as a method that could be utilised in the realisation of the key government policies of lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship. Within policy as it applied to community education, a role was beginning to be established for cbal to contribute to the lifelong learning agenda. This could be seen as the first step towards cbal being viewed in policy as part of lifelong learning, as well as community education. (Lifelong learning as a key concern of government is discussed later in this chapter.)

Secondly, the language of the report suggested that the group distanced itself from the emphasis on the process identified by CeVe (1990). Rather, the emphasis here was on “demonstrating and reporting results” and being “clearly accountable” (Scottish Office, 1998a, p. 23). This represented a shift in focus in policy on community education towards increased scrutiny of the outcomes of the work, which was to be developed in later documents (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007).

Thirdly, the report defined the purpose of community education as “to promote personal development, to build community capacity and to invest, and secure investment in community learning” (Scottish Office, 1998a, p. 24). In 1999 this was followed by a Scottish Office circular (SOEID, 1999) that provided guidance to local authorities on the implementation of *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998a), and set out tasks for community education. These included the development of community learning strategies and plans, as well as the provision of educational support to individuals and families at risk of social exclusion. The circular provided guidance on how community education was to contribute to social inclusion, lifelong learning and citizenship, thus identifying a role for community education that was closely aligned to Scottish government priorities (Tett, 2010).

Following the acceptance of a recommendation of another working group, set up to review training for community education (Scottish Executive, 2000), the term community education was replaced by community learning and development (CLD) in 2002. In 2004, the Scottish Executive published its guidance to local authorities for community learning and development (Scottish Executive, 2004). This document, called *Working and learning together to build stronger communities*, replaced the Scottish Office circular of 1999, and it represents current policy for CLD, and includes cbal as one aspect of this approach.

The guidance set out “a long term framework” (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 1) for the future direction of CLD, placing it within the context of community planning. *Working and learning together to build stronger communities* (Scottish Executive, 2004) consolidated the shift towards CLD as an approach and not a sector, that was seen in *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998a), and the report stated that the methods of CLD were embedded in youth and community work and adult learning services (Scottish Executive, 2004). Three national priorities for CLD were identified. One of these was “achievement through learning for adults” (2004, p. 8) which was concerned with supporting adults in the development of core skills. The second priority related to work with young people, and the third was “achievement through community capacity building” (2004, p. 8) which was about working with individuals and groups to increase their confidence and skills to enable them to participate in decision-making.

The national priorities were to contribute to a number of the UK and Scottish governments’ policies, one of which was lifelong learning. This consolidated the role for CLD, and cbal within it, that was established in *Communities: Change Through Learning* to contribute to the lifelong learning agenda. In addition, the report stated its commitment to social justice. The intention was that CLD work would “focus on the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities” (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 8), and this would be supported by targeting resources to excluded groups.

Since cbal became integrated with youth and community work into community education in 1975, the perspective in policy on the nature and purpose of this area of work has evolved. The Alexander report (SED, 1975) heralded a move away from a

focus on traditional evening classes provided in schools and other institutions. It sought, by integrating adult education with youth and community work, to ensure that opportunities for adults to learn were provided in a range of community facilities. Policy statements since 1975 have emphasised the importance of adult learning being community based, although Tett (2006) noted that in recent policy (Scottish Executive, 2004), this has referred to geographical neighbourhoods rather than communities that share interests. This suggests an assumption in current policy that adults living in the same geographical area are likely to have the same learning needs and interests, and this may not be the case. It also raises the question of who defines the needs of potential learners, if this is not to be achieved through engaging with adults in a community development process, but rather through assumptions about, rather than research on, the needs of adults living in particular neighbourhoods.

The Alexander report (SED, 1975) focused on educational opportunities that were intended to support adults to “deal with the pressures of change and improve the quality of life” (p. 25). This emphasis on issue-based learning that addresses the concerns of participants has been a theme within policy. For example, *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998a) stated that community education should begin with learners’ concerns “rather than with a subject or syllabus” (p. 23), and this still applies to current practice. *Working and learning together to build stronger communities* (Scottish Executive, 2004) provided examples of CLD practice where learning opportunities were organised around issues identified as important by participants. Linked to this, a common concern in the policy documents reviewed has been to target existing resources to disadvantaged and excluded groups. In this respect, the priority for community education has been to provide opportunities to learn for those with particular needs, and not to the whole of the adult population.

Important shifts can be seen in policy on community education since 1975, also. As mentioned earlier, CLD is viewed as an approach or way of working rather than a sector of education (Scottish Office, 1998a; Scottish Executive, 2004). One implication of this is that practitioners in other sectors, such as housing or health for example, could claim to have adopted a CLD approach to their work, but might not

be trained in community education. This means that those working within other professions might adopt the methods utilised in community education, but hold different views on its role and purpose. However, this is possible even within community education, as practitioners might have different perspectives on their work, depending on their interpretations of policy and their experience.

The Committee chaired by Alexander was concerned with the future of adult education (SED, 1975). A second change in policy since the establishment of adult education as part of community education is that a role has been identified for cbal in supporting groups to undertake action, as well as to participate in learning for personal development (Scottish Office, 1998a; Scottish Executive, 2004). This highlights two different perspectives on the role of cbal identified in policy: to support individual development and to facilitate social change.

The third shift identified in policy is a move away from the emphasis on the *process* of working with individuals and communities (SCEC, 1990) towards a focus on measurable outcomes for the work. A consequence of this has been an increased interest in policy in the use of a framework for inspection of CLD practice (Scottish Executive, 2003). The framework in use currently emphasises the outcomes and impact of CLD work (HMI, 2006). A recent document published as “a useful resource” (Communities Scotland and Scottish Executive, 2007, p. 3) for practitioners set out a framework of the expected outcomes from CLD work. There is acknowledgement in this document that the outcomes of this area of work with people can be long-term. However, intermediate outcomes are described in detail, and links are made with the inspection process, making CLD “much more open to scrutiny and regulation” (Tett, 2010, p. 26). This focus in policy on outcomes was underlined further in a joint statement made by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and the Scottish Government that identified five outcomes to which CLD work contributed (CoSLA and Scottish Government, 2008).

A potential consequence for cbal of the increasing prominence in policy of measurable outcomes is that practitioners feel pressured to focus and report on quantifiable aspects of this type of adult learning, such as the numbers of adults participating. In this there is a risk that some aspects of the role that cbal plays in the

context of learners' lives could go unreported, especially if they are difficult to measure. As a practitioner in cbal I reported on what was required by funders and HM inspectors, but I had a sense that there were outcomes of participation in cbal that were not reported and therefore could be neglected in policy.

Lifelong Learning

So far, I have discussed policy in Scotland that addressed the role and purpose of cbal as one aspect of community education. However, the organisation and delivery of cbal have been affected by another strand of policy in the UK which developed in parallel with this. Over the last two decades a number of documents were produced that addressed lifelong learning, some of which included informal types of adult education within their remit.

Although this review has focussed on policy development since 1975, it is important to note that the idea of lifelong learning in policy can be traced back a little earlier. In particular, the report *Learning to be*, published by UNESCO (Faure et al, 1972) which discussed the need for lifelong education, proved to be a turning point (Biesta, 2006; Field, 2006). The report was concerned with the role of education in “the complete fulfilment of man, in all the richness of his personality” (Faure, 1972, p. v).

In the UK, during the 1980s, adult education became increasingly subject to Government attention. In particular, the Conservative government began to view adult education as having a contribution to make to global competitiveness. In addition, adult education was seen to have a key role in addressing unemployment (Fieldhouse, 1996).

Biesta (2006) has noted the “strong ‘agenda-setting’ impact” (p. 170) of organisations such as the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was the publication of a number of policies within the European Union during the 1990s (CEC 1994; CEC, 1995) culminating in the ‘European Year of Lifelong Learning’ in 1996, that led to the adoption of the term ‘lifelong learning’ in the UK (Tett, 2010).

Fieldhouse (1996) noted that the transition from ‘adult education’ to ‘lifelong’ or ‘continuing education’ was more than a simple change in terminology: “It signified the end of a tradition and the dismantling of an adult education *movement* which was to be gradually subsumed into a general education and training system” (p. 68). In this, Fieldhouse drew attention to a shift from the perception by government of adult education as a tool for addressing disadvantage, towards a view that its role lay in contributing to UK policy priorities related to economic prosperity.

In 1998, the Labour government in the UK published its report *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain* (DfEE, 1998). In this document the link between economic prosperity and learning was stated clearly, and the government identified a role for lifelong learning in the development of a skilled and flexible workforce. The report emphasised the need for economic growth in Britain. This was to be achieved through increased uptake of learning opportunities by adults, in order that they could develop and maintain the skills needed by employers (DfEE, 1998). However, the report acknowledged, also, the value of learning for aspects of our lives other than employment, and noted its contribution to a range of potential outcomes for individuals and communities. For example, the report drew attention to the potential of lifelong learning to support good health and encourage creativity for individuals, and to contribute to social cohesion in communities, as well as describing benefits to businesses (DfEE, 1998).

In the same year, the report *Opportunity Scotland* was published (Scottish Office, 1998b). In this report, the term lifelong learning was used to describe a wide range of adult learning opportunities including higher and further education, vocational training and informal learning. However, lifelong learning was explained also in terms of the need for a skilled workforce and for adults to take responsibility for their own learning.

In common with *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998), the role of lifelong learning in contributing to a range of individual and societal goals was acknowledged in *Opportunity Scotland* (Scottish Office, 1998b). Informal education and cbal, specifically, were discussed within the report. The role of cbal in motivating adults to participate in learning was described as “crucial” (p. 23), and the skills and

knowledge gained through the process of community education were valued for their contribution to personal and social development for individuals, as well as for the benefits to communities. A commitment was made to establish a working group to ensure that community education contributed to the Government's priorities of lifelong learning and social inclusion. This group produced *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Scottish Office, 1998a) discussed earlier.

While *Opportunity Scotland* took a "broad view" of lifelong learning (Scottish Office, 1998b, p. 4) and stated a commitment to social inclusion, preparing adults for work through learning was important: "at its core is the fact that people at all levels need to use learning opportunities to keep pace in the jobs market and to ensure that Scotland is equipped to compete in the global economy" (Scottish Office, 1998b, p. 4). However, there was acknowledgement in the report of the role of lifelong learning for "personal and social development" (Scottish Office, 1998b, p. 23), although this aspect of lifelong learning was given less consideration in the document.

Two reports, published in 1999 and 2001 (Scottish Office, 1999a; Scottish Executive, 2001), represented further statements by the Scottish government on lifelong learning. In *Skills for Scotland*, the need was identified for a workforce with the skills and qualifications to meet the demands of employers (Scottish Office, 1999a). Cbal was included in this report. However, the emphasis here was on the improvement of the quality of provision. This emphasis echoed the focus in community education and CLD policy on the development and implementation of inspection frameworks, and in *Skills for Scotland* performance in cbal was to be measured against targets set out in community learning plans (Scottish Office, 1999a). The focus of *A Smart Successful Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2001) was the role of the Enterprise Networks in contributing to competitiveness and economic development in Scotland. The need for a workforce with the skills that are needed for jobs in the 21st century was central, but this was to be achieved through better access to further education, careers advice and in-service training rather than informal or community based learning opportunities.

In addition to a focus on the contribution of lifelong learning to economic competitiveness, policy in Scotland at this time demonstrated a concern with social inclusion. Cooke (2006) observed that *Opportunity Scotland* (Scottish Office, 1998b) was concerned with encouraging participation in learning among socially excluded groups, a sentiment that echoed Alexander's aim to support 'non-participants' into adult education (SED, 1975). In Cooke's analysis, the Scottish government viewed its approach to lifelong learning as an "elegant solution" (2006, p. 167) to the two problems of competitiveness in the global economy and social exclusion, in that excluded adults could be afforded opportunities to learn, which might in turn increase their vocational skills. In this way, inclusion could be achieved through increased opportunities to join the workforce.

In a strategy document concerned with inclusion published in 1999, one of the stated aims was to ensure that everyone in Scotland had the opportunity to reach their full potential (Scottish Office, 1999b), and this was echoed in a later statement on community regeneration (Scottish Executive, 2002). Gallacher et al. (2000) have noted that policies on social inclusion were "a central element" (p. 2) in the pursuit of the aims of lifelong learning. Certainly, the principle established by the Alexander report of supporting learning opportunities for adults to enhance personal lives and maintain a pluralist society, can be seen in lifelong learning policy. However, the contribution of lifelong learning to the economy has come to take priority over these aims in some policy documents.

Current policy on lifelong learning

Two developments in policy demonstrate the priorities of the UK Government in relation to lifelong learning currently. First, the prominence of economic objectives in policy was underlined by a review of skills which reported to the Treasury in 2006 (HM Treasury, 2006). The review identified employers as important stakeholders in lifelong learning and emphasised the need for a skilled workforce to contribute to improved UK competitiveness in a global economy.

Secondly, in 2009, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills published a White Paper on the future of informal adult learning (DfiUS, 2009). In this

document, the contribution made by informal adult learning to individual personal development and well-being, as well as community cohesion, was acknowledged. Progression was not mentioned specifically, but this type of provision was described as “an important stepping stone to further learning, qualifications and more rewarding work” (p. 4). The underlying assumption in this statement seems to be that progression can be defined in these terms. With reference to economic recession, training to support unemployed adults back to work was identified as “our top priority” (DfUIS, 2009, p.4). In the document the government acknowledged a range of potential outcomes of adult learning, but the focus was on the link between adult learning and the needs of individuals affected by economic recession. These are defined in the report as “activity with purpose” (p. 10) for those who might find they have more time for learning due to working less, as well as the practical training that might help people back to work.

The White Paper has been criticised for the lack of attention paid to recent cuts in funding for adult learning (Vincent, 2009). In particular, it did nothing to reverse the decision to cut funding for adults wishing to study for equivalent or lower qualifications to those they hold already (Taylor, 2009). However, it does provide evidence of the UK government’s ongoing commitment to informal adult learning. This can be seen in the establishment of a transformation fund for informal learning and in the invitation to providers of learning opportunities to sign a learning pledge “to promote learning for its own sake” (DfUIS, 2009, p.17). The White Paper demonstrated that informal learning has an important role in UK policy terms. However, in times of economic recession as outlined in the Paper, it is perhaps reasonable that the potential contribution of informal learning was seen in the context of support to those affected by unemployment.

In Scotland an updated lifelong learning strategy (Scottish Executive, 2003) and a revised skills strategy (Scottish Government, 2007c) were published. Both documents took account of cbal, and statements were made about its role and purpose in relation to the lifelong learning agenda.

Taking the lifelong learning strategy first – *Life Through Learning, Learning Through Life* (Scottish Executive, 2003) provided a definition of lifelong learning

which included personal and social development outcomes as well as economic aims. Five goals were identified in the strategy, with CLD highlighted in goals one and four. Here again, cbal was described as having “a crucial role” (p. 40) in supporting people to participate in learning opportunities. Priorities were identified as achievement in core skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology, and “learning related to work and life” (p. 40) and a role for cbal to address issues that concern adults in communities was acknowledged, although these were not defined in the strategy.

In the document cbal was required to address the needs of specific priority groups such as those with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and retired adults, with learning linked to personal and social development. The inclusion of the last group in the list of priorities suggested that account was taken of the needs of learners outside the workforce. An additional task for cbal was the provision of information and guidance. This was important in relation to progression. In *Life Through Learning, Learning Through Life*, cbal was viewed as having a role to support adults in transitions from informal to more formal learning contexts. In particular, the contribution of cbal was seen as supporting participation among adults who are “disengaged from learning” defined as those who may need support to participate in or return to learning (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 40). In this strategy document a role is identified for cbal to contribute to learners’ individual personal development, as well as the needs of those wishing to develop skills for work.

In contrast, the focus of *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007c) was a lifelong learning system which is “centred on the individual but responsive to employers’ needs” (p. 2), defined in the report as a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. The focus in this report was the perceived need to increase the skill levels of adults in Scotland for the benefit of individuals through improved opportunities for work, as well as the economy. Informal learning was included in a consideration of all types of post-compulsory education in this document. The strategy echoed the ideas within the Leitch review of skills (HM Treasury, 2006) in England, but there is a difference in emphasis between the two approaches. In England the focus is on raising the standard of the skills and

qualifications in the workforce, whereas in Scotland the concept of skills utilisation has been introduced (Schuller & Watson, 2009). This means that, as well as the acquisition of skills, learning how to apply skills in the workplace is included. In the case of CLD, skills developed through involvement in activities designed to improve communities are identified as being “essential in a work setting” (Scottish Government, 2007c, p. 27), in addition to their value in communities.

Progression is addressed in this document. The need for “a wide range of progression pathways” is identified (Scottish Government, 2007c, p. 24), with learners being supported in transitions through different types of learning. Accreditation for learning is seen as being an important aspect of progression also, particularly in relation to providing access to other learning opportunities.

Community based adult learning and policy

As this review has shown, community based adult learning in Scotland is influenced by two strands of government policy in the UK and Scotland. On one hand, the type of learning that is the focus of this study is seen as an integral part of CLD (Scottish Executive, 2004), previously known as community education (SED, 1975). In this respect the organisation and delivery of learning opportunities, and the potential role for cbal, were affected by the priorities identified for CLD. Two of these are relevant to this study. The first is work with adults which has the aim of individual personal development, including achievement in core skills. The second is work with groups in communities to support them to participate in decision-making (Scottish Executive, 2004). Current policy on CLD places this area of work in the context of community planning, with a role to contribute to Scottish government priorities (Scottish Executive, 2004, CoSLA and Scottish Government, 2008). A recent announcement of the commitment of funds to support training for the CLD workforce (Scottish Government, 2009) suggests that this role is set to continue in the current administration.

On the other hand, community based adult learning is addressed in policy as one aspect of the post-compulsory education sector. Because of this, policy statements on lifelong learning, such as the current strategy on skills (Scottish Government, 2007c),

affect the organisation and delivery of cbal. The role identified for cbal within this strand of policy is to encourage participation among adults who have not attended any form of post-compulsory education, or who have had a gap in their learning. In particular, the aim is to develop adults' skills and confidence in relation to work. Within the skills strategy, a role is identified for cbal to support learners' transitions from informal to formal learning (Scottish Government, 2007c).

To an extent, the language of policy indicates a shift in thinking over time in relation to the aims of adult learning. Biesta (2006) characterised this as a move from "learning to be" – the view found in the reports by Faure (1972) and Alexander (SED, 1975) for example - to "learning to be productive and employable" (2006, p. 170). This suggests that in current policy, cbal and lifelong learning are defined mainly in terms of the needs of employers for a skilled workforce and economic competitiveness rather than the needs of individuals and democratic society. However this situation is not confined to the Scottish context. Field (2006) summarised the position: "public policy tends to be driven, globally, by largely economic concerns: competitiveness, rather than citizenship, is the primary focus for policy" (p. 11). He observed that the adoption of this approach to lifelong learning is "virtually universal" (p.29), at least in OECD member states.

However, this review has highlighted that policy on adult learning since 1975 has addressed more than one concern. For example, the Alexander report (SED, 1975) emphasised the role of adult education in supporting adults to achieve their full potential, and in fostering democracy, but it acknowledged also the need for the development of new skills in response to technological change (SED, 1975). Similarly, recent policy on lifelong learning has focused on economic considerations, but addressed social inclusion and active citizenship, too (Scottish Government, 2007c). Biesta (2006) observed that many policy documents in this area identify three purposes for lifelong learning: the economic, the personal and the democratic. Different positions in relation to the relative importance of these three purposes can be understood then in terms of differing emphases in policy documents (2006, p. 173). These differences reflect the values and political concerns of the government at any given time and in Scottish policy, there are overlaps among these purposes. The

development of core skills can be seen as personal development, but can contribute to social development as well as employability (Scottish Executive, 2003), and skills gained through community engagement are seen as contributing to the goal of the development of a skilled workforce (Scottish Government, 2007c).

In relation to community education, Tett (2010) discussed Martin's (1987) analysis which identified "universal', 'reformist' and 'radical'" approaches to this area of work (p. 29). In the universal model, the community educator provides learning opportunities for the whole of the population, but this approach has not been strongly evident in policy. Instead, the priority has been to ensure that resources are targeted to particular disadvantaged and excluded groups. In the reformist model the role identified for cbal is in supporting adults to develop skills and self-confidence in order to combat disadvantage or exclusion. Tett (2010) described the radical tradition in which the educator holds a structural view of injustice and inequality, and works with individuals and communities to take action for social change. However, in Tett's view, the number of CLD staff working within this tradition is relatively few, although the tradition is strong. In relation to policy, recent documents stated a commitment to social justice and social inclusion (Scottish Executive, 2004; Scottish Government, 2007c), and supported a role for cbal in working with groups to undertake action for change. However, this was within the reformist tradition of supporting community groups to participate in the government's community planning agenda, rather than the radical approach that would encourage them to challenge the status quo.

The policy context of community based adult learning is complex in that it can be seen as occupying a space between two strands of statements about the work. However, both strands identify an important role for cbal in contributing to social inclusion and lifelong learning (Cooke, 2006; Gallacher et al., 2000; Scottish Executive, 2004; Scottish Government, 2007c). The role of adult learning in supporting participation in decision-making, and in fostering democracy has less prominence in policy on lifelong learning, but is evident in policy as it applies to CLD work (Scottish Executive, 2004).

Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning has evolved over the last three decades, and it presents both problems and possibilities (Tett, 2010) for those working in cbal. The complexity means that practitioners are able to interpret policy in ways that support a range of roles for cbal, rather than prioritising vocational aims. Furthermore, for participants, personal and vocational aims might overlap. Nonetheless, the potentially dominant position of the economic view in policy, and the focus on measurable outcomes of the work could limit the role of cbal to this agenda. Within policy, varying perspectives on the role of cbal can be identified, with different emphases on its potential contribution; depending on the priorities being addressed. Research that examines the role of cbal in the context of learners' lives is needed to clarify the contribution that this type of provision could make to policy priorities.

Section 2: perspectives on adult learning.

In this section, I discuss perspectives in the literature on adult learning in order to place my study in the context of theory in this area. In particular I focus on the range of purposes identified for adult learning in the literature, in the context of the potential dominance of the economic view in policy. The literature that addresses cbal and community education specifically is limited. Therefore I have included writing on adult education, adult learning and lifelong learning as cbal can be encompassed within these terms, although there are some differences between them and cbal. I examine three perspectives, and consider the role of cbal, and how progression is defined in each.

Jarvis (2004) discussed a rationale for adult learning and stated that there were two important aspects. One was adults' need to cope with the pace of change in society today. Linked to this was the changing focus of education which, in Jarvis' view was increasingly about employability. The second was the nature of individuals. Jarvis identified the desire to learn as a fundamental human need, and he noted that "the individual is conscious of the need to learn from very early in life" (p. 35). Later, Jarvis drew a distinction between lifelong learning and adult education (2008) in which he stated that the former takes an uncritical stance to society, and supports the "totalism" (p. 1) of the capitalist world, whereas traditional adult education

encourages adults to be prepared to criticise, or resist, those in power. This draws attention to contrasting views on the role and purpose of learning in adult life.

Three types of community education were identified by Jarvis (2004): education for action and/or development, education in the community and extra-mural forms of education. In the first of these, education is a vehicle for bringing about social change or community development, whereas education in the community describes more general opportunities for adults to learn, often in adult learning centres or community schools, and for individual personal development. Extra-mural education refers to outreach programmes of universities or other educational institutions. Jarvis referred to these as “adult education beyond the walls” (2004, p. 60). Some cbal in Scotland could be seen as belonging to the second type identified by Jarvis. These include general learning opportunities, on a range of topics, offered to adults in community centres. However, community development could be viewed as one aspect of progression from these opportunities. For example, in my experience as a community educator, there were instances in which adults participated in learning for personal development, and later became involved in community groups. Further investigation into cbal could help to uncover potential connections between various types of community based learning opportunities and different outcomes or progression.

Cooke (2006) identified three purposes for adult education in Scotland: “serving the needs of the economy, the interests of the individual, or fostering the democratic society” (p. 172), and he observed that these were conflicting functions. In her discussion of lifelong learning, Tett (2006) suggested that there are four purposes: “learning for work (vocational), learning for citizenship (political), learning for personal development (liberal) and learning that encourages participation in education by previously excluded groups (social)” (pp. 19-20). Tett observed that the increased focus on lifelong learning in policy presented opportunities for community education, but she warned that there was a danger that the vocational perspective might take precedence over other purposes, and that this could reinforce inequality.

In his discussion of the learning society, Ranson (1998) identified three aspects: “learning for the new world of work, a changing society and a new democratic

citizenship” (p. 25). He stated that the term had been adopted by “diverse traditions” (Ranson & Stewart, 1998, p. 253) and used to describe different perspectives on the role of lifelong learning in a changing society. Ranson suggested that these represented oppositional beliefs, for example a commitment to lifelong learning as a response to changes in employment in one perspective, and a commitment to learning for a changing society in another.

The discussion that follows examines this diversity of theoretical positions on adult learning, with a particular focus on the roles and purposes identified for this area of provision. I have organised the discussion under three broad headings, chosen to reflect the role identified for cbal within each perspective. However, the categories have been constructed in order to illustrate potential tensions between the different perspectives. It is possible that participants in cbal might not see personal and vocational aims and outcomes of their participation as separate. In the context of learners’ lives there are likely to be overlaps between these aims and outcomes, although this has not yet been researched in relation to cbal.

The economic perspective

In this perspective, the main role for adult learning is to contribute to economic goals. As the review of policy in the previous section highlighted, this view is a strong theme in UK and European policy on lifelong learning (CEC, 1994; CEC, 1995; DfEE, 1998; DfIUS, 2009). Employers are identified as key stakeholders (HM Treasury, 2006; Scottish Government, 2007c) and their need for a skilled and adaptable workforce is central to the rationale for adult learning. The context for this view relates to changes in society, especially those that affect business and employment. The emergence of a global economy is part of this context, also. So too, are developments in the nature and uses of information and communication technologies, and changes to the ways in which people work, such as increased part-time and flexible ways of working (Biesta, 2006; Field, 2006). Demographic changes are part of the context of the economic perspective, also. In the UK, a falling birth-rate, and increased longevity due to improvements in healthcare mean that older workers will form the majority of the workforce by 2020 (Humphries, 2008). In the

economic view this makes it important for older adults to update their skills and knowledge regularly, in order to adapt to changes in the workplace.

From this perspective, the principal purpose of adult learning is vocational. Adult learning is seen as contributing to increased competitiveness in the context of the global market (Humphries, 2008). This is achieved by supporting workforce development through improved skills and qualifications, and the outcome is a skilled and flexible workforce that can adapt to changes in the work environment.

As well as contributing to the economy, financial benefits of participation in learning are identified for individuals. For example, Field (2009) suggested that improved qualifications or skills can lead to greater employability and increased earnings. In this respect, a strong economy is seen as benefitting society as a whole (Humphries, 2008). Social inclusion is an important aspect of lifelong learning in the economic view, and one way that this can be achieved is through increased employability and improved potential for earnings. This suggests that social inclusion in this perspective is defined narrowly in terms of inclusion in the workforce. Martin (2003) drew attention to the links between educational policy and economic policy in the New Labour government led by Tony Blair, to show that lifelong learning was seen in this view as an important factor in the potential growth of the economy.

A question that arises from the economic view of lifelong learning is whether it has achieved increased “prosperity *for all* [italics in original]” (Biesta, 2006, p. 177). Biesta suggested that this approach could lead to disparity between developed and developing nations, and within societies. Those with access to knowledge, information and technology would thrive, with others being left behind. Barr (2007) observed that, despite increases in the numbers of adults participating in higher education, there has been little impact on social inequality. However, Field (2006) pointed to the complexities of inequality, and viewed the explanation that some have access to knowledge and information, and others do not as “a gross over-simplification” (p. 143). Nonetheless, there is evidence that those with the lowest level of skills are the least likely to participate in learning (O’Leary, 2008). Furthermore, “employers consistently prioritise their spending on training to those with the highest level of skills” (Humphries, 2008, p. 21). In addition, an emphasis

on vocational outcomes may mean that investment in lifelong learning will favour employed adults: “but it neglects others, including the most vulnerable in our society” (Field, 2009, p. 6). In particular, older people and those in poor physical or mental health could be excluded in policy terms if they do not plan to enter employment.

The economic perspective places a focus on skills for work. In a discussion of the need for skills in a global economy, Humphries (2008) outlined features of a system for lifelong learning in the 21st century: “the core purpose of our tertiary education system, and particularly the further education system, should be on providing learning and skills for employment” (p. 32). He drew on successive National Employer Skills surveys since 2000, which identified a shortage of workers with specific technical skills, as well as more general skills such as communication and customer service. Humphries argued that the development of skills needed by employers should be the priority for public investment, and that more needed to be done to support the development of high level skills. Part of the emphasis on skills is the view that improved employability is effective in combating poverty and social exclusion. However, the link between participation in learning and economic prosperity is complex, and inequality can be compounded if opportunities are targeted to those who are already highly skilled (Tett, 2010).

A recent policy development in this area has been a move to a ‘demand-led’ system of post-compulsory education (HM Treasury, 2006). This means that providers of adult learning opportunities in England are required to respond to the demands of individuals and employers, rather than making their own decisions regarding the organisation and delivery of provision (Coffield, Edward, Finlay, Hodgson, Spours & Steer, 2008). Part of this move is that Government funding for adult learning is linked to training for adults working towards initial level qualifications, so that employers and individuals can only make demands within this limited sphere. In their research into the impact of policy on post-compulsory education, Coffield et al. (2008) observed that if an aim is to improve adult learning provision, attention should be paid to the “processes of learning” (p. 20) such as the expertise of the tutor, and the nature of the student-tutor relationship, and not to the creation of a

market for adult learning. In her analysis of lifelong learning policy, Tett (2010) cast doubt on whether the creation of a market for adult learning has had any impact on efficiency or user choice. She cited the example of the de-regulation of further education which had the effect of reducing choice for excluded and disadvantaged groups, as provision for these groups can be expensive.

The economic view prioritises learning for work over other outcomes of participation in learning as an adult. The research undertaken by the Centre for Research of the Wider Benefits of Learning (Feinstein et al., 2003; Schuller et al., 2002) illustrated other important outcomes of participation, such as improvements in health and well-being for individuals, as well as benefits to society arising from increased civic participation and tolerance in communities. Feinstein and Sabates (2008) have argued that a narrow view of the role of lifelong learning that focuses on skills development may be counter-productive. They suggested that good health and well-being, social engagement and civic participation “are important for a well-functioning society that is going to be able to respond to the future challenges” (2008, p. 62) of competition in a global economy. Furthermore, they argued that viewing learning for economic purposes in preference to other types of learning does not take account of the importance for individuals and communities of balancing the demands of employment with leisure.

The Centre for Research of the Wider Benefits of Learning was set up by the Government in 1999 to investigate non-economic outcomes of adult learning (Schuller et al., 2004). At the same time, another Centre was established to address “the Economics of Education” (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 7). This demonstrates recognition on the part of the new Labour government of both economic and wider benefits of learning, although the establishment of two separate research centres highlights that these were seen as distinct aspects of adult learning. However, as Schuller et al. noted “there are boundary issues” (2004, p. 7). It can be difficult to separate economic outcomes of participation in learning from other benefits, and it is possible that one outcome may lead to or occur simultaneously with another. In relation to cbal, more research is needed to investigate the economic and the non-

economic benefits of participation, as well as uncovering any potential relationship between the two.

Biesta (2006) noted that over the last two decades, participation in learning throughout one's life has been viewed increasingly in policy as "a duty for which individuals need to take responsibility" (p. 175). In this view, individuals are responsible for updating their skills to keep pace with changes in employment. The assumption is that the individual will benefit from the improved employability that arises from their participation in learning. Based on this, Humphries (2008) proposed that individuals should take some responsibility for their learning alongside employers and government. This would mean individuals contributing to the cost of adult learning, in terms of both time and money. However, Biesta (2006) expressed concern that this approach could affect learners' motivation. If participation in learning becomes an individual duty, but the outcome relates to the policy agenda, there is a possibility that learners may not wish to take part. Biesta questioned whether adults would be motivated to participate in learning if they were not able to identify the purpose of their learning for themselves.

This shift in responsibility for learning moves responsibility for an inability to access learning also: "people, organisations, and nations fail to thrive because they are not making the most of their talents" (Field, 2006, p. 143). In Field's view, this can lead to inequality being understood and accepted in the context of individuals' inability to take advantage of opportunities to learn throughout their lives. The inequalities based on gender roles or poverty, for example, are ignored, and individuals are seen as responsible for their exclusion. However, as Tett (2010) observed, adults may be unable to participate in learning because of the strong structural barriers they face, linked to social inequalities.

The economic perspective can be seen in UK and Scottish policies on lifelong learning. The focus is on individual responsibility for the development of skills to ensure economic prosperity for all. Social inclusion is viewed as important, but there is an assumption that there is a direct link between skills and economic benefits. Little account is taken of the social context in which learning takes place or the structural barriers to participation for some adults. To an extent, the economic

perspective is narrow, in that there is little acknowledgement of the wider benefits of lifelong learning (Schuller et al., 2002). However, Tett (2010) argues for an analysis of policy that exposes the problems and “creates spaces for challenge and alternative action” (p. 50). In this way, policy can be interpreted to support a range of perspectives and roles for adult learning.

Progression from adult learning in this perspective relates to economic gains for individuals and society. The components of progression are the achievement of qualifications and the development of skills needed by employers. In this view, evidence of progression for individual learners could be seen in increased earnings through access to employment or promotion at work, or moving to more advanced levels of learning in order to further develop vocational skills.

However, it is important to bear in mind the potential overlaps among the various aims and purposes of adult learning. While thinking in terms of three distinct perspectives was a useful organising principle for this review of the literature, it is possible that potential learners do not make these distinctions as they make decisions about participation in learning.

In the next section I discuss alternative perspectives on the role and purposes of adult learning. As Eduard Lindeman (1926) put it, adult education “begins where vocational education leaves off” (p. 5). In the following perspectives, economic outcomes may arise from participation, but they are not central to it.

Individual development

In the literature, a second perspective, that I have called ‘individual development’ can be identified. In this perspective, adult learning has a key role to support individual, personal development of learners, in order for them to achieve their full potential in ways that are appropriate to them. This contrasts with views expressed in the economic argument that focused on the development of skills in order to compete in the global economy, with the goal of economic benefits of all (Humphries, 2008; HM Treasury, 2006; Scottish Government, 2007c).

West (2008) argued that an economic view of adult learning was too narrow, as it did not take account of its potential contribution to “individual and collective well-being in a more fragmented, individualized and unpredictable culture” (p. 41). West made use of the concept of “transitional space” (p. 42) to illustrate how participation in learning could support adults to renegotiate their identities. The concept was taken from the work of Winnicott (1971) who discussed “transitional objects and transitional phenomena” (p. 14) in relation to child development. Using two case studies West highlighted how participation in learning provided a space in which learners could explore their identity, and experiment with new identities. In each case adults had been supported through important relationships with others to cope with transitions in their lives, and adult education had provided the environment in which this could take place. In West’s view, these “intimate, intersubjective dimensions of lifelong learning” (p. 47) were neglected by the economic perspective. The case studies showed that progression was linked to feeling able to participate in new activities such as learning, and making use of these activities to explore new ways of being.

West’s (2008) analysis offers a potential role for cbal to assist learners who are experiencing changes in their lives, which might include returning to or moving on in work. Participation in cbal can provide a supportive and encouraging environment in which adults have the opportunity to reflect on their lives and progress in ways identified by them.

The provision of the opportunity for reflection has been recognised by others as an important role for adult learning. Mezirow (1981) developed a theory of transformational learning in which adults are supported to reflect on and review their values, beliefs and assumptions. Through this process, learners’ perspectives are transformed. In a recent overview of his theory, Mezirow (2008) described transformative learning as the process by which learners examine and reassess their “habit of mind and resulting points of view” (p. 26). Through this process, problematic perspectives are made “more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (p. 26). In transformative learning, the role of the educator is to support adults to reflect critically on their own assumptions, and to

consider these in the light of a range of perspectives through discussion with others, or engagement with alternative points of view. The transformed perspective is linked to action, as learners decide to “live what [they] have come to believe” (p. 27).

Mezirow (2008) acknowledged that a criticism of transformation theory had been the focus on personal change and individual action, but he asserted that an aim of transformative learning was social change. For him, critical self-reflection formed a basis for planning social action.

Brookfield (1986) was concerned with the development of critical thinking, also. He identified two aims for adult learning. One was encouraging adults to become self-directed learners, and the other was supporting adults to develop skills in critical reflection.

In relation to self-directed learning, Brookfield (1986) described this as more than a technical ability to set learning goals and find the resources and strategies to support one’s own learning. He argued that the development of these skills in isolation could mean that learners were self-directed, but within a narrow and unchallenging context. Brookfield described self-direction: “at its heart is the notion of autonomy, which is defined as an understanding and awareness of a range of alternative possibilities” (p. 58). Brookfield’s theoretical position was that self-direction comes about when adults are aware of the possibility that they can change their “personal and social worlds” (p. 58). It was linked to a recognition by learners that their beliefs and values are socially and culturally constructed, and hence they have the power to change them. The role for adult learning was to present alternative interpretations of the social world in order that learners could consider changing the way they live their lives.

Critical reflection was an important part of adult learning for Brookfield (1986). In a discussion of significant personal learning he emphasised the opportunity for adults to “reflect on their self-images, change their self-concepts, question their previously internalized norms” (p.213). Brookfield argued that when adults become aware of the socially constructed nature of knowledge, values and beliefs they can begin to think about changing their own circumstances. In common with Mezirow, this included a commitment to social change, but for Brookfield, the focus was a critique of the links

between capitalism and social inequality rather than “a critique of all relevant ideologies” (Mezirow, 2008, p. 31).

This discussion highlights overlaps with other perspectives on the purpose of adult learning. Mezirow’s (1981, 2008) and Brookfield’s (1986) analyses show how the development of critical thinking skills can support personal development as well as contribute to social change. Furthermore, the ability to think critically could lead to economic advantage through employment, although this was not the focus of Mezirow’s and Brookfield’s work. The critical approach to adult education has been taken up by a small number of practitioners working within a radical tradition, in the work undertaken by the Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh, for example (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989).

Another role can be identified for adult learning that is connected to personal development. Field (2005) examined the links between social capital and lifelong learning and found that “social capital is important for learning, and learning is important for social capital” (p. 110).

The concept of social capital came from the work of Bourdieu (1986) who identified three types of capital to explain the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. The first of these, economic capital, refers to wealth, including property. Cultural capital is used to describe symbols of taste, in music or art for example, that can be used to maintain social standing, especially by the upper and middle classes. However, educational qualifications, as objects of cultural capital, can offset disadvantage as they are “a certificate of cultural competence” (p. 248) that have a value for the holder. Social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1986, p. 248). Social capital could be accumulated through membership of a group or the development of a network of relationships. In addition, it could be increased, but this required “investment strategies” (p. 249) and effort on the part of individuals. Bourdieu argued that elite groups were able to maintain their position in society through their access to, and utilisation of cultural and social capital, as well as

economic wealth. In his analysis, the working class had little cultural and social capital, and so were denied access to power and resources in society.

Coleman (1988) described social capital as a resource which “exists in the relations among persons” (p. 100-101). For Coleman, close ties among the individuals in family, religious or community groups make possible the achievement of goals for those with common interests. In this description, social capital can exist, or be developed, among many communities, not just a powerful élite. Coleman identified trust and trustworthiness as core elements of social capital, in that they create an environment in which individuals carry out actions for one another in the expectation that this will be reciprocated in future.

Coleman (1988) was interested in the links between social capital and human capital, which he described as “being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual” (p. 100). According to Coleman, human capital was developed through the learning that allows individuals to “act in new ways” (p. 100). This was different from cultural capital. Although Bourdieu (1986) had included educational qualifications as an external sign of the possession of cultural capital, he used the term to refer to knowledge of and taste in cultural and artistic activities.

In relation to the education of young people, Coleman found that social capital within families and communities could have a positive effect on young people’s educational performance, and hence the development of their human capital. In his study of young people’s attendance at school in the USA, Coleman found that social capital within the family, and in the adult community outside the family, reduced the possibility of young people dropping out of school before graduation. Coleman suggested that social capital is different from other forms of capital in its “public good aspect” (p. 119): while physical and human capital are private benefits enjoyed by individuals, social capital has the potential to benefit all who are part of the social structure in which it exists.

In common with Coleman (1988), and within the context of the USA, Putnam (2000) emphasised trust and reciprocity as important elements of social capital: “social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of

reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). His use of the term human capital was similar to Coleman’s, also, in that he provided college education as an example.

In his explanation of social capital, Putnam (2000) drew attention to capital as something of value, and he stated that social capital could be both of individual, private value and a “public good” (p. 20). Putnam emphasised that all members of a community can benefit from strong social networks, not just those members of the community that have helped to create them, and he provided examples whereby individuals with little social capital can experience the advantages of living in a well-connected community. Putnam (2000) identified a decline of social capital in American society, a conclusion that was based on analysis of evidence relating to the various ways in which individuals in society might be connected. These could be seen as components of social capital and included participation in political or civic activities, membership of clubs and associations including religious groups and work-related organisations, and informal social groups. Volunteering, as well as reciprocity and trust, were included in social capital (p. 27).

Field (2005) made use of Bourdieu’s analysis but, like Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), in his view everyone in society, including the working class, has social networks that they use to advance their interests. Field identified the components of social capital as “personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with the shared set of values that are associated with these contacts” (p. 19). In his discussion of social capital and lifelong learning he noted that social capital can support participation in learning. However, he identified a “dark side” (p. 28) of social capital. For example, strong social ties may reinforce the norms of a group that favour the informal learning that arises from group membership over participation in formal learning opportunities. Field argued that, although social capital appears to affect participation in learning, the relationship is complex, and is influenced by the context in which learning takes place.

Drawing on the work of Woolcock (1998), Field (2005) adopted a “differentiated version” of social capital (p.28), whereby he identified three types of social connections: bonding social capital describes the close ties between individuals in

families, close friends and neighbours; bridging social capital refers to looser, more open networks where reciprocity and trust may be limited; and linking social capital whereby connections are made with individuals outside a community (p. 34). Field (2005) considered the relationship between social capital and lifelong learning, and he acknowledged that social capital can be an outcome of participation in adult learning, as well as a predictor of participation.

Recently, potential connections between forms of capital and participation in learning have been taken up by researchers in adult learning. In their research into this area, Schuller et al. (2004) found that participation in learning “both maintains and disrupts” (p. 121) social relationships, and they emphasised the complexity of the relationship between social capital and learning. Schuller et al. (2004) investigated the benefits for adults of participation in learning and their study is discussed in more detail in section three of this review. However, their analysis was “constructed around the three poles of human capital, social capital and personal identity” (p. 8), and their definitions are relevant here. For Schuller et al., human capital included educational qualifications as well as knowledge and skills, while social capital referred to the social networks and shared values that facilitate the achievement of common goals. Schuller et al. stated that social capital could be measured through attitudes, in relation to trust for example, or through behaviour such as engagement in civic activity. Identity capital was described as “the characteristics of the individual that define his or her outlook or self-image” (p. 20), and included self-confidence and self-esteem.

Tett and MacLachlan (2007) explored the relationships among literacies learning, confidence, learner identities and social capital. They identified “confidence, developing trusting relationships and social engagement” (p.163) as components of social capital, and they acknowledged that socio-economic factors are influential in relation to communities’ circumstances as well as forms of capital. Nonetheless, they found that positive learning experiences had supported the development of learners’ confidence that had in turn increased social capital.

This discussion suggests a potential role for cbal in supporting the development of participants’ social capital, as well as the development of cultural or human capital

through the achievement of qualifications, skills and knowledge. Although this can be seen as an outcome of participation in learning for individuals, there are potential benefits for communities through increased social networks and stronger community ties. Within the ‘individual development’ perspective, personal development can be seen as the ultimate goal of participation in learning, or it can be seen as making a potential contribution to community or social change.

In this perspective, the role for adult learning is to support learners’ personal development, which may in turn lead to economic or social gains. Progression is linked to the achievement of potential in a broad range of ways including vocational. Components of progression include changes to identity, or transformations of perspectives which could be evidenced in changes to lifestyles or decisions to take action. In addition, progression may be linked to the development of social capital, which could be seen in the development of self-confidence, extended social networks or increased engagement in social activities. However, more research is needed in order to clarify the role of social capital within this perspective, and to explore the inter-relationship between individual and social or community development.

Social change

In a third view of the aims and purpose of adult learning, there is a role for the development of learners’ critical thinking skills, but the purpose is social change. At the heart of this position is the transformation of society as a whole, rather than individual development, and the role for adult education is to support learners to understand their world in order to be able to change it.

This approach to adult learning has been influenced by two revolutionary adult educators, Antonio Gramsci, and Paulo Freire, whose ideas about the role and purpose of adult education were linked strongly to addressing inequality and challenging oppression.

As an Italian communist who was committed to revolution, Gramsci’s interest in education was in its potential contribution to social transformation (Mayo, 1999). Gramsci used his concept of hegemony to explain how power was maintained in society: “consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction

imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Hoare & Smith, 1971, p.12). Hegemony was the diffusion throughout society of the ideas, values and beliefs of an elite group which became accepted as common sense by everyone (Ledwith, 1997).

Gramsci’s consideration of the role of intellectuals in working to challenge hegemony has been important in adult education. In particular, Gramsci identified a key role for those he termed working class organic intellectuals in “articulating new values, posing critical questions and inviting new ways of thinking about reality” (Ledwith, 1997, p. 89). In Gramsci’s view adult educators should connect with the experiences of learners and be committed to social change (Mayo, 1999). The role for adult education was the development of learners’ awareness of their situation, in order to be able to challenge inequality. This was transformative adult education in which the educator can “enhance a participative and dialogical education by conveying information within the context of democratic social relations” (Mayo, 1999, p. 48). In this approach the role for the educator is to engage in discourse with participants, rather than to impart information to them, with the aim of societal change.

The Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire (1970) was committed to revolutionary change also. In particular, he was interested in the development of a “pedagogy of the oppressed” (p. 30). This was a critical approach to adult education in which the role of the educator was to support learners to recognise the causes of their oppression, in order to challenge it.

In the development of his critical pedagogy, Freire (1970) discussed his “banking concept of education” (p. 54) in which the teacher ‘deposits’ his expert knowledge in learners. For Freire, this type of education worked against the development of critical thinking skills, and contributed to individuals’ oppression, as it obstructed rather than supported learners’ abilities to question. Freire proposed a problem-posing education, in which those committed to liberation “must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (p. 60). Dialogue was important in this approach, and

Freire was concerned that adult educators worked alongside learners, as they developed their knowledge and skills.

Freire (1970) held the view that adult education should be based on the situations and experiences of learners: “the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 76). In Freire’s approach the purpose of adult education related to his idea of “praxis” (p. 47), which he described as a combination of action and reflection on the world in order to bring about change. The role for adult education was to facilitate the development of learners’ understanding of the causes of inequality, so that they could change their situations.

Gramsci and Freire saw social change as being the main role for adult education. In this view, adult educators seek to develop a curriculum that takes account of learners’ experiences. They work to facilitate learners’ critical understanding of society, in order to change it. In the UK, this perspective can be seen in forms of adult education that are rooted in the “interests, aspirations and struggles of ordinary people” (Martin, 1999, p. 4) which are part of a radical tradition in both the UK and Scotland. Although it is difficult to evidence, in my experience Freire’s writing informs the work of some adult education practitioners who are committed to engaging in dialogue with learners in order to identify needs, and develop learning opportunities that are relevant in the context of learners’ lives. This approach, sometimes referred to as “popular education” is aligned to supporting excluded groups to have their voices heard (Martin, 1999, p. 4), but might not always be connected to a commitment to revolutionary social change.

In a discussion of his experiences of popular education in Latin America and Scotland, Kane (2005) identified two crucial aspects of this work. The first was the acknowledgement of the knowledge and skills that learners bring to the adult learning experience, and the second was the adoption of a problem-posing methodology by adult educators, which supports learners’ ability to develop their own views. However, Kane pointed out that the interpretation of what counts as a critical understanding may vary depending on the values and beliefs held by the educator. Furthermore, the diverse views of adult educators could influence the

questions they asked, although they shared a commitment to a problem-posing approach. Kane concluded that the ideology of the educator is likely to affect the outcomes for participants in popular education.

Martin (2003) has discussed the role of adult education in bringing about social change, in the context of the “dominant discourse of lifelong learning” (p. 566). He noted that one consequence of policy development over the last two decades has been the increasing link between social and educational policy, and economic considerations of government. In a discussion of citizenship education, Martin argued for a role for adult education that supports “social purpose and political engagement” (p. 571). From this perspective, adult education is about supporting learners to question dominant discourses, with the aim of addressing inequalities in society. It is “a dissenting vocation” (p. 572) that encourages learners to consider issues such as how, and in whose interests, democracy works and whether social policy addresses or reinforces inequality. However, Martin acknowledged the constraints of current policy on lifelong learning, and observed that “this kind of critical, engaged and open-ended adult education has almost disappeared” (p. 573).

While it may be true that there are few community educators working within a radical tradition in terms of organised adult learning provided by the state (Tett, 2010), social movements offer environments for adult learning that have the potential to challenge existing social conditions (Crowther, 2008). Social movements involve adults in group learning processes in order to build knowledge on a particular social issue. The aim of these movements is to engage participants in a collective struggle for change. Crowther (2008) drew distinctions between “modernist movements” (p. 175), such as the labour movement and the women’s liberation movement, which used education to achieve their collective aim, and “post-modern movements” (p. 177), such as some environmental movements in which the focus is the development of individual identities. Furthermore, Crowther (2008) noted that “it is the pre-modern, rather than post-modern (or indeed modern) movements that are setting the agenda for change today” (p. 177), and cited the influence of fundamentalist groups in America as an example. Social movements provide current examples of possibilities for engaging adults in learning that is rooted in personal experience, and

has the aim of developing critical consciousness to bring about change. However, Crowther observed that these are not acknowledged within the dominant discourse of lifelong learning that privileges social inclusion and economic outcomes.

In this perspective, the role for adult learning is to encourage critical thinking, with the aim of bringing about change. Progression relates to learners taking action to address issues that affect themselves and their communities. A component of progression in this perspective is transformations in learners' understanding that lead to decisions for collective action.

There are some commonalities between the social change perspective and the view that the role of adult education is to support individual development. Both perspectives see a role for adult learning in supporting learners' progression in ways that might increase vocational opportunities, but are not limited to the workplace. In addition, encouraging self-reflection, linked to action is important in both views. However, in the individual development perspective, the focus is on supporting learners to achieve their potential, and any action taken will be related to individual circumstances, whereas in the social change perspective, collective action to challenge inequality is emphasised.

The role and purpose of adult learning

Contrasting perspectives on the role of adult learning can be identified within the literature. These can be characterised as the economic view which focuses on the contribution of adult learning to the economy, the view in which participation in adult learning supports individual personal development, and the position that the role for adult learning is to encourage and facilitate transformative social change. However, these are not mutually exclusive, and the perspectives overlap. For example, participation in learning may lead to an increase in participants' critical understanding of their own circumstances. This could be viewed as personal development, but might lead to improved employment prospects or action for social change also. Policy on lifelong learning could be interpreted as prioritising the economic view, but account is taken in policy of social justice and social inclusion. As Biesta (2006) has observed, lifelong learning is "multidimensional" (p. 173).

However, the different perspectives can be understood in terms of differences in focus and values that sometimes overlap than as polarised positions.

Aspects of each of the perspectives may be found in discussions on the nature and purpose of adult learning within policy, academic research and theoretical debates. More research into the role that adult learning plays in learners' lives is needed to explore the complexities and enhance understanding of the contribution of adult learning to individuals and communities.

Section three: related research

In this section, I examine recent empirical work in the field of adult learning, and relate this to my study.

Research has been undertaken into the experiences of learning among adults. An American study (Bingman & Ebert, 2000) identified two sets of outcomes from literacy learning: new "literacy practices" which enabled learners to improve reading and make use of these new skills in everyday life (p. 76), and internal changes such as changes to learners' self-perceptions. These were characterised as increased self-confidence and self-esteem that supported learners in a range of social situations.

In Finland, Antikainen, Houtsonen, Huotelin and Kauppila (1995) utilised a life history approach to explore the meaning of education in the lives of adults. The study suggested that for the oldest adults, education was seen as an ideal, for those born between 1936 and 1945, education was a means to an end, and for the youngest participants education was self-evident (1995, p. 297). Further analysis of the data highlighted changes in the meanings of education in the context of rapid social change in Finland. Adult education and informal learning were included in this study but were not reported separately from other types of education in the findings.

Desjardins (2008) discussed issues that arise for researchers in investigating potential links between education and well-being and suggested the need for improved collection of empirical data, and better analysis.

As the review of policy above showed, the type of adult learning that is the focus of this study was established and has evolved in the UK. Furthermore, distinct policy

developments in Scotland, such as the recommendation for the creation of a community education service by the Alexander committee (SED, 1975), have shaped the organisation and delivery of cbal. For this reason, the remainder of this review of related research has been limited to UK and Scottish studies. I start by investigating participation in adult learning opportunities, and then discuss three themes in the literature. These are the motivations of adult learners and the barriers to participation that they encounter; the outcomes from and impact of participation, and progression within and from adult learning. I conclude the section by considering the place of my study in the context of current research.

Participation in adult learning

For over twenty-five years quantitative research into adult participation in education and training has been commissioned by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). The 1999 survey identified patterns and trends in learning and compared patterns of participation with the previous survey in 1996 (Sargant, 2000). The 1999 survey highlighted aspects of participation that have significant implications for lifelong learning policy which aims to increase participation and create a learning society (DfEE 1998; Scottish Office, 1998b). Learning related to employment was the main subject of study, and there was no increase in the number of adults participating in learning between the two survey periods (Sargant, 2000), despite the increased interest in lifelong learning in policy.

The survey identified an important disparity when participation was analysed in relation to social class (Sargant, 2000), with over 50% of the upper and middle class (AB) and lower middle class (C1) respondents classed as “current or recent learners” (p. 11), compared with 36% of skilled manual workers (C2) and 24% of those in social categories DE (semi-skilled and unskilled workers). When studied over time (since 1990) there was no change in the balance of participation by different social groups. Participation rates showed the largest increase in social class group AB, and “downward trends” (p. 11) were identified among skilled workers and unskilled workers.

Another significant aspect of participation was the age at which adults leave full-time education, with each additional year of initial education increasing the likelihood of participation in learning later (Sargant, 2000). In contrast, in the same year, Field and Spence (in Coffield, 2000) noted that this was not always evident in levels of participation in Northern Ireland. In their study of the links between social capital and participation in adult learning, Field and Spence (2000), found high levels of social capital in Northern Ireland. While these social networks were used to encourage children to achieve in school, it appeared from their study that adults preferred to learn informally from social networks and strong community ties rather than from formal learning. In the case of Northern Ireland, informal learning through bonding and bridging ties in social relationships was used by some adults as a replacement for participation in planned learning opportunities, such as cbal (Field, 2005).

In 2005, the Scottish Executive commissioned a Scottish “boost” of the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) (Ormston, Dobbie, Cleghorn, & Davidson, 2007, p. 1) which had been undertaken for the first time in England and Wales in 1997, and had been repeated several times since. The Scottish survey found that participation rates in all types of adult learning in Scotland were similar to those in England and Wales. The overall rate of participation was high (74%), but much of this related to learning in or for work. In this study, courses that were taught and were related to personal development, such as cbal courses, were included in the non-vocational learning category. Participation in non-vocational learning was much lower than vocational learning, at 28%.

In Scotland, there was evidence of what has been described as “the learning divide” (Sargant, 2000, p. v). The Scottish NALS survey found participation in learning was “positively associated with household income and occupational class” (Ormston et al., 2007, p. 25). Also, in common with the findings of the NIACE surveys, those with the longest period of initial education, and the highest educational qualifications were most likely to participate in all forms of learning as an adult.

The Scottish survey identified two further trends. The first was that participation in learning “declines with age” (Ormston et al., 2007, p. 25). However, the decline was

associated with vocational learning, and older people were more likely to participate in non-vocational learning, including cbal. The second finding was that participation rates in learning were lower for adults with a disability.

Building on the survey work described here, a recent inquiry into the future for lifelong learning (IFLL) commissioned by NIACE considered trends in participation in all types of adult learning in the UK (Schuller & Watson, 2009). In this study, participation rates were high, and compared favourably with those in other European countries. Participation in non-formal education was lower than for formal education but again this was similar to other European countries. However, learners in the UK participated in formal learning for much shorter periods of time, and it was suggested in the report that this may be due to high numbers of employees taking part in short work-related training such as induction or courses related to health and safety issues (Schuller & Watson, 2009).

The 2009 IFLL Inquiry made use of the NIACE participation surveys, and concluded that “the single most salient feature of all the participation data over time is that participation is very closely related to social class” (Schuller & Watson, 2009, p. 65). The inquiry highlighted that this was not just related to socio-economic grouping. In common with the earlier surveys, time spent in post-compulsory education, level of qualification, occupation and income were all positively associated with participation in learning as an adult (Schuller and Watson, 2009).

The findings of the Scottish NALS survey (Ormston et al., 2007) were repeated in the Inquiry: participation in learning declines with age, and those who have a disability are less likely to participate than those who do not (Schuller & Watson, 2009).

These quantitative studies show what is known about current trends in participation in learning by adults. Overall, participation is higher for learning related to vocational or professional concerns than for non-vocational topics. An exception is participation by older people who are more likely to choose non-vocational learning. Taking participation in formal and non-formal learning together, the studies indicate that adult learning reflects inequality in society (Schuller & Watson, 2009). This

suggests a difficult task for those working in community based adult learning for whom a role was identified in policy to combat social exclusion and to support learners experiencing disadvantage (Scottish Office, 1998b; Scottish Executive, 2004). More research is needed to investigate the extent to which cbal has been successful in encouraging participation among disadvantaged and excluded adults, and to explore the role of cbal in supporting progression in this context.

In the next section of this review, I examine research into aspects of adult learning, in relation to my study. The research discussed utilised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Theme one: motivation and barriers

In 1981, Cross brought together theoretical and research knowledge to examine why adults participate in learning, and why they do not, in order to improve adult learning practice (Cross, 1981). Cross identified “intrinsic and extrinsic” reasons for learning (p. 96). Intrinsic motivation described adults who decide to participate in learning simply because of their desire to learn. Others choose to learn because there is something that they need to know in order to achieve a particular goal. For these learners the motivation is extrinsic in that it is linked to a specific outcome of the learning. A third motivation is related to the activity of learning rather than the learning itself. Examples provided by Cross included meeting other people and getting out of the house. Cross found that motivation to learn stemmed from broad goals, such as getting a better job, and more narrow goals such as learning in order to be able to undertake specific tasks, and she observed that further study was required as the question of adult learners’ motivation could not be answered by “any simple formula” (1981, p. 97).

Cross (1981) utilised data from three different types of study to discover why adults do not participate in learning. Barriers were identified that could be classified into three categories: “situational, institutional and dispositional” (p. 98). Situational barriers were aspects of adults’ lives such as work or family commitments that made participation in learning difficult. Institutional barriers were related to aspects of a particular course of study that discouraged participation, such as cost or location; and

dispositional barriers referred to adults' lack of interest in learning, or self-perceptions such as lack of confidence in themselves as a learner.

Cross (1981) provided a foundation for investigating why some adults participate in learning, and others do not. This work was taken up by others, who have investigated motivation and barriers since that time, and enhanced understanding of adults' motivation to learn (Blair et al., 1993; Crossan et al., 2003; Gallacher et al., 2000; St.Clair, 2006).

In 1993, an investigation in Scotland was conducted to examine why adults return to education, what kind of guidance they received and the nature of progression through different types of learning (Blair, McPake & Munn, 1993). Using data from in-depth interviews undertaken with 50 adult learners, Blair et al. (1993) identified two factors which influence participation in learning: circumstances, or "conditions" (p. 11), and goals. They found that participation took place when adults identified goals which they felt could be met by engaging in educational opportunities, at the same time as finding themselves in circumstances which allowed them to return to education: "When goals and conditions are balanced – when education is both desired and possible – then participation results" (p. 15).

In an article based on their research (1995), Blair et al. argued that their approach, which took account of learners' goals and circumstances, added to what was known about situational, dispositional and institutional barriers (Cross, 1981). Blair et al. argued for a new conceptualisation of adult participation in education based on the findings of their study.

The work of Blair et al. (1993; 1995) contributed to our understanding of participation in adult learning. Their study built on earlier typologies of motivation such as those discussed by Cross (1981), as they identified the important role played by adults' circumstances.

The study is important for two reasons. Firstly, as "the first major qualitative study of Scottish adult returners' own views," (Blair et al. 1993, p. 5), it drew attention to the advantages of in-depth interviewing as a method for investigating adults' participation in educational opportunities. Blair et al. examined learners' perceptions

to contribute to understanding of the issues surrounding adults' return to education, and data were used as an "illustrative tool" (p. 9). The study emphasised the need for learners' views to be taken into account in any future research into adults' experiences and decisions about their learning. Secondly, the findings of the study highlighted the need to attend to adults' circumstances in order to understand their participation in learning. In the study undertaken by Blair et al., the context of individuals' lives played an important role in their decisions to participate.

In a more recent study, Bloomer and Hodkinson, (2000) took account of the social context of learning in their investigation of young people's engagement in further education (FE). Bloomer and Hodkinson sought to examine how young people's attitudes and approaches, or "dispositions" (p. 583) to learning changed over time. They noted that, although earlier studies had highlighted the importance of context, they were not longitudinal, and therefore could not examine the "nature and processes of change itself" (p. 584). In their longitudinal study, the method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, with each participant being interviewed several times over a period of three years.

Bloomer and Hodkinson took account of two perspectives in their study in order to examine participation in learning in depth. The first was the social context in which learning occurred, and the second was the influence of structural factors, such as gender and social class on dispositions to learning. The findings of the study indicated that the participants' "learning dispositions" (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000, p. 590) changed over time, but most of the young people fulfilled the expectations of their social class and gender in terms of their participation in learning over the period of the study.

Bloomer and Hodkinson used the concept of 'learning career' to address this. The history of the concept of 'career' can be traced to the work of the Chicago School of sociologists and symbolic interactionism (Gallacher et al., 2002). Bloomer and Hodkinson found that young people's learning careers were "erratic rather than linear or entirely predictable" (p. 593), and that "class, gender and ethnicity had a significant bearing upon the eventual course of those learning careers" (p. 593). They noted that changes took place in the participants' dispositions to learning and

these took place as a result of experiences outside the learning environment, as well as within it. The social context of learning was important. In addition, the young people's engagement with learning was inextricably linked to socio-economic factors.

The work of Bloomer and Hodkinson demonstrated the complexity of the experience of learning. It highlighted the significance of the social context in which learning takes place, as well as the influence of structural factors. In addition, Bloomer and Hodkinson noted that their "focus on individual stories" (p. 596) drew attention to the differences, as well as commonalities in learning careers. The longitudinal approach had facilitated the examination of changes over time. However, the focus of their study was the participation in learning of young people, and more work was needed to explore the experiences of adults.

This was taken up by Gallacher, Crossan, Leahy, Merrill and Field (2000) who utilised the concept of learning careers in their research into participation in FE by adults. Their study was funded by the Scottish Executive, and its focus was the role which participation plays in addressing social exclusion and widening access to educational opportunities for adults. Gallacher et al. included in their investigation provision that is offered in community bases of FE, which is similar in some respects to the cbal that is the focus of my study. In both cases, learning opportunities are provided locally, outside formal institutions, and tutors make use of informal methods in their teaching. However, cbal, as it is defined for my study was not one of the sites for the study.

Gallacher et al. (2000) aimed to identify factors associated with participation and non-participation for three groups of adults: those new to FE, those not participating, and "early entrants" (Gallacher et al., 2000, p. 6), a group who had recently undertaken study within FE. They carried out 41 interviews with new entrants, and a further 60 new entrants participated in focus group interviews. Thirty-three non-participants were interviewed, just under half of whom had no formal qualifications. Only 15 early entrants took part in the study, and Gallacher et al. noted that a longer-term study would have facilitated a bigger sample of this group. Gallacher et al.

adopted a life history approach to the interviews, and they found that this method facilitated “a fuller understanding” of participation in FE (p. 17).

In common with Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), Gallacher et al. (2000) emphasised the complex nature of participation in learning, and the aim of their study was to take account of social structures and social processes in their analysis of life history data. They used a framework for analysis that helped to identify barriers and motivations to participation, but also took account of social structures, “such as inequality or poverty” (p. 20). Gallacher et al. made use of the concepts of learning pathways and learning careers (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) also, to assist the analysis of adults’ decisions about participating in learning.

Gallacher et al. (2000) identified barriers to participation for adult returners to education as negative experiences of learning at school, financial difficulties, responsibilities for the care of children, the location of provision, and age. Many of the research participants saw FE “as being for younger students and therefore not for them” (p. 26). As well as identifying barriers to participation, the study highlighted factors which supported learners’ motivation. These included self-development, enhancing skills for work, and overcoming health related issues. A large number of the participants in the study had experienced physical or mental ill-health and had returned to education as a way of “ending their personal isolation” (p. 29). In addition, some participants were motivated to improve their contribution to community and voluntary activities. Gallacher et al. identified critical incidents as having a key role in encouraging participation in learning. Life events such as divorce or unemployment had served as triggers for participation. Aspects of the learning opportunities, such as the provision of good quality child care, and sufficient information and encouragement were additional motivating factors.

Gallacher et al. (2000) concluded that the motivation to return to learning is “a complex interaction between the agency of the individual and structural forces in society” (p. 38). In common with Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), Gallacher et al. found that relationships with others, both within and outside the learning setting, were important in the development of learners’ identities. Aspects of the learning environment such as learning at your own pace and tutor support contributed to the

development of “confident and committed” learners (2000, p. 34). However, in many cases, learners had moved in and out of learning, and their participation was dependent on a range of factors.

An important aspect of the work of Gallacher et al. (2000) was the recognition within the analysis of the context in which adults learn. The study took the social processes involved in learning into account. In addition, structural aspects such as gender and social class were identified as key factors in participation and non-participation. The methodology employed by the researchers reflected this complexity, and the use of life history interviews facilitated in-depth exploration of the factors associated with participation.

In an article based on their study, Gallacher, Crossan, Field and Merrill (2002) built on the concept of learning career. In the article, Gallacher et al. focused on two aspects of the study. The first of these was the importance of social relationships in supporting the development of learning careers. The second focus was institutional factors such as the importance of community bases: not “just about the removal of a physical barrier to participation but also the use of a culturally unthreatening space” (pp. 502-503). The existence of financial support and child care was mentioned also, but the authors pointed out that while these aspects are important to encourage people to return to learning they are not significant in “engendering lasting change of identity” (p. 505).

For Gallacher et al. (2002) the concept of learning career highlighted that people develop their identity as learners over time. However, they pointed out that this was not a linear progression. The development of learning careers could be fragmented, and Gallacher et al. concluded that adult learners’ identities are fragile.

In another article based on their study, Crossan, Field, Gallacher, and Merrill (2003) re-stated their view that the concept of learning career had been useful to enhance understanding of the experience of learning. They described learning careers of adult returners to education as “contradictory and volatile” (p. 65). Participants in their study moved forwards and backwards, and in and out of learning. Furthermore

individuals' identities as learners were described as "fragile and vulnerable to sudden changes in the learner's social milieu" (p. 65).

The work of Gallacher et al. (2002) and Crossan et al. (2003) built on the concept of learning career, as a way of understanding adults' participation in learning. They highlighted that adults' learning careers can move backwards as well as forwards, and that learners may drop out of learning for periods of time. Linked to this, their study suggested that adults can develop their identity as a learner over time, but this is fluid, and is contingent on learners' circumstances. In their analysis, learning careers should not be seen as linear but as moving in many different directions over the lifespan.

Community-based FE was identified by Gallacher et al. (2000) as important in supporting some adults to return to learning, particularly for those who had negative experiences of school education. However, although many aspects of this type of provision were positive, the study highlighted that some students can become dependent on community-based learning, and this may constrain their learning careers.

Gallacher et al. (2000) found that adults' involvement in informal learning, through participation in community projects such as women's groups and community centres, could support a decision to return to formal learning. However, in their study this was identified as one of a number of motivating factors and was not explored in depth. Gallacher et al. noted that the transition from informal learning in the community to formal learning opportunities "requires further investigation" (p. 30).

In 2006 research was carried out for the Scottish Executive that focused on adults and part time-study (St.Clair, 2006). The aims of this study concerned the motivation of adult learners, whether there was a distinction between participating in learning out of interest in the subject and learning linked to employment, and how these varied among individuals (p. 1). The purpose of the research was to investigate those factors which affect adult learning that could be addressed through policy initiatives.

The definition of learning used in the study encompassed learning in formal, institutional settings, organised informal learning, and learning undertaken on one's

own (St.Clair, 2006). This was a broad focus but the study is of interest because of the contribution it made to understanding why adults participate in learning, and why they might continue to participate.

The research undertaken by St.Clair (2006) suggested that the removal of barriers alone does not necessarily result in participation. St.Clair found that “participation results when basic needs are satisfied, hygienes are in place, and there is motivation for learning” (p. 22). The “hygienes” referred to in the report are those things which are required to be present before participation would even become a possibility. Examples include child care, affordability and positive attitude to learning (p. 17). The findings of this work showed that adults may decide to participate in learning when circumstances support their participation, when there is nothing to prevent them from participating and when they can see clear benefits from participation (St.Clair, 2006).

In relation to the aim of the research to investigate the potential role of policy initiatives in supporting participation in learning, St.Clair (2006) found that many of the factors involved in adults’ decisions to return to learning are not directly affected by policy. While policy initiatives can help to support learners, they “cannot make the difference alone” (p. 49). Nonetheless, St. Clair concluded that there was an important role for policy in ensuring that hygienes were satisfied, in order that adults would be able to participate in learning when they made a decision to do so.

The study undertaken by St. Clair (2006), contributed to understanding of adults’ motivation to participate in learning, and drew attention to the limited role for policy in supporting participation. In common with the earlier studies (Cross, 1981; Blair et al., 1993; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Gallacher et al., 2000), it highlighted the need for further research, especially in relation to particular groups of people, although he stressed the need for research that produced generalisable results.

The studies in this section highlighted the complexity of the links between adults’ motivation and their participation in learning. The role of community-based provision was considered but progression from informal to formal learning needed

further investigation. Furthermore, a question remains about whether learners in cbal become dependent on this type of provision, thereby limiting their progression.

Theme two: outcomes and impact

In 1999, the Research Centre on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) was established by the UK government to “investigate the social benefits that learning brings to individual learners and to society as a whole” (Feinstein et al., 2003, p. ii). While a Centre on the Economics of Education was set up around the same time, the establishment of WBL demonstrated the commitment of government to investigating the role of learning in supporting social inclusion and individual well-being, as well as serving an economic agenda (Schuller et al., 2004).

In the report of a study undertaken by the Centre in 2002, the authors described a framework which they developed to support their analyses of data (Schuller et al., 2002). The framework comprised a triangle made up of human capital, social capital and personal identity (p. 8). To an extent, this framework reflects the different perspectives on adult learning discussed in the previous section. Human capital includes the skills and qualifications that might lead to improved prospects in employment and economic benefits, while social capital refers to the social networks and relationships which can benefit individuals and communities. Identity capital includes self-confidence and self-esteem that can be seen in the individual development perspective. However, Schuller et al. (2002) caution against a simplistic understanding of the framework, and stress the inter-relationships among the three types of capital. They developed a matrix which they used to allow the effects of participation in learning to be examined in terms of individual and community benefits in one dimension and effects that were sustaining, as well as transforming, in another dimension (Schuller et al., 2002).

One of the main findings of this study was that participation in learning can have important sustaining effects, both on personal lives and in a wider social context (Schuller et al., 2002). This effect allows adults to cope with the pressures and stresses in their lives, and can have a protective effect on mental health and well-being. It also enables adults to make a contribution to the well-being of others in

their families and their communities. The sustaining effect is preventative in the sense that it can support learners that are at risk of being affected by mental ill-health. For example, learning experiences had provided a distraction from problems and anxieties for some of the adults in this study, thereby supporting them to avoid depression.

In common with other studies (Communities Scotland, 2003; McGivney, 1999; Morrell et al., 2004), this research suggested that the development of confidence was a “fundamental and pervasive” (Schuller et al., 2002, p.14) outcome of participation in learning. The benefits that might result from increased confidence were identified. These included individual benefits, such as being able to put forward one’s own point of view or challenge the views of others, to collective outcomes, such as the ability to take on roles and responsibilities within the community (Schuller et al., 2002).

In 2003, WBL carried out a large-scale, quantitative study into the effects of participation in adult learning (Feinstein et al., 2003). One of the main findings of the research was summarised thus: “We find consistent evidence for the effects of participation in learning during this period of the life-course [mid-adulthood] on health and social capital” (Feinstein et al., 2003, p. 72). In relation to leisure courses, participation had positive effects on the chances of adults giving up smoking, taking more exercise, increasing levels of civic participation and reducing authoritarian attitudes. This was in relation to most types of adult learning included in the investigation. However, one finding, in relation to leisure courses, was surprising. Participation in leisure courses was “positively associated with becoming depressed” (p. 56). This was in contrast with the findings of the earlier qualitative study in which respondents had reported a very positive effect on their psychological state (Schuller et al., 2002). The authors of this study suggested that the negative effect on well-being might be explained by the fact that adults often participate in leisure courses when they are feeling depressed, as a distraction or to provide a structure to their day (Feinstein et al., 2003).

The research undertaken by the WBL uncovered important effects of participation in learning beyond the economic and vocational. However, they did not include cbal in

their research. Further investigation is needed to establish whether the health and social capital benefits of learning revealed in this research apply to cbal also.

Field (2009b) drew on some of the evidence produced by WBL (Feinstein et al, 2003; Schuller et al., 2002) in a recent IFLL paper, which was produced as part of the inquiry into lifelong learning. The IFLL paper argued that “education has a measureable impact on well-being through all stages of life” (Field, 2009b, p. 7).

Field (2009b) identified non-economic benefits of participation in learning as “self-efficacy, autonomy, social competences, health maintenance, civic engagement, community resilience and a sense of agency or control over one’s life” (pp. 20-21). Although Field discussed these as non-economic benefits, they could be connected to economic advantage for adults through improved opportunities for work. Field noted that participation in learning is not always a positive experience for everyone. In addition, he stated that learning can extend “bridging ties” (2009b, p. 27) , in terms of developing adults’ social networks, but it can adversely affect “bonding ties” (p. 27), in that close family may not accept changes in adult learners’ attitudes and behaviour.

Field (2009b) concluded that adult learning influences well-being and he stated that policies for lifelong learning which focus on the economic benefits for younger, employed adults “are certain to penalise older adults, and will particularly hit those outside the workforce” (p. 30). This IFLL paper highlighted the risks inherent in lifelong learning policy that privileges economic outcomes of participation in learning. There is a need to know more about the potential benefits of participation in order to draw attention to broader definitions of desirable outcomes.

The work of WBL, and the paper which arose from the IFLL, focused on the social benefits of participation in adult learning opportunities across the UK (Feinstein et al. 2003; Field, 2009; Schuller at al. 2002). However, the research investigated a wide range of learning provision which did not include cbal. This work was taken up in 2003, when the Centre for Community Learning and Development, and Adult Literacy and Numeracy, which was part of an Executive agency called Communities Scotland, published a report which examined the outcomes of community based

adult learning in Scotland (Communities Scotland, 2003). In addition, the study sought to investigate how the impact and outcomes of cbal were measured by providers.

The study was carried out in three geographical areas in Scotland, and the outcomes investigated were linked to the policy priorities of social inclusion, lifelong learning, and active citizenship (Communities Scotland, 2003). Three methods of data collection were used in the study in order to take account of the views of both providers of cbal and participants. A questionnaire was completed by the providers of cbal in each area, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of providers. Data were collected from participants through discussion groups (p. 13). The participant groups which took part in the discussions were selected by local providers and were already involved in community-based learning.

The report provided a definition of community based adult learning which identified key aspects of cbal in Scotland. In the Communities Scotland research (2003), data were collected from local authorities, FE colleges, voluntary organisations and one project which was a collaboration among FE, higher education (HE) and a local authority.

Four research objectives were outlined in the report of the project: a description of cbal provision in the three geographical areas; the collection of information about the impact of the provision; consideration of methods for measuring the impact, and collection of information on the progress of local partnerships (Communities Scotland, 2003). The findings of the second and third research objectives, regarding the impact of cbal, are the focus of this discussion.

In this study there was “a significant degree of consensus” (Communities Scotland, 2003, p. 22) about the impact on individuals perceived by providers. These were identified as increased ability to be involved in communities; the development of skills and confidence in relation to employment; the ability to pursue other learning opportunities; and personal benefits related to self-confidence and motivation. The practitioners identified community benefits, related to the development of social capital and social cohesion, also (Communities Scotland, 2003).

Participants' views were sought from two groups of learners and there were differences between the two groups' responses. One group gave equal prominence to the development of skills and increased social contact, with less focus on individual benefits of participation. In contrast, the other group emphasised personal development outcomes of their participation. However, both groups agreed that increased self-confidence and raised expectations were important outcomes of participation in cbal, and they valued "more intangible benefits" of learning, also. (Communities Scotland, 2003, p. 26).

In this study the views of providers of cbal and participants "largely coincide" (Communities Scotland, 2003, p. 26). Increased self-confidence and motivation were identified by each group as contributing to other outcomes, for example increasing employability and building community capacity. They were important also, in encouraging learners to access other learning opportunities. This underlined a role for cbal in supporting adults to progress with their learning (Communities Scotland, 2003).

However, in the Communities Scotland (2003) study, the majority of providers of cbal were able to supply little quantitative information related to the impact of their provision (Communities Scotland, 2003). Qualitative data were recorded by some organisations but this tended to arise from participant evaluations that focused on the experience of learning rather than "more detailed analysis of the impact on participants" (p. 28). The study highlighted that, although providers and participants were able to identify the outcomes of participation in cbal, there was little evidence to support this. The providers of cbal agreed on the requirement for increased recording of the impact of their work, and some identified a need for "the development of practical tools/methods for assessing personal impacts or milestones" (p. 31) as well as staff development opportunities, to enable them to do this effectively.

This study illustrated a range of benefits of participation in cbal. These included the development of skills and confidence in relation to work, as well as personal and social development. Practitioners and participants in cbal were able to describe

personal development outcomes such as increased confidence and self-esteem as well as community benefits through the development of social capital.

In addition, the study highlighted the need to know more about the outcomes of cbal for individuals and communities. In relation to individual development, inclusion of the views of participants was emphasised. The authors of the report noted that “dialogue must be a starting point” (Communities Scotland, 2003, p. 44), especially in the measurement of outcomes of learning provision that is planned and delivered through engagement with learners to meet their needs and aspirations.

The research described in this section suggests a range of outcomes of participation and a role for adult learning that is “beyond the economic” (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 179). However, not enough is known about the specific contribution made by cbal in the context of learners’ lives. The Communities Scotland (2003) study highlighted the need the need for learners’ views to be explored in order to investigate this. Furthermore, the Scottish research drew attention to the difficulties of measuring the benefits that matter to learners, and in providing evidence of the impact of participation in cbal.

Theme three: progression

In this section, I discuss progression in the academic literature. Some of the research I have discussed in earlier sections addressed progression as part of an investigation into motivation, or outcomes, and this is re-visited first. Next, other work, in which progression was the main focus, is explored.

Blair, McPake and Munn (1993) investigated progression as part of their study of adults’ experiences of returning to education in Scotland. Within their report, progression was described as moving “through different forms of provision” (p. 6), and it often arose from other outcomes of participation. One of the main benefits of participation in learning that was identified by the study participants was increased confidence. It was this that was important for progression, in the sense that increased confidence in their abilities was an encouragement to learners to continue with learning, even when this had not been their initial goal. In addition, participants

reported that they had increased their knowledge and that this encouraged them to think about progression also.

One aspect of progression that was identified in the research was that adults' goals had often changed during the course of their participation in education (Blair et al. 1993). Initially, adults had returned with the intention of improving their employment prospects, but progression in learning became the goal of many more participants following their participation: "this switch from employment to progression is most striking" (p. 83).

A second finding of this study was that the participants described progression in a variety of ways. Although progression was defined as moving to other types of education, this did not always mean a move to more advanced levels of study or qualification (Blair et al., 1993).

A later Scottish study investigated motivation and barriers to participation in FE, (Gallacher et al. 2000), and addressed progression in relation to informal learning. Involvement in informal learning through participation in community projects was identified as important, in "facilitating the return to more formal learning" (p. 30). However, this type of learning provision was addressed briefly in the study, and the authors noted that the transition from informal to formal learning required further investigation. The provision of FE in local community bases played a role in supporting decisions to participate in learning, also. The informal, friendly approach of the tutors and the flexible nature of the provision were cited as important to adults, especially those who had not had a positive experience at school. However, the authors noted that some participants could become dependent on community based provision, and this might prevent them from progressing. In this study of participation in FE, progression was defined in the research design as "further study or the labour market" (p. 7), and the role for cbal and community based FE, was supporting learners to move to formal FE provision.

A broader view of progression than that identified by Gallacher et al. (2000) was discussed within the report of the large quantitative study carried out by WBL (Feinstein et al., 2003). The authors observed that participation in learning often

leads to the motivation to undertake further learning, but they suggested that progression from supportive learning environments to more challenging types of learning were “enmeshed with a more general progression in terms of personal and social development” (p. 73). When participants gained personally, with increased confidence for instance, this could lead to a desire to continue to learn. Furthermore, they found that “progression in (or from) learning is important if progression in other areas is to continue” (p. 75). They identified a cycle effect whereby one of the benefits of participation in learning was the desire to participate in further learning, which in turn could lead to other personal and social benefits such as the development of self-confidence and increased community engagement. This “suggests that participation in adult learning is a very important element in positive cycles of development and progression” (p. iv).

The studies undertaken by Blair et al. (1993), Gallacher et al. (2000) and WBL (Feinstein et al., 2003; Schuller et al., 2002) suggested that progression can be both an outcome of participation in learning, as well as part of the motivation to continue to learn. However, in each study a broad range of learning opportunities was examined, and cbal was not the main focus of the research. Progression in these studies was addressed as part of an investigation into other aspects of involvement in learning such as motivation to learn and outcomes of participation. In these studies progression held different meanings. The learners in the study undertaken by Blair et al. (1993) identified the decision to continue to learn as progression but this was not necessarily at a more advanced level. Gallacher et al. (2000) focused on the potential role of community based FE to support progression to formal education, whereas the work of WBL showed that progression was associated with a range of personal and social benefits, including continuing to learn.

Two studies which focused on progression from community based learning, called Adult and Community Learning (ACL) were undertaken in England. The first was a large-scale investigation carried out for the government’s Department for Education and Skills (Morrell, Chowdhury & Savage, 2004).

The research undertaken by Morrell et al. (2004) was a large scale investigation undertaken in two stages. Information from 33 interviews was used to develop a

quantitative questionnaire which was administered through more than 1900 face-to-face interviews. This approach provided a breadth of information about the impact of ACL for a large number of adults, but there is less in-depth information about the complexities of the role of learning in adults' lives, than in other studies (Blair et al., 1993; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Gallacher et al., 2000).

Progression was identified as one important outcome of participation (Morrell et al., 2004). In this study, progression was described as going on to or planning to go on to other learning, especially "a different course, a course at a higher level or a course which leads to a qualification" (p. 1). Progression in employment was considered also, identified here as gaining promotion or a new job (p. 1). This study was undertaken for a department of Government and it highlighted that, from a policy perspective, progression from ACL related to formal education and employment. This has resonance with the policy context in Scotland, in which similar goals for cbal are identified (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007).

Morrell et al. (2004) found that adults' opinions of learning, and views of themselves as learners, had been affected positively by their participation in ACL (p. 91). This had in turn affected attitudes to continuing to learn and progression: "importantly, 20% said they went on to do a course they would not have thought of doing before" (p. 91). In this study, one outcome of participation in ACL was the development of an interest in continuing to learn. Linked to this were changes to learners' attitudes towards learning, and to their self-perceptions which had a positive effect on progression, defined in the study as learning at a more advanced level or accessing improved opportunities in work.

Another study into progression from ACL in England was a small-scale investigation into learning progression and inclusion in ACL (Cook & Smith, 2004). The focus for this study was community-based online learning centres which form part of the ACL provision. Cook and Smith observed that these centres had an increasing role in ACL, and described the provision as "essentially informal learning, using digital media, in a community setting" (2004, para. 4).

Cook and Smith (2004) observed that, within UK policy, community based learning provision was often seen as being able to support learners to progress into more formal learning opportunities or employment. Their study investigated the meaning of progression for ACL staff and learners within this policy context (2004).

The method of data collection in this study was semi-structured interviews with ten tutors and learners. Although the type of learning being addressed in this study is not the same as cbal in Scotland, the findings contribute to the discussion about the role of learning provided in community centres in supporting adults to identify and work towards their goals.

In common with Blair et al. (1993), Cook and Smith (2004) found that adults' goals can change throughout their engagement with education. Although a low proportion of the respondents in Cook and Smith's study began their involvement with the online centres with goals of gaining a qualification or employment, some developed such goals during the period of their participation (Cook & Smith, 2004). In relation to this, Cook and Smith identified a "pre-progression" stage of centre users, whereby learners arrived at centres without specific goals, but moved from this stage, and began to make changes in their lives (2004, para. 29). Their study suggested that adults may begin their participation in learning without clear aims, but they may develop these as their learning progresses.

Cook and Smith (2004) suggested that particular aspects of community based provision, such as crèche facilities, may bring adults into informal learning. Following this involvement, they may develop the aim to participate in more formal learning. The study by Cook and Smith enhanced understanding of progression by identifying the pre-progression stage of learning, in which learners may have no clear aspirations. Through a process of supported learning participants can adopt more formal learning goals.

Much of the focus of this study was on the use of ICT in learning. Cook and Smith (2004) concluded that the use of technology does support learners' goals. They suggested also that more work needs to be done on the types of technology and digital tools which can support pre-progression learners to progress or move towards

their own goals (2004). Although the focus of this paper was a different type of learning from cbal in Scotland, it provided a useful way of thinking about the different stages in their learning that participants may move through, from pre-progression to progression, and it highlighted a role for community based learning in supporting learners in the pre-progression stage.

A significant contribution to our understanding of adults' participation in informal learning has been made by McGivney (1999; 2001; 2002; 2003). McGivney undertook wide-ranging research into informal learning in England, and much of her work focused on progression.

McGivney discussed definitions of informal learning, which she described as a "broad and loose concept" (1999, p. 1). She noted that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between formal and informal learning as, often, there is no clear boundary between the two types of provision. In her research, informal learning was described as taking place outside formal institutions and being "non-course based" (1999, p. 2). In addition, the learning that was the focus of her investigations was intentional, and not the incidental learning that might arise from everyday experiences.

The focus of the study carried out by McGivney in 1999 was progression from informal learning, as defined above. McGivney suggested that progression could be seen in personal, educational, social and economic terms. Personal progression was characterised as changes in lifestyle or personal circumstances, and educational progression was involvement in further learning. Social progression could be seen in involvement in the local community, while economic progression included changes in employment (p. 79). There was acknowledgement within the study that there are a number of outcomes of participation in informal learning but the focus of this research was whether informal learning "leads to more systematic and intentional learning" (p. 8).

The (1999) study brought together literature, first-hand accounts from learners and providers, and observations to draw conclusions about the role of informal learning in supporting educational progression. Important outcomes of participation were identified which related to the development of knowledge and skills, including social

skills, increased self confidence and greater autonomy. In this study, McGivney (1999) found that community based informal learning “sets many people on a continuing learning path” (p. 80) and she identified factors that facilitate progression. These factors related to the organisational structures of providers, such as the strength of the links between providers, and to the provision itself. Aspects of provision that supported progression related to the curriculum, access arrangements, and support for learners. However, the most significant factor which emerged was the role of “key individuals” (p. 26) who worked to support adults with their learning: “without the support of local outreach and guidance workers or other people working in the community, many individuals would not make the transition to formal education or training programmes” (p. 81).

McGivney’s (1999) study found that “progression means different things to different people” (p. 10) and that adults’ individual circumstances and motivations had a bearing on their view of progression. In addition, the study highlighted that the different types of learning opportunities examined supported different kinds of progression. (p. 79).

Following the research undertaken in 1999, McGivney wrote two articles which focussed on perceptions of progression held by policy-makers. The first of these was an article written as a contribution to the Scottish Forum on Lifelong Learning, in which McGivney (2001) discussed the kind of informal learning that takes place through community involvement, such as membership of tenants groups. In the article, McGivney identified a hierarchy of learning in the minds of policy makers in which “experiential knowledge is at the bottom” (p. 104) and she suggested that one reason for this is that the outcomes of informal learning are often difficult to measure. However, McGivney (2001) provided examples of informal learning, through community activities, that could lead to the identification of further learning needs and then to participation in more structured learning. In the article, McGivney (2001) argued that informal learning should not be seen as valuable only for its role in supporting progression to other types of learning but because it is “culturally, socially and economically valuable in its own right” (p. 106).

The second article was a discussion paper which explored the different perspectives held by policy makers and learners on the terms “‘progression’, ‘achievement’ and ‘outcomes’” (McGivney, 2002, p. v). In the paper, McGivney (2002) acknowledged that “broader benefits” (p. 6) of learning have been recognised in policy recently (p. 6) but she again referred to a hierarchy of learning, with accredited learning placed at the top (p. 7). McGivney stated that there is “no universally accepted definition” (p. 11) of progression, but within policy the word has come to imply movement through different types of learning provision. In particular, “vertical progression”, moving from one course to another at a more advanced level, remained the focus policy makers (p. 14). McGivney argued that for many adult learners, participating in informal learning is a rewarding and worthwhile experience, regardless of potential progression, and she voiced concern that learners who do not state progression as one of their aims might be valued less by providers and funders.

McGivney suggested that there is a gap between the aims of learners and those of policy makers and funders, and she suggested that there was a need for those in the latter group to acknowledge broader interpretations of “achievement” and “progression” (p. 33). In addition she stated that there was a need to include learners’ perspectives in decisions about adult learning provision.

Building on her earlier work, McGivney (2003) undertook another study in which the focus was progression “in the context of adult learning” (p.vii). Specifically, she investigated educational progression for adults who had returned to learning following a break from formal education. In this study, a review of the learning routes of winners of Adult Learners’ Week Awards, and analysis of completed questionnaires from FE college students (McGivney, 2003), revealed that “there is no clear typology of adult learning pathways” (p. 48). However, the findings did indicate that adults often continue to learn once they have engaged with intentional learning and that learners’ journeys can be “horizontal and zigzag” as well as upward and linear (p. 10). Learners’ progression routes were characterised within the report as individual experiences which can depend on “age, race, gender and employment status” (p. 48) as well as the variety of adults’ motivations. This reflects the complexity of adults’ learning careers identified by Gallacher et al. (2000; 2002)

whereby continued participation in learning is influenced by the social context in which learning takes place, as well as a range of socio-economic factors.

McGivney's investigations added to what is known about informal learning in the community. In relation to learners, her research highlighted that progression can have different meanings for individual learners (1999). Furthermore, she drew attention to the different perspectives on progression held by learners and policy-makers (2001, 2002). However, McGivney's work pointed to the need to know more about informal learning as there was little information on "adult learning journeys" (2003, p. 5). In addition, her research highlighted that "what was conspicuously missing in debates and decisions about adult learning provision to date has been the perspectives of learners themselves" (2002, p. 31).

McGivney undertook extensive research, and her work enhanced understanding of adults' participation in informal learning in England. However, questions remained about community based adult learning, and progression in a Scottish context.

In Scotland, a study was undertaken to explore persistence, progression and achievement (PPA) in relation to literacies learning (MacLachlan, Hall, Tett, Crowther, & Edwards, 2008). The project aimed to identify aspects of literacies provision that supported or discouraged learners' progression. The study had a particular focus on the experiences of learners who were at risk of not achieving their learning goals.

MacLachlan et al. (2008) adopted a life history approach in their study, in order to take account of the impact of past and present experiences on learners' ability to persist and progress in their learning. A range of methods for collecting data was used in the study. In a first phase of fieldwork, observations along with telephone and face-to-face interviews were carried out with tutors and learners (MacLachlan et al., 2008). A planned second phase had to be amended due to difficulties in contacting learners who had dropped out of their learning, but some face-to-face and group interviews were undertaken.

Progression was discussed in the report of the PPA project (MacLachlan et al., 2008). One of the aims of the project was to enhance understanding of the concepts

of persistence, progress and achievement in literacy learning, and a seminar was held to explore different understandings. In this project, a distinction was drawn between progression and progress. Progression was defined as “continuing to engage in learning formally or informally” (p. 30). It could include moving in different directions in learning but was linked to longer-term goals. Progress was seen as “the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding pertaining to learners’ own goals, no matter how small they may be” (p. 30). Progress was linked to wider achievement and could include goals in learners’ personal and social lives as well as learning. MacLachlan et al. (2008) noted that the understandings in their study differed from those in England, where progress is seen as happening within a course, and progression means moving to other courses, employment or other contexts.

Within their research MacLachlan et al. (2008) found that there were different perceptions of progression in different learning groups, and that tutors employed a variety of strategies to encourage progression. Despite this diversity, they observed that: “the one constant to emerge however was that however it was interpreted, a key factor was that it entailed continuing to learn, in whatever form that might take” (p. 65). This could include moving to more advanced levels of learning, but could mean continuing to learn in a variety of ways. The strategies that were most effective in supporting progression were those that provided “holistic, wrap around support for all aspects of learners’ lives, not merely the learning element of them” (p. 67).

The life history approach that was adopted in this study facilitated the exploration of a range of factors which discouraged literacies learners to persist, progress and achieve (MacLachlan et al., 2008). Aspects of the participants’ lives such as negative experiences of initial education, difficult family circumstances or issues such as depression or addiction had adversely affected participants’ abilities to engage with learning. This could be attributed, in part, to low self-esteem and “low learner identity” (p. 7) which had arisen from negative experiences.

MacLachlan et al. (2008) identified the goals of participants that supported them to persist and progress. These included the aim of securing employment in the future, helping to support their children’s education, increasing self-esteem, and becoming involved in community work. Many of the learners had experienced a change or

incident in their lives that had acted as a trigger to their engagement in learning. The study found that where learners' goals were recognised and supported, learners were able to persist and progress.

This study added to what is known about progression in the sense that it revealed aspects of learners' lives, as well as aspects of provision that supported or discouraged learners to persist or progress. In addition, the study illustrated how a life history approach to the research was effective in taking account of the context in which literacies learning took place. However, the focus of this study was adult literacies provision, and the experiences of learners at risk of dropping out of learning before achieving their goals, and not cbal. The adoption of a life history approach to investigating cbal might enhance understanding of the role of this type of learning in the context of learners' lives.

The Learning Lives Project

The Learning Lives project (TLRP, 2008) was a study of adult learning in the UK that does not fit easily into the categories I have created for this review and so I have addressed it separately. The final publications from this project are forthcoming, but the main findings of the research are available from working papers and summary documents (www.tlrp.org).

The Learning Lives project aimed to explore the meaning and nature of learning in the context of learners' lives (TLRP, 2008). It was a large-scale longitudinal study in which over five hundred interviews were carried out over a period of three years. Quantitative data from the British Household Panel survey were analysed also, and the approach taken was biographical. The research examined the role of both formal and informal learning in learners' lives, and it sought to explore relationships between learning, identity and agency (Hodkinson, with Hodkinson, Hawthorn & Ford, 2008).

This study was large-scale and wide-ranging in scope. Furthermore, the findings of the study were not published at the time that I designed and carried out my research. However, two aspects are relevant to my study. First, the study added to what is known about the relationship between learning and agency. The Learning Lives

project showed that learning can both increase and decrease agency, or the ability to make decisions about one's life (TLRP, 2008). Increased agency was more likely when adults were aware of their learning, such as through participation in formal courses or the achievement of qualifications. Also, the confidence that comes from successful learning could lead to increased agency. In contrast, the study found that learning could adversely affect adults' sense of agency. When learning was too challenging, for example, learners' sense of agency was affected negatively.

The second aspect of the Learning Lives project that is relevant to this review was that the life history methodology pointed to one way that adults learn from their lives. The study suggested that telling stories was an important means of learning from one's own life. Furthermore, the ability to learn through narrative could itself be learned, and the study suggested that "life stories play a crucial role in the articulation of a sense of self" (TLRP, 2008, para 5). This suggested that life history research might play a role in supporting adults to reflect on their lives, as well as take account of the context in which learning takes place.

Summary

This section of the review of the literature has shown how existing research has enhanced our understanding of adult learning. Some of this work has pointed to the complexities of adults' motivation to participate in learning (Blair et al. 1993; Gallacher et al. 2000; Crossan et al. 2003), and has highlighted the multi-directional and fragile nature of motivation. Others have explored the range of outcomes of participation, demonstrating important personal and social outcomes, as well as economic (Feinstein et al. 2003; Schuller et al. 2002, 2004). However, much of this work investigated a wide range of adult learning provision, and little attention was paid to participation in cbal.

One study in Scotland focused on cbal (Communities Scotland, 2003) and suggested that a desire to continue to learn, linked to increased self-confidence, was an important outcome of participation. While existing research has enhanced understanding of adult learning, this review suggested the need for further research in order to add to knowledge about participation in and progression from cbal. The

review illustrated that dialogue with participants is an important aspect of cbal, and should be an integral part of research into this area of adult learning.

In relation to progression, McGivney (1999, 2002, 2003) drew attention to the different perspectives held by policy-makers and providers of adult learning, and emphasised the need for account to be taken of participants' views. In Scotland, MacLachlan et al. (2008) included participants' views in their study of persistence, progression and achievement, but this was in relation to literacies learning, and not cbal. Therefore questions remained about the potential role for cbal in supporting learner progression in a Scottish context.

Conclusion

This literature review has explored community based adult learning in relation to policy, theory and research in order to establish the context for my study. The main focus was literature in the UK, especially Scotland, and this facilitated an in-depth study of the debates and discussions about the roles and purpose of adult learning specific to the context of Scottish community based adult learning. The review revealed a complex picture in which the role of cbal, and its potential contribution to supporting learner progression, is not visible.

At present, cbal lies between two main strands of policy in Scotland, that of CLD and of lifelong learning. This means that the priorities identified in policy for cbal are complex, and contrasting perspectives on the role of cbal can be found in policy documents. In relation to progression there is an emphasis on the role that cbal plays in contributing to an economic agenda, and little account is taken of progression in participants' family, social and personal lives. Research was needed to clarify the potential contribution of cbal in achieving policy goals, and to explore progression in the context of policy priorities.

Contrasting perspectives on the role of adult learning can be seen in theoretical debate, as well as policy. These can be categorised under the broad headings of economic, individual development and social change perspectives. However, this review highlighted that the perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and there are overlaps among the different views. Further research would help to uncover the

experience of participation in and progression from cbal in the context of these overlapping, contrasting views.

Research has been undertaken that has contributed to what is known about participation in and progression from a range of adult learning opportunities. However, there were few studies in which cbal was the focus of the research. One reason for this might be that, in terms of the numbers participating and the funding allocated to it, cbal is a relatively small part of adult learning provision. Another reason could be linked to the problems of investigating outcomes that can be long-term and difficult to quantify. Furthermore, it can be difficult to make claims about the outcomes of short cbal courses. However, participation in cbal over time might have a cumulative effect that can be measured. It is important that the potential contribution of cbal is not overlooked, particularly because this type of provision aims to engage disadvantaged and excluded learners who might not access other learning opportunities. The nature of cbal provision is such that it can provide a first step into learning for some adults. Moreover, there is a need to find ways to measure the outcomes of and progression from cbal, as it might be important to evidence the potential role of cbal in learners' lives in the context of limited resources for adult learning.

In the literature, the importance of taking account of the context in which learning takes place was emphasised (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Gallacher et al., 2000). In addition, the need to take account of participants' views was identified (Communities Scotland, 2003; MacLachlan et al. 2008; McGivney, 1999, 2002, 2003). This review suggested that the adoption of a life history approach to researching cbal would take account of the context of participation and progression, and allow learners' perceptions to be added to debates about the role of this area of work.

This review of the literature highlighted that not enough was known about community based adult learning in Scotland. There was a need for an in-depth study in which community based adult learning opportunities were the focus. It was important to address cbal in the Scottish setting as this is distinct from the policy environment in England. This study was needed to begin to clarify the role of cbal in the light of contrasting perspectives on the potential contribution of this area of work,

and in the context of policy on CLD and lifelong learning. Further research into cbal could help to make sense of the potential role of cbal in supporting learner progression, as part of CLD and lifelong learning provision.

The research aims

In this research I sought to investigate the potential contribution of Scottish community based adult learning, and to add learners' perspectives to knowledge about this aspect of learning provision. I identified three aims for the study as follows:

1. Examine the potential role and contribution of cbal in the context of learners' past and present lives;
2. Explore learners' perceptions of progression, and construct the meaning of progression from the learners' point of view;
3. Investigate learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal in relation to priorities for CLD and lifelong learning identified in Scottish policy.

I used the Communities Scotland (2003) description to define the type of adult learning that was the focus of this study. The learning opportunities in which the learners participated were course-based. In some cases, there was a pre-set curriculum with specified topics, in others the learning was more discussion-based, and addressed issues of concern to the learners.

In addressing the three aims above I sought to contribute to what is known about the role of participation in and progression from community based adult learning in Scotland.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the philosophy that underpinned my study, and I describe the processes and procedures I undertook in the collection and analysis of the data. First, I discuss a pilot study that highlighted the diversity of learners' perceptions of progression and informed my research. Next, I consider the literature that influenced the main investigation, and explain the epistemology, and theoretical perspective that underpinned my approach. I show how my choice of a life history methodology was a good match with the aims of exploring the role of cbal in learners' lives and investigating progression. Throughout the chapter, I discuss ethical and methodological issues that arose, and I explain how these were addressed as I made decisions about data collection and analysis.

The pilot study

In this section, I discuss a pilot study that I undertook in June 2006, to inform my research. I outline the aims of the pilot study, and I describe its implementation. In addition, I discuss aspects of the pilot that influenced the main investigation.

The purpose of the pilot was to explore cbal with a small number of participants in order to identify themes that might need to be addressed in the main study. In particular, I sought to investigate learners' experiences of participating in cbal, as well as their perceptions of progression. Also, the pilot study provided me with an opportunity to design an interview guide, and practise research interviewing.

Ethical approval for the pilot study was provided by the University of Strathclyde, Educational and Professional Studies Departmental Ethics Committee. I carried out in-depth interviews with three cbal participants who had participated in programmes of learning which fitted with the definition of cbal provided in the Communities Scotland research (2003). The Adult Learning Development Officer in East Renfrewshire Council identified the learners on my behalf and asked them to take part in the study. He sought their permission to pass their contact details to me, and I made arrangements for the interviews by telephone. The learners who took part in

the pilot did not participate in the main investigation. One learner had moved from the area, and another had taken up part time work, by the time of the main study. Furthermore I felt they had contributed a lot of their time during the pilot. I explained to the learners that what they told me would not be attributed to them directly in any publication from the research and I agreed a pseudonym with each learner for this reason. I assured them that the recordings of their interviews would be stored securely and I gained written consent prior to their participation in the study. Each interview was recorded and lasted approximately one hour. The interview guide that I used in the pilot study can be found in Appendix B.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. I read and re-read the transcripts several times, and the subsequent analysis was influenced by Smith's (1995) writing on semi-structured interviewing and analysis of qualitative data. Smith suggested four levels of analysis, and for the pilot I chose the principle of classification as a way of presenting participants' views of progression. Within each interview I had identified issues which the participants highlighted as important. In this initial analysis I coded the interviews using categories that were linked to the interview questions: previous experiences of education, motivation to participate in cbal, impact or outcomes of participation and future plans. The outcome of the analysis process was the naming of themes. In an article based on the pilot study, (McIntyre, 2008) I discussed these for each individual case. In addition, I discussed themes that I had identified across all three interviews.

The pilot study highlighted the diversity of learners' experiences of participating in cbal, and it suggested that progression held a range of meanings for each of the participants. The article based on the study, (McIntyre, 2008, Appendix C), presents the findings in more detail.

Lessons from the pilot

In this section, I consider issues from the pilot study, as well as practical aspects of its implementation, that influenced my approach in the main investigation.

The pilot study provided an opportunity to design and use an interview guide. In the pilot I found that my interview questions encouraged the learners to discuss their

experiences, but I needed to increase my use of prompts and probes (Gillham, 2005) in order to get the in-depth responses I sought. In addition, I was able to practise research interviewing. This was important as I had no prior experience of carrying out in-depth interviews, and the experience of the pilot prepared me for the data collection phase of the main study. One lesson that I learned was the importance of allowing the learners time to consider their responses. I was nervous at the start of the first interview, and this made me rush to fill silences, if the learner did not respond to my questions immediately. As I became more at ease with the process, I was able to allow silences to develop while the learners thought about the questions, and I was able to elicit fuller responses from them.

Another issue that arose from the pilot concerned the analysis of data. In the pilot study, Smith's (1995) description provided clear steps to analysis, and I learned how to code the interviews. The interpretive approach fitted well with the aims of the pilot to explore learners' experiences of cbal and identify themes in the interview data.

However, I learned from the level of analysis chosen. Classification (Smith, 1995) provided a way of describing the findings of the study, and I was able to highlight both the meaning of progression for individual learners, and themes that were common to all of the participants. However, during the pilot, I became increasingly aware of the limitations of my approach. I began to feel that moving too quickly to the identification and presentation of themes had the effect of over-simplification. By choosing classification as the level of analysis I ran the risk of reducing the data to categories and thereby missing, potentially, the richness of the learners' stories. Smith has commented on this: "it may be that the participant's own life story is the most significant or interesting part of the data" (1995, p. 20). On the one hand, classification had assisted in the identification of themes. In addition, this approach had the advantage of facilitating comparison across themes, and I hoped to be able to make comparisons among the data from my main study. On the other hand, the use of classification as a first stage of analysis had the disadvantage of categorising the learners' stories, thereby separating the themes from their context at an early stage.

Another, related, issue arose from testing my approach in the pilot study. I learned that in analysing and presenting data, it was important to be alert to the differences

among learners' responses. I decided that in order to learn as much as possible about progression, there was a need to listen to the individual experiences described in the interviews. The participants in the pilot study each brought their own history, values and attitudes as well as different experiences of education to their participation in cbal. Furthermore, how they experienced participation, and how they understood and described progression was particular to them. Understanding this led me to take the view that we can learn as much about the complexity of progression from the differences in people's experiences as we can from the commonalities.

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) discussed this issue in relation to their study of young people's experiences of attending further education (FE): "our focus on individual stories has allowed us to expose the uniqueness of particular transformations and learning careers, while locating them within broader social and economic patterns" (p. 596).

The quote from Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) draws attention to a third important aspect of the pilot study. Bloomer and Hodkinson found that changes to participants' attitudes and "dispositions" (p. 589) to learning in FE were influenced by events and relationships outside the learning setting as well as within it. In the pilot study interviews, the learners talked about aspects of their lives that were not directly related to their learning but nonetheless were associated with progression in their interview responses. These included important events and relationships which learners emphasised when asked about their experience of cbal and progression. For example, Anne's role as a mother of five young children affected her experience of learning. She referred to it as a barrier in relation to her ability to attend courses, and later as an opportunity, as her youngest children were due to start school. The pilot study highlighted the importance of taking account of the context in which people learn.

The pilot study influenced the approach I adopted for the main study in three ways. First, it showed that I should maintain the learners' stories at the centre of the research, and second, it highlighted the importance of finding a way of including the differences between participants' experiences. Thirdly, it pointed to the need to take

account of the context in which participation in learning took place, as described by the learners.

Practicalities

The first practical issue that arose from the pilot related to the environment in which the fieldwork took place. Two of the pilot interviews were held in a large room in a community centre that was set up for formal meetings, and the third took place in the participant's home. Neither was suitable for the research interviews. It was very difficult to create the necessary informal and friendly atmosphere in the large room, and there were many distractions during the meeting at home. I addressed this issue in the main study by asking the participants during my initial telephone contact with them where they would like to meet, stating that we would need a quiet place to talk.

My field notes, written immediately after each interview in the pilot, indicated that it is important to establish a relationship with the research participants. To an extent, the pilot was successful in this regard, and the interview transcripts suggested that the learners felt comfortable in sharing personal information with me. However, although I worked very hard to build a relationship with the interviewees in the pilot study, it was very difficult to create an atmosphere of trust in one meeting. The issue of trust has been discussed by Wieder (1998), who highlighted the importance of establishing trust with participants, as well as the responsibility of reporting a life faithfully. The pilot study highlighted the need to interview participants more than once in order to allow time for trust and rapport to be established, and in-depth data to be collected.

The practicalities of accessing the sample for the pilot study highlighted an important ethical issue. For the pilot, access to adult learners was provided by the contact in East Renfrewshire Council. He identified potential participants on my behalf, and once they had agreed, he passed their contact details to me. However, it became difficult to protect the learners' anonymity when I came to write up the findings of the study. As the sample was small, I felt it might be possible for the East Renfrewshire contact to identify each learner from their story. I had changed direct identifiers of the learners by making use of pseudonyms, but indirect identifiers, such

as details of their families, and which cbal courses they had attended, remained part of the stories. For the pilot, I addressed this by removing some of the biographical details from the writing until I was confident that the learners' identity was protected. In the main investigation I accessed my sample in a way that ensured only I could identify who had decided to take part. Further discussion of sampling in this study can be found in the section headed "*Approach to sampling*" later in this chapter.

The main study

In this section I consider the literature that influenced my main study. First, I discuss epistemology, and my theoretical perspective. Next, I explore life history in relation to claims about knowledge and provide a rationale for my choice of a life history approach in this study.

Theoretical perspective

A constructionist epistemology informed and guided the processes of my study (Sillitoe & Webb, 2007). This is in contrast to positivism, a theory in which objective truth can be ascertained through accurate investigation. In the positivist tradition the central concern is with testing hypotheses using a scientific method, and with "generalizability of findings" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 4). My research was guided by constructionism, in which knowledge is viewed as being constructed through the interactions among people. In this view, the meanings we attribute to objects arise from our interactions with others, and therefore are shaped by our culture (Crotty, 1998). This means that, in my study, I was not concerned to discover an objective reality, but rather to explore "the sense we make" of things (Crotty, 1998, p. 64).

In order to do this, my approach to the research was interpretive, in that I was concerned with enhancing understanding, rather than seeking explanations or causal relations (Crotty, 1998). In this, symbolic interactionism provided a useful perspective. Symbolic interactionism has been traced to the Chicago School of Sociologists, and to the ideas of George Herbert Mead in particular (Crotty, 1998; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Merrill and West, 2009). In this approach it is suggested that "social life is formed, maintained and changed by the basic meaning attached to

it by interacting people” (Robson, 2002, p. 197). Events, relationships and experiences become important when meaning is attached to them. Meaning is expressed through the use of symbols, most commonly through language, and in social research, interpretation of data occurs through social interaction (Robson, 2002). From the symbolic interactionist perspective, the concern is to understand phenomena from the point of view of others. The standpoint of those being studied, in my study the learners’ perspectives on their experiences of cbal, is sought by researchers (Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionism is based on pragmatic ideas in philosophy, and in this perspective the world is seen as “a practical situated activity – rather than an abstract one – for subjects and researchers alike” (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 59).

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) adopted this approach in that they attached importance to the meanings individuals “attribute to their experiences” (p. 589). This fitted well with my study, which was concerned with the experience of participating in cbal and the meaning of progression, from the point of view of participants. Symbolic interactionism underpinned other studies of participation in adult learning reviewed in chapter one, which utilised a life history methodology, and influenced my approach (Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Gallacher et al., 2000).

In addition, the belief that underpinned this study was that participation in and progression from cbal are affected by relationships and events both inside and outside the learning setting: they are “profoundly social and cultural” (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000, p. 589). Therefore, the study had to take account of the context in which learning and progression took place, both within the learning setting and in relation to other aspects of participants’ personal, family and work lives.

As it was the perceptions, feelings and opinions of the participants in cbal that were important in this study, I adopted a qualitative approach. The theory underpinning the research was that our understanding of participation in progression from cbal would be enhanced by engaging with the participants, and seeking to understand better their experiences and points of view. In this way, learners’ perceptions could be added to debates about the role and potential contribution of cbal.

Creswell (1998) has described qualitative research as an approach to enquiry that “builds a complex, holistic picture” (p. 15). This was particularly relevant to the study of progression from cbal, as it was important that any approach to the study of adults and learning must encompass the various factors associated with these experiences as well as attempt to create an account of these experiences that reflected the context in which they took place. A qualitative methodology does this by allowing the topic of the research to be explored in depth. While survey research using questionnaires would allow a large number of participants to be contacted and generate “width of information from a relatively large sample” (Edwards and Talbot, 1999, p.10), it might not provide the depth of understanding of the issues sought by this research.

In any research project, it is important that the methodology chosen is a good match for the focus of the study, and the researcher should be convinced that the approach taken is the best one to elicit the information sought. Creswell (1998) described the role of the researcher in qualitative research as that of “*active learner* [italics in original]” (p. 18). This was attractive to me as an approach because I wanted to explore experiences of learning and progression with participants in order to learn from their perceptions. Creswell went on to suggest that the researcher “can tell the story from the participants’ view” (p. 18). While I recognised that we can never fully understand others’ experiences, I wanted to reflect the learners’ views as closely as possible.

Life history

Goodson and Sikes (2001) described life history as focusing on the subjective experience of the individual, and they pointed out that in this approach we avoid moving too quickly to “the quantitative indicator or theoretical construct” (p. 8), an issue highlighted in the pilot study. For Denzin (1989), all biographical research involves the creation of stories that are interpreted by both the writer and reader. He stated that such stories are fictional, in that life experiences are interpreted by the research participant as well as the researcher and reader. However, he noted also that there will be “traces” of the “real” person being written about (p. 25). Issues related

to interpretations in life history research are addressed in chapter nine in a discussion of the limitations of this study.

I decided to adopt a life history approach in my study for three reasons. First, a life history approach to data collection and analysis was consistent with the theoretical perspective that underpinned my study. It fitted with a constructionist view of knowledge, in the sense that it facilitated an exploration of the meaning that the learners had attached to their experiences of cbal. Second, a life history approach provided a good match between methodology and the aims of my research. My study aimed to focus on the learners' points of view and life history assisted with this as it placed an emphasis on participants' stories. In my study, a life history approach ensured that the participants' views, feelings and experiences were at the heart of the research.

The third reason for choosing life history related to the importance of the context in which participation in learning takes place, which had been highlighted in the pilot study. The pilot suggested that progression from cbal did not happen in isolation from aspects of participants' work, family and social lives, and that the learners' perceptions of progression were located within the context of their lives. A life history approach takes account of the context in which events take place as described by the participants. For example, Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) found that "the stories of most of our young people could only be properly understood when related to experiences grounded outside the apparent confines of formal learning or college life" (p. 595). Goodson and Sikes (2001) emphasised the importance of context in their work on life history research in educational settings. In their view, in life history research we are not simply interested in the stories that people tell about their lives. It is the placing by the researcher of these stories in their wider social and economic, as well as historical, context that gives them meaning. This meant that in utilising life history to investigate learners' perceptions of progression, I took account of the context in which the learning took place.

Life history addressed my misgivings regarding the analysis of data in the pilot study. Urban (1998) underlined the difference between a life history approach to analysis and classification, such as the approach in my pilot study when he described

his motivation “to move towards the humanistic, individualistic and interpretive aspects of historical study and away from the generalizing, social science side of historical endeavour” (1998, pp. 104-105). Life history provided an opportunity to analyse my interview data in a way that focused on the participants’ individual stories, and reminded me not to move too quickly to the identification of themes and categories. The pilot study had drawn attention to the importance of being alert to the differences in learners’ experiences as well as the commonalities, in order to learn as much as possible about progression. The life history approach provided an opportunity to study learners’ stories in depth, which allowed differences as well as similarities to come to the fore.

In relation to analysis, Denzin (1989) discussed three interpretive approaches in biographical research methods. The first was to present participants’ stories from their points of view without interpretation. The second approach was to use the participants’ autobiographies “as a vehicle for sociological theory” (p. 61). He provided an example of the use of the autobiography of a Finnish civil servant to illustrate the new middle classes in Finland. I decided to adopt a third approach, described by Denzin, (1989) as it was appropriate for the aims of my study. It involved looking firstly at single life stories, then moving towards organising the stories around themes. Finally, the researcher starts to “cross-build” (p. 67) across the stories to provide an interpretive account of the research.

Life history research has been discussed in the literature extensively (Armstrong, 1987; Atkinson, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Merrill and West, 2009; Silverman, 2007; West, 1996). Silverman (2007) discussed the work of Saussure who theorised that the meaning of words comes from their relation to other words. According to Silverman, researchers should look at how talk is organised and not treat it “a transparent ‘window’ on underlying cognitive processes” (p. 73). Although I did not undertake a detailed conversation analysis (Wengraf, 2001) of my interview data, this was a helpful reminder not to treat participants’ stories as unproblematic reflections of reality. Instead, I bore in mind that data from life history interviews are likely to be affected by many factors: participants’ memories, their desire to tell me what they believed I wanted to hear, or present themselves in a positive light, for

example. Merrill and West (2009) discussed this and noted that accounts of the past are influenced by the present, and are always uncertain. In my study this meant that I had to design an approach to the research that ensured that I created an interpretive account of the learners' experiences of cbal that was agreed by the learners and convincing to reader.

In his biographical analysis of adults' motivation in higher education, West (1996) undertook life history interviews with thirty students on university access programmes. Each participant was interviewed a minimum of four times, with up to seven interviews being carried out for some participants, over a period of three-and-a-half years. The interviews were transcribed "in accordance with oral history conventions" (p. 29) in that they did not include the very detailed transcription of every aspect of the interviews, including pauses, required of linguistic analysis. In West's study the participants' words were transcribed in full, and the purpose was to identify themes from the transcriptions, as opposed to analysing the structure of the participants' talk. This approach influenced my study, as I was interested in the content of stories that the learners had to tell, and in interpreting these to enhance understanding of participation and progression. In my study, I was concerned with the analysis of the learners' experiences as described by them, as well as the way in which the stories were told. However I did not undertake discourse analysis of the interview data.

Both Denzin (1989) and West (1996) influenced my approach. I used semi-structured life history interviews to investigate participation in cbal and the meaning of progression in the context of learners' past and present lives. The learners' stories were the unit of analysis. Individual stories were subject to analysis first and then potential themes across life stories were sought to build understanding (Denzin, 1989). Both West and Denzin stressed the importance of the interpretation of the content of narratives, as opposed to detailed conversation or linguistic analysis (Silverman, 2007; Wengraf, 2001). For Denzin, "the meaning of a life is given in the text that describes the life. This meaning is shaped by narrative convention and cultural ideology" (Denzin, 1989, p. 33), and for West "the narratives reveal some of the psychological and social spirit people have lived and learned by" (West, 1996, p.

32). In my study, I sought to adopt an interpretive approach to the learners' life stories in order to enhance understanding of participation in and progression from cbal from the learners' points of view.

Personal troubles and public issues

In adopting a life history approach my perspective was that we can learn from individuals' experiences, and that their stories can illuminate a particular problem or issue. Mills (1959) stated that problems in social science research should be formulated in terms of personal troubles and public issues. Individuals experience personal troubles when their values are threatened. Public issues are the concerns of the institutions of society. Mills provided an example in relation to unemployment: when one man is unemployed this can be seen as a personal trouble. The causes and solution of his problem lie with him. However, if many men are unemployed it becomes an issue that cannot be resolved by each individual on their own. Rather the structures of society need to be investigated in order to solve the problem. This perspective was useful for my research in that I investigated the personal concerns of adult learners, in order to illuminate the role of cbal in the context of Scottish policy on lifelong learning (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007).

Goodson and Sikes (2001) have also discussed whether "private issues are also public matters" (p. 88) stating that life histories can "provide vital entry points for the 'big' questions" (p. 2). They drew a distinction between life stories that provide an account of an individual's life and life histories that take account of the context in which events took place. In my study, I adopted a life history approach in order to investigate the role of participation in cbal in the context of learners' lives. In choosing to look for themes across the life stories of the participants, I hoped to make connections between the experiences of the individual learners and concerns that were shared across their life stories.

In the following section I consider three issues that I had to address when I planned the first stage of data collection. These related to my role in the research, ethical issues and my approach to sampling. Prior to collecting data for the main study I sought ethical approval. This involved the completion of a pro forma in which I

outlined the objectives of the study, provided details of the proposed data collection method and described the way in which consent would be sought from participants. In addition, I addressed the ethical issues discussed below, and enclosed copies of the information sheet, participant consent form and interview guide that I planned to use in the study. No difficulties arose from my application, and ethical approval was granted by the University of Strathclyde, Department of Educational and Professional Studies Ethic Committee on 15 November 2007.

Reflexivity

In the pilot study I had worked hard to establish an informal and friendly atmosphere during the interviews. I had tried as far as possible to build trust and rapport with the learners in order to ensure that they felt comfortable during the interview process, and to facilitate in-depth responses to the interview questions. The adoption of a life history approach for the main study meant that this was more important, as deeply personal information was sought in the interviews. Denzin (1989) has suggested that, in biographical research, the writer is written into the text. He goes further stating that “writers and readers conspire to create the lives they read and write about” (p. 26). In my study, I was part of the research process in that personal accounts were provided by the learners in the context of their relationship with me. I recognised that aspects of my contact with the learners, such as how approachable and open I was, for example, might affect the information that they shared with me.

It was important that I consider how my professional interest in adult learning, and my values and attitudes might affect the research. This is discussed further in chapter eight. Another aspect was how I was viewed by the research participants. In addition, my social class, gender and life experience could influence my interpretations of the data (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Denzin, 1989; Wengraf, 2001).

West (1996) maintained a diary during his study in order to have a record of the research processes and to facilitate “an openness and reflexivity throughout the project’s life history” (p. 25). I kept a research journal from the start of my study as a way of ensuring that I adopted a reflexive approach in my study. I wrote in my journal at least weekly, and more often than that towards the end of the study. I

found that the journal served several purposes. I recorded the tasks I completed for the study each week, and this was useful when I needed to discuss progress with my supervisors or reviewer. Also, I used the journal to think about next steps, and noted goals for the study as I set them. In addition, I used the journal to reflect on my approach to the study. One way that I did this was to write about problems or issues that arose. Writing about these helped to clarify the nature of the problem and often led to the formation of questions that I discussed with my supervisors. I dealt with theoretical aspects of the study in my journal also, such as approaches to sampling and the role of theory in narrative research. Again, the process of writing supported in-depth reflection on these issues and, although I did not come to conclusions on every occasion, the process helped me to develop my thinking.

As well as the practical and theoretical aspects of the study, I attended to feelings in the journal. This in-depth reflection served to raise my awareness of my own role in the research, and feelings, especially of worry or concern, often indicated an aspect of the study that needed attention. For example, in one entry, written prior to the interviews for the main study, I worried about the ethics of a life history approach and considered how I might ensure that the participants in my study were not affected negatively by the research. In a later recording, I wrote that I felt “disappointed” after one interview because the learner did not elaborate on many of his responses. Writing about this in my journal prompted me to think about this more, and I realised that my own nervousness had made my approach stiff and formal, and I made a conscious effort to be more relaxed and friendly in subsequent interviews.

Ethical issues

In life history interviews, participants are asked about aspects of their past and present experiences that may be painful to recall. Recounting memories can be both a negative and a positive experience, as adults attempt to provide an account of their lives. West (1996) highlighted the importance of paying attention to ethical concerns in biographical research, and described an ethical code which was used “to protect the welfare of the learners” (p. 28). An important aspect of this for West was

ensuring that participants understood that they were free to refuse to answer particular questions, or to withdraw from the research project at any time.

I took a number of steps to address this concern. First, I prepared an information sheet that explained that part of the interview would cover aspects of learners' families, jobs and early experiences of education, as well as their experiences of cbal (see Appendix D). Then, during the first contact made with learners on the telephone, I explained the life history approach and stressed that I would be asking questions about the past. At that point I checked whether they were still willing to participate, making it clear that they were under no pressure to agree. On the day of the interview, as part of an introduction to the study that lasted about five minutes, I reiterated that I would be asking about learners' past and present lives and emphasised that they could say "no" to any question or change their mind about being involved in the study at any time. Finally, I checked at several points throughout the interviews that participants were feeling comfortable, and were happy to continue.

A second issue for consideration prior to collecting the data was the extent to which learners would be involved in the study after their interviews were completed. From the start of this investigation I felt strongly that it was learners' own views of their experiences I was seeking. Therefore, it was important that they agreed that the stories I created about their lives were an accurate account, and I decided prior to undertaking the interviews that I would take a collaborative approach.

Approach to sampling

In identifying a sample for my study I had to think about who I wanted to interview and why. In addition, I had to take account of issues identified in the pilot study relating to participants' anonymity, as well as practical concerns such as travel and time.

I considered a number of approaches to sampling for this study. Three in particular were identified in the literature. The first of these was to choose one or two sites of community based adult learning and to seek to interview the participants in that particular programme or community/learning centre. This approach was adopted by

Bennetts (2003), who was interested in the benefits of participation in learning for adults who had received support from the Second Chance Trust. In Bennetts' case this was appropriate because she was investigating the outcomes of one particular opportunity. This was not applicable in my study, as I was interested in participation in and progression from a type of learning provision, but not in one particular programme. Others (Communities Scotland, 2003; Gallacher et al., 2000) chose a number of learning sites, seeking to include a mix of rural and urban, large and small providers. However, these were much larger-scale investigations than I could reasonably undertake on my own, and there was a risk that the depth of information that I was able to collect would be compromised if the study was undertaken in a number of different sites.

The second approach I identified in the literature was to choose participants who were representative of particular populations. Bingman and Ebert (2000), in their qualitative study of the outcomes of literacy learning, chose a small sample from a larger survey in which participants were "representative of adult learners in Tennessee" (p. 7). Furthermore, they took steps to ensure that their small sample was "as demographically representative as possible of the Tennessee population of ABE students" (p. 8). In this approach generalisability to other populations is important. However, the aim of my study was to explore learners' perceptions of progression, and it was their individual views, feelings and opinions that were the focus.

A third approach to sampling that I considered was to seek typical participants in local provision. McGivney (1999) has identified particular groups of people, such as those on low incomes, minority ethnic groups and women with young families for whom informal learning "is a particularly important learning starting point" (p. 6). However, in this third approach the main focus is the characteristics of the participants. The focus of my research was the role of community based adult learning in the context of participants' lives. In addition, it sought to investigate progression as it was perceived and understood by learners. Therefore, it was important to define the type of provision that participants in my study had experienced and then to select a sample that would allow investigation of that experience.

Identifying the sample

I decided to include participants in the study because they had taken part in cbal, as defined by Communities Scotland (2003), and were able and willing to talk about that experience (Darlington & Scott, 2002). The characteristics of the learning experience were important, as well as those of the learners. Silverman (2005) described this as purposive sampling stating that a case should be chosen because it “illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested” (p. 129). In my study, participants were chosen because they had experienced the type of learning that was the focus of the investigation and might be able to illuminate that experience.

The Communities Scotland definition does include some characteristics of potential participants in that it states that provision is targeted to adults in particular social circumstances. Therefore, by using this definition, to an extent the participants in my study were likely to have some characteristics in common. However, I did not pre-determine these as a condition of participating in the study.

One consideration was the number of participants needed. Armstrong (1987) suggested that one approach to life history is to examine the life of one person in depth. The advantage of this approach is that the focus of the study can be investigated in the context of a detailed story of the participant’s life. The focus on one life story facilitates the collection of extensive data, and maintains the subject of the study at the centre of the research. In this case the focus of the study is the life of the participant. However, in my study the focus was participation in and progression from cbal. The use of life history interviewing was to set this in the context of learners’ lives. Therefore, in order to discover as much as possible about cbal and progression, I needed to collect data from several participants. As Darlington and Scott (2002) observed, “if we interview different people about the same event or phenomenon, we will inevitably get a range of perspectives” (p. 48). While I did not seek to be able to generalise from the findings of my study, I hoped that exploring the experiences of participants from a range of provision might enhance understanding of the role of cbal.

I wanted the sample to be large enough to reflect a variety of experiences of participating in cbal. In addition, I was aware that some participants might drop out of the study before its completion. However, as I planned to interview each learner on two occasions, I had to be careful not to end up with more data than I could reasonably analyse.

To ensure the sample was manageable I decided to set geographical boundaries to the area in which to seek participants. Renfrewshire is my home area, and thus my choice was partly convenience: it would be easier to travel to participant interviews, especially if I needed to return several times to seek new information or check the accuracy of my data. In addition, through previous jobs, I had contacts who could act as 'gate keepers' and could assist me in accessing learners.

However, there were good research reasons to choose this area. Renfrewshire takes in two Council areas (Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire) and both Councils provided community based adult learning opportunities (HMIE, 2003, 2004). The two Council areas are substantially different in relation to poverty and health indicators. In East Renfrewshire, the percentage of the population classed as income deprived is lower than the national average, with three data zones, all in the Barrhead area, in the 15% most deprived in Scotland. Health indicators in East Renfrewshire compare favourably with Scotland as a whole, but again, there are inequalities in small pockets of Barrhead where residents experience poorer health than the rest of the area (East Renfrewshire Council, 2008). In contrast, Renfrewshire Council area has 36 datazones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland, and has been identified as one of seven local authority areas with the highest levels of worklessness. In relation to health indicators, Renfrewshire fared less well than East Renfrewshire. Life expectancy for men is below the average for Scotland, with abuse of alcohol identified as a major issue (Renfrewshire Council, 2008).

I identified my sample in two stages. The first was to use the definition of cbal (Communities Scotland, 2003) to find a pool of potential participants, and the second was to try, as far as possible, to select from the pool, learners who had experienced a variety of provision and who varied in terms of age, gender and geographical location.

Making contact with learners

I met with the manager for Adult Learning in Renfrewshire Council and the Adult Learning Development Officer in East Renfrewshire prior to contact with cbal participants. At these meetings I explained the purpose of the study and the nature of the help I needed from them. Following a general discussion about adult learning provision we agreed the following aspects of the sample:

- The definition provided by Communities Scotland (2003) fitted with the type of learning opportunities provided by the two Councils. Therefore learners contacted for this study would have participated in learning which fitted with this definition.
- Literacy learners would be excluded, as this type of learning was outwith the scope of my study.
- The learners involved in the pilot study would be excluded, as they had already contributed a substantial amount of time to the study, and I was keen to ensure their anonymity was not compromised.
- As extensive research has already been carried out into FE provision (Gallacher et al., 2000; Gallacher et al., 2002; Crossan et al, 2003), learners who participated in opportunities provided by partner agencies such as Reid Kerr College would be excluded. This criterion was abandoned after the second interview in the first phase. By that point it had become clear that some of the participants had taken part in a range of learning opportunities offered in their communities, and they did not necessarily distinguish between the different providers.
- Everyone who participated in cbal during September – December 2007 would be invited to take part in the study.

A letter that described my study and invited people to participate was sent from the Council contacts on my behalf (see Appendix E), and stamped envelopes were enclosed, addressed to me, in order to protect the anonymity of potential participants. This addressed the problem I had encountered during the pilot phase of the study. In

East Renfrewshire 153 letters were sent and I received 32 positive responses. The majority of these had completed the slip attached to the letter, but two learners phoned to ask about the study, before agreeing to participate. In Renfrewshire 30 letters were sent, and 12 participants volunteered to take part in the study. I replied to each respondent by letter thanking them for their willingness to help and assuring them that I would be in contact either to arrange an interview or to let them know that they were not needed for the study.

I collated the responses onto one sheet for East Renfrewshire and one for Renfrewshire. I have not included the sheets here, in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. I had names and contact details for each respondent but no information about which courses or classes they had attended. To begin with, my approach to selecting people to interview was simply to start at the top of the list. My first and second interviews were the first names at the top of the list for each area, and then I moved to the next names. However, as the data collection phase progressed, I started to seek learners from different areas in Renfrewshire to ensure that I included as wide a range of experiences as possible. Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) adopted a similar approach in their study, in order to ensure participants in their study were from across the range of FE courses. One of the participants in my study told me that a number of people from the same area had attended the same course, and I wanted to avoid interviewing several people who had participated in the same provision.

Table 1, below, shows the types of cbal the learners had attended between September and December 2007. The total number of learners adds up to more than 10 as some learners participated in more than one course or group.

Name of course	Number of learners
Introduction to computing (PC Passport)	4
European Computer Driving Licence	1
Introduction to Psychology	1
Introduction to Sociology	1
Women's discussion group (2 locations)	3
IMPACT (Personal Development)	2
Steps to Excellence (Personal Development)	1
Gaelic language	1

Table 1.

Interviews – preparation

In this section I describe the preparation for the data collection phase of the study. My first step was to consider the lessons I had learned from the pilot study. One such lesson related to the environment in which the interviews took place. For this first interview phase of the main study I considered these issues in the light of my concerns to protect participants' anonymity, as meeting in a local community centre would necessitate the involvement of janitorial and support staff to make the arrangements. I offered potential participants the choice of whether to meet in their home or in a local centre. However, this time I explained that we would need somewhere quiet to talk. Nine of the interviews were carried out in the learners' homes. In the main they had taken steps to ensure we were not interrupted, although on one occasion the learner's four-year-old son was present. I met one learner in the community centre where she had attended for cbal, on the same day and time as her class had been.

It was important to be well prepared for the interviews. I had decided that the interviews should be semi-structured, an approach that had been used successfully in other studies related to education and learning (Bingman and Ebert, 2000; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Gallacher et al., 2000). As discussed earlier, the focus was

learners' perceptions, and my intention was to encourage them to discuss any experience, event or relationship which they felt had an impact on their learning.

However, it was important that cbal and progression remained at the heart of the investigation. I developed an interview guide (see Appendix G) to be used in the interviews to ensure that both life histories and some main topics were explored in each of the interviews. For example, prompts (Gillham, 2005) were included in the guide to ensure all the participants would be asked about their previous experience of education and learning, work, their experience of cbal and their views of progression. I planned to make greater use of probing, "the most productive (and sensitive) probes are not questions at all, more like forms of responsive encouragement" (Gillham, 2005, p. 32) to encourage participants to tell me as much as they were able.

In addition to the interview guide, I prepared a consent form (Appendix H) and information sheet (Appendix D), as discussed in relation to ethical issues above, based on the ones I had developed for the pilot study. Finally, I prepared a rough script to be used as an introduction to the interview process. The script had two purposes. One was to help establish the relationship of trust I felt was necessary for the success of the interviews. The second purpose was to ensure that all the ethical issues I had identified could be fully explored with the learners. The script included an introduction of myself as a student, researcher and lecturer. It continued with a description of the aims and purpose of the study and an explanation of the life history approach. The potential emotional aspects of talking about the past were included as well as the learners' freedom to say 'no' to any of the interview questions. The final aspect covered in this script was my intention to publish my research, and the issues of confidentiality and anonymity that are related to publication. Running through this introduction took about five minutes, and I ended with the opportunity for the learners to ask any questions. None asked anything at this stage, and I then invited the learner to read the information sheet, and sign the consent form.

Interviews - process

In this section I describe the data collection phase of the study. I took as much time as I could when establishing contact with the learners to begin to build a relationship

with them. My first contact was on the telephone. During this conversation I explained who I was and why I was contacting them. I told them about the aims of the research and the purpose of the interviews. Also we talked about the learners' involvement with cbal before I asked if we could arrange to meet for an interview. At this point I checked with the learners that they were still happy to be involved in the study and made it clear that they were not obliged to do so.

My first interview was with Sam, and I was happy with the way the interview went overall. I used my script at the start of the interview and it appeared to be successful in introducing me and the study. I took time to explain the various aspects of the study, and it helped to create a relaxed atmosphere. In addition, I felt confident that Sam understood what his involvement would mean in terms of publication and anonymity. I kept to this introduction for the remainder of the interviews, and I found that there was less need for my notes as the study progressed. Sam was very welcoming and helpful. He had made arrangements to ensure we had a quiet place to talk uninterrupted, and he answered all my questions patiently. However, I learned from this first experience and made small changes for subsequent interviews. I felt that the order of questions was wrong. I had asked Sam to talk in detail about his life history at the start of the interview, and this had proved difficult. Sam became much more relaxed as the interview progressed and talked freely about his life and his participation in various types of learning. I changed the interview guide for the remainder of the interviews, starting with questions about the learners' lives at present, moving on to a discussion about both formal and informal learning and addressing life history at the end. This worked much better in that the learners seemed to find it easier to talk about details of their present lives, and their involvement in learning at the start of the interview, and then when they were more relaxed later in the conversation, they were able to answer questions about their past lives. I made no further changes to the guide. Also, I felt that I had rushed through the interview. The recorded part of the interview lasted thirty minutes, although Sam continued to tell me about his life and participation in learning after the recorder was switched off, and I sought his permission to use all of the information he had given me in the study. I was nervous, as it was my first interview since the pilot, and the result was that I did not use prompts and probes as much as I had planned. Before the

next interview I re-read Gillham's (2005) advice on conducting interviews and took some notes. I read my notes in the car prior to the later interviews, and this acted as a reminder.

In the rest of the interviews I used prompts and probes. Gillham (2005) identified different types of probes, and I used some of these throughout the data collection phase. For example, I sought clarification from Helen about the courses she had attended as she described her participation in many different courses, and I wanted to be accurate. With Elaine I tried to show understanding: "that must have been very difficult for you", and I asked Sarah for examples when she mentioned that she felt she was more confident after taking part in cbal. Also, I used a probing question to extend the narrative (Gillham, 2005): "can you tell me a bit more about that?" (Interview with Doreen). In addition, I found that reflecting the learners' responses back to them was useful to encourage further exploration of a topic or clarify what had already been reported.

I carried out 10 interviews over a period of two-and-a-half months during this phase of the study. In my letter to invite learners to take part in the study I indicated that I sought 10 participants, but at that stage I did not rule out further interviews once I had undertaken some initial analysis, or if a participant dropped out of the study. After 10 conversations I felt that I had collected data about a range of cbal experiences and from participants who differed in terms of gender and age and geographical location and I wanted to stop and take stock of what I had found. At that point I did not make a final decision about whether to seek additional participants.

The interviews varied in length from 30 to 75 minutes. Although all the learners answered all my questions, some of their responses were quite short. Included in the interview guide were questions about the learners' hopes for the future and their plans, if any, for further learning. At that point in the interviews I asked each of the learners if I could meet them again to talk about how their plans had worked out in practice, and I hoped to add to the data I had collected. All of the learners agreed to another meeting.

Each of the interviews was recorded. I checked that the equipment was in working order and took a second recorder and spare batteries with me to the interviews. As soon as possible after the interviews I wrote field notes that described my feelings about how the interview had gone, any information that was relevant to my study that had been part of the informal discussion and any initial thoughts that might be important for the subsequent analysis. As these notes were kept securely and were seen only by me I did not seek permission from the learners specifically to write them. However, I did seek permission to use information provided by the learners after the recorder was switched off. Also, I wrote about the interviews in my research journal, which allowed me to add any thoughts I had missed from the field notes, and I had a record of when each interview took place. I wrote about my initial impressions of the interview such as how comfortable the learner seemed, and whether I thought I had managed to collect data on progression. I tried also to evaluate critically the way in which I had conducted the interview in order to learn from any mistakes and do things differently if necessary. Writing the research journal served as a way of checking that I had thought through each interview soon after it took place.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and I developed a process for checking the accuracy of the transcriptions and beginning the analysis, which is described in the next section, headed '*Analysis of data: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis*'.

One interview differed from the others in a number of respects. The interview with Elaine was the only one that did not take place in her home. At her request we met in the local community centre at the time of her usual class. At the start of the interview Elaine appeared to be nervous, and she told me she was feeling unwell with a cold. I suggested that we postpone the interview, but she declined and we went ahead. At this stage I was aware of a contradiction between what Elaine said and how she behaved. She did not seem unwell when we met, and I wondered if she was looking for an excuse to withdraw from the interview. It was for this reason that I offered to postpone our meeting. On the other hand, Elaine had brought to the interview a large carrier bag full of worksheets, photographs and copies of certificates from her

participation in cbal, which suggested that she did want to talk about her experiences of learning.

The interview began in the same way as the others, but Elaine became very distressed when she talked about her childhood. At that point I switched off the recorder and checked how Elaine was feeling. With the recorder switched off, Elaine told me some more details of her life, explaining why she was upset. She told me that she had been diagnosed with reactive depression and was still in the process of recovery. I tried to be as sensitive and understanding as I could, and we chatted for a while until I felt that she was calm and I could ask about the research interview. I asked Elaine if she wished to stop the interview, but she said she was happy to continue as long as she did not need to talk about her childhood. We agreed that, with the recorder on, we would talk about her participation in cbal and aspects of her life in the present. We did this and the rest of the interview went well. Elaine took time to show me the papers and photographs she had brought, and she seemed to relax and enjoy talking about her participation in learning. At the end of the interview I asked Elaine if she would be willing to meet again in a few months and she agreed. Later, I wrote field notes, as I had done after the other interviews, and I reflected on the experience in my research journal as a way of thinking through the issues.

The experience of interviewing Elaine enhanced my understanding of the nature of life history interviews. It reminded me of the need for sensitivity when exploring deeply personal aspects of people's lives, and it highlighted that memories can be painful. I became more aware of the ethical issues surrounding life history research, and the experience influenced my approach to the second interviews. I discuss this more fully in the section on preparation for the second phase of data collection below.

Analysis of data: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis

In this section I describe the processes that I undertook in the first stage of data analysis. I begin with a discussion of two approaches to analysis of data from life

history interviews, and provide the reasons for my chosen approach. Next I describe how I went about the analysis, and the stages involved in creating life stories.

Polkinghorne (1988) stated that, in human beings, the realms of matter, life and meaning co-exist (p. 4). The realm of meaning is unique to humans, and he saw narrative as part of how we make sense of things. Polkinghorne identified five problems in the study of meaning. He observed that meaning is an activity, not a material object that can be easily studied and that we have direct access only to our meanings. Further, because data used in the study of meaning are in linguistic form, they are “context-sensitive” (p. 7), and meaning can be lost if they are treated in isolation. Analysis of linguistic data is interpretive. Polkinghorne stated that the complexity of the way in which we communicate our ideas creates difficulties in research into the realm of meaning. However, he suggested an approach to the study of meaning which addresses these problems: “because the characteristics of the realm of meaning are different from the material realm, its study requires an alteration in the research methods the human disciplines have traditionally used to study consciousness” (p. 9).

The alteration in method that Polkinghorne (1988) suggested was narrative as a “form of meaning making” (p. 36). Narrative serves as a way of understanding apparently disconnected activities and events, and he described two approaches to analysing data from qualitative interviews to enhance our understanding of meaning.

In an article concerned with analysis of qualitative data, Polkinghorne (1995) drew a distinction between analysis of narratives and narrative analysis in relation to life history interviews. I considered the advantages and disadvantages of both and, in the following section, I discuss these and outline the decisions I took in relation to the analysis of data in my study.

Bingman and Ebert (2000) used life history interviews as the method of data collection for their study of the outcomes of literacy learning in Tennessee, USA. Bingman and Ebert interviewed participants on two occasions, and pre-set questions were devised “as a guide for interviewers, not as a structure for the interview” (p. 10). The interview guide ensured that the focus of the research was addressed, while

participants were encouraged to talk about their lives in order to “put participants’ literacy practices and experiences in adult education programs in the context of their everyday lives” (p. 7).

In their study Bingman and Ebert (2000) described their method of data analysis stating that they adopted what Polkinghorne (1995) defined as “analysis of narratives” (p. 5). In this approach the data consists of life histories but the analysis produces themes and categories. Bingman and Ebert described their approach to data analysis as “an inductive iterative process” (p. 12), which produced six categories that were reported in their findings. However, Bingman and Ebert stressed that the participants’ life histories were important to provide the context for literacy learning, and they “noted both particular stories and common themes and categories” (p. 12).

Analysis of narratives as defined by Polkinghorne (1995) and utilised by Bingman and Ebert (2000) has the advantage of taking account of participants’ life histories while ensuring that the focus of the research is addressed. However, a potential disadvantage is that some of the richness of the data and the uniqueness of individuals’ experiences may be lost in the reduction of the data to themes and categories. Polkinghorne acknowledged that this approach allows for the potential to move from individual stories to themes and categories and has the potential for generalisation to a wider context. However, he asserted that this kind of knowledge is “abstract and formal, and by necessity underplays the unique and particular aspects of each story” (p. 15).

In my study I utilised one method described in the Bingman and Ebert (2000) study. The use of an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was to ensure that aspects of participation in and progression from cbal were not lost in the detail of learners’ life stories. However, I decided not to use analysis of narratives, as I wanted to explore each participant’s experience in depth, prior to identifying themes. I wanted to explore progression in the context of participants’ lives and felt that to classify or categorise data at the first stage of analysis might mean that the uniqueness of participants’ stories could be lost.

In narrative analysis the data are configured into a coherent whole rather than separating them into their constituent parts (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative analysis has been described as a way of constructing accounts from data, an approach which produces “an individual contextualised story” for each participant (McKay, 2002, p. 86). In this approach the analysis process treats the interview data as a series of events which are organised into “explanatory stories” (McKay, 2002, p. 86). The data are presented as a story for each participant, and the differences in participants’ experiences are acknowledged. Rather than seeking similarities which can be sorted into categories, the data are arranged chronologically for each participant. The uniqueness of each story is highlighted. When the events described by participants are configured into a story with a plot, they are understood in terms of their contribution to an outcome or ending (Polkinghorne, 1995). The benefit of this approach is that the focus of the research can be explored in the context of other aspects of participants’ lives. In relation to my study this meant that participation in cbal and progression could be analysed in a way that took account of the learners’ work, learning, family and social lives.

However, there were potential problems in this approach for my study. The focus of my research was participation in cbal and the meaning of progression for participants, and there was a possibility that this focus would be lost in the telling of the stories of participants’ lives.

McKay (2002) used narrative analysis in her study of women with mental illness. In the interviews for her study, McKay asked only one question, simply asking participants to tell their life story. Probes were used to seek clarification if this was necessary. This approach was successful in illustrating how living with mental illness had affected the women throughout their lives. In McKay’s study narrative analysis was appropriate because the focus of the study was so closely linked to the women’s lived experience. In my study, simply asking participants to tell their life story carried a risk that cbal and progression would not be addressed fully. It was for this reason that an interview guide was used which included questions about participants’ lives as well as questions about their participation in cbal in order to understand progression in context.

In my study it was the learners' perspectives that were important. In relation to narrative analysis, Silverman (2005) has discussed this, and he stated that attention should be paid to participants' use of categories. He emphasised that it is "the contexts and consequences of your subjects' use of categories" that is important, rather than the researcher's own. In this approach the "frame of explanation" used by the participant is to the fore (p. 157).

I decided that narrative analysis was the best approach to this first stage of data analysis, as it fitted well with my aim of investigating learning and progression in the context of learners' lives. A potential disadvantage of my use of narrative analysis was that the focus of the research would be lost in the detail of the learners' lives. However, I had addressed this by using an interview guide to ensure that the topics of participation in and progression from cbal were covered in the interviews. The main advantages of narrative analysis for my study were that this approach supported my aim of focusing on the learners' perceptions; it took account of their contexts, and it prevented me from moving too quickly to categorisation of their experiences.

I felt that it was important to construct the data into life stories in order to highlight the differences in the learners' experiences and to provide an opportunity to learn from the variety of those experiences. According to Polkinghorne (1995), the outcomes of this approach are individual cases. He suggests that we understand "new episodes by means of analogy" (p. 11), rather than through generalisation. I wanted to focus on the individual cases of the participants in my study. This decision was in relation to the initial stage of analysis of the first phase of data collection. Silverman (2005) has suggested that it can be helpful to analyse data as they are gathered, and I decided to analyse data from the first phase of interviews before moving to the second. This fitted well with the approach suggested by Denzin (1989) that individual life stories are created from qualitative data as a first stage of analysis.

In the next section I describe the procedures I undertook in creating life stories for each of the learners in my study, and show how I addressed problems as they occurred.

First stage of analysis: narrative analysis

Preparation

I took a number of steps prior to writing the life stories in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, keep the data in good order and create a data set for each learner that made working with them as straightforward as possible.

I created files for each learner that comprised the signed consent form, the field notes written immediately after each meeting and the transcripts of the interviews. These were kept in a locked filing cabinet and removed one file at a time as I analysed each data set.

My first step was to check the transcripts. I listened to the recording with the transcript in front of me and marked any changes, for example corrections to the wording, emphasis or punctuation. Then I made the changes to the word processed transcript and listened to the recording again. While listening for the second time, I marked any final changes. Once I was satisfied that the transcript was as accurate as possible I printed a clean copy. Next, I made sure that the copy was anonymous by checking for any references to names of participants or family members.

One problem I encountered was that, in some cases, the recording was not clear enough to transcribe every word. In most instances only one or two words or a short phrase were missing. However, the transcript from one interview, with Alan, had larger sections missing. This was partly because he had a strong accent, and partly because his speech had been affected by a health condition. I addressed this by listening to the recording over and over and in some cases eventually managed to make out the words, but I had to accept that some data were lost. I had to bear in mind that information was missing when I was constructing Alan's life story later.

Checking the transcripts in this way served two purposes. It ensured that the interview data I was using were as accurate as possible, and it provided an opportunity for me to become familiar with the tone and emphases in the interviews, as well as the words that had been used.

The next step was reading the transcripts several times. On the second and subsequent readings I tried to pay attention to the participants' responses, and filter out the questions, so that the learners' perspectives became the focus and it began to flow. Once I felt that I had absorbed the interview I began the process of creating life stories for each participant.

Lifelines

Polkinghorne (1995) described the process of narrative configuration as an activity that "draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes" (p. 5). He stated that the task of analysis is to bring together the elements of an individual's life into a story that gives meaning to the data (p. 16). In an earlier description of the process for this, Polkinghorne (1988) suggested that the events and actions of the life should be arranged chronologically. For Polkinghorne this meant that "an event must be more than a single occurrence; it must be located in relation to other events that have preceded it or come after it" (1988, p. 131). In order to arrange the interview data chronologically, I studied the interview transcripts carefully and arranged the separate events and happenings into a lifeline. The lifelines that I created for the learners can be found in Appendix I. The lifeline showed the elements of the life described by the learner in chronological order, starting with their birth and moving through such aspects as the birth of siblings, illness, formal education, etc. The elements that were included were not the same for each lifeline. Instead, they reflected aspects of their lives that learners described in response to my questions about growing up, early experiences of education, and decisions made about work, marriage and family. In some instances, the learners had provided a lot of information, and the lifelines were complex, making them difficult to read. To make it easier, I arranged information related to the learners' personal lives above the lifeline, and placed information about work and learning below it. The final part of this step was to add additional information to the events on the lifeline, where learners had provided it, to make the lifelines as clear as possible. The creation of the lifelines helped me to manage the interview data by providing a structure for showing the various aspects of the learners' lives. Also, they helped me to make

sense of what the learners had told me by showing where different events had occurred in relation to each other throughout the chronology of their lives.

Learning diagrams

Next I focused on the education and learning elements of the interviews. I manually searched the transcripts for references to any kind of learning and then sorted them into categories. I did this by identifying the categories in the first transcript, and then adding to them as I worked through the transcripts one at a time. For example, all of the learning described by Sam could be sorted into categories of formal education, such as attendance at school or college, learning related to work throughout his career in Africa, informal learning planned by Sam, such as reading books and newspapers, and participation in cbal, which I distinguished from the previous category by naming it organised informal learning. When I came to work with the transcript for Mary, I had to create another category, learning related to volunteering, to accommodate all of the learning in which she had participated.

As I worked through all of the transcripts I was able to arrange the data into these five categories: formal education, including learning leading to qualifications; learning related to work; learning for voluntary work; personally planned informal learning, such as that related to leisure interests or research into issues such as health or holidays; and the type of organised community based informal learning that was the focus of this research. I represented these in a diagram for each participant. The learning diagrams that I created for the learners can be found in Appendix J. This step was additional to those suggested by Polkinghorne (1995). However it was important, as it helped to keep my attention on cbal and addressed the risk I had identified of losing the focus on learning and progression as I got involved with writing life stories. Also, the learning diagrams showed the range of learning opportunities in which the learners had been involved throughout their lives, and placed their participation in cbal within that context.

I had decided not to use computer-assisted analysis in this step as I wanted to be closely involved with data at this stage. I was concerned that the use of NUDIST or N-Vivo would have the effect of creating distance between myself as the researcher

and the data, which was at odds with my approach. Merrill and West (2009) have tried computer-assisted analysis in their life history studies and found that “it can also overly objectify as well as simplify the analytic process and risks devaluing and dehumanising the subjects at the heart of the research, including the researcher” (p. 144). Producing the lifelines and learning diagrams for each learner increased my understanding of the interview responses and helped me to make sense of the data, in that I was able to keep in mind the two important elements of my study: participation in and progression from cbal, and the context of learners’ lives.

Life stories

Next I began to work on creating life stories from the data. Polkinghorne (1995) suggested that in this approach, researchers should ask questions such as ‘why did this happen?’ and search the data for answers. He referred to Dollard’s (1935) seven criteria for judging a life history, and I used these to guide my analysis, described below, as they helped to clarify what was needed in the narrative analysis approach to creating life stories.

According to Dollard’s criteria (1935), the life story should include the cultural context in which the story takes place. In addition, the researcher should include the physical aspects of the participant. For example an individual’s age or health is part of the context in which actions are taken. These aspects are part of the context of individuals’ emotional responses also, and account should be taken of this in the life story.

The third criterion identified by Dollard (1935) refers to the role of others in the participant’s life. Reasons for a person’s actions may be related to an important relationship and not just their own priorities. In his version of Dollard’s criteria, Polkinghorne (1995) stated that these three features - the cultural context, the physical aspects and other people - may influence the decisions individuals take. However, he reminded researchers that they must also view the participant as an actor who makes choices about his or her actions. People make decisions about what they will do to move towards particular goals. Another perspective was provided by West (1996) who pointed out that individuals do not always know why they act in a

particular way, and “the forces at work may be cultural: class, gender or ethnic factors shaping the way people think feel and talk about themselves” (p. 5). Also, it was important to remember, as Bruner (1994) noted, that how individuals describe themselves in biographical stories will vary with the circumstances, and to whom the story is being told. The implications of this for my study are addressed in chapter eight as part of a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of my approach.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) identified history as important in narrative. The participants have experienced social events in history and their decisions and actions should be understood in light of their descriptions of these experiences. However, Polkinghorne (1995) cautioned against making assumptions about the relationship between past experiences and later actions.

The result of narrative analysis is a life story. The sixth criterion or guideline described important aspects of the story. It should have a clear beginning, middle and a plot that moves towards an ending. The story should include details of the events and characters within it as it is these that differentiate it from other stories.

Polkinghorne (1995) asserted that it is the uniqueness of individual stories that provides their “power” (p. 18). The last guideline suggested that narrative analysis should result in a life story that is clear and has credibility (Polkinghorne, 1995).

In writing the life stories for the learners in my study I tried to keep to these guidelines. I searched the data for the components below:

- Cultural and historical context, including political and social events
- Physical factors such as age, and health, including previous illnesses or those of people close to the learner
- Relationships with others
- Reasons for learners’ actions

The life stories that I created comprised these components, where the information was available. For example, Alan described his difficulties in finding work in the context of how his heart condition was viewed by potential employers at that time. In other stories, such as Helen’s and Linda’s, relationships were to the fore and they did not provide much information on the historical context. I found that many of the

learners had described events without stating why they had taken place. In some instances it was possible to speculate about reasons for decisions from the descriptions in the interviews, but I felt I did not want to include these in this first draft of the story. Instead, I kept a note of events, actions or decisions for which no reasons had been given by the learner, and sought clarification in the second phase of the data collection.

Polkinghorne (1988) emphasised the importance of plot in the creation of life stories. In his view, the plot transforms a list of events in to a coherent whole and the meaning of a story lies in how events and plot interact. I followed Polkinghorne in his suggestion of looking for the plot, but did this by identifying a theme for the story, and working on this by looking at the elements of the data that contributed to the theme. I identified the theme for each learner by searching the interview data for events that they identified as important, either by saying so directly or by inference through repetition or emphasis. An additional task was to ensure that learners' engagement with learning was included to ensure that the focus of the research was not lost.

There was an interpretative aspect of the analysis, and I constructed the stories around the themes that the learners had described as important. For example in my interpretation of the data from Linda's interview the story of her life and her learning was woven around family relationships.

I wrote a life story for each participant in the study. In each case the story began with the learners' birth, moved through the events of their lives and ended at the point that the interview had taken place.

My approach to this study was that I wanted to investigate learning and progression in the context of adults' lives. The stories I constructed were unique to each individual learner, but they had their participation in cbal in common. Each life story included details of participants' learning, both formal and informal in order to place learning and progression in the context of the learners' past and present lives.

As a final step in this phase of the research I added a lifeline, a learning diagram and a draft life story to each of the participant data files I had created.

This was the first stage of analysis. I had represented the interview data in a life story and had undertaken some initial interpretation. However, I was aware that further analysis was necessary to move towards more in-depth interpretation and the making of meaning from the data. It was clear to me that I needed additional information from the learners to be more confident about answering such questions as ‘why did this happen?’ and ‘what did that lead to?’ as suggested by Polkinghorne (1995). Also, I felt I wanted to explore the stories with the learners. It was their lives I was describing, and, as Denzin (1989) has observed, “the meanings of these experiences are best given by the persons who experience them” (p. 25). Furthermore, I was influenced by West’s (1996) approach, and felt that the learners had the right to see what I had written about them. The learners had collaborated with me in the research process in the sense that they had told me about their lives in response to my questions (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). If the stories were to be “plausible and understandable” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18), it was important that the learners collaborated further by being involved in their construction.

I had produced life stories for each of the ten learners. In the following section I explain the steps I took to prepare for the second phase of data collection and describe the form the second interviews took. In addition, I discuss the second interview with Elaine which differed from the others in this phase.

The second phase of the data collection had three main purposes. First, I wanted to build on the relationships I had established during the first interviews. Secondly, I wanted to show the learners their life stories, collect any information that they thought was missing and check if the learners agreed with my account of their lives. Finally, this phase provided an opportunity to explore further the learners’ perceptions of progression.

Preparation for the second phase of data collection

It was important that I was well prepared for the second interviews. Goodson and Sikes (2001) have stressed the importance of “personal dynamics” (p.28) in life history research and it was important therefore, to address any issues that might have a negative affect on the relationships I had established in the first phase of the data

collection. Part of my preparation involved addressing two issues that had arisen during the first phase. One of the issues concerned my personal safety. I had met nine of the learners in their homes, and a colleague suggested that I might have put myself at potential risk by doing this. In fact, all of the learners were very welcoming and kind during the first phase. Many of them offered cups of tea and checked that I had everything I needed before the interview started. Each had gone to some lengths to ensure that we had somewhere quiet to talk, and I felt comfortable in all of the situations in which I found myself. Nonetheless, once the issue was raised, I addressed it. Prior to each interview I left a note of the name and address of the participant with my partner, together with a time that I would text that all had gone well. On receiving my text my partner then destroyed the note. I did this throughout the second phase of interviews, although there was no time when I felt that it had been necessary.

The other issue was an ethical one. The first interview with Elaine had demonstrated that recalling events from the past can be a difficult experience (West, 1996). However, Atkinson (1998) has suggested that usually it is not necessary to try to avoid these painful moments, but it is important to acknowledge the participant's feelings and be sympathetic to their distress. Atkinson reminds us also to "respect the boundaries the teller presents" (1998, p. 35) and to be considerate.

I felt I needed to be prepared for the possibility that any of the learners could be upset in the second interviews, and I sought advice from colleagues in the Social Work and Counselling departments in the University of Strathclyde. Following their recommendations, I developed a list of organisations that the learners could contact if they felt they needed additional support (see Appendix K). The contacts listed were local to Renfrewshire and included free telephone help lines for emergency support, as well as organisations that provided counselling services. I decided that I would offer the contact list to all the learners, as it was possible that the need for support would come after the interviews.

In the first interview with Elaine, I had found dealing with her emotions difficult, and I prepared for the second phase by talking over with my supervisor how I would handle a similar situation. Following Atkinson (1998), my colleagues in Social Work

and my supervisor, I determined that the demonstration of emotions was to be expected in life history interviewing, and that I should be compassionate and sensitive to this, but not shy away from it. However, it was important to be prepared.

The next stage involved the preparation of another introductory script and the development of a guide for the second interviews. My introduction re-stated most of the points from the first interviews: the focus of the study, the life history approach (including the option of choosing not to answer a question) and issues relating to anonymity and publication. This time it included the purpose of the interview and indicated the topics that I was interested in: I wanted to discuss the life stories that I had written for the learners, and I hoped to explore progression in more depth in this interview.

In the first phase I had not used the word 'progression' during the interviews. In my introduction, I had explained that my study was about progression but had addressed the subject in the interviews by asking such questions as "what did you do next?"; "what are your plans for the future?" and "what difference has your participation in cbal made to you?" For this phase I decided that, if I was seeking learners' perceptions of progression, I should ask them about that explicitly. I recognised that I could not be sure that the learners felt free to express their views in response to my questions. However, my rationale for addressing progression in this way in the second phase was that I felt at that time, that my relationships with the learners had developed in such a way that there was less likelihood of them telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, which might have happened earlier in the study.

I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix L) that was intended to guide my questions but would not need to be followed exactly, or in any particular order.

Second interviews

I contacted the learners by telephone to arrange the second interviews. At this point I re-introduced myself, reminded the learners about my study and asked if they would be willing to talk to me again. During the telephone conversation I explained that I had written up the information from the first interview, and said that I would send it to them in advance of our meeting. I followed this procedure for each learner, and it

seemed to work well in the sense that it re-established my relationship with them. Approximately six months had passed between the first and second interviews, and the telephone conversations helped to me to re-connect with the learners, and reminded them about the focus of my study. When I posted the life stories to them I confirmed the arrangements for the interview and thanked the learners for agreeing to meet me again.

All of the learners agreed to a second interview, which I hoped meant that participation in the study had not been uncomfortable or difficult for most of them. Clearly it had been difficult for Elaine, but she too, agreed to a second interview. None of the interviews were subsequently cancelled, and I was able to collect additional data from each learner.

The second interviews were different from the first meetings in a number of aspects. The fact that I had met the learners before made a difference to the atmosphere during the interviews. For example, I found that there was less need for a scripted introduction. While this meant that there was a risk that I might forget an important point, taking a more informal approach seemed to help to make the introductions less formal, and the learners appeared to be more relaxed. In the interviews I covered all the points I had noted but I did not stick to the script rigidly. This was in contrast to the first interviews in which I had referred to my introductory script and the interview guide throughout the interview. The second interviews were more of a conversation, which included asking how the learner had been since the first meeting. I sought answers to the main questions in each interview, but the order varied according to how the interview proceeded.

I noticed a shift in my relationships with the learners between the two meetings. In the first interviews our respective roles as researcher and research participant were clear. I had worked hard to establish relationships, but there had been some formality and nervousness on both sides. Furthermore, it was clear from the outset that this was my study, the interview questions were mine and that I set the agenda. While it was still my study, the relationships were on a more equal footing at the second meetings. I was able to create an atmosphere of collaboration, with researcher and learner working together on their life story.

Sending the learners' life stories in advance proved useful. The learners had time to consider their responses, and I was able to seek more accurate and fuller accounts. I used the stories as the basis of a conversation, and I found this encouraged the learners to talk in detail about their lives. In each case, I asked the learners how they felt about what I had written, and they responded in a variety of ways. Some learners described their feelings when they read about themselves. Others took the opportunity to correct inaccuracies in what I had written or to add information that they had omitted to tell me at the first meeting. Two of the learners said they were happy with what I had written about them and did not suggest any changes.

Next, I showed the learners the lifelines and learning diagrams I had created, and I worked with the learners to explore their lives further. I had not sent the lifelines and diagrams in advance because I wanted the learners to focus on the stories I had created. However, in the interviews they became useful devices to prompt the learners to talk about their lives. As we worked through the lifelines, diagrams, and life stories together, the learners commented, sometimes explaining an event or decision in more detail, or sometimes responding to my questions about information that I thought might be missing. In the interviews with the two learners that said they had no amendments to suggest, I checked a second time that they were happy with my account, and we talked about how it felt to read the stories. After that I asked them to tell me about their lives since our last meeting. In some cases the learners asked to keep their stories and diagrams so that they could refer to them in future.

As in the first phase of data collection, I recorded the interviews. Although the order differed, the second interviews covered the main topics I had identified as being important. I asked the learners to tell me about their lives since the first interview and we had a discussion about the life stories I had created. Also, I asked the learners to tell me both what 'progression' meant to them and what progression would be for them.

As it was likely that this was the last time I would meet the learners, it was important to end the interviews well. When the recorded part of the meeting was over, I gave the learners the list of contacts for support, explaining that I gave it to everyone. I stayed for a short time and chatted informally, often about the nearing Christmas

holiday. Then I thanked the learners for their involvement and explained that I would rewrite their life story, taking account of the new information from the second interview. As most of the learners had access to email, we agreed I would send the revised stories electronically, and they could respond either with further corrections or to accept the story as an accurate account of what they had told me. I explained that their involvement with my study would end at that point.

The final step in this second phase of data collection was to write field notes about the interviews. I hand-wrote the field notes as soon as possible after each interview, often in the car or a coffee shop before returning home in order to avoid distractions that might make me forget something. In the notes I recorded my feelings about the interview, any initial thoughts or observations about what the participant had told me and any information that the participant had provided after the recorder was switched off. The field notes were added to the files for each learner that I used in the second stage of the analysis described in the section headed “**Second stage of analysis: bridging commentaries.**”

Interviewing Elaine

Nine of the second interviews took the form described above. However, there were some differences in my meeting with Elaine.

After the first interview with Elaine when she became distressed, I had emailed her to check how she was. She had not replied, so I was unsure how she would react to my getting in touch again. I telephoned Elaine to ask if she was willing to meet me again and, at first, she was hesitant. She remembered me and we chatted a little about how she had been since the first interview. She said that she had experienced some “ups and downs” and mentioned that talking about the past had been difficult. She also spoke of a photograph a friend had shown her which had triggered emotions too.

I explained that I wanted to interview her again but stressed that she was under no obligation to do so. Unexpectedly, she agreed to meet me again but said that she did not want to talk about her life history. We agreed that the focus of the interview would be what she had been doing since the first meeting and any plans she had for the future. In addition, I told her that I had written a life story based on what she had

told me at our first meeting. Again she stated that she did not want reminders of the past, and we agreed that I would send her an edited version of the story. I re-wrote Elaine's life story that day and sent her a version that began with her participation in cbal and contained no references to what she had told me while the recorder was switched off. However, I retained the original version on my computer.

I was nervous about meeting Elaine again, despite my preparation. We had arranged to meet in her local community centre, and I was not confident that she would come. However, she did, and we chatted easily as we went up the stairs to the room I had booked. At that stage, she admitted that she had been very nervous at the first interview, but she felt more relaxed this time because we had met before. I hoped she trusted me by this point, and I tried to ensure she knew that I would not ask her to do or talk about anything which made her uncomfortable.

As I set up the recording I sensed a tension in Elaine. I asked if she minded if I recorded the interview, and she said she would prefer it if I did not. I was glad that she felt able to say how she felt about it, and we agreed that I could take notes. I am not sure why Elaine did not want the interview to be recorded, but I felt that she had regretted some of the things she had told me at the first meeting, and this time did not want to have a record of what she had said.

After this, the interview went well. Elaine had brought some more materials with her that were related to the courses and classes in which she had participated. She seemed happy to talk, and I covered the topics on the interview guide. Towards the end of the interview I explained to Elaine that I had another version of her life story that included some of her life history, and I asked if I could use the data. She agreed, detailing one particular incident that she did not want me to use but saying that I could use the rest. She was keen, she said, to contribute to anything that demonstrated how valuable cbal could be to people in a similar position to her.

I ended the interview as I had the others. I thanked Elaine for her time and assured her that the contribution had been useful. At that point, we agreed that I would send a revised version of her life story, based on changes she had suggested, and she would

respond by email. I gave her a copy of the contacts for support, but she did not appear to want them, and told me of other contacts that I had missed.

I wrote my field notes as soon as possible as I was keen to get as much detail written as I could since I did not have a recording of the interview. Later that day, I received an email from Elaine with details of the support contacts that were missing from my list. In the email, Elaine said that she had enjoyed meeting me again and wished me well for the Christmas holidays, and it seemed that this interview had ended well.

Later, when I came to revise Elaine's life story I realised there was an inconsistency in my conversations with Elaine. During our telephone conversation when we arranged the second interview, and at an early point in the second interview, Elaine had stated that, although she was happy for me use the data from her life story, she had no wish to read it again. Thinking about her past had been the trigger for her distress in the first interview. Later, at the end of the second interview, as I was leaving, she had agreed when I suggested sending her the revised story. At that point her request not to re-read her story had slipped my mind.

Once I had worked on Elaine's second interview data, I was unsure what to do with the revised story. Elaine had suggested three minor changes and, on reflection, I decided to make the changes but not to send it to her. This seemed the course of action that would best protect Elaine's mental well-being.

Revising the life stories

I took a number of steps to prepare the interview data for use in revising the life stories. Nine of the interviews had been audio taped, and these were transcribed verbatim. I had written notes from the tenth interview, taken while interviewing the participant.

Next, when I received the transcriptions, I checked them using the same process that I had used to check the first interviews: listening to the recordings and noting changes on the printed transcript. Once I was satisfied that the transcripts were as accurate as possible, I added a clean copy to the file for each participant, and used a further copy to work from.

The final step was to become familiar with the data from the second interviews (Smith, 1995). In order to do this, I read the transcripts and field notes several times. During this process I searched for, and noted down any references to the life stories, lifelines or learning diagrams. This included references to inaccuracies, additional information which would provide a more detailed context for understanding learning and progression, and descriptions of feelings.

Before I revised the life stories, I made changes to the learners' lifelines based on the information from the second interviews. In the main, this involved adding dates, and making changes to the chronology of events. In addition, some learners had remembered courses and classes they had attended and had forgotten to tell me about. I added these to the learning diagrams. Next, I re-wrote the life stories for the eight learners who had suggested changes, using the information I had noted from the second interviews. This involved starting with the life story written after the first interviews, and then incorporating into the stories all the changes and comments made by the learners during the second meeting. Next I sent the revised stories to the learners, except Elaine, with an accompanying note, stating that I would like them to read their revised story, and that I would be in touch within a few days to talk it over with them.

When I talked to the learners about their revised story, two suggested minor changes, which I made. The others said they were happy with the revised version of their story. During these conversations I found that the learners were keen to tell me about any developments in their lives or their learning since our last meeting. I was happy to receive this additional data, and took notes of the telephone calls, to add to the learners' files.

Second stage of analysis: bridging commentaries

In this section, I describe the second stage of data analysis. The section is divided into three parts. In the first part I explore what I had achieved in the creation of the life stories. Then I discuss my decision to move to a second stage of analysis and provide the reasons for my chosen approach. Next I describe the steps I took to complete this stage.

What was achieved by the life stories?

By the end of the first phase of analysis, I had created a life story for each learner, based on the components identified from Polkinghorne's (1988, 1995) guidelines that I had revised and agreed with them.

In a discussion of life history and narrative in research, Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) pointed out that not everyone makes a distinction between these two approaches. However, for others, life history is seen as a type of narrative. They quoted Nancy Zeller who described her understanding of life history as a subset of narrative: "while all life histories are narratives, not all narratives are life histories" (Zeller, 1995, p. 114). Life history was described by Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) as the story of a life. The central concern in this approach is what is told. This can be distinguished from narrative research where the focus is on ways of knowing, or how people tell stories. For my study this meant that the focus of the life stories was what the learners had told me about their lives, and I did not undertake detailed analysis of how the learners talked in the interviews.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) drew a further distinction: between life stories and life histories. For them, a description of a life constituted a life story, but life stories must be placed within their social, political and historical context to become life histories. Goodson and Sikes discussed two levels of interpretation in life history research. In their description, one layer of interpretation takes place as the participant tells their story. A second layer of interpretation is undertaken when the researcher creates a life history (2001, p. 17).

According to Polkinghorne (1995), the result of narrative analysis is a life story. This was supported by Hatch and Wisniewski: "it seems to us that narratives generated via narrative analysis procedures would look more like 'life stories' than the 'life histories' of those adhering to Goodson's position" (1995, p. 126).

For my study I had undertaken narrative analysis using Polkinghorne's (1988; 1995) guidelines, and the results of this approach were the construction of life stories. In this I had begun to address two aims of my research, which were to examine the potential role and contribution of cbal in the context of learners' lives, and to explore

the learners' perceptions of progression. The focus in my approach had been the stories that learners told about their lives and learning. Greater emphasis on the ways of telling would have led to the production of narratives (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995). In creating the life stories, I had taken account of aspects of learners' social, political and historical context to an extent (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). For example, the political situation in Zimbabwe had been important in Sam's decision to leave the country and return to Scotland, and Sarah's experiences in the formal education system, especially in relation to her disability, could be understood in terms of how the education of pupils with disabilities was managed in the 1970s. However, in my study these aspects provided the context in which the learners constructed their stories about themselves.

The need for further analysis

The creation of the life stories had facilitated an exploration of the learners' perceptions of participation in and progression from cbal at an individual level. In this I had addressed the first and second aims of the research. However, I had not achieved the third aim of the research. I felt there was a need to undertake further analysis in order to search for themes in the learners' stories and to increase understanding of the role and contribution of cbal, especially in relation to Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning.

As discussed earlier, Mills (1959) described social enquiry as being concerned with both private troubles and public concerns. Later, Brookfield referred to this as the "reestablishment of the severed connection between individual biography and social structures" (Brookfield, 1986, p.7), and he saw this as an important purpose of social research. One aim of my research was to investigate the learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal in relation to Scottish Government priorities for CLD and lifelong learning. In order to achieve this in my study, I needed to explore the participants' life stories, their personal concerns, in relation to public policy.

Goodson and Sikes commented on the importance of this process, saying: "without contextual commentary on issues of time and space, life histories remain uncoupled

from the conditions of their social construction” (2001, p.17). Similarly, in their discussion of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly observed that “the mere telling of a story leaves it as a fixed entity” (2000, p. 251) and asserted that work was needed to make links with broader social questions. For my study this meant that in order to achieve the third aim of the research there was a need for commentary on the learners’ life stories in relation to Scottish policy.

In order to achieve the aims of my research, I needed to identify themes in the learners’ life stories and to explore potential links between the stories and Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a process for undertaking this work which was appropriate for my study for three reasons. Firstly, Clandinin and Connelly described narrative inquiry as a way of “understanding experience” (2000, p. 20). In their view, the starting point for narrative inquiry is experience. This was relevant to my study in that I wanted to understand the learners’ experiences of participation in and progression from cbal. Secondly, Clandinin and Connelly described narrative inquiry as a joint endeavour between the researcher and the participants, which takes place over time, and this fitted well with the approach I had taken in the creation of the life stories, in collaboration with the learners, and over a period of approximately one year.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained an approach that would help me to move from the individual life stories to research which made connections to any experiences that were shared by the learners, as well as CLD and lifelong learning policy. The process they outlined allowed me to do this without reducing the learners’ stories to categories. The starting point in my approach had been that I wanted to understand the learners’ experiences of cbal in the context of their lives, and that I wanted to make links between these individual experiences to aspects of social life, and this was the third reason that I utilised the approach described by Clandinin and Connelly.

In their discussion of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) used the term “field texts” (p. 80) to describe a range of data that might be collected in the process of an investigation. They discussed the need for inward looking texts, such as journal entries, as well as outward looking texts, such as field notes. Examples of field texts

in my study included transcripts from interviews, field notes written after the interviews had taken place, the lifelines and learning diagrams, and journal entries. They observed that in narrative inquiry, there is no one true version of events. Field texts are “always interpretive, always composed by an individual at a certain moment in time” (p. 84). They emphasised that data are not uncovered by the researcher, but rather are constructed or created. However, they noted that not all interpretations are equally valid, and that field texts need to be kept carefully and addressed continually by the researcher. In my study I had constructed the life stories from the interview data, and I used these, as well as the interview transcripts, in the next stage of analysis. In the next section I describe how I utilised the approach outlined by Clandinin and Connelly in order to undertake further analysis.

Bridging commentaries

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a process for analysis of data that they called moving from field texts to “research texts” (p. 119). In this section I describe the steps I took in the second stage of my analysis, moving from my field texts to research texts in order to investigate the links between the individual learners’ life stories and any commonalities among the stories. In addition, in this part of the analysis, I began to look for links between the individual stories and policy concerns.

I undertook the process described below for each learner in turn. The reason for this was that I felt that if I worked with the data from one file at a time that would allow me to focus fully on each learner.

At the beginning of this second stage I sorted the field texts into chronological order in terms of when they had been collected or created. In some cases, notes from telephone conversations and copies of emails from the learners had been added to the files. I copied relevant sections from my research journal and added these journal entries. Finally, I gave each field text a number and created an index of field texts. At this point, the learners’ files contained between ten and fourteen separate, numbered field texts, together with an index of texts, amounting to up to 70 pages of notes.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observed that there is no set procedure for moving from field texts to research texts. They explored the idea of “interim texts” (p. 133)

which might be produced as part of the process. Interim texts could be shown to the research participants as part of the investigation and were “intended to facilitate ongoing conversation with participants” (p. 133). The life stories that I had constructed could be seen as interim texts for my study. They had provided a useful starting point for much of the conversation in the second interviews which in turn had supported the achievement of the research aim of exploring learners’ perceptions.

The next steps in this stage of analysis involved getting as close to the data as possible. First, I read through all of the field texts in the file. During a second reading, I took notes and searched for “patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 133). I did this by noting aspects of the learners’ lives and learning that they identified as important, the reasons that they provided for decisions they had made and any theme which recurred in the field texts. I composed a list of the themes I had identified for each learner. The list of themes is shown below. At this stage the themes related to the experiences of the individual learners.

Themes from stage two analysis.

Sam

Retirement

Well-being/depression

Connection with family

Academic progression (intermediate – advanced)

External validation

Adjustment to change in personal circumstances

No plans for future

Class cancelled due to lack of numbers – had to attend another class

Sarah

Mental illness

Voluntary work

Educational achievement prior to participation

Disability

Learning in a group

ICT

Chal part of picture/ role in recovery

Moving beyond mental illness

Group cancelled without explanation – Sarah would have continued to attend

Linda

Roles held: wife, mother, daughter, sister

Recovered from depression

Limited initial education

Successful in work

Successful return to learning

Gained skills and confidence from computing class

Plans for future include further learning and work

Plans for future dependent on family circumstances

Next level of computing class not available in the community – encouraged to consider college.

Mary

Ill-health

Change

New role as foster carer

Commitment to learning

Positive attitude, interest in new experiences

Busy, full life

Many jobs

Opportunity to complete Steps to Excellence course after gap. Participation in Teenage behaviour course by end of contact.

Helen

Family – role in supporting children's education

New stage in life, after children and husband

Childminding, pride in work

Commitment to learning

Learning as unfinished business – fill gaps created at school, fulfil potential

Effect of the research process, leading to action

Progression includes continuing to learn but not cbal as such – sewing class (privately run) language classes (University evening class) etc.

Alan

Trauma of being seriously ill

Living with disability

Roles in a variety of workplaces

Experience of discrimination as a young man

Learning as an adult: for work, as part of recovery, cbal

Voluntary work

Family

Effect of research process, leading to action

Progression = recovery from stroke, contributing to community, keeping busy, keeping mentally active. Learning

Feelings of not achieving potential

Class cancelled due to lack of funding

Doreen

Husband and children most important part

No plans to work in future

No plans to learn at more advanced level

Friends, nice people, enjoying a laugh: school, work, gym, cbal

Encouraging others to take part

Learning at same level – Spanish, ECDL, psychology

Progression = voluntary work, but difficult to organise

Problem with ECDL course, cancelled until next year

Settled life, no stress

Alison

Daughter: additional needs

Ill-health

Early retirement

Art and painting

Adjusting to retirement: loss of identity, looking for something else to do

Successful at school
Social isolation
Social science
College
Continuation of community based classes
Melanie
Single parent
Unemployed/in receipt of benefits
View of self and others re above
Son: ADHD
Social life and learning around Resource Centre
Relationship with mother
Stress
Positive attitude – to learning, to life
College
Wallpapering the kitchen
Elaine
Injury at work
Depression
Difficulties in childhood
Interrupted schooling
Women's group
Fragile recovery from ill-health
Agency – I've got choice

I read all of the field texts a third time, checking the themes, patterns and tensions with the life stories. Also, this time I looked for aspects of the texts which referred specifically to the third aim of the research of exploring learners' experiences of cbal in relation to policy. A list of the questions which informed this part of the analysis can be found in Appendix M.

By the end of the reading phase of the analysis, I had added a set of notes to the file of field texts, and I had composed the list of themes for each learner from the field texts. Next I worked with these notes to write about each learner. In this process I had moved from the collection and creation of field texts from two interviews, through the construction of life stories as interim texts, to the production of a research text for each learner.

The next step in the analysis involved the composition of a research text for the learner. Clandinin and Connelly observed that research texts "can always be otherwise, always be improved, a text that is inevitably only a step, a kind of placeholder, from which still other inquiries, with still more field texts may be imagined or pursued" (2000, p. 156). This was a reminder that the research texts that I composed were my interpretation. I had not discovered, but had constructed, meaning from the field texts.

I composed a commentary which, together with the life story, constituted the research text for the learner. The purpose of this stage was to undertake analysis that established themes in the individual life stories as well as providing a bridge from the stories to Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning. I did this by analysing the data with a focus on aspects of policy that relate to cbal and progression. These were

- target groups in policy such as adults experiencing disadvantage, minority ethnic groups, retired adults or those with a disability;
- progression, defined in policy in educational terms such as moving to more advanced levels or formal learning, and economic terms such as accessing paid employment or promotion at work.

For example, I considered whether the participants had gained accreditation for their learning, whether they had plans to move to formal learning or whether they had

gained paid employment. Therefore, in the commentary I included a discussion of the learners' perceptions of their participation in and progression from cbal, in the context of Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning as it relates to a specified role for cbal. This helped me to analyse the individual stories that illustrated the learners' personal concerns in relation to public policy issues of targeting provision and progression (Brookfield, 1986; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Mills, 1959).

I followed all of steps outlined above for each of the learners and the results of this process were 10 research texts which each comprised a life story and a commentary. The commentaries were useful in my study because they acted as a bridge between understanding the role of cbal in the context of the individual learners' lives and beginning to make statements about the potential contribution of cbal. I did not seek to generalise about cbal from 10 life stories but the creation of the bridging commentaries addressed the need for analysis that went beyond the individual. An example of a bridging commentary can be found in Appendix N.

In this study there was a tension for me as the researcher between the desire to foreground the learners' points of view and acknowledging the need for more in-depth analysis. The bridging commentaries helped to manage the risk identified in the literature (Clandinen & Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001) that the life stories remained static statements about cbal in the lives of 10 individual learners. They helped me to identify the themes listed above for each learner that might be common across the learners' experiences, as well as begin to explore the learners' stories in relation to Scottish CLD and lifelong policy priorities.

During this second phase of the analysis I had created the list of the themes that I had selected from the research texts for each learner. This list allowed me to consider a third stage of analysis.

Third stage of analysis: thematic analysis

Identifying themes

At this stage I had achieved the aims of the research to an extent. Firstly, I had explored the learners' perceptions of participation in and progression from cbal and

had constructed life stories to place these perceptions in the context of learners' past and present lives. Secondly, I had identified themes in the learners' stories and I had composed bridging commentaries which addressed cbal in relation to policy. In this, I had followed Denzin's approach by beginning with single life stories, and moving to organising the stories around themes for each learner. However, in order to meet the aims of the research as fully as possible, more analysis was needed.

The third stage, suggested by Denzin, was to "cross-build" (1989, p. 67) to provide an interpretive account of the role and contribution of cbal. In the third stage of analysis, I needed to identify common themes across the data in order to be able to move away from the individual personal accounts of the research participants, and begin to explore cbal and progression as a shared concern.

Merrill's (Merrill & West, 2009) method of analysis of life history data influenced my approach at this stage. In her approach to analysis, Merrill aimed to "illustrate the collectivity in people's biographies" (p. 133). The third stage of analysis in my study was to identify themes across the life stories in order to move from individual concerns to collective ones (Merrill & West, 2009). I followed Merrill's approach of looking for examples of connections across the life stories where themes were repeated, in order to be able to illustrate the commonalities in the learners' experiences. An important part of this step was to be alert to differences, as well as common themes; to take account of contradictions and exceptions, as well as patterns and themes. I developed a table to help me to organise the data in this stage (see Table 2 below). I grouped the themes I had identified in the individual life stories vertically on the table, and placed the name of each learner for whom I had found this theme, opposite. This helped me to identify "shared experiences and patterns" (Merrill & West, 2009, p. 133) across the learners' life stories.

Theme	Learner
Qualification prior to cbal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None • Highers • PDA Classroom Assistant • SVQ • HNC • Registered General Nurse • Diploma in Agriculture • Post-graduate Diploma 	Elaine Doreen Linda Mary/Helen Melanie Alison Sam Sarah/Alan
Unwaged <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retired • Unemployed • Not working 	Sam/Alan/Alison/Elaine Sarah/Linda/Melanie/ Doreen
Disability/physical ill-health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As carer • Personal 	Alison/Melanie Sarah/Mary/Alan/Alison
Transitions/changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation • New role as foster carer • Family left home • Becoming disabled • Early retirement • Injury at work 	Sam Mary Helen Alan Alison Elaine
Well-being/mental health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining mental health • Recovery from mental illness/depression 	Sam/Alan/Doreen Sarah/Linda/Elaine
Social relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconnection with family • Extending social networks • Recovering social networks 	Sam Mary/Doreen/Melanie/Elaine Sarah/Alan/Alison
Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Having choices • DIY 	Linda Elaine Melanie
Importance of accreditation	Sam
Feelings of unfulfilled potential	Helen/Alan/Elaine
Future plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue to learn at the same level within cbal • To move to learn at a more advanced level • Paid employment • Voluntary work 	Sarah/ Linda/Mary/Doreen Alison/Melanie Sam/Helen/Alison Sarah/Linda/Helen/Melanie Mary/Sarah/Alan/Doreen/Elaine

Table 2.

On completion of this stage of the analysis, I had used the table to organise common themes from the individual life stories. The next and final stage was to undertake thematic analysis of the interview data in order to be able to discuss the learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal.

Thematic analysis

I examined the table of themes to identify key areas that could be analysed further in order to be able to draw conclusions about cbal. This fitted with Merrill's (Merrill & West, 2009) description of the stages of analysis in biographical research, in which it is important to "relate the data to theory" (p. 135) as a final step.

I searched the themes, and was able to see connections among them. There were themes that related to forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986): levels of qualifications held by the learners, the role of accreditation, and themes connected with social relationships. I grouped these in order to undertake thematic analysis in relation to theories of human and social capital.

There were three themes that related to health and well-being and I grouped these in a similar way in order to analyse them in the context of the literature on participation in learning and health. The themes of transitions, changes in personal circumstances, and future plans were connected with progression in the interviews. As progression had been a focus of the research from the start, I included these, together with the learners' responses to a specific interview question, in the thematic analysis for progression. In this I analysed the study data in relation to four types of progression identified by McGivney (1999, 2003).

Table 3, on the next page, shows how I grouped the themes under the headings of forms of capital, health and well-being, and progression.

Theme	Learner	Heading
Qualification prior to cbal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None • Highers • PDA Classroom Assistant • SVQ • HNC • Registered General Nurse • Diploma in Agriculture • Post-graduate Diploma 	Elaine Doreen Linda Mary/Helen Melanie Alison Sam Sarah/Alan	Human capital
Unwaged <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retired • Unemployed • Not working 	Sam/Alan/Alison/Elaine Sarah/Linda/Melanie/ Doreen	Links to policy target groups
Disability/physical ill-health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As carer • Personal 	Alison/Melanie Sarah/Mary/Alan/Alison	Health & wellbeing
Transitions/changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation • New role as foster carer • Family left home • Becoming disabled • Early retirement • Injury at work 	Sam Mary Helen Alan Alison Elaine	Progression
Well-being/mental health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining mental health • Recovery from mental illness/depression 	Sam/Alan/Doreen Sarah/Linda/Elaine	Health & wellbeing
Social relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconnection with family • Extending social networks • Recovering social networks 	Sam Mary/Doreen/Melanie/Elaine Sarah/Alan/Alison	Social capital
Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Having choices • DIY 	Linda Elaine Melanie	Health & wellbeing
Importance of accreditation	Sam	Human capital
Feelings of unfulfilled potential	Helen/Alan/Elaine	Life history
Future plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue to learn at the same level within cbal • To move to learn at a more advanced level • Paid employment • Voluntary work 	Sarah/ Linda/Mary/Doreen Alison/Melanie Sam/Helen/Alison Sarah/Linda/Helen/Melanie Mary/Sarah/Alan/Doreen/Elaine	Progression

Table 3.

I undertook thematic analysis of the interview data in order to provide an interpretive account (Denzin, 1989) of the learners' experiences of cbal. I searched the data for connections between cbal and theories of forms of capital, health and well-being and progression. More in-depth description of the components I looked for in the data, along with a discussion of what I found, is included in chapters four, five and six.

Two themes did not fit into any of the groups described above. One of these, related to the learners' employment situations, was relevant in relation to CLD and lifelong learning policy. As the third aim of this study was to investigate the learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal in the context of Scottish policy, I decided to include this aspect in a separate discussion of the findings of my study and policy in chapter seven. The theme of feelings of unfulfilled potential is addressed in chapter eight as part of a discussion of the learners' experiences of participating in life history research.

Conclusion

In this study I adopted a life history approach in order to investigate learners' experiences of cbal. I undertook three stages of analysis of data to ensure an in-depth investigation. In the first stage, I carried out narrative analysis of the interviews, and I created life stories for each of the learners that were checked and agreed with them. Next I searched for themes for each individual learner, and I made links with Scottish policy on CLD and lifelong learning. The commentaries that were the result of the second stage of analysis acted as a bridge between the individual learners' experiences and common concerns. In stage three of the analysis, I identified commonalities among the themes, and I analysed these in relation to theories of capital, health and well-being, and progression.

This three-stage process of analysis that I developed for this study, called Life History Progression Analysis, facilitated an in-depth investigation of the potential role and contribution of participation in and progression from cbal in the context of learners' lives. I discuss the strengths and potential weaknesses of my approach further in chapters eight and nine.

Introduction to the life stories

The life stories that I created in this study were distilled from the two interviews with each learner that were between 30 minutes and 90 minutes long, as well as discussions with the learners that lasted up to one hour. I have given each learner a pseudonym to protect their identity. The stories are all different because, in each case, I wrote the story as fully as possible to reflect the information that the learners had provided. Although I had used interview guides, each interview was semi-structured, and therefore, the conversations I had with learners followed various directions as they responded in their different ways to my questions. The stories are between 1500 and 3000 words long. Alan's story is the longest, as he provided a lot of additional information at the second interview, related to his career in business that he was keen for me to include. Elaine's story is the shortest because she asked me not to include some of what she told me.

I wrote the stories in the third person to show that, although the learners collaborated in the process, they were constructed by me. However, the focus of each story is the learner's perspective. The stories are of the learners' reasons for their actions, their connections between events, and their emphases, as described to me and checked with them. I have used direct quotes from the interviews where I felt that the learners' own words best expressed their perspectives. However, quotes are used on relatively few occasions, as I tried to avoid repetition with the analyses in chapters four, five and six.

The life stories are written in the present tense to show that they reflect the learners' lives as they were described at the time of the first interviews. Each story includes a postscript. The postscripts are in the past tense because they were written by me after the life stories had been agreed with the learners. They include what the learners told me about events that took place between the two interviews, as well as additional information given on the telephone or by email, after the data collection phase was finished.

Details of the learners' socio-economic status are not included in the life stories. I did not seek this information in the interviews because the influence of social class on

the learners' experiences of cbal was outwith the scope of this research. Instead, as described earlier in this chapter, I focused in the writing of the bridging commentaries, on the extent to which the learners fitted into the target groups identified in Scottish policy, in order to achieve the third aim of the study. Details of the learners' ages and employment status at the time of the first interview are in Appendix F.

In the next chapter I present the learners' life stories in their entirety in order to foreground the learners' perspectives and show the contexts in which the community based adult learning that was the focus of this study took place.

CHAPTER THREE: LEARNERS' LIFE STORIES

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the role played by cbal in the context of the learners' lives. The life stories that I created from the interview data in stage one of the analysis form the main part of the chapter. At the beginning, I explain my reasons for including the stories as a discrete chapter of my thesis. Then the stories are presented in their entirety, with the postscript at the end of each one. Finally, I discuss what I learned from the life stories, and I describe how they are used in the discussion chapters that follow.

Reasons for including the life stories

In this study the life stories were an integral part of my goal to foreground the learners' perspectives in the sense that the stories focused on the learners' descriptions of their experiences, and had been agreed and checked with them. In addition, they demonstrated the outcome of the first stage of the three-stage analysis process I had developed for this study.

I was in contact with the learners for a period of about one year, and the life stories were created in collaboration with them during this time. I wrote the first versions of the stories, and this was an interpretive act in the sense that they were the result of the narrative analysis stage. I discussed and checked the stories with the learners during the second interviews. All of the learners had read my version of their story prior to the second interview, and eight of the learners made comments and suggestions for changes during our conversation. Some of them had written on the manuscript that I had sent them, and others had kept notes on a separate sheet of paper that they explained to me. Alan had typed a version of his story on the computer that contained much more detail about his work, and I kept this in the revised version of his story. Alison and Melanie did not suggest any changes. Both had read their stories and provided additional details when I asked for them, but each of them said that my first version was accurate and did not need to be altered.

In writing this thesis I had to decide how to present the life stories that I had created. In their life history study of literacy learning, Bingman and Ebert (2000) provided brief descriptions of the study participants in the main text of their report, and full “profiles” (2000, p. 132) were included in an appendix to provide additional background information. An advantage of this approach was that the profiles were not a distraction from the main focus of the study which was learner-identified outcomes of participation in literacy learning. Also, the profiles were not included in the word count of the final report. An alternative approach was that adopted by West (1996), who included sections or “fragments” (p. 32) of the participants’ life stories in his discussion chapters to provide the context for the themes under discussion. This was a useful way of making clear the links between the participants’ life histories and themes.

However, there were limitations in these approaches for my study. In each approach the learners’ life histories were included in the discussion sections of the research in part. The focus of the research in each case was on themes that had been identified from the data. However, in my study, the focus of the investigation was the learners’ perspectives on their experiences of cbal, in the context of their lives. In earlier drafts of the thesis I had placed the life stories in an appendix, and used sections of the stories in the discussion chapters to illustrate the main points. However, this proved to be repetitive, as I tried to ensure that all the relevant information was presented, in order for the discussion to make sense. I realised that the context provided by the life stories was crucial to understanding the role that cbal had played in the learners’ lives. They showed the starting-points for the learners in terms of their learning and they illustrated how particular events and relationships had acted as facilitators of, as well as barriers to, progression. In order to achieve the research aims of foregrounding the learners’ perspectives and examining the potential role and contribution of cbal in the context of learners’ past and present lives, it was important that the life stories be read in full, as an integral part of the investigation.

The life stories in this study were important for a further two reasons. Firstly, they had been created in collaboration with the learners. The learners had played a part in their construction through their participation in the second interviews, and the stories

had been checked and agreed with them as an account of their contribution to the research. Secondly, in this study the life stories were not simply a description of the learners: they were the outcome of the first stage of the data analysis. In the creation of the stories, I had interpreted the data from the interviews and had attempted to bring “order and meaning to the life being told” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). This was an important first step in the three stages of analysis, and therefore the life stories should be included in the main text of the research.

The life stories have been included in their entirety in this chapter because the context that they provide is critical to understanding the learners’ participation in and progression from cbal. I believed that including sections of the stories in the discussion chapters might have the effect of omitting important information about the learners. Therefore I have included them as a discrete chapter in order to show the findings from first stage of the interpretation, that is, the narrative analysis. The life stories are both the outcome of this stage of analysis, and were subject to further analysis, as I worked through the three-stage analysis process.

I made small changes to the life stories prior to presenting them in this thesis. First, I took out direct identifiers, such as the names of the learners’ partners and family members, as well as indirect identifiers such as place names. Then, I removed some of the direct quotations because they were used as illustrations in the discussion chapters, and for them to remain as part of the stories would have been repetitive. In addition, I changed a few words and grammar to make the stories easier to read, but tried to ensure the sense of the story was not altered. With the exception of these changes, the stories that I created in collaboration with the learners are presented in the next section.

Life stories

Helen

Helen is 47 years old. She is separated from her husband and lives with her three grown up children and her dog. Two of the children have graduated from university; one is working in Glasgow and the other has secured employment in England having just returned from snowboarding in Canada for a year. The middle child is studying for a PhD which he is due to complete in two year's time. The children have all talked about moving out of the family home in the next few months which means that, after 26 years of raising a family, Helen will be living alone. This is a time for Helen to reflect and to consider which direction she wants to take for this new stage in her life.

Helen was born and brought up in a tenement in Glasgow. She was the fourth child in a family of five girls. Her mother stayed at home with the children until Helen was 10 years old. She remembers her father working hard, sometimes six days a week, on a building site. The girls all spent the summers with their grandparents in Ireland, which Helen loved. Although the family did not have much in terms of money and material possessions, it was a happy childhood. Helen has memories of her local area before the motorway was built, when lots of families lived there and it was a busy, thriving community.

Helen went to nursery and then primary school near to her home. The five girls walked to school together in the mornings. The nursery class and primary school up to primary five were housed in the same building, so Helen did not experience any difficulty with the transition from nursery to primary school. During primary school Helen was moved ahead of her year group. Due to overcrowding in the class, four pupils, including Helen, were moved from primary four to primary six. They completed primary seven, and then went on to secondary school. Helen was not yet eleven years old at that stage.

Reflecting on this situation now, Helen feels that it led to some difficulties. She says that the others in the same situation seem to have fared fairly well educationally, but she has always felt that she missed some of her education, and that there are gaps in

her knowledge as a result. Now she wonders why no-one questioned the situation. However she feels that, in those days, it was difficult to challenge teachers. They were viewed as professionals who knew what they were doing.

The move to high school was a bit more daunting as it was a bus ride away and there were many more pupils there. However, Helen coped well. She remembers school as a positive experience, but she has unhappy memories of the use of corporal punishment. She was belted twice in incidents which involved the whole class receiving the same punishment. Looking back, she remembers the cruelty of some teachers, and the unprofessionalism of others. The memories have stayed with her and she worried about how her daughter, who was quiet and shy, would cope. Fortunately, in Helen's view, corporal punishment was banned when her daughter was in her first year of primary school.

Academically Helen was an average student. Her favourite subject was history. She has kept all her notes on the subject and has continued to read history for leisure to this day. Helen left school as soon as she turned 16, having achieved some O-grade qualifications. She passed her English but failed mathematics. She attributes this to the fact that she was moved ahead of her year group in primary four.

Helen went into a job straight after leaving school, something that was becoming increasingly hard in 1976 because the rate of unemployment was high. She worked as a junior in a solicitor's office for one year, and then she moved to the contracts department of the Regional Council. Helen remembers friends from school who had gone to university struggling to find work when they graduated, but she stayed in employment with the Council until she left to start her family. While she was working with the Council she attended college on a day-release basis to study National and Local Government and Scots Law. She attended for two years but did not complete the qualification.

While she was working for the Council, Helen married and moved out of her parents' home to a flat nearby. Later, in 1982, she had her first child, a daughter, and she left work. She did not intend to return to work, preferring to stay at home and look after her family. Helen's two sons were born in 1983 and 1984.

For 13 years Helen was a housewife and mother. The family moved away from Glasgow to a small village where they settled in a house with a garden and where the family still lives. Sometimes, Helen felt that her role as a mother was not taken seriously by others who valued working outside the home more. However, these are attitudes that Helen believes have changed now, and it is easier for mothers to choose to stay at home with their children.

Helen became a childminder when her youngest child was in primary seven. Again, this role was not taken seriously by some, but for Helen it was the right choice of job, and it allowed her to stick to her decision to be there for her own children.

Financially the family experienced some difficult times, but Helen never regretted her choice of career. She feels that it has contributed to the close relationship she has with her children now, and she feels that her job is valued by the parents of the children she has in her care.

The next period in Helen's life was taken up with childminding full time as well as looking after her own family as they progressed through school and studied for exams. She enjoyed the childminding very much and many of the children in her care became part of the family. They keep in contact with one boy who is now 17 years old and living in America. Another child was with the family for 50 hours a week and all her own children became close to him. Childminding proved to be an ideal choice of career for Helen in many ways. Mostly she worked full time but was able to change to part-time hours if that became necessary. Working in her own home allowed Helen to be there for her own children while earning money at the same time. In addition, she was able to keep in contact with her parents and sisters, as she could visit during the day while she was looking after the children.

At the time when Helen became registered as a childminder, five other women who lived in the same street also became childminders. Living in a small village with poor public transport they felt a little isolated, so they formed a support group and Helen has been involved with the group ever since. They meet to exchange advice about childminding and they raise funds to pay for parties for the children at Easter and Christmas and a day trip in the summer. At present Helen is an office holder on the committee.

Not long after she had begun childminding Helen attended a course to gain qualifications in childcare. The course was run by a local charity in receipt of lottery funding. She attended the course on Wednesday evenings for three years and completed modules towards a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) level two. At this time Helen's children were studying for Standard Grades and Highers and so four members of the family were studying at the same time. Helen achieved some of her modules but received her certificate late because of a problem with marking and publishing results, at national level. However, Helen's main concern at this time was her daughter who had an agonising wait for Higher results to find out if she had been accepted for university.

Unfortunately the charity lost its funding and the course came to an end before the learners had completed their qualification. Helen has never completed the SVQ. Going out at night became difficult as the children began to do more and it was difficult to attend a course during the day unless a crèche was provided. However, she would like to complete what she started one day. She is aware that in the current climate of increased amounts of paperwork and annual Care Commission inspections, there is a requirement for childminders to be qualified.

Helen really enjoyed the course. She had attended because she felt she needed qualifications to support her childminding, including achieving a certificate in first aid which is a requirement for all childminders. It set her on a path of learning that has continued to the present.

In the last two years Helen has participated in several learning opportunities. She attended evening classes in Gaelic and computing in a local high school. However, she had to give up the Gaelic before the course was finished because her father took ill and she was visiting him in hospital at the time of the class. She continued learning computing at the local library where she attended a short tutored course and then undertook self-directed learning tutorials online. In addition, she updated her first aid certificate.

More recently Helen has attended a class run by the Council in the local community centre. The Wednesday class covers a wide range of topics negotiated with the group

and there have been sessions on card making and computing, as well as a guest tutor who taught 'Heart Start'. Helen found out about the class from a community worker who came to the gates when the children were coming out of school. A crèche was provided for the course which made it possible for Helen to attend, and she hoped she would learn about other learning opportunities through her participation.

At this course Helen met other people from the village. She feels she would not have got to know them otherwise as their children are much younger than her own. She is still in touch with two or three of the others and she has just started going to a sewing class with one of them. Helen attributes an increase in her confidence to the evening classes and the Wednesday group. She does not think she would have had the confidence to go to the sewing class without the experience in the community-based classes first. Helen acknowledges that dealing with parents, teachers and others through the childminding has contributed to her level of confidence also.

At the moment Helen has a busy life. She is in good health and she enjoys walking and gardening in her spare time. She knits, and goes to the cinema often. When she has time she likes to read too. She is excited about the sewing class she has started attending. It is run by two women in the village in a building that was bought by the local community when the bank sold it. She could not sew much at all when she started but has made a bag already and has plans to make items to contribute to an arts and crafts stall at Christmas time.

Helen is still childminding full time. She has considered working outside the home in the future but she thinks it is unlikely she will do that.

Helen is in close contact with her family. She sees her sisters often and she shares some of the care of her elderly parents with them. Both parents are in their eighties and her father has suffered seven strokes. He is on medication and seems to be doing well just now. Nonetheless, Helen likes to pop in as often as she can to make sure they are all right. She is still very close to her own children and says she seems to do even more with them now than she did when they were younger.

However, she knows that the children are reaching a stage when they are moving on with their own lives and they will move away from home soon. She has thought

about this and feels that she is coming to a time in her life when she can focus more on her own needs and interests.

Helen feels that she chose to be there for her children throughout their education, and she is proud that she achieved this. Now, Helen has a sense of being at the beginning of a new stage in her life, but as yet she has no fixed idea of what the future holds. She would like to complete the modules that would enable her to become qualified in childcare. She is thinking about going back to complete the parts of her school education she feels are missing, especially mathematics and English. Through the children in her care, Helen is aware that the methods of teaching in schools have changed, and this is something she would like to learn more about. She is considering taking her love of history further too. She says that she would like to go back to education. Other ideas such as travelling or learning a language are in her thoughts. At present, learning features as a central part of the range of possibilities.

Postscript

Between the two interviews with Helen, all three of her children moved out of the family home. Helen continued her work as a childminder, and she had used the local library for online tutorials in computing. The sewing class re-started after the summer break and Helen went back to it. She had made some enquiries about other learning opportunities but had not committed to anything.

In a telephone conversation after the data collection phase, Helen told me that one of her sons had decided to move back home. Her other son who had moved to England came back every weekend, and her daughter “flits in and out”. Helen was looking after four extra children because one of the childminders in the village was ill. She had not participated in any new learning opportunities since the interviews.

Alan

Alan is 64 years old. He is disabled on his left side following a stroke in November 2000. He had to stop working immediately, having worked in a variety of posts in business since the age of 19. At first Alan hoped he would recover fully and would return to work but he suffered a series of seizures, and other complications, over a period of two years after the stroke and he had to accept that he would not be in paid employment again. It is three years since the last seizure and Alan has gradually gained some independence. He enjoys spending time with his daughters and their families and he attends a computing class in his local community centre. He is keen to continue to do more on his own and it is important to him that he keeps as active as possible both physically and mentally.

Alan was born and brought up in Ireland. He has an older brother and two younger sisters. He went to a small primary school at first and later the family moved house and Alan moved to a much larger primary school. Alan did not like school. He says he had a negative attitude which he now admits impeded him from achieving better qualifications while at school, and stories he had heard from his older brother made him anxious about attending. This was at a time when there was no preparation for school in the form of playgroups or nurseries.

When he was nine, Alan contracted rheumatic fever and spent three months in hospital. He recovered and returned to school.

Despite his negative attitude and the spell in hospital, Alan did reasonably well at school. He passed the Eleven Plus, the qualifying examination for grammar school and went to the same school his brother was already attending. He remembers the importance of the Eleven Plus at that time, saying it would have been “catastrophic” if he had not got into grammar school.

As he matured Alan’s attitude changed. He was never particularly fond of school but he got on with his work and gained six O-levels. He failed French and he tried it again the following year, when he was sitting A-levels. However he failed it again. Eventually, on the advice of a teacher he decided to try once more but at A-level.

This time he failed the A-level but was awarded the O-level at last. When Alan left school after 6th year he had A-levels in geography and history, and 7 O-levels.

While he was still at school Alan had begun to start looking for a job. Further academic study did not appeal to him and he was keen to go out to work. In addition, Alan was aware that his father wanted him to go out to work rather than continuing to study at university. His father suggested pursuing a career in the insurance industry. In consequence, under the guidance of the school's careers master, Alan wrote for information to the Chartered Insurance Institute. Alan learned that to progress in insurance, it would be essential to study part time for professional qualifications i.e. Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute (A.C.I.I.) but this did not deter him.

At that time O-levels, including English and mathematics, or the Institute's preliminary exam, were necessary to study for the A.C.I.I. Three months before sitting his O-levels, Alan sat the preliminary exam for work in insurance just in case he failed his exams. He had interviews with insurance companies and was offered a job with the largest firm of brokers in Northern Ireland. The job was subject to the outcome of a medical and Alan went along believing it to be routine, confident he would start work soon. However, the medical was not straightforward and there followed a period of uncertainty and heartbreak for Alan.

The medical examination for the insurance brokers had highlighted a heart condition of which Alan was unaware until that point. It transpired that the rheumatic fever had attacked the aortic valve and left him with a heart murmur. The job offer was withdrawn.

Alan applied for other jobs in insurance but the outcome was always the same. When the company learned about Alan's heart condition they would not take him on. The reason was that he was too big a risk for the pension scheme. It seemed unfair to Alan and he still feels a sense of injustice about the situation today, but he reflects that discrimination was not monitored then the way it is now.

Alan went back to school and studied for A-levels. He had to stop playing rugby now that his heart murmur was known. He had to stop all sport except a bit of cricket in

the summer. He passed his A-levels and applied to train as a primary school teacher. He was accepted and was sent for a medical. His words best describe what happened:

But he [the doctor] came in and he put his arms on my shoulder and he said they're not going to accept you, I advise you to get a job behind a desk. Well I thought that was stupid saying that because the insurance was going to be behind a desk... he said well I'll send my report to them if they ask for it. And I got a letter from the teacher training college saying that I was un..., physically unfit to train, so that, em, was me devastated.

Alan tried to find a job in a bank and the Electricity Board for Northern Ireland. Each time he was required to attend a medical examination and failed. For some time he was despondent and not sure what to do. He reached a stage when he could no longer face attending any more medicals. Alan's father noticed that the local branch of well-known men's outfitters was advertising for trainee salesmen specifying O-levels as a minimum educational requirement. On his father's suggestion, Alan applied and got the job. At the interview, the manager told Alan that, after a few years, promotion was possible, but no definite career path or timetable were given or outlined. At first Alan felt that he could do better as the job did not require the academic qualifications he had, but he found he enjoyed the work and he did well. Nearly three years later, Alan was sent to the company's head office in London for a week's introductory training course, but no indication was given of future courses or training.

The next period of Alan's life was characterised by job changes, promotions, study, and unemployment. During this period he studied at night school and gained qualifications in business. While he was still working at the men's outfitters, Alan's father introduced him to one of his business associates who agreed to take Alan on in his company selling to clothing manufacturers. After Alan gave notice at the outfitters that he was leaving, the local manager told him there were plans to send him on a management training course, but this would mean spending some time in London. Although he was reluctant to take the new job, his new employer indicated that Alan would eventually become a partner within a few years. The prospect of

eventually becoming self-employed appealed to Alan and he regarded his new employer as a man of his word. As well as this, Alan's father was keen for him to take the new job and he did not want to disappoint his father. Alan took the job and worked there for five years but did not enjoy it, and eventually he left. He was unemployed for a spell but by this point he had completed a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Business Studies. He applied for a position as a trainee manager with the then nationalised Post Office Telecommunications. After attending a full day of interviews and tests, he was offered a position, but would initially be located in Liverpool. He was asked to undergo a medical examination and a few days later he received a letter advising him the job offer remained, but it would be a non-established position i.e. he would not be able to join the superannuation scheme and would have to arrange his own personal pension scheme. At the same time he was offered a position as a purchasing and marketing manager in a flax spinning and linen cordage manufacturing company, which he accepted. The salary was similar to the Post Office position. A few months later he was invited to join the pension scheme, which was subject to a medical examination. He was accepted into the scheme with qualifications limiting the amount of life assurance paid to next of kin, in the event of death in service. Alan was in charge of an office with four people and he quickly learned to do the accounts using the double-entry system, and to prepare a trial balance at the end of each month.

While Alan was in this job, he met and married his wife. Later the company began to struggle. There was competition from other firms who used manmade fibres and eventually the company went into liquidation. Alan was made redundant and was looking for work again. This time he found a job with the Belfast office of a quarrying and road surfacing company. Alan did not particularly enjoy this job but he did what was asked of him and got on with it. While there, Alan studied part time and gained a Diploma in Marketing. He continued his studies and, with support of the company, achieved a postgraduate qualification in Management Studies. During this time Alan's two daughters were born.

While working for the road surfacing company, Alan was asked if he wanted to join the company pension scheme, and he was able to do so, without needing a medical

examination. After a few years, a colleague told Alan about a job opportunity as a market analyst in the company Scottish headquarters in Glasgow. Having gained the diplomas in marketing and management studies, the job appealed to him. His application was successful, and he moved with his family to Glasgow.

At first the managing director in the Glasgow office seemed unclear about the nature of Alan's post. Alan did not receive guidance but worked on his own initiative. He researched the market for the supply of dry aggregates to the precast concrete manufacturers in Scotland, which indicated the company only had 3% of the market. In the wake of his report, greater sales efforts to this sector were instigated and within a short time the market share increased to 10%. In 1981, Alan and a colleague from the company headquarters in Wolverhampton were instructed to research the emerging interlock paving market in the UK, which senior managers perceived as a possible competitive road surfacing material to blacktop surfacing. Their subsequent report forecast exponential growth and recommended serious consideration to manufacture, supply and lay such paving blocks as part of their service as road surfacing contractors. The company did not act on these recommendations and this sector is now dominated by Monoblock, which is synonymous with the products, no matter who the manufacturer or supplier is.

Around 1983 a new managing director was appointed to the company. Alan got on well with him and under this new manager his job grew and developed. Later this man left to work with another company, and after six months he asked Alan to come and work for him there for a 33% increase in salary which Alan accepted. However two years after taking up his new post, the company collapsed. At this time there was a slump in the property market and the business was badly affected. Once again Alan was unemployed. He found work selling pre-cast concrete products in Scotland for a company in Northern Ireland. However this job did not work out and Alan was made redundant again.

Over the next couple of years Alan worked for his brother-in-law undertaking some research, and he also worked as a sales agent.

In 2000 Alan had a stroke and emergency brain surgery was necessary. For the next two years Alan was seriously ill. As well as the seizures there were a number of complications. Much later his cardiologist told him that he had not expected Alan to survive, but he gradually regained some strength and a little bit of independence.

About three years ago Alan started attending the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) near to his home. An occupational therapist who was working with him at the time suggested he go along. During his involvement at the DRC, Alan studied Scottish history, French, psychology and modern studies. He completed assignments for some of them and gained SQA qualifications. Alan did not enjoy the psychology as he disagreed with some of the ideas but he did enjoy the opportunity to study again.

While at the DRC, Alan was asked to join the local Access Panel which had been set up to monitor access for disabled people. Alan was appointed as Treasurer of the group but as he had problems with his eyesight at this time, others in the group covered the duties for him. Once Alan's eyesight improved he took over as Treasurer but found the accounts to be in a muddle. Around this time Alan began to disagree with some of the decisions taken by the group and he left. At the same time he left the DRC altogether. He felt he had "outgrown it" and he was not making progress. In addition funding for some of the modules had been stopped.

After he left the DRC, Alan heard about a class in French that was being run in the local community by the tutor who had come to the DRC. He went to the class for a while but eventually the funding for that too was stopped.

Alan is disabled to the extent that he cannot walk without the aid of a walking stick. Sometimes he uses a wheelchair depending on the environment he is in. He is cared for by his wife and a home help comes in on week days to help him get up and dressed. Over the last three years he has gradually increased the things he can do for himself. He has greatly increased his self-confidence and can stay in the house on his own for several hours. He can go upstairs using a stair lift. However he cannot do any physical work.

Alan uses the computer quite a lot, emailing and surfing the worldwide web. He also reads a little bit and he tries to walk on his own. He can walk outside for about 100

yards and he walks around the house too. He has tried swimming but found it too difficult. He needed help to get dried and dressed and needed someone to support him in the water.

Alan and his wife see a lot of their family. Both daughters live nearby and visit often. Their older daughter is a qualified physiotherapist and, at present, is a full-time mother of two girls aged four and one-and-a-half. His younger daughter has a son of one year. She is a teacher and works two days a week, and Alan's wife helps out with childcare. Alan's grandson had some health problems when he was born and recently underwent a major operation. However, he is recovering well and the family is pleased with his progress.

About 18 months ago Alan started attending a computing class at his local community centre. The class is aimed at adults wishing to increase their skills to return to work and included word processing, Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint, and Alan has completed some assignments towards a qualification called PC Passport. The class has stopped for the summer but Alan hopes to return in the autumn.

Alan says he goes along to the classes for a number of reasons. He enjoys getting out of the house and meeting people and he knows that it gives his wife a break from caring for him too. He is interested in the subjects he has studied, especially the French and the computing but he is not particularly bothered about gaining qualifications. However, he does appreciate the feeling that he is using his brain. He enjoys the challenge of learning and, although there will be no outcome for him in terms of paid employment; he wants to show that his disability has not affected his intellectual ability.

Alan has experienced being treated differently by some people because of his disability, but the learners in his computing class treat each other equally.

Although Alan did not expect to have a practical use for his increased computing expertise in terms of paid work, he is planning to begin voluntary work soon and his computing will be useful there. His cardiologist suggested to Alan that he help at the hospice once or twice a week when Alan mentioned that he was getting bored now

that he is more independent. Alan has some concerns that it could be too much for him physically, or that it could be demanding emotionally. However he is looking forward to becoming involved in the work of the hospice. At the same time he hopes to return to the computing class and to continue with learning, perhaps art history, in the future.

Postscript

Alan began the voluntary work in the hospice not long after the first interview. He started going on a Monday morning for four hours, but by the time of the second interview he was there more often, covering shifts that other volunteers could not manage. He had not returned to cbal because the computing class had been cancelled. Alan believed that this was because there were not enough potential participants, and there was a lack of funding for small numbers.

In a telephone conversation after the interviews, Alan told me that he had increased his voluntary work to two regular shifts per week.

Alison

Alison is a retired nurse. She was a nurse for 25 years, specialising in theatre and recovery. A year ago she retired early, at the age of 45, due to ill health. Having retired so young she is looking for a new direction for her life. However it is proving difficult to know which direction to take as she is unable to make a full-time commitment due to her illness. Alison's daughter has special needs and Alison spends a lot of time and energy supporting her, taking her to appointments with a variety of professionals and ensuring she has the best possible chance for development. There is no doubt in Alison's mind that her daughter's needs take precedence over her own plans.

Alison was born in a large town to the south of Glasgow. She was brought up in a tenement flat where she shared a room with her sister who is four years younger. Perhaps because of the difference in their ages, the sisters did not spend a lot of time together. They had different sets of friends and, particularly when Alison reached her teenage years, they fought often. Alison was brought up by her mother and father. Her father worked and her mother went out to work full time when Alison was about 10 years old. However the new job was in the garage next door to the family home and the girls stayed with their grandmother for the hour after school until their mother came home.

Alison says she was a tom boy when she was young. Also, throughout her childhood and school days she had a great love of art. She was always drawing and painting and she went to an art club in the museum near her home.

Alison can remember her first day at the local primary school. She loved it and did not want to go home. That set the trend for the rest of her time at primary school. Alison did well academically, being in the top section of the class in most subjects and she continued to enjoy school. That changed dramatically when she moved to the local secondary school. She was bullied and, although she stood up for herself, she says she hated it. Despite this, Alison continued to do well in her classes and this provided an opportunity to move to another school. Two fee-paying schools in the

town offered some places to the most academic pupils in the state schools and Alison won a place at the grammar school.

The atmosphere at the grammar school was quite different from secondary and Alison enjoyed school once again. However, the teachers were not very supportive of Alison's interest in art. They pushed Alison to consider going to college or university but told her forget about her ambitions to go art school. On reflection Alison feels that she may have made a mistake in attending the grammar school as the staff in the other school which offered scholarship places supported some of their pupils to apply for art school. Alison did not know that at the time and it is something she regrets now. However she kept going and got her art Higher. She stayed on at school until sixth year, mainly in order that she could continue painting.

Alison did not apply to university or college. Someone at school suggested that she might enjoy nursing and she applied and got an interview. However, Alison's heart was not really in her application. She deliberately dressed in scruffy clothes for the interview in the hope that she would not be successful. Her own words describe the situation:

My mum was with me and she was totally embarrassed with me. But I refused to change. That's the way I went, and that was it, you know. They offered me a place, but I actually turned it down. So they offered me another date, and I said I didn't want to go then either, cos I wanted to stay on and do art. And they offered me a third date and my mum was sitting glowering at me so I accepted that one. So I ended up having to leave school just before the end of sixth year so that I could start nursing.

Alison moved out of the family home the day she started her nursing training. She moved into the nurses' home but she did not like the restrictions on her freedom. For example, there was a requirement for all the nurses to be in by 10 o'clock at night. Alison found herself staying with friends because it was too late to get into the home

or go to her parents' house. After six months she moved into a flat. Later she moved back to her home town, living in a variety of places over the next few years.

Alison completed her training and became a Registered General Nurse. She worked as a nurse all of her adult life eventually specialising in theatre and recovery work, until she retired. She says she enjoyed nursing but she witnessed many changes in the job. She considered leaving a couple of times, to go back to art. However, Alison never committed to the art full time, but she did continue to paint throughout her time as a nurse. She went to the Print Studio in Glasgow for a while and she sold some of her paintings. She was also commissioned to paint on a couple of occasions.

While she was still working as a nurse Alison met and married her husband. Later, her daughter was born. Alison's daughter has special needs: she has complex problems with her sight and is registered blind. Also, she has additional learning needs. The family lives near to where Alison was born and brought up.

A few years ago Alison was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and associated colitic arthritis. Her joints ache and she has pain in her hands, although she has had injections in her hands, which have helped. She was unable to do anything for a while because she was too sore. One of the reasons she had to stop work was that she did not have the control of her hands needed for working with intravenous drugs. Alison was off sick from her work for about two-and-a-half years, and eventually she retired and her work pension was made available to her early.

Since retiring just over a year ago, Alison has been looking for other things to do. It is difficult because she can become exhausted if she tries to do too much. Ideally she would like to find something that she could commit to one or two days per week, or perhaps parts of days.

While she was off work, about two years ago, a neighbour told Alison about a computing class at the local community centre. Alison says she went to the class because she was bored at home, and hardly saw anyone during the day.

She was a bit nervous about going to the class at first because she did not know what to expect but everyone was friendly and the tutor explained what she had to do. Later

the neighbour who had introduced Alison to the class left but by then Alison was comfortable and happy to continue on her own.

Alison enjoyed the computing and she was able to improve her skills. She learned word processing, how to use the internet and use of Excel as well. Alison joined two other classes: one in childcare and one on social sciences, and she has achieved a number of modules in each. Eventually, Alison started using what she was learning at the computing class to help produce her assignments for the other two classes. She has used the internet to search for information on her condition but did not find much. Some reports were too detailed and filled with medical jargon and others only stated what she already knew. Later she had to give up the computing as she found attending three classes too much, but she has continued with the others.

Alison enjoys the relaxed friendly atmosphere of the classes. However, she identified some aspects that were not quite so good. For example, the tutor for one of the social science modules was not well prepared for the class. Many of the other participants in this class stopped going and the numbers dropped. However, Alison found the subject interesting and stuck with it despite the problems. She also feels that information about forthcoming courses is often available only at the last minute, and that might affect the number of people who know about it and are able to attend.

Alison feels that going to the classes has increased her confidence. She says that she was confident in her work as a nurse but did not know if she could learn other things. She is more likely to talk to other people now and she has applied for, and been accepted, to study for an HNC Social Sciences part time at the local FE college. She hopes to continue to attend the classes in the community centre as well as study for the HNC.

Because of her illness it is sometimes difficult for Alison to draw and paint, but she continues with her art when she can. Last year she found out about a workshop for amateur artists and she began to make childcare arrangements so that she could go. However, there was a change to the arrangements for it and in the end Alison was unable to participate. It clashed with one of her daughter's after school activities.

At the moment much of Alison's time is taken up with her daughter who is 12 years old and is involved in after school activities such as dancing and the choir. In addition, Alison is quite involved with the life of the school. Recently she helped to make the costumes for the school concert and she joins many of the school trips as a helper.

Alison's daughter is due to go to secondary school soon and the whole family has been involved in the decision about which school she should attend. The family sought support and guidance from the primary school staff and the educational psychologist as well as staff from the local high schools. In the end, Alison's daughter decided she liked the school which was geared to support her special needs. The decision was made and it has been something of a relief to Alison that her daughter is going to get the kind of help she needs.

Alison spends a lot of time taking her daughter to appointments with the various specialists and professionals who are involved in her care. She does not drive so visits to hospital in Glasgow can take up nearly the whole day. Alison also attends a lot of appointments for her own health problems and at times she wonders how she ever found the time to work.

Alison visits her mother quite often and she sees her sister then too. Although they still do not have a great deal in common, the sisters get on well now and keep in touch. Alison feels that they are there for each other when they need to be even although they do not socialise together.

When she gets time, and when she is well enough, Alison continues to paint. At the moment she is trying to put together some paintings for an exhibition. She has been asked by a friend to paint a picture for her, so she is working on that too.

In the future Alison would like to find something to do that would not adversely affect her health. She has to be careful to protect her income too. She has only a small pension from nursing along with incapacity benefit. She cannot afford to take on work that would mean that she lost her benefits, especially because she could end up unable to continue the work in the long term. Alison's hopes for the future are very closely tied to her hopes for her daughter who she would like to see happy at

school with a group of friends and gradually being more independent. She plans to study part time for an HNC and see where that might take her.

Postscript

Between the two interviews Alison started studying part time for an HNC Social Sciences at her local FE College. She continued to attend cba1 one morning per week for an introductory course in sociology which she hoped would help her when she covered sociology in the second year at college. Her daughter had settled well into secondary school.

Doreen

Doreen's life is busy but settled. She feels fortunate that she does not have to work and she is financially secure. Her life is focused on her family: looking after her children, visiting her parents and keeping in close touch with her brothers and sisters. Now that her youngest child is at school, she is developing her own interests and is enjoying the company of other adults during the day.

Doreen was born in 1969 and she was brought up in Glasgow. She is the middle child of five, and she has two brothers and two sisters. When she was young, her father worked away from home during the week and came home at weekends. However, he was a big part of the family's lives and Doreen remembers how hard her father worked. She remembers being brought up by her mother who worked as a cleaner or home help, after the youngest in the family went to school. Both Doreen's parents worked very hard throughout their lives and this is something that Doreen appreciates now, looking back. Because of their hard work, the family were able to move to a house and Doreen feels that she owes both her parents a lot.

The family was happy and the five children got on well together. They were close in age and, perhaps because they had no cousins, they relied on each other. Doreen's father is from Ireland, and the children and Doreen's mother spent the summers there with their grandparents. Doreen's father would join them for three weeks. As she got older Doreen did not want to be away in Ireland all summer when she could have been in Glasgow with her friends but she remembers the summers being long and the five children having a lot of freedom.

Doreen went to the local primary and secondary schools. When she was eleven or twelve the family moved house but Doreen stayed at the same school. She loved school and stayed on as long as she could. She says she would have done a seventh year if that had been possible.

Despite not being "too bothered" academically she gained eight O-grades and two Highers by the time she left. However, it was not the subjects she was taught that Doreen enjoyed. She went to school to meet her friends, and this aspect became particularly enjoyable in the latter years of secondary school.

Doreen gained qualifications at school but she never considered continuing with her education. Her brother had gone to university but Doreen did not want that herself. Her mother and father were not well-off financially, and she wanted to start earning money. When she left school she got a job in the bank and she was happy.

Doreen participated in some in-service training with the bank but she did not seek promotion. She stayed with the same bank throughout her time at work and enjoyed being there. She changed her job only once, moving to Customer Services when she went part time after her first child was born. In employment, as had been the case at school, Doreen enjoyed the work but she says that the interaction with her colleagues was more important.

During the time when she was working in the bank Doreen met and married her husband. When her first child was born, two years later, she took a year off work, and then returned part time. She did the same when her second child, a daughter, was born. After having her third child, Doreen returned to work after a year as she had done twice before, but she did not stay for long. She went back for one day, but did not like leaving the children. She left immediately, and has not been in paid employment since then, a period of nearly eight years.

As well as being unhappy about leaving her children, Doreen felt that working in the bank had changed. New, younger members of staff had joined and she felt that their approach to work was not the same as hers had been. She said that they had a different work ethic, got bored and moved on quickly. Later, Doreen had a fourth child.

Doreen's oldest child is now thirteen years old. For the past eight years she has been a housewife and mother full time, a role she is very happy with. She does not see herself being in paid employment again, and the children do not cause her any worry. Her main interest other than the family, is keeping fit. When the children were small she used to go out running when her husband got in from work. Now that she is free during the day she goes to the gym most days, participating in two or three classes a day, in yoga, Pilates and aerobics. She is physically fit as a result of this and she feels that it helps her mental health too. If she does not go to the gym during the day she

has difficulty sleeping at night. However, she says that does not suffer from any stress in her life.

Doreen visits her parents two or three afternoons per week. Her mother is in good health. Her father has Lupus and has difficulty walking but otherwise keeps well. Doreen's brothers and sisters all live nearby and she sees them at least once a week. On a Thursday she walks into the city centre to do some shopping.

Doreen has a house in Spain which the family uses every summer. However, her children have started to say they that they would rather stay at home, just as Doreen and her brothers and sisters had felt about going to Ireland as they got older.

For the last eight or nine years, Doreen has been on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) of the children's primary school. She held the office of Treasurer for some time but now is an ordinary member. Doreen is very involved in the life of the school, and often helps out with fund-raising activities and school trips. She feels that she may have been on the PTA for too long now, and is considering leaving and joining the Association at her son's high school.

Last year Doreen started going to a positive thinking and confidence building course in her local community centre. She found out about it from a leaflet that came from the primary school. She describes what made her decide to go:

I decided I wanted to do something because I mean Friday morning was my day for the gym as well. I thought ***k me. I thought [the gym] was sort of taking over my life, you know. So I can go to that morning class, and then go to a one o'clock class down at [the gym].

Doreen really enjoyed the class. It was discussion based and the group of about ten women gelled. Doreen says the tutors were fantastic and once again the social interaction was an important element for Doreen. In addition, she feels that the course content made a difference to her. She was encouraged to think positively and see things from different perspectives. Although she does not see herself as a negative person she still found this helpful. She also set personal goals.

One of the goals was to learn Spanish, to help on the trips to Spain. Doreen did this, attending a class run by the University. However, the number of participants in the day time class dwindled and those that were left were asked to join the evening class which did not suit Doreen and she left.

Doreen has attended the community centre on a Friday morning for several months now. After the positive thinking classes finished the group was keen to continue to meet so they set up an informal computing class. After the summer break the Council will provide a computing class and Doreen plans to go to that.

Doreen is very content with her life. She is grateful that she does not have to go out to work and she enjoys her role within the family. As her children have grown older she has developed her interest in keeping fit and she intends to continue to attend community based learning. She has appreciated meeting other people and enjoys the company. However she has one specific goal for the immediate future.

During one session of the positive thinking course a worker from the local Council for Voluntary Service came to speak to the class about doing voluntary work. Doreen had been thinking about this for some time and the session inspired her to do something about it. The speaker was very engaging and provided information about how to find volunteering opportunities. Doreen followed this up right away although, so far, she has not been able to get the information she needs.

Voluntary work appeals to Doreen. She does not need to be earning money from paid employment but misses the social aspect of work. She feels that volunteering would provide this but without the level of commitment that paid work requires. However, she is keen to learn from voluntary work. She is interested in working with people with a disability, or perhaps young people experiencing problems with drugs or alcohol addiction.

In addition to the computing course, Doreen hopes to attend a class in psychology which may take place in the community centre. However, she is clear that she still has no wish to continue her education at college or university. She feels that she does not have the confidence and is wary of the stress caused by tests and assessments. In

the meantime Doreen is happy to add to the range of activities she is involved in and to continue with her life as it is.

Postscript

After the first interview Doreen spent the summer in Spain with her family. When she returned she went to the computing class as she had planned. However, she felt that the course was not well-organised and she stopped attending after a few weeks. She continued to attend the community centre on a different day for a discussion-based course, with the same group of women who had participated in the confidence-building and positive thinking course.

Doreen tried to enquire about volunteering opportunities but by the time of the second interview, she had been several times to the local office of the Council for Voluntary Service and it had been closed each time. She was considering ending her membership of the gym as the family now had a dog, and she felt she got the exercise she needed from taking the dog on long walks.

Sam

Sam has experienced major change in the past two years and he is working hard to adjust to the changes and to enjoy his retirement.

Sam was born in 1938, and he was brought up in Glasgow. He lived with his father, mother and older sister, and his memories of his childhood are happy ones. He describes himself, with a chuckle, as the “bad one...the black sheep”. The majority of Sam’s school education took place in Glasgow, except for some months which were spent on North Uist. More than once Sam spent three or four months on the island visiting his grandparents with his mother. His mother was from North Uist, and she returned to look after Sam’s grandparents when they were ill. Gaelic was Sam’s first language as a child: throughout his childhood and into his teenage years Gaelic was spoken at home all the time.

Sam enjoyed school and did quite well, although he feels now that he could have done better. He says he was a bit wild at school but settled down after he left. However, he did well enough to go to agricultural college straight from school. Sam found college easier than school because he was studying subjects that he was interested in, and he left in 1959 with a Diploma in Agriculture.

Sam had always wanted to emigrate. As a boy he read about Africa, and Australia, and thought about leaving Scotland. Around the time when he was finishing college there were adverts in the newspapers for assisted passage to Canada and Australia. He considered going to both those countries. Fellow students at the agricultural college were applying for jobs with the Colonial Offices in Africa, and, through the Crown agent, Sam was interviewed for a job in Africa. It was the first job he had been offered and he took it and left for Africa in 1959.

Sam’s first job was as an agricultural officer in Northern Rhodesia. He stayed there for two years and then left to work in Ireland. Sam was in Ireland for around four years and then he returned to Africa, this time as a livestock development officer in Botswana.

Sam settled in Africa. He married his wife, who was born in Zambia, but was brought up in Rhodesia, and they had three children: two daughters, and a son who lives in London now. One daughter lives in Brisbane, Australia and the other is in South Africa. After a few years in Botswana, Sam moved to a well-established company in Rhodesia where he worked for over thirty years. Sam had a successful career in sales and he was promoted to field sales manager. Sam lived through many changes in the history of Rhodesia, including the declaration of its independence in 1980 when it became Zimbabwe. He is saddened by the troubled situation that the country is in today.

While Sam was establishing his life, family and career in Africa, learning was related to work. He learned the local language and passed an oral examination to gain an increment in his salary. He did in-house training, mostly sales courses, which were run by his employer.

Sam was very happy living in Zimbabwe. He enjoyed his work, being out in the fields all the time, and had good friends and his family were doing well. However, things changed when his wife became ill. She had several operations on her spine, and suffered a heart attack also. She still has difficulty with her breathing. It was difficult to get the medication she needed and with the political situation worsening in Zimbabwe, Sam and his wife decided to come back to Scotland. Sam retired from his job, and in 2006 they settled in the south side of Glasgow. Although she is not from Scotland, Sam's wife has settled well into life in Glasgow. However, Sam misses Africa. He misses his work; he misses his friends, the weather, the country itself. Sam still has friends in Zimbabwe. His wife has suggested that he goes to visit them but he explains why he feels he cannot do that: "No. Because I'm scared to go because I'd never...my wife says 'why don't you go?' and I say 'no, if I go, you'll never see me back again...no way would I come back to this place'".

Now Sam is retired and he has established a routine to keep himself busy. He goes to the gym nearly every day and he reads a lot of books and newspapers. He feels that it is important to keep his mind and body active after retiring. Recently, Sam decided to stop smoking, and he joined a smoking cessation group. Then, as a consequence of giving up smoking, he put on weight and so he joined a weight-loss support group.

Each of Sam's children has children of their own and Sam and his wife spend time visiting them. Also, Sam has visited cousins and friends in North Uist and Benbecula. He has enjoyed meeting up with people he hasn't seen for over fifty years. The next time he goes to the islands the plan is that his son will go with him, which he is looking forward to. His son is keen to see where his grandmother was from and to visit her grave.

In Glasgow, Sam has re-visited his childhood home. He took his wife and son to where he grew up. The building was still there but Sam saw many changes. Unfortunately Sam's sister died four years ago, and he is glad that he saw her just before she died, at his son's wedding. Sam has also re-established contact with a cousin on his father's side, although Sam feels he always had more affinity with his mother's side of the family, and his sister was closer to their father's side

Sam goes to a Gaelic class for two hours on a Thursday evening. He decided to go because he wanted to relearn Gaelic. He never spoke the language while in Africa and so had lost his grasp of it but he was keen to see if it would come back to him. He was a bit nervous going to the class for the first time but soon realised that other people were complete beginners and he was a step ahead of them, having spoken the language in the past. He started in the beginners group but after six months the tutor suggested that he move into intermediate. Now he has been told that he could be in the advanced group, but he is happy going along at his own pace. On one hand he knows that he is learning quicker than others in his group but, on the other, there are many new words that didn't exist in Gaelic when he was growing up.

When Sam visited his cousins and friends he conversed with them in Gaelic, and he says that it felt good to be able to do that.

Learning Gaelic has become a big part of Sam's life. When the course finished for the summer last year he travelled to another part of the city to attend a six-week course, and then returned to his local group in the autumn. He goes to Gaelic days run by the nearby university and he recently attended a weekend course in an FE college.

Sam enjoys the Gaelic classes because he has met many different people and it is part of his plan to keep busy. However the subject matter is important too. The fact that Sam is relearning Gaelic and that he can talk with his cousins in the language is crucial to his commitment to it. He plans to keep going with it and perhaps move into the advanced group soon.

In the future Sam hopes to attend more community based classes and has put his name on a waiting list for a course on how to use mobile phones.

Sam is ambivalent about being retired. He misses his work and his life in Africa. His whole life has changed in the last two years, and he is making many adjustments. However, he is working hard to make a new life in retirement in Scotland. Part of that is reconnecting with a part of his life that he left behind when he emigrated from Scotland. Part of it is in making new friends, keeping physically fit and participating in learning.

Postscript

Between the research interviews Sam continued to learn Gaelic. He had attended another weekend course at an FE College, and again he had travelled to a different area to go to an evening class, while his cbal class was closed for the summer. After the summer break, Sam had returned to the intermediate class in his own area but there were only four participants, and the class was cancelled. At the time of the second interview, he had to choose between attending an intermediate class in another area, or go to an advanced course nearby. He was undecided as to what he should do.

Sam continued to go to the gym regularly, and he reached his target weight. He stopped participating in the smoking cessation group as he felt he no longer needed the group support. The course about using a mobile phone had not yet taken place.

Elaine

Elaine is 47 years old. She has had some good times and some difficult times but one particular event, which took place over 10 years ago, has shaped many aspects of her life in recent times.

Elaine worked as an auxiliary nurse at a hospital outside Glasgow. She liked the work and enjoyed the company of her colleagues. One day she was attacked by one of the patients in the hospital. The patient lost his temper when Elaine told him that a toilet was out of use. What followed was a serious assault which resulted in Elaine sustaining an injury to her back. Elaine carried on with her work that day, and continued working for the next three to four months. However, her back condition got worse and eventually she was off work for 10 months. Elaine went back to work but soon the pain returned and she had to stop working again. During the period that followed, Elaine suffered from reactive depression, as well as the problems with her back.

Over the next year Elaine attended several specialists to try to find treatment for her back but no-one seemed to know how to help. She was desperate to return to work as she missed the people there as well as having something other than her children to focus on. Elaine hoped to access retraining but this did not materialise and she was retired on the grounds of ill-health in 2000, when she was 35 years old.

Over the next five years Elaine was prescribed anti-depressants and she did not go out much. One symptom of the stress was hair loss and it took a long time before she had the confidence to meet new people. However, over time she eventually came off the anti-depressants and has gradually re-built her life.

Elaine was born in a small town outside Glasgow. She has a twin sister and an older brother, and the children were brought up by their father. Elaine missed most of her last year at primary school due to illness and she feels that she never quite caught up. She enjoyed the first couple of years at secondary school but says that third and fourth year were not worthwhile. Elaine did not sit any Standard Grade examinations and she feels that the teachers were not interested in her because of this. However,

she says she enjoyed school towards the end of fourth year and was reluctant to leave by then.

Elaine's first job was on a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) placement with a printing company. At the same time she did some voluntary work at a hospital. After four years at the printing company, she got the job as an auxiliary nurse which she had until she retired. Elaine believes the voluntary work helped her to get this work. In addition she got a good reference from the printing company. While she was a nurse, Elaine participated in courses as part of her in-service training: Moving and Handling; Health and Safety; Food Hygiene.

Elaine married in 1990 and she had twins (a boy and a girl) in 1992. She continued to work after the children were born, enjoying having something other than home and family in her life. However, this changed when she was assaulted, and she suffered physical and mental illness which lasted several years.

Elaine's father became ill and she and her twin sister looked after him. He had several heart attacks but then suffered a fatal stroke. This was another difficult time for Elaine as she was not with her father when he died. She had saved for a long time to visit her brother who had moved to Canada and her father insisted she went ahead with the trip even although they both knew it could be the last time that Elaine would see her father. She was in Canada when she was told that he had died.

Elaine found out about adult learning from the local authority website while she was on the computer her husband had bought because she spent so much time in the house. She emailed for more information and a year later she received a reply inviting her to an Open Day at the local community centre. Elaine went along to the Open Day with a friend. The two women were "terrified" but they were interested in what was being offered. Even so, it was another year before Elaine plucked up the courage to go back to the community centre. She joined a women's group there. At the same time, she started learning computing at another class in the centre.

Again Elaine was nervous at first. She did not know what to expect from the group and she was worried that there would be people there that she knew and that she would be asked to share personal information with them. However, she went because

she was seeking friendship. Elaine had experienced some difficulties with her existing friends when she became ill at first with some of them providing conflicting advice about what she should do.

The women's group was run as an informal discussion-based class, covering subjects such as assertiveness and confidence building. Members were encouraged to bring along material that was of interest to them, something that Elaine enjoyed. She often researched topics for discussion such as health information. The tutor was friendly, and she was good at identifying and addressing both group and individual needs.

Members of the group were encouraged to write about their experiences and read this out to the class and, although Elaine found this nerve racking, it helped her deal with some of the issues in her life.

Two aspects of Elaine's experience of the women's group were important to her. The first was that she was asked to do some outreach work to encourage new members to the group. Elaine was pleased to have been given the responsibility for this. She was not paid for doing this work, but it caused some conflict within the group as some members felt that she was doing the duties of paid staff, so she had to stop. The second event was that the group entered, and won, a competition aimed at increasing mutual respect for young people. The work that the group had undertaken was displayed at the local museum and Elaine took her children along to see it.

Elaine says that the fact that the group was nearby was important, particularly when she was suffering from depression. In addition, she is more confident now, and she attributes this to the fact that she was listened to and shown respect by the others in the group.

While attending the women's group, Elaine went to a computing class that was running at the same community centre. To date she has passed several modules towards her PC Passport qualification.

Elaine has stopped taking anti-depressants. She is doing well but still has days when she finds it hard to cope. Not getting the help she needed when her back was injured and not being able to go back to work caused her depression, she feels. At times

Elaine still finds her life stressful. For example she can be caught in the middle of conflict in her family when her husband works night shift and she tries to keep the house quiet for him during the day. Physically she has not fully recovered and still takes painkillers for her back.

When she gets time to herself Elaine enjoys making greetings cards. She has always enjoyed drawing and she also does ceramics. Elaine's brother still lives in Canada and she does not see her sister very often. Although they were close when they were younger they have grown apart now.

Elaine has started to think about the future, although she says she does not like to think too far ahead. The twins have just started their fifth year at school and they are doing well. Elaine can look ahead and see that in the near future she might start to have more time to concentrate on the things she wants to do. She would like to continue with learning computing but she is not sure if she will return to the women's group.

Elaine has the support of her husband to continue learning and he has suggested Elaine does voluntary work, something that she is considering. She is thinking of getting involved in befriending. She has thought of taking art lessons too, but the cost of equipment might prove to be a barrier to that.

At the moment Elaine is taking each day as it comes. She would like to see her children settled and then take some time to think about what to do next.

Postscript

In the time between the two interviews Elaine was diagnosed with high blood pressure. Her doctor recommended that she exercise more so she had begun going to the gym twice a week, and she had joined a walking group. She continued to learn computing at the community centre but the women's group had not re-started after the summer break. Elaine did not know the reason for this.

Elaine continued to make greetings cards for her friends and she had signed up to a volunteer website, but at the time of the second interview she had not become involved in voluntary work.

Melanie

Melanie has a very positive outlook on life. She is an enthusiastic and successful adult learner and wants to continue to learn. However, some aspects of her life can make moving on in the way that Melanie would like, more difficult.

Melanie was born in 1970 and she lived in a housing scheme outside Glasgow. She grew up with her two sisters and four brothers and attended the local primary school and secondary school. Melanie enjoyed school. She has happy memories of that time, and remembers enjoying the school meals. In fact she was always interested in food and volunteered at a pensioners' lunch club on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Also, she helped out in a catering organisation at night. She remembers helping with buffets for weddings and other events, sometimes washing piles of dishes, on a voluntary basis. Melanie used to have her school photographs and regrets that her mother did not keep them so that she can look back and see if her son is like her. Melanie was not particularly academic but she did do her school work and did her best. She says she was the cleverest in her family, alongside her youngest sister. When she left school at 16, Melanie had some qualifications.

Despite enjoying school, Melanie was happy to leave. She started work on a YTS as soon as she left school. The job was local and for the first time she was earning a wage. At first Melanie was sewing in a factory, which she quite enjoyed, although sometimes there was not that much to do. However, Melanie experienced some bullying by other members of staff. She told her employer and she was moved within the company. The job was still local and this time she was doing office work which she enjoyed. After a year she was moved back onto the production line at the company. Some of the people she'd had difficulties with had left by this time but Melanie felt under increased pressure on the production line and she left after six months.

After this, Melanie got a job in the local mill. She was pleased to get this job as the pay was good, and she settled there and stayed in the job for nine years. During this time Melanie worked night shift. She did not want her life to consist of working all night and sleeping all day so she went along to the Women's Centre and participated

in Sign Language and a confidence building course during the day. After nine years the mill was bought over and two workforces were brought together on different terms and conditions. Melanie disagreed with this and she decided to leave.

While she was working in the mill, Melanie met and married her husband and the couple settled near Melanie's family.

Melanie's next job was quite different but took her back to her interest in food and catering. She got a job working in a pub, and in 2000 she went to college and gained an HNC in Licensed House Operations. After that she started Hospitality Management but did not enjoy it as much as the previous course. It did not seem as relevant to her work in the pub and she left the course after four months. Melanie stayed in the catering industry but moved job once more, this time into school meals. While she was in this job she had her son. She returned to work briefly after he was born but eventually gave up work altogether when the baby was a few months old.

Melanie's son has a disability, and Melanie decided not to go out to work in order to look after him. However, she was very conscious of how people on benefits are viewed by other members of the community. She did not want people to think she was lazy and did not want to work and she was keen to keep her brain active. Not long after her son was born, Melanie went into her local community centre to find out what classes she could attend. She signed up for a Spanish class on a Tuesday night because she wanted to keep her brain active and she was looking for something to do which would give her a break from looking after her son. In addition, a member of her husband's family lives in Spain, and Melanie thought it would be good to know some of the language if she ever visited her. She was nervous about going to the class at the start but soon realised that everyone else was a beginner.

Melanie thoroughly enjoyed learning Spanish and she did get the chance to use the language, when she had a holiday in Spain. She got a lot of pleasure from being able to have conversations in Spanish and understanding menus. Melanie did so well in her class that the tutor and the other students copied a method she had devised to help her learn vocabulary. Later when another tutor started a new class for beginners she used Melanie's notes to help her prepare material for the students.

Two years after starting the Spanish course, Melanie's marriage came to an end. Once she was separated from her husband she had no one to look after her son at night and she had to give up the class.

However, she continued to attend the community centre, as a crèche was provided there, and participated in Health and Safety in the Workplace and Computers for the Terrified. She also went to the local primary school for a computing course and has completed a number of modules towards the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) qualification. Over the next two years Melanie attended two more short courses: Steps to Excellence, about positive thinking, and a course for parents on helping children with their homework. This latter course has been put to use as Melanie has helped her nieces with their school work. Melanie always attends each course fully. She feels strongly that if the tutor has made the effort to prepare and turn up then she should do the same. She attended a course that was a requirement of the job centre, although the subsequent training that was promised did not materialise, and Melanie was disappointed.

Melanie values the welcoming atmosphere in the community based courses. She has enjoyed meeting people and realising that everyone feels the same about going along to something new. On the other hand she is aware that she has been learning with the same group of people for a while now and she would like to meet a different group of people. She has had a negative experience when members of a group she was in talked disparagingly about people who are dependent on benefits. Nonetheless, Melanie says the courses have made her more confident. She knows that she appeared outwardly to be a confident person anyway but she says that in reality she was quite shy. Also, she says she is more intelligent, and she knows more now.

Some of the work that Melanie undertook for the positive thinking course was recognised by the local authority and she won an Adult Learner's Award. She attended a certificate presentation and was photographed for the local newspaper.

At the moment Melanie lives with her son and cares for him alone. He does not see his father. Melanie is still in close contact with her sisters and brothers. Her father died in 1998 but her mother still lives nearby and Melanie sees her every day.

However Melanie's mother is not very supportive of her decision to participate in adult learning.

Melanie's main social contact is through the community centre. In addition to the courses, she also goes to a mother's support group. The group members participate in leisure activities such as Tai Chi and arts and crafts and they organise events to raise funds to provide a holiday for their families. This year around sixty parents and children will be going to Butlins for five days.

Melanie is very keen to continue to learn. She hopes to continue with the computing and complete the ECDL qualification. In addition, she intends to go to a beauty class that has been advertised in the community centre. Again, she feels it will be good to show that she has been doing something with her time and cannot be accused of being lazy and not doing anything.

There are two barriers to Melanie's plans to continue with her learning. One is her mother's unsupportive response:

She wants me at her beck and call. I know that sounds silly. Em. Because obviously she's older now, she needs a lift up the toon for messages, and she expects me to be there. But she forgets I've got my life and I've got [my son], and supposedly when he's in the nursery it's 'me time' but it's never 'me time' because everybody wants a bit of me, and I just get ...
no...[interruption].

Melanie's mother's attitude was different when she went to her graduation when she completed her HNC at college. Then, she was excited and proud. The other barrier to continuing to learn is child care. Melanie's son will be going to school soon and Melanie would like to go to college. She is planning to get a prospectus to find out what courses are available. At this stage she is looking into part-time opportunities because she does not want to put too much pressure on her son. In the meantime she is continuing to work on her computing skills on her own, using the computers in the local library.

In the longer term, Melanie has a dream of working in a pub again, perhaps as a manager organising the preparation of good food. It was her depiction of this dream that contributed to her receiving the Adult Learners' Award.

Postscript

After the first interview Melanie was accepted onto a part-time National Certificate course in hairdressing. At first she had difficulty finding suitable care for her son but eventually her local councillor helped to find a place in a nursery for the hours she was in college. She had not been able to continue to attend cbal, but she kept in touch with the friends that she made there, and she continued to work towards her ECDL qualification through the Flexible Learning Centre at college.

Sarah

Sarah described herself as content and happy. She has been very successful at school and in her career in the past: she described herself as “ambitious” and “a perfectionist”. However, Sarah has experienced some very difficult times recently. In her words she “embarked on a mission of self-destruction”. Hers is a story of overcoming difficulties, of success, bleak times and survival.

Sarah is 36 years old. She was born in Ayrshire and she has one brother who is three years younger. The family moved house often during Sarah’s early childhood – she had attended three different schools by the time she was in primary five – but settled eventually in Glasgow where Sarah attended secondary school. Sarah and her brother did not get on well as children. Sarah attributed this partly to her own success in formal education and her brother’s relative difficulties. Later he was diagnosed with dyslexia and Sarah thinks that, before his diagnosis, he believed he was stupid.

Sarah was blind when she was born. Following surgery as a child she gained some sight but has remained visually impaired into adulthood. However, she has not allowed her disability to prevent her from pursuing her goals.

Sarah’s mother fought for her to attend mainstream education but it was not made easy for Sarah. Her ability was tested at age four, prior to going to nursery, and she did very well in the test. However, she had to go through a review process at the end of each school year before she could continue into the next year. Sarah described this background to her schooldays: “It was the kind of thing...fear was there. It was never actually said directly to me. It was always, you know they spoke to my parents and there wasn’t a lot of discussion, but if I was kind of underachieving, I’d get kicked out to the special school type thing. But it never happened”.

Despite the difficulties of changing schools often, her visual impairment and being monitored constantly, Sarah was both happy and successful at school. She made friends easily and she was enthusiastic and energetic in her attitude to learning. Even at this stage, she was ambitious.

Sarah gained the necessary qualifications for university in her fifth year at school. She set out to train as a teacher at age 17 and completed three years of her four-year course. A turning point came when Sarah became ill with glandular fever. The illness forced Sarah to take time off from her studies and during this time she decided not to go back to teacher training. She felt that she had chosen teaching partly because it was what was expected of someone with her background and abilities. She had wanted to study languages but was dissuaded from this by her mother who had missed several years of her own education due to illness.

It took some time but eventually Sarah recovered physically and psychologically from her illness. While at secondary school Sarah had started to become involved in dance. She had attended ballet and tap lessons as a child but had not enjoyed them. Then her interest in dance was sparked when an outreach programme of Scottish Ballet visited her school. Later, she became more and more involved in dancing and at the age of 22 or 23 she won a scholarship to train professionally in London. At this point, Sarah had already started working in the dance field, and she was given the time out to go to London to study. During this period, she gained experience through various placements, and worked in summer schools in Scotland.

Once again Sarah was very successful in her chosen field. She gained a postgraduate diploma at the LABAN Centre in London and returned to Scotland to work as a professional dance artist and choreographer. However, her disability meant that she was not able to perform very much and she focused on choreography instead.

Sarah ended up teaching, but in a subject area she loved and outside the traditional classroom. For the next few years Sarah worked mostly as a dance teacher and choreographer in schools and nurseries, with children and adults, and alongside school teachers. It was hard work and stressful at times but Sarah enjoyed it. During this time learning for Sarah was focused on dance. She attended summer schools in London and New York when she was not involved in teaching.

Later, Sarah gained employment with a dance project in Scotland. Although on the surface everything seemed to be going well, slowly at first and then more quickly Sarah became very unwell.

What followed for Sarah was a very difficult period. Over several years, she harmed herself; she had suicidal thoughts, and attempted to end her life numerous times. She became anorexic; her weight plummeted and in all the chaos found that her weight was something that she could control. Over a number of years Sarah became very ill. She was admitted to NHS hospitals and The Priory many times but it was when she experienced Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) that she began, slowly, to recover.

Eventually, in 2003, Sarah was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, and this was an important turning point. The therapy helped Sarah to challenge her thoughts and behaviour, and the diagnosis confirmed that others had experienced this illness too: “At last I didn’t just feel like some weirdo. This was a diagnosis, other people felt the same as me. I wasn’t alone”.

By 2004, Sarah was well on the way to recovery. In January of that year, she met her husband. The couple got married in June of the same year, and had their son, the following March. However there were problems in the marriage and the couple separated in June 2005.

Five years after her diagnosis, Sarah is doing well. Her recovery has been a slow and difficult process but she is no longer on medication, her weight is healthy and she does not harm herself any more.

Sarah hopes she and her husband will be divorced soon. They share the care of their son, who lives with Sarah for part of the week. While her son is there, much of Sarah’s time is taken up with looking after him and doing the usual household chores. She enjoys being a mum, and, in her spare time, she likes to read, to write and she spends time on the computer. Her parents separated recently, but she still sees her father regularly. She is still not in touch with her brother but she hopes their relationship will improve one day. While she was ill, Sarah became very isolated and her friendships suffered, but she does still keep in contact with one friend from her teacher training days.

Diagnosis, medication and therapy were crucial to Sarah’s recovery from mental illness. However, voluntary work and a women’s group at the local community centre are central to the continuing process of picking up the threads of her life. The

activities and the learning involved in both have been crucial to how Sarah feels about her life now, and how she views the future.

Sarah found out about the women's group and the personal development course through a member of staff in a café in the local community centre. She had gone to the café to take her son for a quick lunch after one of his toddler activities and she started going once a week. Gradually she got to know the staff and they told her about the group. Importantly a crèche was available which made it possible for Sarah to attend. However, it was several months before she plucked up the courage to go for the first time. She remembers being very nervous that first day and being unable to take part in the activities at first, but the group was very supportive, and Sarah gradually participated more and more.

The course covered aspects of personal development such as assertiveness and goal-setting, and Sarah has identified two main things she has got from her participation. One is the confidence that comes from talking in the group. The second is a feeling of belonging somewhere, of being part of a community. The member of staff in the community café, the tutors on the course, and the others in the group have all contributed to this. Having moved around a lot in her life, Sarah can now go out in her local area and meet people who know her. For someone who had become so isolated during her illness that she could go a whole week without speaking to another person, this connection with others has been very important.

Through the women's group Sarah found out about computing classes and she attended these for a few weeks, while continuing with the personal development. Her parents looked after her son in the evening to enable her to attend. Learning to use the computer has been a great addition to Sarah's skills as this was something she struggled with in the past due to her disability.

Recently Sarah has become very involved with local mental health organisations. While her son is with his father she does voluntary work helping to develop a group to support others' recovery from mental ill health. This involves a range of activities from advertising for new members to all the planning that goes into running writing workshops: arranging catering, guest speakers, accommodation, equipment etc.

Voluntary work has further increased Sarah's confidence and she has begun to consider going back into paid employment. She thinks she will look for part-time work to begin with but may look for full-time work when her son goes to school in a couple of years. Sarah has continued to learn through her voluntary involvement. She has completed a two-day course called Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASSIST), as well as self-harm awareness training and a Training for Trainers course on mental health awareness. Recently she delivered training for the Scottish Health Council on Mental Health Awareness.

Sarah is optimistic about the future. She intends to continue with her voluntary work and hopes to go back to the women's group in the autumn. However, this depends on whether the crèche is available. Also, she plans to develop her computing skills more. She has begun to write and will carry on with this too. She feels well and happy and is content for the future to consist of "more of the same really". She has recovered from her serious illness, and survived very difficult times.

Postscript

During the summer between the research interviews Sarah's parents separated. There were problems in the family and Sarah decided to end her contact with her mother.

Sarah had been offered some part-time work by a worker she met through her voluntary commitments. At the time of the second interview the work had been discussed in principle, but had not been confirmed. Sarah had not returned to the community centre because the women's group had not re-started after the summer break. Sarah was not sure of the reasons for this but she thought it might be related to a shortage of staff.

Sarah continued to volunteer with mental health organisations and she had been invited to take part in a consultation exercise about mental health and pregnancy. She had also joined the PTA at her son's nursery.

In an email sent a few months after the interviews, Sarah told me that she had not started paid work but still hoped to in the future. In the meantime she was attending

the Visual Impairment Unit to “keep up with technology and make life a little more accessible.”

Linda

Family is important to Linda. She is a daughter, sister, wife and mother and she both takes these roles seriously and derives pleasure from them. Learning is an important aspect of her life too. Since returning to education as an adult she has been an enthusiastic and successful learner. Following a period of depression a few years ago, Linda is thinking about returning to work, or perhaps continuing with her education. However, plans for the future juggle for position in Linda's life alongside the roles she plays in her family.

Linda was born in 1968, in a town near Glasgow. Her father worked in a tannery and her mother worked in a children's home. Linda has two brothers; one who is six years older and the other was born when Linda was two years old. The family moved house when Linda was four years old and remained there while she was growing up. Linda's mother still lives in the house they moved to as a family.

Linda described her childhood as "just normal" and she was close to her brothers and mother and father. However, her father drank and because of this, sometimes her mother struggled to make ends meet. Linda often witnessed her father being violent towards her older brother which she found difficult to understand as a child. He never hit her, or her mother or younger brother and the violence did not affect her directly at the time. It was only much later, at the age of 21 that Linda discovered that her older brother was not her father's biological child, a fact that helped her to understand what had been happening in her family. Linda has happy memories of her childhood also, and can remember family holidays to Butlins in Ayr.

Linda attended the local primary and secondary school which she enjoyed, although she was not very academic. At that time she was not interested and reflects that, although she got two O Grades she could have achieved more. She left after fourth year and went straight into work.

The first few years of working life were in the hospitality industry. Linda trained and worked as a commis chef and later had spells working away from home as a chambermaid, which she enjoyed.

When Linda was about 18 or 19 years old, her parents divorced. She says that she did not experience this as particularly traumatic. Linda tried to keep in contact with her father, but he had some problems and the contact came and went over the years. Later Linda began a successful career in retail and she remained in this area of work until her first daughter was two years old. She started as a sales assistant but was promoted several times within the same company and became the manager of a shop in Glasgow. Linda did not participate in any form of planned learning related to her work. All of the knowledge and skills that Linda developed throughout her retail career were gained “on the job”.

Linda met her husband at work in 1995. The couple had a daughter, and Linda continued to work in the shop. In 1999, on the day that Linda was choosing her dress for her forthcoming wedding, she heard that her father had died. She has some regrets that, although they had maintained contact off and on over the years, she had not seen him for some time.

Linda’s career in retail came to an end when she became ill with depression. She found it difficult to cope with managing the shop as well as running the house and looking after her daughter. She has been treated for her depression and feels she is over it now. She thinks that perhaps becoming a parent triggered memories of her own childhood and the violence she witnessed. Although it did not seem to affect her at the time, Linda believes that it did later in her life. She has recovered but worries that if she took too much on in the future the depression could return

Linda has not been in paid employment since her illness, a period of over ten years. She had her second daughter and the girls are now seven and twelve years old. Since she gave up work she has been a full time housewife and mother.

About three years ago Linda started to think about going back to work. She enrolled on a course at the local FE College to train as a classroom assistant. An important factor in her decision to go on the course was the fact that it took place while the girls were in school. She could drop them at school in the morning, go to the course, and be back in time to collect them at the end of the day. Although the practical aspects of the course were suitable, Linda was extremely nervous about going to

college. However, she loved the content of the course, the tutors, and the feeling of being part of the college community. She became the class representative and her attitude to learning changed. She started to value education which she attributed to becoming more mature.

Linda completed her training and became qualified to become a classroom assistant. She did well on the course and found she was good at it, but she did not seek work in a school. Looking back she feels she did not have the confidence to apply.

Throughout her years of working in the shops she had been promoted without being interviewed. The thought of completing application forms and attending interviews was enough to put Linda off at this stage. She feels if she had been offered a job as a classroom assistant at this time, without having to go through the application process, she would have been confident to do the job. However, she completed the course but has not used the qualification to gain work so far.

Linda became involved in community based adult learning by accident. She went to the local community centre to find out about computing classes for her husband. He had recently gained qualifications in health and safety and he wanted to improve his computing skills to help him move into another job, with more emphasis on health and safety. The course Linda found out about was not suitable for her husband because it was during the day but Linda decided to sign up for it herself. The person Linda spoke to at the community centre was very encouraging and this helped Linda find the confidence to enrol. In addition, the course was at a time that fitted in with family commitments and she could attend without having to arrange after school care for the children. Another aspect of Linda's motivation was the potential for computing skills to improve her chances of getting a job.

In addition, Linda hoped going to the course would help to build her confidence through meeting new people and gaining new skills. As with going to college, Linda was nervous at the start of the class. However, she found that she really enjoyed the class and the group all get on well together. Once again Linda did well in her studies. She learned quickly and often helped the others in the class when the tutor was busy with other students.

Linda described a combination of benefits from her participation in cbal. She looks forward to going and enjoys the company of the group. She feels she is more confident than she was at the start and she has learned a lot about computing. Being able to get greater use of the computer at home has been a source of pleasure and pride.

Linda has gained SQA modules in computing and she is still attending the class. She intends to continue until she has her PC Passport qualification. She is learning PowerPoint which she has thoroughly enjoyed. In addition, she has enrolled in a Back to Work course. The community worker at the centre told her about it and she has just started the six-week course. Again going back to work is still part of Linda's future plans.

At the moment Linda is a full time housewife and mother. She is at home when the girls come in from school and she is aware that they have never had to get used to going to after-school or holiday care. In addition, Linda cares for her mother who does not keep good health. She sees her mother most days and takes her to hospital or doctor's appointments at least once a week. Of the three siblings, Linda does most of the caring for her mother. Her brothers work and do not have much time during the day.

Recently, Linda's husband had a serious accident at work which left him with a broken jaw and unable to work for several months. He is recovering now and hopes to be back at work soon. This was a serious event in the family members' lives.

Linda has many family commitments but she is very happy to have them. In addition to being with her husband and the girls, she sees her younger brother often. The two families are close and go on holidays together. She does not see her older brother as much but is still in touch with him.

As well the two classes, she goes to the gym and is trying to keep herself fit. Linda still hopes to go back to work or continue with her learning but it is difficult to balance this with her responsibilities. She would really like to study social work. She believes her interest in this type of work comes from the experience of her mother's work in the children's home when she growing up. Also she has an aunt who has

Down's syndrome. However, Linda does not think it will be possible to find a course that would fit in with her care commitments. She knows that her responsibilities will lessen once her younger daughter goes to high school but at the moment that seems a long way off and she says she feels ready to do something else.

Since returning to learning as an adult three years ago Linda has become very motivated to continue her studies or go back to work. She has been successful in her learning and her confidence has increased. At present it is difficult for her to move ahead with her plans because of her commitment to her family.

Postscript

Linda finished the Back to Work course, and completed the assessments for the PC Passport qualification. She wanted to continue to learn computing but the next level of course was not available in the community centre. She had been advised to continue with computing at college but she did not want to do that. At the time of the second interview she planned to return to the community centre to the class that had started there after the summer, even although it was at a level below what she had achieved.

In the time between the interviews Linda applied for a job but she had been unsuccessful. The job had appealed to her because the hours fitted with her caring responsibilities. In a telephone conversation after the data collection was complete Linda told me that her mother was still unwell. In addition, her husband had another accident and had been off work.

Mary

Mary has experienced some ups and downs in her life, with changes over the years relating to work, relationships and her health. She has grasped opportunities as they have come along and continues to try new things. As an adult, learning has been an integral part of her life.

Mary was born in 1962 in a suburb in the north of Glasgow. She grew up there with her parents, older sister and two younger brothers. The first school Mary attended was in the local community centre where she stayed for the first six months of primary one while a new school was being built as at that time there was a shortage of school accommodation. Mary's memories of primary school are happy ones. She had the opportunity to move to another newly built school in primary five which was closer to her home but she decided to stay with her friends. Mary went to the local high school and remembers playing with the hockey team on cold Saturday mornings. She got on well with her teachers and the only disruption she recalls is one teacher asking her if there was anything she could do about the behaviour of her younger brother. He did not like school much, preferring to play football, but Mary did not feel responsible for him.

Mary liked school and did well. She achieved eight O-grades but got bored and left at age 16. Her teachers were disappointed that she did not return to study for Highers but at the time she simply did not see the point. One of the subjects Mary had studied was shorthand and typing. She decided she wanted to be a shorthand typist and got a job with the Health Board.

Mary stayed in the Health Board for a year-and-a-half but when a friend left, she looked for a new job too. Following a few months of temporary work she got a job with an advertising agency which she enjoyed. She stayed with the agency for four years, then left there to go to a job that was nearer to home. However, after only three months in this post an opportunity to experience something new presented itself. A penfriend from Australia asked Mary and her cousin to move to London with her. With little hesitation, Mary left her job and went to London.

Living in London did not suit Mary. She got on well with her penfriend but found it too busy and impersonal and so left after three months. However, she went home for only two days and then travelled to Jersey, somewhere she had wanted to visit for some time. Mary was in Jersey for six months and she was happy there. She found work in an insurance company and volunteered in a youth club in the evenings. Eventually Mary got homesick and she returned to Glasgow. She got a job in a Glasgow branch of the insurance company she had worked for in Jersey and she remained there for some time. Throughout this first stage of her working life, Mary did not attend any formal learning or in-service training related to her work.

In 1983, not long after returning from Jersey, Mary married. The following year, her daughter was born, and she had her son a year after that. Once her children had started school, ten years after leaving school herself, Mary decided to return to study. She wanted to train as a social worker and needed to gain three Highers to be accepted on to the course. At that time adults were being encouraged to return to their local school and to study for O-grades and Highers, alongside school pupils in the classroom. Mary chose Highers in English, modern studies and geography and passed them all. However, Mary did not attend a social work course. She applied, and was accepted but she decided not to take up the place. Her marriage had been difficult for some time and it was not the right time to give up work and go to college. Mary re-applied to study social work three years later but she was not accepted this time. Later she attended North Glasgow College and completed an HNC in Social Care.

During the period of Mary's life when she had young children, and she was studying for Highers, she returned to voluntary work. She completed a basic youth work course and worked in youth clubs in the local area which she could fit easily around her family commitments. Then she trained as an adult literacy tutor and worked one-to-one with a young woman for a year. Her pupil progressed well and eventually went to college and gained NVQ qualifications. Around this time Mary gained a first aid certificate too.

Mary decided life would be better for her and her children if she divorced her husband and cared for the children and worked to pay the bills on her own,

something she believes made her a stronger person. Later she met her second husband through work, and the couple got married in 1998.

Then, in 1999, she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). For the next few years Mary did not keep well. She was tired all the time. It was overwhelming and at times she did not have the strength to pick up a kettle or walk any distance. Mary decided to learn all she could about her illness. She got books from the library and researched MS on the internet. She found some evidence that diet and lifestyle were influential and began to make changes to what she ate and drank. Gradually her symptoms improved and although she still has MS, she is feeling much stronger.

Two years ago Mary's husband changed his job and began work in a different part of Glasgow. The couple decided to move nearer his new workplace and they bought a house in the south side of Glasgow. Mary's daughter did not move with her, and she lives with her partner now. In April of this year they had a baby and Mary tries to see the family once a week. Her son spends some of his time in the new house. The house required a lot of upgrading and Mary's husband has been involved in extensive replastering and DIY work. Mary has more involvement when it comes to the decoration.

The couple have got to know their new neighbours and made friends through the local bowling club, and Mary is still in touch with her siblings. She is in regular touch with her sister and her youngest brother who both live in Edinburgh. She sees her other brother less often but is still in contact with him.

Mary has a job in administration in a day care centre for people aged over 50. She works part time for three full days per week and enjoys having two other days to do other things. The job is not as busy as Mary would like it to be but she is not considering looking for a new job at the moment.

A big part of Mary's life just now is that she and her husband have applied to become foster carers. Over the last eighteen months they have been through a long and, at times, intense assessment process. This has included Mary attending two different doctors for medical checks, and both her children being interviewed. However, the process is almost at an end and Mary and her husband hope to hear the

outcome soon. In the meantime the possibility of becoming foster carers has influenced some other areas of their lives. For example there is additional pressure to complete the renovation of the house quickly and Mary is delaying looking for a new job.

At Christmas time in 2007 Mary's Australian penfriend invited her and her husband for a holiday. Mary had originally intended going to Australia when she was 18 and as this hadn't happened, Mary asked her husband how he felt about a holiday in Australia. They thought about going in May, and then Mary's daughter told her in January that she was pregnant and the baby was due in May. As her daughter was diabetic Mary thought there could be complications and she would want to be around for her so she went to the travel agents the next day to book the earliest possible flights which were in three weeks' time. The next three weeks were spent researching on the internet all the places the couple wanted to visit and booking accommodation resulting in a fantastic holiday of a lifetime and catching up with Mary's penfriend and meeting her family. About two weeks after they returned, Mary's daughter gave birth to a daughter of her own.

They had a great time and now Mary would like to visit Tasmania, New Zealand and Canada. However, as Mary says "it all depends what happens with this fostering".

During this period, since moving to the south side and throughout the assessment process for fostering, Mary has been participating in learning. In addition to reading books from the library and using the internet for research, she has participated in community based adult learning. She went along to a course called IMPACT at the local community centre which was about image, positive thinking and motivation. Mary was looking for something to do when she was not at work and heard about the course from a volunteer at work. She wanted to meet other people in the area and she enjoys learning.

Mary enjoyed the course. She was not nervous at the start and thinks that, because the two tutors got on well together, that helped her to feel comfortable. She enjoyed meeting new people and found the informal approach suited her. A second course was suggested to her and she attended it after IMPACT was finished. The second

course was also about positive thinking too and Mary says that it made her think differently about things.

Mary sees some of the other participants socially and she hopes to go to another course in the community. It depends on the ages of any foster children she has. If they are at school and a suitable course is available she intends to participate.

Mary has attended several courses related to her work. Part of her job involves finding out about courses to support the work of the volunteers and she often attends them herself so that she can tell the volunteers about them. Since starting in her job a year ago Mary has participated in courses on personal safety and self-esteem, elementary food hygiene, and she has updated her first aid certificate. Soon she will be attending Health and Safety course. After that she would like to do sign language or the Sage bookkeeping course. She has thought about learning how to proof read, too, as she was good at English at school.

There might be some courses related to fostering and Mary would participate in these if they became available.

Mary and her husband are waiting to hear the outcome of their application to become foster parents. If they are successful their lives will change significantly and decisions about work and learning will be made in this new context. In the meantime Mary tries to remain positive about her health and her life. Her parents are less keen to try new things and Mary does not want to be like that. New experiences are important to Mary, and learning has a place in that. Whether it is learning about new places to visit or updating her knowledge of her illness, checking out learning opportunities on behalf of the volunteers she works with or learning in the community, each experience is valued.

Postscript

Mary continued to attend the courses in the community centre. At the time of the second interview she had started the ECDL qualification, and she was participating in some of the sessions of the confidence-building course that she missed while she was in Australia.

Mary and her husband were accepted as foster carers and Mary had given up her job to focus on this, and attend the training and meetings that were involved. They had one short-term placement at that point.

In an email sent a few months after the second interview, Mary said that two boys, aged eight and nine years, had been placed with them long-term. She had completed four modules of the EDCL and hoped to complete the other three in the next few months. She continued to attend cbal at the community centre and had attended courses in health and teenage behaviour. Her travel plans had been put on hold for the time being.

Conclusion

The life stories in this chapter enhanced understanding of progression from cbal in the context of the learners' lives by showing their starting-points for learning, as well as their reasons for choosing to participate. In addition, the stories highlighted the barriers to progression and the events and relationships that impinged on the learners' participation, and enhanced or inhibited progression. These are discussed in more depth in chapter six.

The life stories demonstrated a key role for practitioners in cbal in relation to participation and progression. For example, in Helen's story, she found out about cbal through outreach work undertaken by a community worker at the gates of the local primary school, and it was another worker who encouraged Linda to attend the Back to Work course. Practitioners were involved in discussions with learners about moving from one course to another, as Linda's story showed. Another example was Sarah, who learned about the computing course through the women's group. The nature of cbal was important in some of the stories also. The informal, friendly atmosphere, and the support of tutors and other learners featured in the stories, and Sarah and Helen were able to participate because a crèche was provided.

However, while the roles of practitioners in cbal were mostly positive in the life stories, some negative aspects of cbal were highlighted also. These are discussed in more depth in chapter five. However, it is important to comment on one occurrence in which it took one year for cbal staff to reply to Elaine's initial enquiry about cbal provision. As Elaine's story showed, the circumstances in which she made her enquiry were such that her motivation and confidence in relation to participation in learning were very fragile. Although Elaine did eventually participate in cbal this draws attention to the importance for cbal staff to respond promptly and positively to learners' enquiries. It is fortunate that the delay in receiving information did not put Elaine off attending, but it is possible that others who were not part of this study were discouraged from potential participation.

The roles of cbal practitioners and the nature of cbal provision were highlighted in the learners' life stories, and they showed the ways in which these impinged on

participation and progression. However, the term community based adult learning was not used by the learners in this research. The learners discussed the cbal in which they had participated, but cbal was not within their terms of reference. In this research, the term cbal was used by me to describe the focus of the study from the start, in the information sheet and consent form, and in my introductory script. However, the learners talked about the classes and courses they had attended in different ways. Some referred to the location of the provision such as the community centre, or local high school. Others used descriptive terms such as “the Wednesday class” or “the women’s group.” I did not ask the learners why they did not use the term cbal, but from the interview data there appeared to be two reasons.

First, although the learners were generally positive about the benefits of locally-based provision, they did not appear to distinguish between that provided by the local authority, which was the focus of this study, and courses offered by other organisations. For example, in Helen’s story the cbal in which she had participated was discussed by her as part of a range of learning opportunities she had accessed, alongside childcare modules delivered by a local charity, and the sewing class run by local women as a small business. In this there was a sense that it did not matter to the learners who had provided the learning opportunities, as long as it met their particular needs at that time.

Second, it seemed that community based adult learning and cbal might be jargon, in the sense that they are terms that are understood by policy-makers and providers of opportunities but are not used widely by others. This was suggested to me by Sarah who asked me what cbal meant when we discussed her life story at the second interview. In other interviews I used the term, but then had to explain further the type of learning opportunities about which I was asking.

In this research I checked with the learners about the type of adult learning they were describing, because I wanted to be sure I was attributing their responses to cbal correctly. However, it did not seem to be important to the learners to make distinctions among different types of opportunities and different providers. One potential implication of this is that lack of recognition of the role of cbal in learners’

lives might contribute to the low profile of cbal, and its marginalisation in relation to other types of adult learning, such as FE and HE.

Understanding of the meaning of progression for the learners in this study is enhanced through appreciation of the starting-points for their learning and of the contexts in which obstacles to progression were encountered or overcome. While the research interviews could have been analysed for themes in the first stage of analysis, the configuration of the data into a story through narrative analysis facilitated an insight into the place of cbal in relation to events and relationships both within and outside the learning experience (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000). The life stories in this study contributed to the aims of the research to focus on the learners' perspectives and to investigate cbal in the context of learners' past and present lives.

Introduction to the discussion chapters

In the next three chapters, I move from the learners' individual life stories to collective experiences of participation in cbal. In chapter three, I began to address the first aim of the research by examining the role of cbal in the context of the learners' past and present lives. In chapters four and five I move from exploring the individual learners' contexts to an examination of themes that I identified in the bridging commentaries in the second stage of the analysis that were shared across the learners' stories. In doing this I address the first aim of the research more fully in the sense that I move the analysis beyond the individual. In chapter six I address the second aim of the research, namely to investigate the learners' perceptions of progression and construct the meaning of progression from their points of view.

The analysis of forms of capital in chapter four informs the examination of health and well-being in chapter five by showing how increased capital led to a sense of well-being for some learners. The discussion in these two chapters is a critical step in understanding the learners' descriptions of progression because they illustrate how capital and health outcomes for learners supported their ambitions and future plans, related to progression. If I had moved too quickly to analysis of the interview data for progression, there was a risk that progression might not be understood in the learners' terms.

I make use of three different theoretical frameworks in the three discussion chapters. The reason for this is that I did not begin my study with a particular framework in mind. Rather, my concern at the start was that the learners' stories should be the focus of the research. However, in writing the bridging commentaries in stage two of the analysis process, I identified themes for each of the learners that I then grouped together, where there were commonalities across the stories, at the start of stage three. When I had created the table of the common themes among the learners' stories I identified the need for thematic analysis to explore these in depth. At that point I sought to make use of theory that would assist the third stage of analysis. In chapter four I analyse the interview data in relation to theory about human and social capital, and in chapter five I draw on the literature on health and well-being. The outcomes of the progression analysis are discussed in chapter six.

There are overlaps between human and social capital, health and well-being and progression in this study. For example, the development of self-confidence was mentioned by some of the learners in relation to social capital such as being able to join a group, and by others in connection with increased self-esteem which might contribute to well-being. Others spoke of increased self-confidence when they were asked about progression. I addressed this overlap by looking at the context of the learners' responses in order to decide where a particular unit of data fitted. The thematic analysis is presented in the following three chapters. Although forms of capital, health and well-being are addressed separately, they were intertwined in the context of the learners' lives.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF CBAL IN LEARNERS' LIVES

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITAL

Introduction

In chapter three I presented the life stories in order to show the role played by participation in and progression from cbal in the context of the individual learners' lives. The table of themes that I had created in the third stage of the analysis helped me to identify collective experiences across the learners' stories, and in this chapter I address one aspect of these.

This chapter explores the connection between participation in cbal and the development of human and social capital for the learners in this study. In the first section, I explain my decision to investigate the development of capital. I discuss definitions of different forms of capital in the literature, and I describe the components that I looked for in the data. Next, I explore the participants' experiences of cbal as described by them, and I discuss the extent to which their participation facilitated the development of human and social capital in this study. I conclude that cbal played an important role in supporting the development of human and social capital, for some learners. Also, I argue that other learners were able to recover lost capital through their participation in cbal.

Exploring forms of capital

I explored the potential connections between participation in cbal and the development of human and social capital for two reasons. Firstly, the table created in the third stage of analysis of the data had highlighted the development of these forms of capital as experiences that were common to some of the learners. Secondly, research identified in the literature review had pointed to both types of capital as predictors of participation in learning (Sargant, 2000) as well as outcomes of it (Field, 2005; Schuller et al. 2004; Tett & MacLachlan, 2007).

In order to analyse my data in relation to forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), I needed to define the terms for my study and clarify the themes for my analysis. I searched the interview transcripts, as well as the life stories, for links between the learners'

experiences of participation in cbal and the development of human and social capital. Drawing on the literature (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Schuller et al., 2004) I looked for evidence of the development of human capital in terms of:

- the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, potentially leading to the ability to do something new or do things differently;
- educational success, evidenced by the achievement of formal qualifications.

In the latter, I followed Schuller et al. (2004) who included qualifications as part of human capital in their study of the benefits of learning. For Bourdieu (1986), formal qualifications were symbols of achievement that contributed to cultural capital. However, I had not asked the participants in my study about cultural capital, described by Bourdieu as symbols of taste in music and art, and so I decided to include qualifications in the search for components of human capital.

In relation to social capital, I drew on the definitions provided by Field (2005) and MacLachlan and Tett (2007) which focused on confidence and trust in relationships and the development of social networks. Therefore I looked for:

- the development of confidence, in terms of interactions with others;
- references to trust or trustworthiness in relationships;
- the development of social networks and supportive social relationships, including membership of groups.

Social engagement, evidenced in membership of organised groups and civic engagement such as increased community involvement or volunteering were included in social capital by Schuller et al. (2004), and I included these in my analysis.

Human capital

New knowledge and skills

The cbal provision in which the learners in this study had participated covered a range of topics (see Table 1, on page 100). Some of these aimed to develop skills,

such as computing or positive thinking, while in others the focus was on a particular topic or subject. The women's groups attended by three of the learners in different locations were discussion-based, and covered a range of topics. Seven of the participants had attended more than one class or group. Almost all were able to identify new knowledge or skills that they felt that they had gained through their participation in community-based learning.

The development of skills in computing was identified as important by many of the learners: "I couldn't believe the amount of things that the computer done that I didn't know" (Linda). In Linda's case, she hoped her new skills would help her find suitable work in the future. Melanie and Alison found that they needed their skills in word processing to write their assignments, when they moved to college provision: "it [the computing class] paid off. I knew it would pay off in some way. I didn't realise how quick it was, so it was good" (Melanie). Learning how to use the computer was particularly useful for Sarah. Before she went to the class, her skills in information technology were "non-existent" because of the problems with her eyesight. Encouraged by the tutor in her local community centre, she said: "I learned millions and came home to practise it. I just loved it". Sarah valued being able to access the internet, and use email, which her disability had prevented previously.

Some of the learners had chosen to attend a computing class at the outset, but a number of others became interested through their involvement in other cbal provision. The fact that the classes were taking place in a familiar, local environment supported this, as well as enthusiastic tutors and community work staff who were effective in encouraging this participation: "the tutors here are really good" (Elaine); "She [the tutor] was just really, really fabulous with people" (Sarah).

Doreen and Mary identified the development of their skills in positive thinking through their participation in the IMPACT confidence building course, and the Steps to Excellence course: "I've thought more about what I say to people, to not put people down" (Mary); "I did set goals for myself" (Doreen). Melanie felt that the skills she had developed enabled her to deal with negative comments from others in discussions: "with the positive thinking and confidence building you just shrug it off don't you?"

As well as skills, some of the learners described new knowledge they had gained, especially those who had participated in subject-based courses. The learners were able to make use of this new knowledge in a variety of ways. For example, Alison had attended courses in social sciences: “just that doing that has helped me at least understand things, the situation at home with my daughter, which is making it easier for me to follow through some things with her”. Melanie had learned Spanish and had the opportunity to use her new skills: “and then when I was on holiday, I was telling them he was my son and what age he was and our names and things like that, and it was all right”. These learners were able to apply their new knowledge in the context of their family and social lives.

Only Elaine did not mention new knowledge or skills when we discussed her participation in cbal. Although she had attended a computing class and achieved modules towards her ‘PC Passport’, the focus of her responses in the interviews was the emotional support she gained from attending the women’s group.

Qualifications

Eight of the learners achieved formal qualifications through their participation in cbal. Most of these were introductory modules in computing that contributed to the ‘PC Passport’ or European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). In addition, Alison had achieved certification in introductions to psychology and sociology, and both she and Helen had completed modules in childcare as part of a Scottish Vocational Qualification.

For some of the learners, accreditation for their learning enabled them to identify the stage they were at, and make decisions about the next step: “There we were sitting looking at the prospectus, and she [the community worker] said ‘there’s the level, they’re at that level, so all you need to do is just step up one and you’re at that level. So why not give it a shot?’” (Alison). In this example, the community worker, as well as accreditation, played a key role in supporting Alison to recognise her achievements and feel confident about moving forward in learning.

There was no external validation for the Gaelic language class, and this was disappointment for Sam, as it would have helped him to decide whether to move to a

course at a more advanced level: “but I don’t want one of those things that say that Sam has attended a course for Gaelic for one year. That doesn’t mean a thing ... you know a very basic test, are you capable of going on or should you stay behind.” This quote suggests that accreditation was important to Sam as a symbol of the human capital he had built through cbal.

Accreditation was linked to work for Linda, who hoped that her computing qualifications would enhance her chances of finding a job. The modules that Helen undertook were directly related to her work: “they were building up modules with us and we did everything from an introduction to child play to first aid, which I, as a childminder, have to have a First Aid certificate. So that was really good.”

However, the achievement of formal qualifications did not appear to be important for everyone. The courses chosen by Mary were discussion-based, and the focus for her was different: “Just to better myself. It’s good to get ... I think it’s always good to learn. You can never know enough. The more you learn the better.”

Accreditation was perceived negatively by Doreen and Alan. For them, external validation represented a pressure attached to learning that they would not welcome: “I think that’s something that would scare me. Although I say I never get stressed out, I can imagine if I was like under pressure to pass something I wouldn’t like the ... I wouldn’t like the ... I couldn’t cope with it in fact” (Doreen). Alan expressed similar feelings: “I did an exam on the internet there at the class and I was struggling because the pressure was getting to me.” These learners valued the informal nature of cbal, and it might be that for some learners, accreditation for learning detracts from this important aspect of this type of provision because it formalises the learning experience and might put pressure on learners to meet pre-set standards.

Sarah did not mention accreditation or certification. This could be because I did not ask a question about accreditation specifically in the interviews. The other learners talked about it in response to general questions about cbal. Sarah was well-qualified prior to her participation in cbal which suggested that accreditation had been important to her in the past. More recently, she had achieved certification for some of

the training for her voluntary work but she had not sought this for her participation in cbal.

Social capital

The development of confidence and trust in relationships

In this section I explore the ways in which the learners in this study described changes to themselves, in the context of their relationships. I have taken the development of confidence, and references to trust in relationships together, as these aspects were often addressed at the same time in the interviews, and they were intertwined in the learners' responses.

All of the learners mentioned the development of confidence in the interviews. In some cases, learners indicated a general increase in confidence in themselves and their abilities:

It gave you some skills and a bit more confidence which you just gradually build up as you did things, got to know people, and sort of realised that you did actually know and understand a lot of these other things too (Alison).

However for others, the development of confidence was linked to social interactions, and it is this aspect of confidence that is important in discussions about social capital.

Getting used to going out and meeting other people was part of the motivation to participate in cbal for Alison. She said she went to cbal because she was looking for something to do after retiring early, and she described how she felt about the social aspect at first: "it was like a big move for me because I hadn't gone to anything and I was just in the house and I didn't know anybody there. So it was a big step just to go in and see what was happening and join in and gradually get to know people." Alison later described the support she had gained from meeting others in similar situations to herself, and she stated that this had helped her to regain the confidence in herself she had lost (interview 1). Recognising that other people are in the same situation as themselves was mentioned by several learners as important for the development of confidence: "You know they're all feeling the same" (Melanie).

Some learners found that their participation in cbal had increased their confidence in relation to taking part in other social activities: “It’s been fabulous. Going to the adult classes has given me the confidence to go out and do something like this [join a sewing class]. Before that I would’ve felt a wee bit silly turning up and saying I’ve never sewn anything in my life!” (Helen). Melanie described herself as shy and withdrawn prior to her involvement in cbal but this had changed: “When I go into these groups noo, I go in and I’m all bubbly and it gies me mair confidence” (Melanie).

The learners in this study felt that they had gained confidence in social interactions through their participation in cbal. Although none used the word ‘trust’ in their responses, there were indications that some of the learners felt more able to trust others. For example, Sarah cited the fact that she had invited me, a stranger, into her home, and was comfortable talking about herself to me, as evidence of how much she had changed (interview 1). Elaine described the other members of her group as a “godsend” and she explained how the relationships in the group had built up through listening to others and everyone being “treated equally” (interview 1).

The development of social networks

In this section I explore the extent to which the learners in this study were able to extend their social networks and supportive social relationships, including membership of groups, as described by them.

It is not possible to identify a causal relationship between the learners’ participation in cbal and the extension of social aspects of their lives. The life stories showed that participation in cbal took place in the context of the learners’ lives. Therefore the role of cbal in developing social networks and supportive social relationships needs to be understood in connection with the learners social relationships including family relationships, friendships and memberships of groups, both within and outwith their participation. Nonetheless, all of the learners in this study identified the development of social networks and social relationships as an important part of their participation in cbal in different ways.

For some of the learners, their decision to participate in cbal was linked to a desire to develop their social relationships. For example, Alan, Elaine and Sam described their motivation to find something to do outside the house, as they had become isolated for a variety of reasons. Each of them had become involved in activities that they could do on their own such as going to the gym, or walking, but they sought contact with other people. Elaine identified “friendship” as part of her motivation to participate in cbal, and Alan’s response was typical of others in that it suggested that meeting people was one of a number of reasons to participate:

It was just the challenge to myself. Also, to get me out of the house, and to give my wife a break. And I also did ... that was the reason I went to the computing class, to refresh my knowledge of it...my knowledge and also to get me out and to meet and interact with people (Alan).

Supportive social relationships were identified as an important part of the learners’ enjoyment of their participation in cbal. For some, it was more important than the subject-matter. For example, Linda had attended the computing class at first because she hoped that skills in computing might help her secure work in the future. Later, she stated that was considering returning to a class below the level she had achieved previously in order to maintain the social interaction the class provided (interview 2). This was most evident in Doreen’s interviews:

Doreen: Again I think I must have wanted some good craic (laughs). We’d such a laugh at it, the first group we went on. The first couple of weeks you were...you never knew anybody, but then the group really gelled.

Janis: So what’s the motivation for you then? It sounds to me as if the learning is not the biggest thing for you.

Doreen: No. I’d say probably it’s just getting in amongst adult company again, you know?

However, Sam said that he had chosen his class specifically for its content, and that although he enjoyed meeting the other learners, this was not the most important aspect of his participation (interview 1).

One interpretation of the analysis in this section is that the contribution of cbal in these learners' lives was simply the enjoyment of belonging to a social club. It seems clear that they valued the social contact that participation in cbal provided. However, prior to their involvement in cbal Alan, Elaine, Linda, Sam and Doreen had become socially isolated because of the circumstances of their lives such as ill-health, retirement or the care of others. Participation in cbal provided an opportunity to develop social capital through the development of supportive social relationships as a way out of their isolation.

There was evidence that participation in cbal had supported the extension of the learners' social networks as part of social capital. As well as the opportunities for developing social relationships within the classes and groups, several of the learners developed friendships that had continued beyond their attendance at cbal. Part of Mary's motivation to participate had been to meet people after moving house, and she identified "going down there on a Friday. Somewhere to go and meet people and you become friends" as the best aspect of cbal. She was still in touch with two people from the group (interview 1), and the whole class socialised occasionally: "we went for a night out down to the Ivy; twelve of us went down there" (interview 1). Melanie had maintained contact with the people she had met even after she left cbal and attended college: "the girls invited me and sent me a text the other day and invited me down in the morning ... they're having a wee tea and coffee thing and that." However, Melanie commented also that she had been part of the same group for some time and she would like to change that: "I want to learn different things and learn ... and meet different people. I don't want to get stuck with the same folk." Helen felt that her social network had broadened. She had met people in her village that she had not spoken to before, and as some were a lot younger or older than her, she thought that their paths might not have crossed otherwise (interview 2).

These examples show how the learners in this study developed their social networks through their participation in cbal. For Mary, Melanie and Helen the social

relationships they developed within cbal were continued beyond the confines of their membership of particular groups, to other spheres such as new friendship circles. This suggests that the social capital gained through the development of social networks was sustainable beyond the learners' participation in cbal. Participation in cbal supported the development of social networks that might act as a resource for the learners in new situations after their involvement with cbal had ended.

Sam's social networks had developed in other ways: "I mean I've gone back up to the island on holiday last year, and I met people, old friends and two cousins I hadn't seen for about fifty years. So I'm able to converse with them in Gaelic, not too well because I'm still a bit rusty...I'm going up again next month." Sam was able to re-connect with family and friends through re-learning Gaelic. This had extended to the next generation as Sam's son accompanied him to the islands on his second visit. One interpretation of Sam's life story is that this re-connection with family and friends through re-learning Gaelic helped Sam to settle in Scotland despite his reluctance to leave Africa. The role for cbal in this case was linked to the development of social networks outwith the cbal group that were supportive to Sam's efforts to adjust to his new circumstances.

Social and civic engagement

Schuller et al. (2004) identified social engagement such as membership of organised groups, and civic engagement including volunteering, as components of social capital. In this study, some of the learners described experiences that suggested their participation in cbal had supported these aspects of their lives.

Several learners joined other cbal classes after their initial involvement, some attending computing and others moving from the IMPACT class to Steps to Excellence. As we have seen, Helen joined a sewing class after her participation in cbal. The sewing class was run independently from the Council provision, and it took confidence for Helen to join as it was a less familiar environment than the local authority cbal. Other learners joined groups outside cbal too. Sam's membership of the smoking cessation group and Elaine's walking group are examples.

Sarah talked about membership too: “there is a real ... I hate to say community...but there is. There’s a real sense that I really belong.” In her case she felt she had become a member of the wider community, something she had not felt during the isolation caused by her illness. Sarah’s hesitation in this quote suggested ambivalence in her feelings about community. I did not ask her about her qualified response during the interview and so I can only speculate as to its meaning. On the one hand Sarah appeared to value the sense of belonging to which participation in cbal had contributed, and she talked in her interviews about enjoying meeting people she knew from the classes when she was out with her son. On the other hand, her hesitation seemed to come from a sense of embarrassment about using the term ‘community’. One interpretation of this is that, prior to her ill-health, she might not have felt the need to feel part of a community to the extent that she did when she was recovering. Alternatively, it is possible that she was not comfortable using a word that might be perceived as jargon.

Two of the learners were involved in volunteering in their communities. In Sarah’s case, her involvement with the mental health charity had begun around the same time as her participation in cbal, whereas Alan started helping out at the hospice once he had gained confidence in his abilities: “Probably I’m feeling so much better now, stronger, slightly more independent.” Both Doreen and Elaine were considering becoming volunteers in different projects in their communities, and they saw this as a form of progression, or “next move” (Doreen).

An important aspect of Mary’s life was her application to become a foster carer. At the time of the interviews decisions about her life were made in this context: “But just now we’re seeing how the fostering goes. At the moment my life’s sort of on hold to see how that goes. Obviously that’ll make a lot of changes.” Mary intended to continue to work, travel and participate in learning, but with this would be underpinned by her role as a foster carer, which could be seen as a new type of social and civic engagement for Mary.

However, the other learners did not mention volunteering or other types of community activity in their interviews. While they appeared to value meeting others

in their local area through their participation in learning, at the time of the study this had not extended to wider community involvement for those learners.

The recovery of capital

The analysis in this chapter revealed a further contribution of cbal in relation to forms of capital, namely the recovery of lost capital. Although I had not included this in the components for which I was looking, analysis of the study data showed that participation in cbal had supported the recovery of some lost capital for a small number of the learners.

In relation to human capital, Sam had gained language skills, but in the context of his life he was recovering the skills he had held as a boy, and lost through lack of use in Africa: “I was a Gaelic speaker as a youth at home. My mother was from one of the outer islands, so I spoke Gaelic all the time at home ... so I thought it’d be nice to go back and learn it and so it’s all coming back to me. Slowly, but it’s coming back”. In Sam’s his case he was re-learning, as opposed to gaining completely new knowledge. He was able to apply this in his interactions with Gaelic-speaking family members. Alison had been a qualified Registered General Nurse, but the benefits of this form of human capital were diminished when she had to retire early. Through her participation in cbal she gained qualifications in social sciences which added to her reduced human capital, through accreditation for new knowledge and skills.

In relation to confidence in social relationships, Linda said of her participation in cbal: “to try and get my confidence back. You know, when you’ve been in the house just with the kids for years and years and years you forget how to speak to people I think. So it’s confidence-building” (Linda). This suggested that Linda had been more confident socially in the past but had lost some of this through being out of the workplace for over ten years. Re-building her reduced confidence in social relationships was part of her motivation to participate in cbal.

Sarah described increased confidence in a similar way. She said that she had been confident contributing to group discussions in the past, but she had become isolated due to her illness. Participation in cbal had contributed to enabling her to regain lost confidence. In addition to talking in a group, she was able to talk about herself: “you

know a lot of stuff I'd already done in therapy but that was between me and a bit of paper, whereas this was me talking in a group and listening in a group and responding to someone else and reacting." This was important to Sarah, especially in the context of her serious mental illness, and the loss of confidence that had arisen from it.

As the analysis in this chapter has shown participation in cbal had supported the development of social networks for some learners. To an extent this could be seen as the recovery of social capital for Alan, Sarah and Linda. Each of these learners had benefitted in the past from the capital that is gained through the social networks established in the workplace, and this had been reduced when they left employment. However, the recovery of social capital was limited in the context of the learners' lives. While Linda hoped to return to work in the future, her ability to build social capital was limited by her responsibilities for the care of family members. Alan and Sarah had re-built social capital through their participation in cbal to an extent but they had not recovered previously held capital fully. As Sarah pointed out when she talked about becoming confident enough to challenge another group member's views: "it wasn't a change from where I had been professionally before, but after I had got really ill, it was a massive change". Because of their ill-health, Sarah and Alan had not returned to the levels of capital they held previously. However, one interpretation of Alan's increased social engagement through volunteering was that he was able to recover some of the social capital gained through social contact at work, that had been lost when he became ill.

Discussion

It could be argued that the human and social capital held by the learners in this study were predictors of their participation in cbal, as well as outcomes of it (Field, 2005). Prior to their participation in cbal, all but one of the learners held formal educational qualifications. In some cases, the learners had left compulsory education at age sixteen with relatively low-level qualifications but had added to these in later years. Others had attended tertiary education immediately on leaving school, and were very well-qualified adults. In their interviews, the learners described the circumstances of their lives which, in each case, suggested the existence of some social networks such

as close family ties or friendships. Research has shown that participation in learning as an adult is positively associated with achievement in initial education, and with social class (Ormston et al. 2007; Sargant, 2000; Schuller & Watson, 2009). Therefore it might be reasonable to assume that the learners in this study had accessed cbal because of their earlier educational and social experiences.

However, the relationship between human and social capital and participation in cbal was complex in this study. Bourdieu (1986) observed that different types of capital were not held in equal measure by individuals in society, although he acknowledged that people could accumulate capital through investment or effort. In this study, the life stories highlighted that the learners' participation in cbal was intertwined with their personal circumstances, including their accumulated capital, and therefore it is difficult to identify "clear causal relationships" (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 16) between participation in learning and the development of forms of capital. Nonetheless, the analysis of the interview transcripts and life stories presented in this chapter suggests that participation in cbal was associated with the development of human and social capital for the learners in this study, in a variety of ways and within the limits of the circumstances of the learners' lives.

Taking human capital first, there was evidence that some of the learners had gained new knowledge, while for others the development of skills was one outcome of their participation in cbal. The learners were able to describe how they used these newly acquired aspects of human capital to "function effectively in economic and social life" (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 14). Certification of learning had been a negative experience for one learner in this study, and was viewed as stressful by another. Nonetheless, some of the learners had achieved formal qualifications through their learning, further adding to their 'stocks' of human capital.

In relation to social capital, all of the learners in this study cited "personal connections and interpersonal interaction" (Field, 2005, p. 19) as an important aspect of their participation in cbal. While for some this may have simply added to their enjoyment of the experience, for others it provided respite from stressful situations. Some of the learners had increased their social capital through "confidence, developing trusting relationships and social engagement" (MacLachlan & Tett, 2007,

p. 163) which had facilitated their move away from social isolation. On one hand one learner had been learning with the same group of people over several years, but on the other many of the learners had extended their social networks through their participation in cbal.

To an extent, the development of social capital in this study was limited by the learners' personal situations in the sense that those with diminished social networks due to the social isolation associated with their retirement, unemployment or ill-health might require "an unceasing effort of sociability" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250) to establish and maintain new social capital. Nevertheless, in this study, participation in cbal was associated with the development of social capital, evidenced through making new friends, membership of other organised groups, and engagement in community life through volunteering.

The learners in this study held human and social capital in various forms, prior to their participation in cbal. To an extent, therefore it might be unsurprising that they were able to access cbal and benefit from it in the ways described above. However, building capital through learning "involves complex processes" (Schuller et al, 2004, p. 178) and for some of the learners, changes in their personal circumstances meant that, to an extent, the capital they held had decreased. For example, in some cases paid employment had provided opportunities for social interaction which were lost through retirement, ill-health or family responsibilities. The learners affected by these circumstances were able to recover some lost social capital through their participation in learning in the sense that they were able to develop new social relationships and extend their social networks in ways that might take the place of those lost through changes in employment or health.

For others, existing educational qualifications were rendered irrelevant in new circumstances. New knowledge and skills gained through participation in cbal supported the recovery of lost human capital through their relevance in the context of learners' lives. Examples were skills in other languages that were utilised by the learners in their social lives, as well as computing skills that supported the execution of a variety of tasks undertaken by the learners. In some instances, the learners were participating in cbal at an educational level lower than their previously held

qualifications, but nonetheless the learning had value and meaning in the context of the learners' changed circumstances.

Another finding from this study was the potential of one form of capital to support the development of another. In his study of young people's attendance in high school in the United States, Coleman (1988) investigated the effect of social capital "in the creation of human capital" (p. 109), and he found that social capital in young people's families, as well as social networks in the wider community to which the young people belonged, had a positive effect on their attendance at school. In Coleman's study, social capital was "a resource for education" (p. 113) and hence for the development of human capital. In this study, social networks had facilitated some of the learners' participation in cbal, which had triggered the development of new knowledge and skills. For example, a neighbour had told Alison about cbal and it was through this contact that she participated and gained knowledge and qualifications in social sciences. Like the young people in Coleman's (1988) study, the learners in this study were supported in their learning by family and friends who encouraged their continued participation. In addition, several of the learners valued learning in groups, and benefitted from "the recognition of oneself in the accounts of others in a group, along with the validation of one's own experience" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 61). In these instances, the social interaction within cbal supported the development of human capital.

The analysis of the data in this study suggested a potential role for human capital in the development of social capital, also. For example, the development of language skills enabled Sam to re-establish his family relationships, and through her participation in the computing class, Sarah was able to keep in touch with friends via email. This study suggested that relationships between different forms of capital, and the ways in which one links to or influences another can change over time and with individuals' circumstances.

Conclusion

This study appears to support the findings of earlier research that suggested that human and social capital are important for participation in learning (Ormston et al.

2007; Sargant, 2000; Schuller & Watson, 2009). One interpretation of the data suggests that the learners in this study were able to access and benefit from participation in cbal due to previously accumulated capital. However, the analysis points to a more complex relationship between forms of capital and participation in learning, in that changes to some learners' circumstances had contributed to the loss of capital, but they were able to access learning opportunities through cbal nonetheless.

In this chapter I sought to analyse the study data in relation to forms of capital. The creation of the life stories in this study means that the potential connection between cbal and forms of capital was explored in the context of the learners' lives and can be understood in relation to their personal circumstances.

MacLachlan and Tett (2007) have reminded us that participation in learning takes place in the context of broader socio-economic structures that affect adults' abilities to take up and benefit from opportunities. Therefore, the role that participation in cbal can play in supporting the development of social and human capital is likely to be limited unless the causes of inequality are addressed. Nonetheless, the cbal that was the focus of this study contributed to the development of knowledge and skills, self-confidence and social networks for the learners, some of whom had experienced disadvantage due to ill-health, disability and unemployment.

This study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between human and social capital and participation in learning in three ways. Firstly, it confirms for cbal what has been established previously for other forms of adult learning, namely that participation can support the development of human and social capital (MacLachlan & Tett, 2007; Schuller et al. 2004). Secondly, it suggests that participation in cbal can facilitate some recovery of lost capital for learners for whom changes in circumstances have led to decreased social networks and changed needs in terms of knowledge and skills. Thirdly, it highlights the interrelationship between forms of capital and suggests that human capital can contribute to the development of social capital as well as confirming the role of social capital in the development of human capital (Coleman, 1988).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE OF CBAL IN LEARNERS' LIVES

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Introduction

In chapter four, I explored one of the themes that I had identified in the third stage of the analysis, namely the connection between participation in cbal and the development of human and social capital. In this chapter I undertake further analysis in order to address a second theme that is linked to the theme of social capital. Some features of social capital such as self-confidence, social competence and civic engagement are important for individuals' well-being (Field, 2009). In this chapter I examine the themes of health and well-being in more depth.

The participants' life stories and the preparation of the bridging commentaries suggested that health and well-being were important issues for the learners in this study, and this chapter explores these concerns. In the first section, I discuss recent work in this area (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2005; Field, 2009; Schuller et al, 2004), and identify the components of health and well-being that I looked for in the analysis. Then, I present the learners' descriptions of their experiences of physical and mental ill-health, and I discuss these in relation to their participation in cbal. I conclude that health issues were part of the motivation to participate in cbal, for some learners. For others, participation in cbal had contributed to a sense of well-being and was seen by them as supporting their capacity to cope with ill-health. In addition, I suggest that cbal can play a role in the recovery from mental ill-health and depression.

There were overlaps between the analysis in this chapter and that in chapter four. For example, chapter four showed that all of the learners talked about increased confidence in their interviews, and this had been important to the development of social capital. As mentioned earlier, this in turn could be associated with a sense of well-being. Self-confidence is addressed again here, but I included it in the analysis only where it was mentioned in relation to aspects of health or well-being.

Analysis for health and well-being

The table of themes that I had created in the third stage of the analysis showed that many of the learners in this study were affected by issues related to health and well-being. In four cases, the learners had experienced difficulties with their physical health, while three learners had suffered from mental ill-health or depression. Elaine was in both categories. Four of the learners were affected indirectly through their responsibilities for the care of a family member with health problems, and one of these was Alison, who had health problems of her own. The learners were at different stages of recovery, and they had addressed their health issues in a range of ways.

In order to undertake the analysis for this chapter, I drew on the literature to help me define the terms for this study and to identify components of health and well-being. In their study of FE, Gallacher et al. (2000) identified “overcoming health and related problems” (p. 29) as a key motivating factor for adults’ participation. In order to explore potential links between the learners’ motivation to participate in cbal and health issues, in this study, I searched the interview data for:

- references to motivation to participate, expressed in the context of health issues.

Next, I looked for “mediators that link learning to health” (Schuller et al, 2004, p. 40). These are factors that can be associated with learning that might contribute to health outcomes. Specifically, I searched the data for evidence of:

- the development of self-esteem, when competence matches expectations, for example, or the confidence derived from recognition of achievement;
- self-efficacy in terms of confidence in one’s own ability to take control of situations, make decisions and execute a plan of action;
- feelings of agency in terms of “perceived control over important life choices” (Field, 2009a, p.183).

Lastly, I drew on the work of Diener et al. (1997) and Schuller et al. (2004) and looked for indicators of health benefits of participation in cbal as follows:

- references to subjective well-being in the learners' descriptions of their own feelings about their lives. Specifically, I examined how the learners assessed their lives, and I searched the data for components such as "life satisfaction" and "positive moods and emotions" (Diener et al., 1997, p. 26).
- descriptions of effective coping with personal circumstances, including ill-health;
- protection or recovery from mental health difficulties.

Health and well-being

Motivation to participate

In the interviews I asked the learners why they had participated in cbal, and some of the learners identified health issues as part of their motivation. In some instances, this was linked to a wish for increased social interaction as discussed in chapter four.

Sarah and Elaine had sought a way out of the isolation they had experienced, which they linked to their mental health problems. In Sarah's case, this was in conjunction with her involvement in voluntary work: "I tried to find some way that I could reintegrate into the community. I have attended classes at a local learning centre."

This quote suggested that Sarah recognised that she had become socially isolated because of her illness, and that she saw attendance at cbal as a well-being issue and one way of re-connecting with others.

Alan and Alison had both retired early due to physical illness. They too had social reasons for wishing to participate in cbal, but it was part of an active move away from their ill-health also. Alan sought to prove to himself that he was still capable intellectually, and for Alison, cbal was a first step in her search for a new way to be occupied since her career as a nurse had ended.

Although still able to work, Mary's diagnosis with MS contributed to her motivation to participate in a range of new experiences, including cbal: "I'm not going to lie

down quietly.” In Mary’s case, her diagnosis of ill-health had increased her motivation to do as much as possible while she was physically able, and attending cbal was part of this.

For Melanie, participating in cbal was related to health indirectly through her responsibility for her son who had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She expressed her motivation to participate in cbal in connection with the care of her son:

He was only a month old and I thought ‘It’s gi’en me something to do. I’ve got him all day’... I was in the house all day and I thought ‘I’ll get out and it’ll gie me something’ and believe it or not it was only two hours on a Tuesday night. I thought ‘I need the release’.

Sam, Helen and Doreen said in their interviews that they were in good health. Therefore, their motivation to participate in cbal was linked to other concerns. It is perhaps surprising that Linda did not mention her recovery from depression in relation to her motivation. Instead, the focus of her response to my question about her motivation was her plans to return to the workplace in the future, through continued participation in cbal.

Self-esteem, self-efficacy and agency

In this section I examine factors that were associated with participating in cbal in this study that might be connected to health outcomes. I used the definitions in the literature discussed above to identify evidence of the development of self-esteem, self-efficacy and feelings of agency in the learners’ responses. However, only Sarah used any of these terms, when she spoke about the difference participation in cbal had made to her life: “You know, it’s confidence, it’s self-esteem. They are little words, but they are massive things.” The other learners did not use those terms themselves. I analysed the interview data in relation to the components of health and well-being I had selected, and interpreted the learners’ responses using the definitions for each component.

Alan said that he had gained in confidence through his participation in cbal, and in my interpretation of his interviews, this in turn contributed to the development of his self-esteem. One example of this was directly related to his health in that he was able to challenge a doctor when he felt he had been treated badly during follow-up care. He felt that the doctor had assumed he would not understand his treatment because he was in a wheelchair and Alan had made his unhappiness with this clear. It was important to Alan that he was not treated differently because of his disability, and cbal had contributed to his self-esteem in this respect:

Well it's given me confidence that, you know, I still have the intelligence and the intellect that I always had. You know, what level at is hard to gauge but I can argue a point, you know? Because people are, they see someone in a wheelchair and think because they are disabled, they're disabled from the top of the head to the toe, including their brain. But some of the brainiest folk are disabled.

One of the aspects of the computing course that Alan enjoyed was that the other learners treated him "like themselves." In the class, everyone was sitting at a computer, so attention was not drawn to the fact that Alan was in a wheelchair. This was important to Alan, and there were other examples in his story where he made efforts to take attention away from his disability. He said that when he attended theatres or cinemas, he chose not to sit in the area reserved for wheelchairs. He preferred to use his walking stick to make his own way to his seat, and he always stood when he was being photographed. Although Alan did not use the word self-esteem, these examples from his interviews suggested that how he was viewed by others was important, and cbal contributed to his sense of self-worth in the sense that his disability was not the focus of his participation.

Other learners had gained self-esteem from the realisation that they were able to achieve through learning: "Also the fact that you're progressing yourself because it gives you more confidence. You're just gradually getting more confident and getting to know what yourself is capable of" (Alison). "So I felt quite good. I says I must

have achieved something wi' it" (Melanie). In these examples Alison and Mary expressed feeling better about themselves through their recognition of their own learning.

The recognition of their achievements by others was important for self-esteem also. Although she found it nerve-racking, Elaine felt good about herself after reading her story to others in the women's group. One interpretation of Elaine's interviews was that increased self-esteem, gained through her participation in cbal, was linked with feelings of self-efficacy and agency: "It's made a big difference because I feel I have a choice, that my opinion counts, whereas before it never...you felt each person was respected, you know? There were rules whether you agreed with that person's opinion, you know?" This was an important aspect of Elaine's participation in cbal. She had been frustrated by not getting help during the attack at her work, and in her subsequent struggle to recover and return to her job. The women's group had provided an opportunity for Elaine to feel that her voice was heard.

Like Elaine, Alison had found it difficult to retire. Partly this was because the decision was not hers, and she said that she had experienced this as a loss of confidence and of identity. Participation in cbal had helped with this:

I was perfectly happy and confident in the situation that I was in before, but to no longer be in that and suddenly have to more or less start afresh which I would never have thought before. So you do realise that you have got capabilities to do other things.

This quote fits with the components of self-efficacy that I looked for in the analysis in that it suggests that Alison felt a new sense of her ability to take control of her life. Later, when she had begun to attend college, she said that cbal had helped her to find a new identity and that she had started to believe that she could do something other than nursing.

Some of the other learners described their experiences in terms of self-efficacy, in that they felt more in control of aspects of their lives and were able to make

decisions: “I think I suppose I feel a wee bit more independent. I just feel I’ve got something to look forward to all the time, you know” (Linda).

Melanie had wallpapered her kitchen, something she attributed directly to the content of her positive thinking course, and the encouragement of the tutors:

It’s probably, maybe, the silliest answer you’ve heard but it’s the truth, you know, and I thought: ‘right I can do this now’. I’ve started to put the beading down and I was putting poles up. You name it, I’m trying DIY things just myself now.

This statement from Melanie showed her enthusiasm for this outcome of her participation in cbal, as she perceived it. It suggested that she developed agency through her participation in cbal, borne out by action. She had increased confidence in her abilities, and this had been translated into action in terms of undertaking home improvements. The quotes from Alison and Melanie suggested that these feelings of self-efficacy and agency were new, and represented a change from their situations previously.

In the analysis of the interviews for this section, self-esteem, or feelings of self-efficacy or agency were not apparent for all of the learners who had health problems. Sarah highlighted the development of social networks as the main benefit of her participation in cbal, and did not focus on these other factors associated with health. Even so, one interpretation of her story is that the development of social capital had helped to change the social isolation she experienced during the period of her mental ill-health. Mary did discuss her participation in cbal in relation to her illness, but her responses related more closely to feelings of well-being, addressed in the next section.

Well-being

The focus of this section is a sense of well-being, rather than physical health, although the two are connected in the sense that each can contribute positively to the other. Well-being can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In this study I analysed the

interview data using the definition by Diener et al. (1997) in relation to how the learners reported feeling about their lives. Schuller et al. (2004) made use of the same definition in their study of the wider benefits of learning. The learners in this study did not use the term well-being in their interviews. Nonetheless, some of them did refer to aspects of their participation in cbal that suggested it had made a positive contribution to how they felt about their lives. In this section I explore these in relation to subjective well-being, as it was described by the learners. Some learners missed cbal while it was discontinued during holiday periods, and looked forward to their course or class re-starting: “I’ll go back on Friday mornings and then whatever is coming up after Christmas. I actually do enjoy my Friday mornings...just getting dressed up on Friday mornings, out of my gym stuff” (Doreen). Melanie expressed a similar feeling about her attendance at college, following her participation in cbal: “I feel as though it’s kind of brightened me up, spruced me up, and I’m like that ‘oh aye’. I light up when I talk about it.” These quotes suggested that the learners felt better about themselves, and that participation in cbal had contributed to their more positive outlook. Doreen’s words suggested that going to her class provided a new purpose to Friday mornings that gave her a reason to take extra care with her appearance. The focus of the quote from Melanie described an internal change in the sense that she became enthusiastic and more cheerful when she talked about college.

Both Doreen and Mary felt that they, too, had developed a more positive approach to life through their participation in cbal: “Well my husband says ‘oh, you’re a lot happier when you come back from your courses’, and I tell him what I’ve been doing” (Mary). This sense of well-being was especially important, in the context of Mary’s ill-health:

I suppose if you get a diagnosis of poor health, that makes you think well I’m not going to sit down and feel sorry for myself. I’m going to get up and do something with my life. So I want to see different places. I want to do as much as I can basically. Just in case. You never know what’s round the corner.

It could be argued that the learners in this study might have been pre-disposed to being positive. However, each of them was coping with a range of issues in their lives, such as ill-health and caring responsibilities that had the potential to undermine well-being.

Participation in cbal was not always a positive experience in this study. Chapter four showed that assessment and accreditation were a source of worry and stress for some of the learners: “I go ‘I can’t do this, I can’t do it!’ And [the tutor] says ‘for goodness sake, Linda you know you’re fine’, but I panic about that”.

Some aspects of cbal provision had caused frustration. Linda and Alison were disappointed by ill-prepared tutors, and this had adversely affected their enjoyment of some classes, which might in turn have affected their feelings of well-being. Confusion over the organisation of a computing class led Doreen to give it up: “They’ve said there’s problems with the computers round there, so I stopped going to it, I would say probably about a month ago because I wasn’t getting anything from it”.

Some class discussions were difficult for Melanie:

When I’m on courses I’ve had to sit there and bite my tongue because some folks say ‘and see these folks that’s on benefits’ and I’m like ‘do you want to live in my shoes?’ ...And I says ‘you should actually just sit and don’t cast aspersions on anybody’ you know? That sometimes is, I don’t actually like...the tutors never ask you that. It’s just the conversation of all in the group, you know?

On these occasions, the comments of others had acted against any feelings of well-being Melanie might have derived from participation in cbal. Instead she felt worse about her own circumstances, something she was sensitive about in any case. However, these instances had not deterred Melanie from attending cbal. She had continued to participate, only leaving when she was accepted into college. The quote

above suggested that support from the tutors might have encouraged Melanie to continue to participate in cbal, despite the comments of other learners.

Effective coping

For some of the learners in this study there was evidence that participation in cbal had supported effective coping with a range of circumstances. However, there were overlaps in the interviews between effective coping and other aspects of health and well-being. For example, participation in cbal could be seen as a way of coping effectively with the social isolation that arose from ill-health, as well as being part of the motivation to participate. Similarly, increased self-esteem had helped Alan to cope with his disability. This section is short because aspects of effective coping have been addressed in other sections in this chapter.

For the four learners who had retired earlier than they planned, participation in cbal was one strategy for coping by providing a sense of purpose in their daily lives: “You could sit and vegetate if you didn’t do something” (Sam). This suggested that participation in cbal was part of coping with the reduced levels of activity that can be associated with retirement.

As well as early retirement, Alison and Alan had to cope with long-term physical illness and disability, and their participation had supported this:

So I’m just trying to find other things to do. It’s quite difficult because I’m trying to find things to do that I can do maybe at a slower pace ... Because of the Crohn’s, I tend to get exhausted ... so if I was to do something four days every week I wouldn’t be able to keep it up” (Alison).

Alison’s words suggested that she was looking to find a new purpose after retiring early. However, this had to be within the constraints of her ill-health.

Some learners cared for family members with health problems, and cbal contributed to their ability to cope by providing respite from the stress of their responsibilities. Others were coping with changes in their personal circumstances, such as re-location or children leaving the family home. The life stories in chapter three illustrated the

range of circumstances with which the learners were coping in their day-to-day lives, and participation in cbal was part of this context. Cbal supported coping by fitting in with the learners' circumstances in practical terms such as the times and location of provision, as well as the provision of crèche facilities, and in terms of support from cbal practitioners.

Protection or recovery from mental health difficulties

The interpretation of the interview data for this study suggested that participation in cbal had played a role in protecting the mental health of some of the learners as they coped with the circumstances of their lives: "it kept me going" (Alison). This suggested that cbal supported Alison to develop resilience in the context of her ill-health and early retirement.

Another example was Sam whose description of his participation in cbal suggested a desire to protect his mental health by creating a sense of purpose for himself: "the Gaelic, the gym, just keeping myself busy. I miss my work. It's terrible to retire, because then you realise that - I am old." The way that Sam talked about retirement indicated a kind of battle to stave off sliding into inactivity or possibly even depression: "it's just to keep myself, I like keeping myself, since retiring I find it's very difficult to ... (laughs). You mustn't let yourself get into a rut, you must keep active physically and mentally, I feel (laughs)". This suggested that Sam feared that he might feel down if he did not keep to his daily routine, and learning Gaelic through cbal was part of his plan to keep busy. Although he did not use these terms, Sam's words suggested that he was fearful of the on-set of mental ill-health and depression. The life history approach to this study captured this by revealing the connections between the learners' lives, participation in cbal and health issues.

For Linda participation in cbal had alleviated some of the stress of caring for her children and mother, while her husband convalesced from a serious accident. While Linda did not say that participation in cbal protected her mental health, it is possible and that her participation had helped to ensure that her recovery from depression was sustained.

Conversely, Doreen said: “I don’t suffer from stress.” Although she described going to the gym as “great for you mentally”, she did not refer to her mental health in connection with cbal. However, she was enthusiastic about a course which she said had helped her to “look at things from a different angle and not see the bad in everything” which suggested that cbal had contributed to her well-being and possibly protected her mental health to an extent.

Three of the learners in this study had experienced mental health problems prior to their participation in cbal. Linda felt she had recovered fully at the time of her interviews, but stress and mental ill-health featured strongly in the life stories of Sarah and Elaine: “I ended up with back problems; reactive depression and I lost my hair” (Elaine). “With the self-harm ... I was just really, really ill.” (Sarah). These quotes revealed the seriousness of both women’s ill-health, as well as the longer-term physical effects, and emotional scars.

The community centre staff played an important role in Sarah’s participation. The encouragement of the supervisor in the café, as well as the timely intervention of the community worker meant that, after many months, Sarah eventually felt able to attend the group. Both Sarah and Elaine emphasised that their participation had taken “courage.” Once there, they identified learning in a group as beneficial. In chapter four I suggested that this aspect of participation in cbal can support the development of social capital. For Sarah and Elaine it had contributed to their recovery from mental health problems as well:

I’ve learnt that coming here and listening to, you know other people. I’m inspired by other people and I’ve enjoyed hearing, you know, what they’re like, what going through school was like. You know the struggles that people have and if you don’t know anybody coming here, it’s hard to go into classes (Elaine).

Sharing her experiences in this way had contributed to Elaine making sense of them, and she had drawn comfort from knowing that others had experienced similar difficulties. Another interpretation of this quote is that participation in the women’s

group acted as a distraction for Elaine from her feelings of depression. It is possible that the activities in which Elaine became involved through cbal were a diversion from her troubles. However, Elaine's confidence was still very fragile and she said that there were "still a lot of things [she was] unsure of."

Sarah felt that she had recovered from her illness, and her interview data suggested that cbal played an important part in her journey towards full health. However, it is important to be aware that her participation cannot be separated from other aspects of her life such as the medical care she received, the birth of her son, and the opportunities that voluntary work had presented.

Discussion

The interpretation of the interview data for this chapter suggests that there are benefits of participation in cbal for some learners for health and well-being. This is not to say that participation in cbal changed the difficult circumstances of the learners' lives in relation to their health. Furthermore, it is not possible to attribute positive health benefits directly to participation in cbal. Nonetheless, cbal, along with a range of events, activities and relationships in the learners' lives contributed to positive health and well-being for some learners.

This is a small-scale study. However, health and well-being were important issues for so many of the learners, and formed at least part of their motivation to participate in cbal. These learners sought to "come back into the community" (Gallacher et al., 2000, p.29) and to address the social isolation associated with their health issues. Some learners had become closely identified with their illness, and their decision to participate appeared to be linked to a desire to take an active step away from this, towards new ways of being and thinking about themselves. For others, respite from caring responsibilities was one consideration that led to their participation. Gallacher et al. (2000) noted that the motivation to participate in learning is a "complex interaction of a number of factors" (p. 27) and that it cannot be attributed to one cause. While the learners in this study identified a range of reasons for their participation in cbal, the analysis in this chapter suggests that issues related to health,

whether directly through a diagnosis of illness or indirectly through caring for someone who is ill, can be important in adults' decisions to participate in cbal.

In this study, participation in cbal was associated with "intermediate factors linking education and health" (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 37). The first of these, self-esteem, was linked to the increased confidence that some of the learners gained through their achievements in learning, and from the recognition of these by others. This in turn built feelings of self-worth that for some learners had been eroded through experiences of disability, mental illness or depression. The development of confidence was found by Schuller et al. (2002) to be "fundamental and pervasive" in many other studies of adult learning (p.14), and they identified ways in which increased confidence might be important to health outcomes. Three of these could be seen in this study. Firstly, some learners had "challenged the views of others" (Schuller et al., 2002, p. 14). In these instances learners' self-esteem was increased through feelings that they had stood up for themselves. However, this was in contrast with Melanie's experience of saying nothing when other learners in her group expressed views with which she disagreed. Secondly, both Alan and Mary had been able to "communicate more effectively with professionals, notably on health or education matters" (p. 15). A third aspect of increased confidence – "to draw on and make sense of their own personal experience" (p.14) – was applicable in Elaine's case. In this study, the development of confidence and increased self-esteem were inter-linked in ways that supported health outcomes for some learners.

The analysis of the interview data suggested that participation in cbal had supported two further "mediators that link learning to health" (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 40), namely the development of self-efficacy and feelings of agency. Through their participation, some of the learners reported feelings of independence, and that their opinions counted. A sense of agency, or "the active pursuit of goals that are relevant and meaningful" (Delle Fave and Massimini, 2005, pp. 383-384) was highlighted in the stories of some learners who had made decisions about their lives, and carried out their plans. However, the learners did not express the benefits that they perceived of their participation in cbal in terms of agency or self-efficacy. This has potential implications for funding of cbal in the future, in a policy context in which it is

important to be able to report on and provide evidence of the outcomes of cbal provision. It might be important for practitioners to look for ways to evaluate cbal provision that facilitates discussion with learners about the health and well-being outcomes of their participation. The implications of this study in relation to the measurement of outcomes of cbal are discussed further in the conclusions in chapter nine.

Recent research has suggested that participation in learning can contribute to health and subjective well-being (Aldridge & Lavender, 2000; Feinstein & Hammond, 2004; Field, 2009; Schuller et al., 2004). The findings of this study support this to an extent in that some of the learners described the development of a more positive frame of mind through their participation in cbal. However, there were some negative aspects of their participation which had worked against this on some occasions. Field (2009) has noted that some adults experience “anxiety, stress and frustration through learning” (p. 184), and this had been the case for some of the learners in this study. Often, accreditation was a source of concern, both for those who feared assessment processes and for one learner, highlighted in chapter four, who sought external validation for learning. Provision that was badly organised and tutors who were insufficiently prepared were off-putting for the learners in this study, and these aspects of cbal had led to at least one learner discontinuing her involvement. Although there are many benefits of learning in a group (Schuller et al. 2002), both Melanie and Sarah described how insensitive comments from others had been upsetting.

In their study of the impact of learning on health, Aldridge and Lavender (2000) identified further “disbenefits” (p. 19) of learning which related to dissatisfaction with one’s life, and the breakdown of personal relationships, as learners’ “horizons opened up by new learning” (p. 20). The analysis of the data in this study pointed to a sense that many of the learners felt that new opportunities were available to them, and this is explored in chapter six. However, there was no evidence that this had disrupted personal relationships, although this may be because a specific question was not posed in the interviews about effects on learners’ relationships.

Participation in cbal had supported effective coping in a range of personal circumstances, including caring responsibilities, early retirement and disability. Schuller et al (2004) identified “a sense of purpose and future” (p. 50) as one outcome of participation in learning. They noted that this can support effective coping with early retirement due to physical ill-health and disability, and this could be seen in the analysis of data in this study.

The analysis suggested that participation in cbal had played a role in protecting the mental health of some of the learners in this study. Schuller et al. (2002) distinguished this “sustaining effect” (p. 12) of participation in adult learning, from what they described as the more dramatic transformations that can result from education. However, for other learners participation in cbal was part of their recovery from mental health difficulties, alongside other activities. This contrasts with the work of Feinstein and Hammond (2004). Although their investigation did not include the type of learning that is the focus of this study, Feinstein and Hammond found that “leisure courses either lead to depression or are taken by individuals who are becoming depressed and who are not helped out of depression by participation in leisure courses” (p. 216). They noted that this was surprising as their fieldwork (Schuller et al., 2002) had suggested that participation in learning had positive effects on mental health and well-being. They suggested that it could be that some adults become involved in leisure courses when they feel low, as a distraction from their difficulties. In this study, participation in cbal had contributed to some of the learners’ positive mental health to an extent, but some negative experiences had detracted from this on some occasions.

The findings in this chapter did not apply in the same ways to all of the learners in this study. Four of the learners were in good health at the time of the study, and one of these, Helen, did not mention health-related concerns in her interview. However, the analysis of the others’ interviews suggested that participation in cbal had supported their health and well-being in a variety of ways.

Conclusion

There are some overlaps between this chapter and the previous one. Chapter four highlighted that participation in cbal can support the development of human and social capital for some learners, as well as the recovery of lost capital for others. It has been suggested that social capital “is strongly linked to subjective well-being” (Helliwell & Putnam, 2005, p. 455), and the data analysis in this chapter, appears to support this. In this study, social interaction through participation in learning had provided “important sources of personal support” (Field, 2009, p. 186), and had contributed to health and well-being outcomes for some learners. This illustrates the interrelationships among human and social capital outcomes of participation in cbal and aspects of individual health and well-being. I have addressed these aspects separately for ease of discussion but in the lives of the learners in this study, “these factors are related to one another as well as to health and education in complex ways” (Schuller et al., 2004, p. 37).

This study contributes to our understanding of the potential connection between participation in learning and well-being and health, in three ways. Firstly, the study points to an important role for health matters in the complexity of adults’ motivation to attend cbal. In this study, the learners described the ways in which the support of cbal practitioners and feelings of being heard by others, as well as a new sense of agency and independence facilitated health and well-being. Many of the learners in this small-scale study had concerns about health issues prior to their participation. The life history approach revealed a virtuous circle between participation in cbal and positive health, in the context of fears of mental illness and depression described by some learners. Further research is needed to explore this in more depth to uncover potential links between health issues and motivation to participate in cbal.

Secondly, the analysis in this chapter confirms for cbal what has been established previously for other forms of adult learning (Schuller et al. 2004), namely that participation can contribute to learners’ health and well-being. In this study cbal did this by contributing to the learners’ confidence and self-esteem and supporting a sense of purpose, as well as providing a diversion from their health issues. This is an important finding for cbal, given that Feinstein and Hammond (2004) found that

leisure courses can be positively associated with depression. However, this needs to be held in balance with negative experiences of learning that can detract from these potential benefits. The learners in this study identified some aspects of their participation in cbal that had a negative effect on their experiences of learning. It is important that those who provide cbal opportunities are alert to the barriers to learning that poor organisation can create, and that they remain sensitive to the problems that learners might have in their lives.

Finally, this study contributes to knowledge about the relationship between participation in cbal and health and well-being in a third way. Aldridge and Lavender (2000) have noted that making claims of causal links between learning and health “is problematic” (p. 27). This study supports that assertion in that it highlights the complexity of the factors associated with learners’ participation and their health concerns. Moreover, it shows that potential health outcomes of participation in cbal need to be understood in the context of other aspects of learners’ lives. The life stories in this study facilitated understanding of the role of social relationships, events and activities that supported the learners’ positive health, in conjunction with participation in cbal.

CHAPTER SIX: THE LEARNERS' PERSONAL PROGRESSION

Introduction

In chapters four and five I examined participation in cbal in relation to forms of capital and the health and well-being of the learners in this study, themes that I had identified in the third stage of the analysis. In this chapter I build on the knowledge gained in those chapters in order to explore the theme of progression and thereby address the second aim of the research. In this study understanding of progression was enhanced by insights about the role of participation in cbal discussed in the earlier chapters in the sense that they provided the context in which different types of progression might take place. Like forms of capital and health issues, progression was identified as a strong theme in the creation of the life stories and the bridging commentaries. However, it differed from these themes to the extent that progression had been the focus of my study from the start, and some of the interview questions were designed specifically to address this issue.

In the first section of the chapter I discuss relevant literature, reviewed in chapter one, and I identify the components of progression that I looked for in the analysis. Then I explore the participants' perceptions of progression, and I consider the extent to which the learners moved towards their goals during the period of the study, as described by them. I discuss these issues in relation to the learners' participation in cbal, and I conclude that progression had diverse meanings for the learners in this study. In addition, I suggest that cbal played an important role in supporting learner progression, especially for those who were adjusting to changes in their personal circumstances. This chapter shows that participation in cbal contributed to forms of economic, educational, personal and social progression for the learners in this study by supporting them towards their goals.

Progression

One of the aims of this study was to explore experiences of progression from cbal, from the points of view of learners. In order to do this I reviewed the different perspectives on progression that had been highlighted in chapter one and I used a synthesis of these to search for components of progression in the interview

transcripts. The first of these was identified in the literature which prioritised economic outcomes of participation in learning (Humphries, 2008) and is a strong theme in UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning (HM Treasury, 2006; Scottish Government, 2007c):

- Economic progression, in terms of gaining employment or promotion at work.

The second component was progression in learning. This aspect was identified in all of the studies reviewed. However, in some of these (Gallacher et al., 2000; Morrell et al., 2004) the focus was on progression to more advanced levels of study, whereas in others (Blair et al., 1993; McGivney, 1999, 2003; MacLachlan et al., 2008) progression was seen as continuing or planning to learn at any level. In my analysis I decided to use a synthesis of the definitions in the latter group and I looked for:

- Educational progression, indicated by moving to other types of learning at any level, and including plans to continue to learn.

In addition, I included in my analysis two aspects of progression described by McGivney (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003):

- Personal progression characterised as changes in lifestyle or personal circumstances;
- Social progression, including involvement in the local community and volunteering.

This last component of progression highlights further overlaps in discussions about participation in and progression from cbal. Engagement in community activities and volunteering were explored in chapter four in relation to the development of capital. In this chapter, I include these aspects where the learners referred to them in relation to progression, and I aim not to repeat the discussion in chapter four.

In this chapter, three inter-related elements of progression are addressed. The first concerns the learners' plans for the future, and the second relates to their perceptions of what progression might mean for them. I asked a question about the first of these

in the first interview, and asked both questions in the second interview. The third aspect is connected with the learners' progression during the time that they participated in this study. Often, these three parts of progression were discussed together in the interviews, and I have done the same here. However, as far as possible I indicate in the discussion which aspect of progression is being addressed.

Economic progression

For some of the learners in this study economic progression, defined as finding paid employment, featured in their plans for the future. Melanie had a long-term plan to return to work once her son was settled in school, and she said that she wanted to use what she learned in community-based courses "in the big bad world". At the time of the second interview, Melanie had begun to consider starting her own business, but she intended to continue with learning first.

Both Sarah and Linda had given up work due to mental ill-health but they planned to seek paid employment in the future: "yeah, I could start sessional work and that could easily lead to part time, and realistically part time is all I can look at in the foreseeable future anyway. So you know I can't over-emphasise how big that is" (Sarah).

Sarah said that there had been a time in the past that she would not have been able to consider paid work and the last part of her quote suggested that, in Sarah's view, being able to consider employment was an important part of progression. For Linda, participating in cbal was part of preparing herself for work by testing whether she was ready for the commitment and social interaction that having a job requires. The quotations from Melanie, Sarah and Linda illustrated that, while progression in terms of paid work had not been an immediate outcome of participation in cbal, economic progression might take place for these learners in due course.

Some of the learners who included paid work in their future plans were unsure about how and when this would happen: "I'd love to go back to work of some sort. You know some kind of job. What, I don't know. I keep changing my mind" (Linda). Linda expressed both a desire to find paid work and a fear that her depression would

return, and she lacked confidence that she would be successful in finding work: “I’ve still got the problem with interviews though”.

Other learners did not rule out finding new jobs, but their interview responses suggested that they believed it was unlikely:

As I said, I can’t really see me going back to work outwith [the home] ... maybe if the opportunity presents itself, I would maybe go back into the workforce, but at the moment I can’t see myself doing that. I think I’ll probably end my working days as a child minder (Helen).

This suggested that Helen did not see herself as being part of the labour force, despite her work as a childminder. Although she stressed in her interviews that she enjoyed the work that she did, and felt that it was valued by the parents whose children she cared for, it appeared that she did not see it as a job. It is possible that Helen was not part of the workforce in the sense that her work might not be included in labour market statistics if her arrangements with parents were informal. In Helen’s case, it seemed unlikely that economic progression would take place, in terms of new work outside the home.

Similarly, Alison hoped to find work in the future, but she thought it would be difficult to find anything suitable because of her ill-health: “I’d like to think I’d be able to use [learning] to do something, probably on a part-time basis.” An additional barrier to progression for Alison was her responsibility for the care of her daughter. She had given up opportunities to learn in the past because they clashed with her daughter’s activities. For example, she had been unable to attend an artists’ workshop because her daughter attended an after-school club. Alison was clear that she had to take account of her daughter’s needs in any of her future plans, and her progression needs to be viewed in this context.

These learners hoped for economic progression in the future, in terms of finding paid employment, but their plans were fragile and conditional on their personal circumstances. Caring responsibilities, ill-health and lack of confidence were features of their lives that might affect their abilities to achieve their goals. These inter-related

aspects of the learners' personal circumstances presented potential barriers to economic progression. In this study, the life stories showed how the learners' descriptions of progression were closely connected to their personal situations that might in turn impact on economic progression by making it difficult to work outside the home.

Five of the learners in this study had no plans to return to paid employment, but they described educational, personal and social progression as they made decisions about next steps. At the time of the first interviews, Sam was beyond retirement age, and Alan was sixty-four years old. Alan had hoped to return to work, but it was not possible because of his illness and subsequent disability:

So he [former employer] would have given me a job, I know he would have, if I had been able. I thought after the stroke a lot of people can recover ... I wouldn't have the confidence to drive, let alone the physical ability (Alan).

Elaine had been reluctant to give up work: "They gave me ill-health retirement. I thought 'I can't'. I was only thirty-five, I can't, you know. It's aged me. I feel, you know, a lot older". However, she had no plans to return to paid work at the time of the study, although she felt that she was gradually recovering from her depression.

Doreen and Mary were different in the sense that they had chosen not to work: "the way I am the now, you know, thank God we're financially ok, so I've got no need to go out and work. I can't imagine working 'cos I'd have to pay childminders anyway, you know" (Doreen). In terms of economic progression, Mary's decision to give up work could be seen as a regressive step: "They [social workers] said they'd like somebody to be at home. So I went 'that's fine. I'll give up my job'". However, Mary sought progression of a different kind as she prepared to take on a new role as a foster carer. For Doreen and Mary economic progression, defined as finding employment or promotion at work, was not applicable in the context of their lives.

In this study participation in cbal did not lead directly to economic progression for any of the learners. Some of the learners hoped to find paid work in the future but these plans were long-term and conditional on other factors in their lives. For others

economic progression in terms of employment was not relevant because of their personal circumstances. In policy terms, it could be argued that the learners in this study had not achieved economic progression. However, the relationship between participation in cbal in this study and policy priorities was complex. In order to address this important issue in more depth, I examine it separately in chapter seven.

Although not applicable for all, some of the learners in this study could be said to have progressed in economic terms to the extent that they hoped to return to paid employment in the future. Participation in cbal could be seen as a step towards this goal, through supporting the development of human and social capital that might be relevant in the workplace. However, the learners described different forms of progression in their terms that are explored in the following sections.

Educational progression

All of the learners in this study intended to continue to learn, and this was expressed across the interviews in different ways. However, their plans were diverse, and included learning at various levels. For example: “the next step is to get over my fear and actually go to a college-based [course] ... I’ve been thinking about that” (Elaine); “the next thing I thought about was the Basic Sign Language” (Mary); “the only thing is, as I say, I’d like to go back and do the Maths and English” (Helen). In this section I explore educational progression, both in terms of changes to the learners’ participation in learning, and in relation to their perceptions of progression in learning.

To an extent Alison and Melanie could be said to have achieved educational progression in that they moved from cbal to further education (FE): “I started [college] in September and it felt really strange at first because when I went in I knew one other girl who had been doing the Learning Centre classes” (Alison). Melanie had attended cbal for several years but, at the time of the second interview, she had begun to study for a hairdressing qualification at college: “I started college in September, start of September ... em just a year stepping stone for the Hairdressing and then advancing on and whatever”. However, both of these learners had achieved qualifications at FE level in the past, Alison in nursing and Melanie in a course

related to her work in the pub: “I went into Reid Kerr [college] and did the HNC Hosp ... no it wisnae hospitality, it was Licensed House Operations”. On one hand, they had moved forward in their learning, in the sense that they had moved from cbal to a more advanced level, but on the other hand they were repeating learning at a level they had achieved previously.

Alison and Melanie had moved to formal learning during the period of their involvement in this study. However, some of their responses in the interviews suggested that their perceptions of progression included other perspectives. For example, in relation to studying social sciences Alison said, “I’m more aware of the fact that I do maybe understand a bit more than I’d realised about what goes on round about”. Alison identified her participation in cbal as “a big move” and evidence of personal progression in the context of her social isolation through ill-health. In a sense there was progression *to* cbal, as well as from it. Melanie said that she had “already progressed,” and cited having the confidence to attend new courses in the community centre as evidence of this.

For other learners, moving to more formal learning featured in their plans for the future. Elaine had attended cbal for three years and she felt it was time to “move on.” She said that she did not think that she would return to cbal, which suggested that moving on for her would mean attending a different kind of learning provision. She had considered going to college, but she was very unsure about taking this step: “I don’t know if I could commit myself, you know with my health and stuff.” A course that Elaine had found required attendance at college three days per week, and Elaine was concerned that she might not feel well enough to attend for such long periods of time. Helen discussed continuing with her education as an important part of the new stage in her life:

So to eventually go out and do something would be big progress for me, and even if it’s something that I wouldn’t have a qualification with, if it was just something I could go out and do and enjoy, that, I wouldn’t mind that. But I’d be very disappointed if I’d got this opportunity now to go out and do

something and I didn't take it. I would say that would be a step back rather than a step forward for me.

It is unclear whether Helen was making a distinction between 'progress' and 'progression' in this quote. Certainly, in her interviews she talked about moving on in her life now that her children were no longer dependent on her, which suggested that 'progress' included activities such as travel and meeting new people, as well as learning. However, this quote suggested that educational progression was important to Helen too, but she did not define this in terms of gaining qualifications or learning at a more advanced level. She was keen to learn a language, which was linked to her desire to travel, and she considered following up her interest in history. However, Helen thought that she might need to complete a qualification in child care, due to changes in the requirements for child minders, and she was prepared to do this.

Many of the learners intended to continue to participate in cbal, including Alison who combined cbal with attending college. For three of these learners this meant learning at a level below the qualifications they had achieved previously. Alan was keen to return to the computing class in the community centre. He said he wanted to "learn for learning's sake" and was clear that it was "not for leisure", but to broaden his mind. Sarah was proud of her achievements in cbal and the courses linked to her voluntary work. Sarah and Alan were well-qualified, but at the time of this study, they had no plans to learn at a more advanced level.

It could be argued that Linda took a backward step in terms of educational progression. FE, rather than cbal, had been her first experience of education since leaving school. Later she participated in learning at a lower level in cbal. However, she said she was "probably more confident with the computer," and she moved from computing to the 'Back to Work' course. This could be seen as progression in the context of Linda's recovery from depression and, as discussed in chapters four and five, was linked to health and social capital outcomes for Linda. Furthermore, Linda had improved her computing skills, which had brought another benefit that was connected with her family:

it's not until I've come back and spoke about things I've done with my daughter, because she's actually doing this, she's doing this at high school. So it's quite good you know, if she's maybe got a problem then I can [say] 'oh I've done that, so I can help you', you know the kinda way?

This quote illustrated that the skills that Linda had gained in computing enabled her to help her daughter with school work. The tone of the Linda's words suggested that she was proud of this additional benefit of her participation in cbal, which might in turn have built self-esteem and improved her relationship with her daughter. Furthermore, Linda hoped her computing skills might prove useful in other ways in the future, perhaps related to work or further learning.

Linda's caring responsibilities were a potential barrier to her progressing further: "Yeah and looking after my mother and everything. So you've got to try and think how everything would fit in". Like some of learners identified in the discussion of economic progression, Linda's educational progression was conditional on factors in her personal life. Her life story illustrated that her roles as daughter, sister, wife and mother were demanding. Although Linda emphasised that she was happy with this, she identified her caring role as part of the reason that she had not found work, or continued with her college education:

I still have the problems with the schools. If I could get a course that suited the schools, or even a full-time course that suited the schools I would do it ... I don't have anyone to watch them. My mother's over the road, but she's crippled with arthritis ... so if I could get something that was half-nine until half-two again, like the PDA classroom assistant, I would definitely do it. I would love to do Social Work or something".

Other learners intended to continue to participate in cbal:

I'm going to start ECDL...I think that is just a computer course, the European Driving Licence course. I'm starting that in September. And as I said, I think [the tutor] is going to start on the psychology course, and that'll be two mornings anyway tied up (Doreen).

The latter part of this quote suggested that part of the reason that she participated in cbal was to attend an activity other than the gym, and that course content was less important to her than social interaction. Mary planned to continue to participate in cbal, and she hoped to learn about her new role: "the Fostering Network run courses". Mary had moved backwards and forwards between levels of courses, and among a diverse range of subject areas. She did not progress in a linear fashion from one type of learning to another. Rather she dipped in and out of courses as they became available, and zigzagged through learning in the sense that she continued to learn at one level in cbal while beginning a new course at another. Mary's plans in terms of learning suggested a different form of educational progression from her perspective that was connected to her decision to become a foster carer, as well as her continued motivation to learn at any level.

Sam intended to continue to learn Gaelic through cbal. In his descriptions of the various Gaelic classes he had attended, he referred to moving from beginners to intermediate, saying he had "progressed" from one to the other. However, Sam was not confident that he would be able to cope with the challenge of the advanced class:

I think I'm a bit lazy. I like being, how can I put it? It's great being in a class where you're virtually top of the class, if you know what I mean. So that suits me. Then of course you're still learning all the new words and things like that, whereas if I go to an advanced one then I might battle a bit, and I hate battling. You know anything that I want to do, I like to do and do properly. If not, then I get upset.

Although Sam referred to his “laziness,” my interpretation of what he said is that it might have been lack of confidence in learning that prevented Sam going to the advanced class. The quote suggested that he was reluctant to move to more challenging learning unless he felt confident that he would be capable of meeting the challenge. Sam’s words suggested ambivalence in his feelings about educational progression. On the one hand, he enjoyed re-learning Gaelic through cbal but on the other, his lack of confidence might detract from this as well as present an obstacle to moving forward in his learning. This points to an important role for tutors and community workers in cbal supporting progression for learners at points of transition between levels of learning. Learners who lack confidence might need additional support to build belief in their abilities to learn at more advanced levels.

Sam’s perception of progression was being able to speak Gaelic “fluently the way I did as a youngster, and as a teenager”. His level of knowledge and fluency in Gaelic had increased, and he had gained the confidence to use the language with his cousins. In terms of progression, he did not move full-time from informal to formal learning. However, he attended FE and HE for day and weekend events, which consolidated his learning and ensured there were not long periods when he was unable to practise Gaelic, which could be seen as a different form of educational progression.

To an extent re-learning Gaelic was connected with the past for Sam, and it could be argued that his motivation was about nostalgia for his childhood. However, as discussed in chapters four and five, there were social and well-being benefits too. Furthermore, Sam’s achievements in learning fitted with Scottish Government policy on Gaelic language (Scottish Government, 2010) in which increased use of Gaelic, as well as ensuring a sustainable future for the language, are priorities.

This section has shown that the learners in this study felt the need to continue with learning. Their plans were varied and included learning at different levels, but they were expressed in the interviews as part of progression. However, a recurring theme for some learners was that their own needs in learning were held in balance with the needs of others. These circumstances changed at different points in the learners’ lives. For example, as the mother of a young child, Sarah said of the crèche provision: “I just didn’t do it before, so it actually made it possible.” As discussed

earlier Linda was the main carer for her mother and her daughters, and that influenced her decisions about work and learning. Elaine had children of school age, and she anticipated the children getting older when her own needs could come to the fore: “I wouldn’t feel so guilty. My sister did that, when her kids were grown up. She’s a nurse at fifty” (Elaine). Both Melanie and Alison talked about the arrangements that they had made for their children before they were able to consider going to college:

My only downfall with it was trying to get him a placement, because it was a pure nightmare. They wouldn’t say ‘come in.’ They told me they’d no places ... so I spoke to my councillor, after being at the health visitor, the social worker, you name it, nobody was helping me. And then finally I got it sorted and again it was ‘it’ll just be until Christmas’ ... I was like that, so it was back to square one. But back on the phone to the councillor and he went ‘you’ve got it for the full year’. I was like that ‘right, ok’ (Melanie).

Helen was at a different stage in her life because her children were adults, and it was this that had allowed her to think about her own needs: “I’d like to see them settled, and I’d like to see me going on and doing something. I don’t know what, but I always thought, once they go, I’ll concentrate on myself”.

Most of the learners in this study were women who had responsibility for the care of others. Sam supported his wife who did not keep in good health, but he did not mention this in connection with his participation in cbal or his plans to learn in the future. Alan’s wife cared for him: “my wife is my full time carer.” This study has highlighted that some women experience barriers to progression due to caring responsibilities and might need additional support in policy and practice.

Educational progression, defined as moving to further learning at any level, could be seen in the learners’ descriptions in this section, and the learners expressed forms of educational progression that were applicable in the context of their lives. For some learners this was moving to more advanced levels of learning, but for others it

included learning at a lower level than previously or at more than one level at the same time. Educational progression from the learners' perspectives was conditional on factors such as their self-confidence, health and caring responsibilities, and needs to be understood in this context.

Personal progression

In this study progression was connected to the learners' personal circumstances. It is possible that the methods I used drew particular attention to this aspect of progression in that the context of the learners' lives formed the focus of the life history interviews. Nevertheless, the learners' responses suggested strong links between their perceptions of progression and their individual situations. In this study there was a set of relationships between cbal, the learners' lives and progression.

One type of relationship was between participation in cbal and recovery from ill-health. Chapter five highlighted that participation in cbal had contributed to health and well-being outcomes for some of the learners, and the analysis for this chapter suggested that this could be seen as part of progression. Sarah felt that she had not progressed from where she had been as a professional worker in the dance project, but she perceived herself to have made "massive progression" from the fearful, isolated person she had become through her illness:

it really really was you know when [my son] wasn't here, you know I was just kind of in bed, or in the flat with the curtains closed and just like I didn't exist. And now I'm out doing things. I'm quite happy to initiate things, and certainly being involved in all of these things has led to that.

Sarah's perception of progression was linked to her hopes for the future. She was keen to move beyond her unhappy marriage, to have a wide circle of friends one day and to "be completely integrated into regular society".

In Alan's case, progression was linked to his recovery, as well as learning how to live his life as independently as possible. He perceived himself as having already progressed from what he described as "a very low plateau" since the stroke. This

process had begun with becoming physically stronger and more independent: “You know not being able to sit, not being able to balance, to taking a first few steps and learning to walk more independently and set back by other problems.” Alan perceived his participation in cbal as part of progression, as it had been the next step after his attendance at the Disability Resource Centre, which he had “outgrown”.

The experiences of Sarah and Alan illustrated the relationships among participation in cbal, recovery from ill-health and progression. A second relationship between cbal and the learners’ lives related to progression as adjustment to new circumstances.

In this study it was difficult to separate participation in cbal from other aspects of the learners’ lives in order to define progression. Indeed, it could be argued that it would be unrealistic to try to set apart progression in this way, especially as the learners associated progression with their lives in the interviews. In this study, participation in cbal coincided with changes in personal circumstances for many of the learners. For example, Alan, Elaine and Alison had recently retired from work, and at the time of the second interview, Mary had just become a foster carer. Helen was thinking about ways to adjust to her children moving out of the family home. The interview responses suggested that part of progression was adjusting to changes successfully:

For months, the moving on, I’ve been really determined. Because we knew that [my son] was definitely moving out and we thought it would have been before the end of the year...I know I’m determined that I’m going to do something next year (Helen).

One interpretation of Sam’s story was that progression was linked to resettling in Scotland, after forty years away. He had been reluctant to leave Africa, and it is possible that his increased grasp of Gaelic might have helped him to adjust to the changes he had experienced, and to feel connected to Scotland.

Elaine had made changes to her lifestyle during the period of her involvement in the study. She was diagnosed with high blood pressure and was referred to a health project. As a result of this, she went to the gym twice a week and had joined a walking group. Although the impetus for these developments had been the diagnosis

of high blood pressure, it could be said that there was evidence of personal progression in how easily Elaine joined the new groups. She had participated in the women's group a year after she first heard about it, whereas she had gone to the health project as soon as she was referred.

In the second interview, Elaine described progression in a very personal way:

I've moved on. I'm not in a job or something, but I've moved on.

Janis: when you say you've moved on, what do you mean by that?

Elaine: That was 2005 [I started at the community centre], I'm still here in 2008.

In the interview I took this to mean that during her experience of depression Elaine had considered suicide, and that progression was linked to her recovery, and to the fact that, literally, she is still here. This served as a reminder that some factors associated with personal progression, such as the learners' health as well as the health of their families, were outwith the learners' control.

Four learners did not mention any major changes in their personal lives in the interviews. Even so, progression was connected closely to their individual circumstances, which suggested further a relationship between cbal, progression and the learners' lives. For example, Alison and Melanie had achieved educational progression, but they identified other aspects of progression that highlighted the link with their personal circumstances: "so it's making ... I don't know if you'd call it progression or not but it does allow me to progress in a sense with my daughter. It allows us to have some sort of understanding" (Alison).

Melanie described changes to how she felt about herself as part of progression:

I sort of see a difference in myself as well because I go out now to college and I've got my make up on. I treat it as though I'm going somewhere nice,

and I've always got my hair done, and I've got my hair all freebied anyway.

They gie you it all cut and styled and that suits me, it saves me money.

This suggested that going to college meant more to Melanie than educational progression. It was linked to how she felt about herself, and how she thought she might be viewed by others. An unexpected benefit was the money she saved by getting her hair cut and styled by fellow students.

Personal progression was not identified as important by all of the learners in this study. Doreen was convinced of the value of participation in cbal, but she expressed progression in relation to other learners:

It could open the doors for a lot of people. It could build their confidence up...like rather than be quite negative about themselves. I think it can give you that wee boost if you're getting used to being in a crowd and, say, you've got to answer out or speak your views about something. I think it probably can help you going into the workforce if you haven't worked for a few years.

She did not seek this kind of progression for herself: "Not really for me because I've actually, you know, I can sit anywhere and talk to anybody. I don't feel intimidated with anybody, but I do think...that Steps course was amazing".

Although Linda said in her interviews that continuing to learn and finding paid work were part of her plans for the future, she expressed ambivalence about the notion of progression: "Do I need to progress? I don't know. I really don't know. It's something I've never thought of. I'm just quite happy with the way things are. I just don't know if I need to progress."

While Doreen and Linda had identified clear benefits of their participation in cbal in their interviews, their quotes suggested that progression was not a priority for them in the context of other aspects of their lives. It is possible that this was connected with the barriers to progression discussed earlier in the sense that both Linda and

Doreen were mothers of school-age children, and they expressed the view that their own progression needed to be understood in that context.

In the analysis of economic, educational and personal progression in this chapter the caring roles held by the women in this study were identified as potential barriers to progression. Another aspect of progression for some of the learners was linked to family responsibilities in the sense that cbal was associated with helping others. The quotes from Linda and Alison above suggested that they perceived part of progression as being able to help their daughters. Mary's plans for progression were connected to her new role as a foster carer: "we've joined the Fostering Network... so they're doing courses, training courses, and one it's like child... it's an SVQ, so I'm going to do that." For other learners part of progression was linked to helping others through voluntary work, and this is explored in the next section.

In this section I have explored personal progression in relation to the individual learners, rather than as a collective experience. This was because the interview responses suggested that this aspect of progression was intertwined with the distinctive circumstances of the learners, and I wished to illustrate the diversity of the learners' experiences. The analysis drew attention to different types of personal progression for the learners in this study. These were as part of recovery from ill-health, adjusting to changes in personal circumstances, helping others and positive changes to self-esteem. A list of the activities that the learners moved to following their participation in cbal can be found in Appendix O.

Social progression

In this section I explore social progression in terms of increased voluntary commitments and community engagement. Links between this kind of civic engagement and participation in cbal were examined in chapter four, and so I have included here only where the learners perceived these aspects to be part of their progression. As a consequence of this, the section is shorter than the others. Nevertheless, social progression was important to those learners who identified it as part of their development.

Becoming a volunteer was seen as progression by some of the learners in this study: “I do think voluntary. That’s definitely my definitely my next road... I’ll go down. I’ll start that in August.” (Doreen). A guest speaker at Doreen’s cbal group had inspired her to think about volunteering, and at the time of the second interview, she had made enquiries about it, although she had not arranged to start.

Elaine had considered becoming involved with voluntary work, too. However, in relation to this as well as moving to formal learning, she said: “I’m always looking for things but I never actually take it further from here, you know?”, which suggested it might be some time before she was confident enough to take her plan forward. This suggested that from the learners’ perspectives progression was sometimes incomplete and ongoing, in the sense that participation in cbal might be associated with plans for progression, but these were not always implemented immediately. The postscripts to the life stories in chapter three illustrated that plans for progression were sometimes delayed. In some cases the delays were caused by factors outwith the learners’ control. For example, the classes that Alan and Sam planned to attend were cancelled, and Linda was advised that the next level of learning in computing was at college, which she did not want to do at that point. At the time of the second interview, Doreen had tried but been unsuccessful in finding out about voluntary work. Each of the learners in these circumstances hoped to follow through with their plans in due course, but at the end of my contact with them it was unclear when that would take place.

Alan began voluntary work at the hospice in the period between the two interviews. His description of this as “the next stage in the process of my life since the stroke” suggested that he perceived his involvement as part of his progression. However, he described “just expanding my knowledge, you know my general knowledge” as progression too. This suggested that progression meant more than one thing to Alan.

Sarah’s voluntary commitments increased between the research interviews. She joined the Parent Teacher Association at her son’s nursery, and she had taken part in an event that included speaking to politicians about mental illness. Also, she had undertaken advanced training with one of the mental health projects that she was involved with. However, although Sarah talked about voluntary work in her

interviews, she did not include it in her response to my questions about progression. This suggested that progression had a different meaning for Sarah. As well as her plans for further learning and sessional work described above, Sarah described progression in terms of aspects of her personal life such as settling her divorce, and moving house. She hoped to increase her circle of friends and she said “I just want to be happy. I just want to be content. I just want to, you know, have what normal people have”.

Although I had included a reference to community involvement as a prompt in the interview guide for the first interviews, social progression in terms of community engagement and volunteering did not feature in the interviews with the other learners. The focus of their interview responses was more inward-looking, and tended to be concerned with individual development.

The analysis in this chapter revealed forms of social progression in this study. This was part of ongoing, but not yet implemented, plans for involvement in voluntary work for some learners. In addition, it included becoming a volunteer for the first time, as well as increasing existing voluntary commitments.

Discussion

The learners in this study seldom used the word “progression” in the interviews. Although I used it when I introduced the study in each interview, and asked a question about progression specifically in the second interviews, most of the learners used a variety of other terms in their responses. These included “next step”, “progress”, “moving on” and “lead to”. It is not clear why the learners did not use “progression” more often, or why one learner questioned the need to progress, especially when there were signs of progression in the context of her life, and in the life stories of the other learners. Perhaps, like cbal, progression is a term that is jargon, more likely to be used by providers of learning opportunities than by learners.

Nonetheless, the analysis of the data for this chapter suggested that cbal had supported learner progression in this study. Cbal was associated with varied types of progression, namely economic, educational, personal and social progression. Personal progression included a set of relationships between cbal and the learners’

lives, linked to recovery from ill-health, adjustment to changes in personal circumstances and connections with individuals' situations. In this study cbal contributed to the learners' goals in a range of ways. In some cases participation in cbal was associated directly with progression, while in others progression was delayed, and conditional on other factors in the learners' lives.

For the women in this study there was a strong connection between progression, as it was described by them, and their roles as principal carers of family members. For many of the women their responsibilities presented a barrier to progression. A recurring example was that plans for further learning or work had to fit with arrangements for childcare. In this study, the women's learning and progression needs were put on hold in the context of the needs of others. Furthermore, for some learners, helping others was part of progression as it was defined by them. The issue of gender and participation in cbal was outwith the scope of this study. However, the analysis in this chapter suggests the need for further research in order to explore the role of gender in the context of progression in more depth.

In this study participation in cbal did not lead to economic progression directly for any of the learners. However, some learners had begun to think about seeking paid employment in the future, and there was evidence that participation in cbal had supported this. In some cases the focus of the cbal provision was "learning and skills for employment" (Humphries, 2008, p. 32) such as computing and 'Back to Work' courses but, in others, the learners identified increased confidence and changes in personal circumstances as the drivers for their motivation to think about returning to work. Plans for economic progression were very tentative for some learners in this study, and this type of progression was conditional on a range of factors in their personal lives. Nonetheless, participation had supported some learners to begin to include economic progression as part of their future plans.

However, economic progression in terms of paid employment was not relevant in the lives of half of the learners in this small-scale study. Some learners were unable to consider work due to ill-health or caring responsibilities, and others had chosen not to work in order to assume alternative adult roles. This suggests that learning

provision that prioritises economic progression might neglect the needs of learners for whom paid employment is not possible (Field, 2009).

The definition of economic progression used in the analysis for this chapter is a strong theme in UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning (HM Treasury, 2006; Scottish Government, 2007c). However, this study suggests that measures of progression that focus on immediate outcomes related to paid employment do not take account of the skills, knowledge and confidence that were associated with participation in cbal as perceived by the learners. The relationship between cbal and policy priorities is addressed further in the next chapter.

In common with many other studies (Blair et al, 1993; Communities Scotland, 2003; McGivney, 1999, 2003; Morrell et al., 2004) the cbal that was the focus of this study supported a desire to continue to learn for all of the learners. However, educational progression was not characterised as a linear path from informal to formal learning or to more advanced, accredited courses (McGivney, 1999). Participation in cbal had been important in “facilitating the return to more formal learning” (Gallacher et al. 2000) for two learners, but each of these had learned at FE level previously. Other learners intended to continue to participate in cbal, choosing to learn at the same level, and in some cases participating in other learning provision at the same time. The analysis of the interview data in this study pointed to a variety of learning goals. The learners had moved forwards and backwards through a range of learning opportunities, and educational progression was “multi-directional” (Gallacher et al., 2000). However, progression from cbal was aligned with the goals of learners in the sense that cbal had supported their directions, which were identified in this study in retrospect sometimes.

Chapter four highlighted that some of the learners in this study were well-qualified prior to their participation in cbal. However, changes in their personal circumstances had contributed to a situation whereby the learners’ existing qualifications were no longer relevant in terms of paid employment or accredited learning. In these instances, cbal had supported the learners’ progression in the context of their current lives. Furthermore, some learners perceived their participation in cbal as progression for them.

Personal progression was a strong theme in this study, which could be attributed to the focus on individual lives in the life history interviews. Nonetheless, the analysis of the data suggested that progression could not be separated from the learners' personal circumstances and was associated with personal progression in two important ways. The first was connected to personal transitions. Many of the learners in this study had experienced changes in their circumstances, and their participation in cbal coincided with a period of adjustment as they learned to live with these changes. The analysis of their interview data suggested that cbal might have provided a "transitional space" (West, 2008, p. 42) in which the learners were able to adjust to their new circumstances and experiment with new identities (West, 2008). Helen provided an example as she sought a new role for herself after 26 years as the main carer for her own and her minded children. This aspect of personal progression needs further investigation as it was not the focus of this research. Even so, personal transitions were a strong theme in this study, and although it was not explored in depth, some of the learners connected their transitions and progression in the interviews.

The second aspect of personal progression related to "changes in lifestyles or personal circumstances" (McGivney, 1999, p.79). For some learners, progression was closely associated with aspects of their personal lives such as ill-health, disability and caring responsibilities. Perceptions of progression for these learners were expressed in terms of progressing in their lives in ways that facilitated moving beyond these circumstances in order to live their lives in new ways for some, or return to former ways of living for others.

One way of thinking about cbal in this study is in terms of "learning lifelines" that are linked to personal progression. The concept of "lifelines" can be related to cbal in two ways. First, the analysis in this chapter suggested that cbal provided a lifeline for some learners who had experienced challenges in their lives that were potential barriers to progression. For these learners, participation in cbal was a lifeline in that it supported their personal progression, sometimes assisting learners to move beyond constraining circumstances. Second, progression from cbal in this study was closely

linked to learners' contexts. In this sense, cbal was bound up with learners' "lifelines" in that it could not be detached from their individual situations.

Social progression in terms of civic engagement and volunteering has been identified as an important outcome of participation in learning (Feinstein et al., 2003; McGivney, 1999). In this study some learners described their progression in these terms, and this was an important part of their development, especially for "those who were initially isolated and lacking in confidence" (Schuller et al., 2004 p. 176).

This analysis suggested that progression from participation in cbal was affected by other aspects of the learners' lives. Some learners had identified clear goals for the future but had to address barriers such as caring responsibilities or physical mobility in order to be able to achieve these. Others were more tentative about their progression, and the barrier for them was lack of confidence. Nevertheless, all of the learners in this study were able to describe their perceptions of progression either to or from cbal.

Conclusion

This chapter has enhanced our understanding of the potential role of cbal as part of lifelong learning in three ways. Firstly, the study has added learners' perceptions to knowledge about progression. Their descriptions suggest that progression is complex and can be interpreted by learners in a range of ways. In this chapter, different types of progression were identified and addressed separately for ease of discussion, but the learners' responses pointed to overlaps in their interpretations of progression. The learners' perceptions in this study illustrated that progression can "mean different things to different people" (McGivney, 1999, p. 10). In addition, this analysis shows that it can mean more than one thing to an individual learner.

Secondly, some learners in this study had experienced periods of change in their personal lives. The analysis drew attention to the potential for cbal to support learners by providing a transitional space in which they could renegotiate aspects of their lives and facilitate their adjustment to change. However, learner transition was outwith the scope of this study, and further research is needed to examine in depth the ways in which participation in cbal might achieve this.

This chapter has enhanced understanding of progression from cbal in a third way. In this study progression from cbal was connected closely with learners' lives. Some aspects of learners' individual situations created potential barriers to progression, while for others progression was characterised by a desire to move beyond limiting personal circumstances. The cbal that was the focus of this study could be characterised as a "lifeline" that supported progression and was integral to learners' lives. The introduction of the concept of learning lifelines draws attention to the need to take account of learners' life histories as we seek to identify progression. The life history approach adopted for this study was an effective way of showing the meaning of progression from the learners' perspectives, and in the context of their lives.

The review of the literature in chapter one highlighted that progression is a central concern in lifelong learning policy in the UK and Scotland (DfEE, 2009; Scottish Government, 2007). The analysis of the data in this study suggests that participation in cbal can support learner progression, and this is discussed in relation to policy in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CBAL AND POLICY

Introduction

The previous three chapters highlighted the potential contribution of participation in cbal to the development of capital, health and well-being and progression for learners. Chapter six showed the diverse perspectives on progression held by the learners in this study also. The review of the literature in chapter one drew attention to lifelong learning as a central concern in current educational policy in the UK and Scotland, and revealed the need for better understanding in relation to the potential role of cbal as part of lifelong learning and CLD in policy. Therefore, there was a need to explore potential links and gaps between the findings of this study and UK and Scottish Government priorities.

In this chapter I address the third aim of the research by examining Scottish policy for cbal as part of lifelong learning and CLD, and discussing key issues that arise from policy concerns. I draw on the life story and interview data of one of the learners in this study in order to explore the potential connections between learners' experiences and policy matters, or between their private troubles and public issues (Mills, 1959). In the first part of the chapter I explain my reasons for using one story in this way. Then I review briefly the role identified in policy for cbal as well as policy definitions of progression. Next I explore one learner's experiences in relation to policy, and I conclude that cbal can make an important contribution to Government priorities for lifelong learning and CLD. However, this may be in ways that are more fluid than is suggested in policy documents.

Alan's story as an analytical tool

One of the aims of this study was to investigate learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal in relation to priorities for CLD and lifelong learning identified in Scottish policy. In addition, I sought to add learners' perspectives to debates about cbal provision. I decided to draw on the life story and interview data of one learner in this study in order to achieve these aims, and to examine the issues in depth. Alan's story was relevant to analysing policy for two reasons. First, his story facilitated an exploration of cbal in relation to the policy priorities of social inclusion

and economic progression in that his experiences of ill-health and subsequent disability and retirement meant that he might be at risk of exclusion, and paid employment did not feature in his plans. Second, the analysis of Alan's story highlighted potential commonalities and differences in perspectives held by learners and policy-makers.

Policy

In chapter one UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning and CLD was reviewed in depth. In this chapter I focus on three main elements of policy as it affects cbal: priorities for resources, the identified role for cbal and definitions of progression.

Resources

In UK Government policy on lifelong learning, economic outcomes of participation are identified as a priority (HM Treasury, 2006). Within current Scottish policy documents, resources for cbal are to be targeted to priority groups such as those with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, the retired and adults who have not participated in learning for some time (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004). However, *Skills for Scotland (2007c)* emphasises the needs of employers and those who wish to develop their skills for work. This suggests that resources for cbal as part of lifelong learning might not be readily available for provision aimed at those outwith the workforce.

The role for cbal

At UK policy level, a role is identified for informal adult learning to contribute to a range of outcomes for individuals and communities, but there is an emphasis on supporting adults to develop their skills for work (DfIUS, 2009).

In the Scottish context in relation to CLD, the priorities are to support adults in the development of their core skills, and to facilitate engagement in local decision-making processes by community groups (Scottish Executive, 2004). In policy statements about lifelong learning, there is a role for cbal to address both social inclusion and the needs of the economy (Scottish Executive, 2003). However,

employers are identified as key stakeholders, and there is an emphasis on the economic outcomes of participation in learning (Scottish Government, 2007c).

Progression

The potential role for cbal to support learner progression is acknowledged in UK and Scottish lifelong learning policy (DfiUS, 2009; Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007c). At both levels of policy, progression is characterised as moving from informal to formal learning, especially to more advanced and accredited courses. In addition, progression is seen as leading potentially to new employment or promotion at work.

Policy and Alan's experiences

These three policy areas can be analysed in relation to Alan's experiences of participation in and progression from cbal. From Alan's life story and interview data it is unclear whether he belonged to one of the target groups identified in Government policy. Prior to becoming ill, he had been employed in a senior position in industry, he was financially secure and his children were no longer dependent on him. However, since the stroke and Alan's subsequent experience of disability, he fitted more closely with policy definitions of disadvantage and exclusion. He was unable to return to work, which affected his economic situation, and he had limited access to opportunities due to his disability. On one hand, Alan's circumstances suggested that, in policy terms, efforts should be made to attract him into cbal provision. On the other hand, Alan's age and disability meant that it was unlikely that he would return to the workforce. Furthermore, he could not be considered to be "disengaged from learning" (Scottish Executive, 2003, p.40). Prior to his participation in cbal he had accessed learning opportunities throughout his adult life, and he held formal qualifications at a high level (SCQF, 2003).

This analysis of Alan's story draws attention to an ambiguity in relation to which groups of prospective learners should be targeted by funders and providers of cbal. Target groups have been identified in some policy statements (Scottish Executive 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004), but one of these, retired adults, does not fit well with the government priority of addressing the needs of employers. In addition,

Alan's story highlights the potential for policy to neglect those for whom paid employment is not an option (Field, 2009).

In chapters four and five a range of outcomes of participation in cbal were described by Alan. The development of new social networks was highlighted as particularly important in the context of his earlier loss of social capital, and there was an unexpected outcome in terms of his updated computing skills: "By that time I should be into it [voluntary work], so the computer class is coming to its use there you see. I didn't go in for that reason, but I'm glad I did. It refreshed my memory". In addition, Alan identified increased confidence and self-esteem as having contributed to his sense of well-being.

These outcomes fit well with policy statements that identify social inclusion and the development of core skills such as computing as some of the goals of lifelong learning (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2004). However, they are somewhat at odds with other policy aims of economic benefits for both individuals and the economy. If, as Field (2006) asserts, these latter aims are prioritised by UK and Scottish government, the outcomes of Alan's participation in cbal will not be valued in policy terms. This analysis of Alan's life story and interview data identifies important outcomes of his participation in cbal, and the need for these to be more explicitly acknowledged in policy.

In the context of Alan's life, progression was linked to his recovery from the stroke, as well as learning how to live his life as independently as possible. From Alan's perspective it was relevant to consider progression *to* cbal as well as from it. However, he identified further progression, in terms of continuing to learn and undertaking voluntary work. This highlights commonalities between these forms of educational and social progression described by Alan, and policy that has identified continued learning and engagement with community groups as important outcomes of CLD and lifelong learning.

Conversely, in relation to lifelong learning policy, Alan might be seen as not progressing as he had no plans to move either to a more formal learning environment or into paid employment. In the context of Alan's personal circumstances, moving to

more formal learning opportunities, with the associated stress of accreditation, was not appropriate, and returning to work was not a viable option because of his illness and disability. However, as he saw it, entering voluntary work was progression, as he worked through the various stages of recovery towards independent living.

The analysis of Alan's interview data pointed to other interpretations of progression. During the period between our conversations, he had gone with a group on a ramble. The other group members were all able-bodied, and they had hired a motorised wheelchair in order that Alan could keep up with the pace. One member of the group had taken some video footage of the outing and Alan showed it to me. Then he ran the tape backwards and we both laughed about how Alan looked travelling backwards in his wheelchair. Alan had identified going with the group as personal progression, but another interpretation was that being able to laugh about his disability was part of progression also. As part of the same conversation, Alan told me that he had been to Spain on holiday with his wife and members of her family. Although he did not say so, this could be seen as progression for Alan, as he would have been unable to contemplate such an upheaval at the time of our first meeting.

At the time of the first interview, Alan hoped to continue to improve his computing skills, and he was considering learning other subjects such as history or art. However, as the postscript to Alan's life story in chapter three showed, the classes in his local community centre were cancelled, and he had not attended any further cbal at the time of the second interview. In Alan's case there was a risk that the educational progression he had planned, as well as the potential benefits of his participation in cbal, could be undermined through the cancellation of cbal opportunities.

This analysis of Alan's story highlights commonalities and differences in perspectives on progression between policy makers and learners (McGivney, 2002). In Alan's case, some policy interpretations of progression were neither appropriate nor desirable. Nonetheless, he had progressed in his own terms, and could be said to have achieved policy goals in relation to social inclusion and increased engagement with community groups, through his involvement in voluntary work.

Discussion

The analysis in this chapter has highlighted some commonalities and some contrasts between Alan's experiences of participation in and progression from cbal, and policy statements about the priorities for this type of lifelong learning provision.

To an extent Alan belonged to the target groups identified in lifelong learning policy, in that he has a disability and is retired from work (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007c). However, he did not fit easily with some descriptions of disadvantage because of his education and employment history. Nonetheless, Alan identified benefits from his participation in cbal. These included some of the goals of policy, such as the development of new skills and achievement of formal qualifications, but there was a range of wider benefits of learning also (Schuller et al., 2004). These were the development of Alan's social networks and increased confidence and self-esteem that in turn contributed to Alan's sense of well-being, as discussed in earlier chapters. Alan's story suggests that for some learners there is a variety of outcomes of participation in cbal that go beyond the vocational, and there is a need to ensure that these are valued in policy. As Feinstein and Sabates (2008) have observed, a view of the aims and purposes of adult learning that takes account of a broad range of outcomes of participation is important, as discussed in chapter five.

In relation to progression, Alan met one of the aims of policy in that he gained accreditation for his learning, but his perspective on progression emphasised important aspects of progression that were linked to his personal circumstances and social life. There was no evidence of economic progression for Alan in the analysis in this study, but he described personal, social and educational progression (McGivney, 1999). Alan's perspective draws attention to the need for policy to take account of the connection between progression and the context of learners' lives. As his story showed, cbal can support learner progression, but there is a risk that this might be overlooked in policy because it can be long-term and less visible than moving directly from cbal to formal learning or paid employment.

Greater account of learners' contexts could be achieved through increased use of Individual Learning Plans by practitioners to identify learners' starting-points in the context of their lives and track progression toward their identified goals, monitored through the existing inspection regime.

The analysis in this chapter has focused on the experiences and life history of one learner. However, Alan is part of the estimated 20% of the working-age population who are economically inactive because they are unable to work due to caring responsibilities or ill-health (Scottish Government, 2007b). Furthermore, Alan's story is relevant to policy in the context of the Scottish Government's concern to plan for an ageing population (Scottish Government, 2007a). Strategic outcomes identified as part of this include extending opportunities for older people to learn throughout their lives and to participate in their communities. For these reasons, the extent to which Alan achieved the goals of policy has implications for planning and funding cbal for a large number of potential learners in Scotland whose circumstances might be similar to Alan's.

To an extent this analysis suggests that policy statements about the aims of cbal, as well as for whom it is provided, are too narrow. However, the current, economic climate raises questions about the ways in which limited resources ought to be targeted. One side of the debate might argue that resources for cbal should be targeted towards those learners with the least human and social capital, and should support only that provision that facilitates learner progression directly into formal learning or work. However, another view is that adults in a range of situations can benefit from participation in cbal, especially those for whom changes in their personal circumstances have led to the loss of previously held capital. Moreover, while learners might emphasise their personal and social progression at one stage in their learning, it is possible that these might lead to economic and educational progression in the future. In Alan's case, personal progression in terms of increased confidence and self-esteem had been associated with social progression which could be seen in his engagement in voluntary work. However, the cbal that he had planned to attend as part of his educational progression was withdrawn, underlining the potentially fragile nature of funding for cbal in the current economic conditions.

Some of the outcomes of and progression from cbal in this study are less visible and more difficult to measure than movement to accredited formal learning or improved employment prospects. Nevertheless, this study suggests that they were important in the context of learners' lives. There is a need to find ways to measure the outcomes of participation in cbal, as well as the kinds of progression that matter to learners in order to meet the demands in policy for increased accountability for public funding. Furthermore, learners cited specific aspects of cbal that supported their participation and progression such as the provision of crèche facilities and the accessibility of the community centres, as well as the friendly staff and informality of the provision. In this study the nature of cbal was key to supporting learners for whom access to learning opportunities and progression was not easy due to difficult personal circumstances

Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the potential role for cbal in relation to UK and Scottish policy on lifelong learning. The analysis suggests that cbal can make a valuable contribution to the goals of policy in two main ways. First, cbal can provide a step into learning for adults whose personal circumstances might present some barriers to progression. As this chapter shows, this can be important for those for whom human and social capital has been lost, as well as those who have been disengaged from learning for some time. Second, the features of cbal such as supportive tutors, informal atmosphere, local provision and crèche facilities can support progression from learners' starting-points towards their identified goals. Different forms of economic, educational, personal and social progression can arise from participation in cbal, but these overlap in the context of learners lives. Some of these might coincide with policy goals connected to social inclusion and lifelong learning, but this might be in ways and in timescales that are more variable than is suggested in policy. Furthermore, by starting with learners' contexts, cbal can support a range of adult roles, such as caring and volunteering, and not just those of paid employment.

The practitioners that provided the cbal that was the focus of this study were effective in providing a setting in which the learners were not constrained by their personal circumstances, and were able to consider progression. In an environment in

which resources are limited, and there is an emphasis on accountability, this study supports arguments for cbal provision for which the outcomes of participation are not visible or easily measured, and it highlights the need to identify methods for measuring outcomes and progression that matter to learners. In addition, it illustrates the overlaps among different types of outcomes and progression, and it draws attention to the possibility that one may lead to another.

Practitioners should be supported to continue working with learners to help them move towards their goals in ways appropriate to them. This need not be in conflict with policy priorities. Community based adult learning can have an important role in the achievement of the aims of lifelong learning policy, while supporting the personal goals of learners.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE MEANING OF LIFE HISTORY

Introduction

In chapter seven I discussed my analysis of the interview data in relation to UK and Scottish policy statements about priorities for cbal. In this chapter I move from the discussion of findings to consider features of the approach I adopted for my study in order to show how the life history method that I adapted might be an effective way to investigate cbal. In the first section I explore the ways in which I undertook the study and consider how these fitted with my experience as an informal educator. Next I discuss some strengths and weaknesses of my approach to life history research. Then I explore the experiences of participating in the study, from the points of view of the learners. I conclude that aspects of my professional experience shaped this study, and that there were both advantages and disadvantages of my approach. In addition, I suggest that taking part in a life history investigation had an impact on some of the learners in some negative, but mainly positive ways. Finally I suggest that an informal education approach to life history research can be a useful way to study cbal, as well as an effective tool for learning.

An informal education approach to life history

My experience and this study

At the start of the PhD process I was relatively new to research. I had undertaken an evaluation of cbal in South Lanarkshire for my Masters qualification some years earlier, using questionnaires. However, the PhD study was different in that I chose to use life history interviews as the method of data collection, and the study was much more in-depth.

Research interviewing was new to me, and I developed my skills by reading the literature (Gillham, 2000, 2005), and by way of practice as I moved through the pilot project and the various stages of the main study. However, I found that my professional experience of working with adults in communities shaped how I carried out the research.

I adopted a life history approach to this study for the reasons described in chapter two. Moreover, I found that I could work with the research participants in ways that fitted with my professional experience and were aligned to my values as a community educator.

In this section I discuss the ways in which I conducted this study in relation to theories of informal education. In order to do this I make use of the defining features of informal education identified in the literature (Crosby, 2001; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). Specifically, I explore:

- the links with informal education that is “based around conversation” (Jeffs and Smith, 2005, p. 23);
- the role of building relationships;
- the principle of working collaboratively with others.

A detailed description of my data collection and analysis is included in the chapter on research design, but in this section I discuss how I conducted this study in relation to these three features of informal education, in order to show how my adapted method of life history research was suited to the study of cbal.

The first of these relates to the commitment in informal and community education to conversation, and is linked to the value of “respect for persons” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 20). In my study I made use of dialogue to show the learners that I was interested in them, and that I respected their views. I did this by engaging them in conversations about their lives and listening carefully to their descriptions of their experiences. As Gillham has observed, “careful listening is the central skill in interviewing” (2005, p. 29). In this there was a good match between the commitment in informal education to conversation, and good practice in research interviewing.

Secondly, in accordance with definitions of informal education that place emphasis on the relationships between educators and learners (Crosby, 2001; Jeffs and Smith, 2005), I worked hard to build relationships with the learners. I used email and telephone contact, as well as the two interviews in order to maintain links with the learners during their involvement with the study, a period of approximately one year. In addition, in common with the feminist approach to biographical research

described by Merrill and West (2009,) I was prepared to answer questions as well as ask them. For example, on some occasions, the learners asked me about aspects of my personal life such as holiday plans or family responsibilities and I answered these. Although there were boundaries to my relationships with the learners in the sense that I was a researcher and they were participants in my research, I was committed to building trust within the relationships, and shared some information about myself as part of this approach.

In this there was a risk that some learners might ask questions or seek to develop our relationship beyond the boundaries of the research project. I addressed this at the start and end of my contact with the learners, although I aimed to be open and friendly throughout. I tried to be clear about my role as a researcher at the outset, using my introductory script, and I ended the data collection phase of the research by stating that I had all I needed for my project and there was no need for further contact. None of the learners asked me anything that overstepped the boundaries of the research relationship but in the event that they did, I would have steered the conversation back to the research topic, using the interview guide.

The third feature relates to the concern in informal education to share power with learners, where possible (Freire, 1970), and to work in partnership with them. In this study, I set the agenda in that the focus of the study, and the interview questions were determined by me. However, I tried to work jointly with learners in the first stage of the analysis. I created the life stories in collaboration with the learners, and I sought their approval for revised versions of their stories. Merrill and West (2009) described how feminist researchers had chosen biographical and life history approaches in order to give voice to women who previously had not been heard in social science research. They showed how feminist-inspired research “became increasingly presented and celebrated as a participatory enterprise” (p. 30). In my study I sought to add learners’ perspectives to debates about cbal, and to do this I used life history as a method of research that involved the participants in the study and maintained their perspectives at the heart of the investigation.

As this discussion has shown, my professional experience in adult learning, and my commitment to informal ways of working with learners shaped how I carried out this

study. However, it was important to take account of the different purposes of research and community education. As an educator I had worked to build relationships with adults with the aim of engaging them in educational activities that were “rooted in the interests and experience of ordinary people” (Tett, 2010, p. 33). In this research I had built relationships with the learners in ways that aligned with community education, but the purpose was to engage them in a process that would support in-depth investigation of their experiences of participation in and progression from cbal provision. In the next section I consider some strengths and weaknesses of an informal education approach to life history in this study.

Strengths and weaknesses of the approach

One outcome of the experience and professional values that I brought to the research process was that I was able to collect rich data. During the interviews the learners shared many personal aspects of their lives, and some contacted me with additional information as it occurred to them. Two examples are provided by Mary, who emailed details of courses she had forgotten to tell me about in her interview and Sarah who told me how her life had developed since our meeting, when I sent her life story for approval. This was a strength of the relationship-building approach I had adopted.

Working jointly with learners is an important principle of community education (CeVe, 1995), and this led to the collaborative method that I used in the creation of the life stories. One aspect of this was that the learners had the opportunity to read and comment on this stage of my analysis, and the final versions of their stories were approved by them. To an extent this was a strength in the sense that the learners had the opportunity to check my interpretation of their interview data, which contributed to the credibility of the research. However, it was important to acknowledge the limits of the collaboration. As it took place within the context of my relationship with the learners, as researcher and researched, I could not be certain that the learners felt able to dispute the content of the life stories I had created. Nonetheless, as described in chapter two, most of the learners did suggest that I make changes to their stories, and so I hoped that meant they felt confident to say if they disagreed with my interpretations, or if they wanted to revise or correct them.

An informal education approach to life history contributed to the collection of rich data, and to the validity of the research in this study. However, there were potential weaknesses too. It was possible that due to the constructive relationship that had been built, the learners would feel pressured to tell me in their interviews what they thought I wanted to hear. As part of my commitment to openness in the research process, I had explained the nature of the study and my interest in progression. Therefore there was a risk that the learners would focus on the positive aspects of their experiences of participation in cbal, and might suppress any negative aspects.

To an extent the relationship I had built with the learners helped me to address this. I used the dialogue in the interviews to make clear that I wished the learners to feel free to express their views. I emphasised that I valued their contribution, whatever that might be and that I was interested in their experiences. In addition, I sought information about any negative aspects of participation in cbal by including a prompt about this in the interview guide. As discussed in chapter five, some of the learners did tell me about aspects of their participation in cbal that had not been positive. I took this as an indication that they did not feel pressured to suppress negative opinions, and a way of checking that the learners had felt comfortable to express their views in the interviews.

Another potential problem was that the learners might wish to portray themselves to me in a positive light. Denzin (1989) has argued that autobiographical statements should be viewed as a “mixture of fiction and non-fiction” (p. 24), but that each statement will contain “certain unique truths” (p. 24). In this study there were two occasions upon which there were signs that the learners wished to present an idealised version of themselves. The first was in Sarah’s interviews. Although she told me in detail about the mental illness she had suffered, she talked in positive terms about the current state of her mental health: “mental health, I think I’m probably a lot better than most people”. However, she said that she was still seeing a psychotherapist at the time of the second interview, which suggested that her recovery might not be as full as she had described. The second example involved Alan. At his second interview he gave me a version of his life story that he had written after receiving the one I had created. The revised story included many details

about his professional life prior to his illness such as what he had earned and his various job titles, and he seemed keen that I understand that he had been successful in business and had held qualifications in the past. Alan talked in his interviews about how he felt about how he was treated by others since being confined to a wheelchair: “I get annoyed with people who don’t treat me as a whole person. They don’t know they’re doing it but I notice it”. One interpretation of his revisions of his life story for this research was that he wished to present himself in a way that was not limited by his disability. The version of Alan’s life story that is presented in chapter three is the one he provided in order to represent him as he presented himself.

In these examples the learners idealised themselves in different ways. Sarah was concerned to present her recovery from illness as positively as possible, and it seemed that she wished that part of her life history to be kept in the past, and not part of her present situation. This was distinct from Alan, whose concern was to ensure that his past experiences in business were included in how he was viewed now.

I reflected on the problem of how the learners presented themselves during the course of the research, and I addressed this by aiming not to take the learners’ accounts of their lives uncritically, and by checking my interpretations of their stories with them. In the examples above, I included the fragile nature of Sarah’s recovery from mental illness, and Alan’s feelings about others’ views of his disability in my analysis of their data. However, a feature of the life history method is that no one story exists or can be told consistently, which contributes to the complexity of the learners’ stories.

Field notes and the research journal

I have said above that I reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of the approach I adopted for this study. In order to do this I made use of my field notes and my research journal. I described in chapter two how I used these throughout the period of the study. However, it is relevant here to discuss how I used them identify the strengths and weaknesses of the study as well as reflect on the informal education features of my approach.

I wrote field notes and journal entries on the days that I conducted interviews, and both processes supported reflection in the sense that I analysed the interviews through the writing process, and identified strengths and weaknesses of the research. In the field notes I recorded initial thoughts about the interview procedure, and noted anything that I thought I should do differently at the next one. For example, in the field notes for the first interview with Doreen, I reflected that her responses to my questions were short and I noted that I needed to make greater use of prompts and probes at the next interview.

I tended to write in my research journal later in the day which allowed me time to reflect further on the interviews. I used the journal to record how I felt about the interview process, and to reflect on my own responses in the study. For example, in the entry for the first interview with Sarah, I recorded that I had been uncomfortable hearing some of the information that she had shared about the causes of her mental illness, and I noted that although Sarah seemed happy to talk about it, I needed to be more prepared to receive emotional responses to the questions I asked. In these examples, the process of writing reflectively facilitated improvements to the way in which I carried out the research.

The field notes and research journal helped me to take a reflective approach to this study, as they raised my awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the study as it progressed. In this way I was able to adjust how I managed the interviews when I identified a potential problem. Later, at the analysis stages described in chapter two I copied relevant entries from my field notes and research journal, and kept these in the files for each learner. Re-reading my notes and journal entries at various stages of the analysis helped me to keep the individual learners in mind as I wrote about them.

Towards the end of the investigation the field notes and research journal allowed me to reflect on the study as a whole, and not just each interview as it happened. For example, I was able to use them to reflect further in order to undertake the analysis of my approach for this chapter. It was through this process of reflection that I began to see the commonalities between my commitments in informal education and the approach that I adopted for this study.

The focus of this chapter has been the ways in which my professional background influenced my approach to this study. Therefore, I have explored potential strengths and weaknesses of the study that arose directly from my experience in and commitment to informal and community education. The limitations of the study are discussed further in the conclusions in chapter nine.

The learners and life history

In this section I explore the experiences of participating in life history research for the learners in this study. I did not include a question about this specifically in the interviews, but some of the learners told me about aspects of their participation, and these are discussed here.

Two of the learners asked if they could keep the copies of the lifelines and the learning charts that I had created for them. Melanie commented that she liked her charts, and both she and Mary appeared to value them as a record of their achievements:

I've done quite a lot actually... I suppose I didn't really think I'd done that much. But when you see it written down you think 'oh that's right I did that, and I did that' and it brings it back to you basically (Mary).

Other learners shared their charts and life stories with family members: "But no, that's definitely me. My husband read it as well and he said 'oh that's definitely you'" (Linda). Linda did not say how much discussion with her husband her story prompted, but she had reflected on how she would feel if people in her neighbourhood read it, especially in relation to the problems within her family and her depression. She came to the conclusion that "there's nothing I would be ashamed or bothered about. It is part of who I am, which I think I said to you the last time." One interpretation of this comment is that reading her story supported Linda to reflect on and accept these aspects of her life.

Alan showed his life story to his family, and this opened up a discussion with them about his experiences of trying to find employment as a young man. Alan felt that his

daughters had a better understanding of the discrimination he had encountered, which he was glad about. Also, he felt he gained personally from participating in the research:

I quite enjoyed it actually; you know helping you in this. But it's good to have it down in writing actually. It was good therapy for me to see ... not exactly the frustration I went through in these early years, but virtually all my life.

In Alan's case, reading his life story was linked to action. He decided to write to the Institute of Insurers to tell them about his experiences and to ascertain if his situation would be treated differently now. To an extent, taking part in the research had contributed to a return of Alan's feelings of frustration, but also it had prompted him to take action which might help him to find a way of concluding the matter for himself satisfactorily.

Helen took action after reading her life story, also. She started to make enquiries at universities and colleges about learning opportunities that she could access when her children left home. Participation in this research appeared to have added to Helen's sense that her education was incomplete:

There was definitely one thing had come through. I've started further education so many times and never completed it. Wee bit annoyed with myself that I have started so many things and never seen them through to the end. Maybe I found excuses along the way not to complete it, but I was enthusiastic at the time.

However, by the end of Helen's involvement in the study she had not followed up her enquiries because one of the parents for whom she worked asked her to change from part-time to full-time hours for a short time.

For both Alan and Helen the actions they had taken were linked to feelings of unfulfilled potential: “I feel sometimes when I see my contemporaries, people I knew or have met, who would have been my ... you know ... who did well in insurance, in life you know? And I said to myself ‘I could have done that’” (Alan). Helen expressed regret about missing one year of primary school: “So I feel as if I missed a chunk of school that didn’t stand me in good stead when it came to my standard grades. I just felt as if there was a chunk of my education missing”. It seems possible that reading their stories had led to reflection on these feelings, and had prompted action related to them.

Like Helen, Elaine had missed some of her schooling. In Elaine’s case this was due to ill-health in primary seven. However, she did not refer to this in relation to participating in this research. Elaine’s experience illustrates that taking part in life history research was not a positive experience for all of the learners. As Elaine’s experience, discussed in depth in chapter two demonstrates, recalling difficult events can be upsetting. However, Elaine identified a positive aspect of her participation also. During her second interview, she said “I’m still worthwhile as a person” in relation to her depression, and she cited her involvement in this study as evidence of this.

The participants in this study were able to identify that they had learned through cbal, and the comment from Alan about helping me with my project, as well as Elaine’s words above, highlighted that they contributed to my learning also, through their involvement in the research. At the start of the research process I had been influenced by Creswell (1998) who described the role of the qualitative researcher as that of committed learner. By the end of the project I had learned from the participants about their experiences of participation in and progression from cbal, as well as how to take a participatory approach to research. I had developed an innovative way of using informal education methods in life history research.

The other learners did not talk about their experiences of participating in the research. Alison was happy with the life story I had created and made few further comments. Sam, Doreen and Sarah discussed their stories in detail, and made several

additions to the information presented but did not express feelings about their role in the study.

Learning from life history

In their study of learning in the life-course, Goodson et al. (2010) noted that life stories can “function as ‘sites’ for learning” (p. 14). They found evidence that the participants in their research had learned from telling their stories, and that in some cases narrative learning had affected their lives.

The analysis of the interview data in this study suggests that some of the learners were affected in different ways by their participation. In some cases, the “learning potential” (Goodson et al., 2010, p.13) of the life stories was to the fore. Examples are Mary and Linda who reflected individually and came to some conclusions about aspects of their lives, as well as Alan who shared his life story with others which supported increased understanding with family members. In other cases, there was evidence of “the action potential” of life stories (p. 13). This could be seen in relation to Alan and Helen for whom their life stories were an impetus for doing something to change situations that caused them frustration.

Elaine’s experience highlighted that life history research might not lead to new learning necessarily, even in circumstances where it has affected the participants to some degree.

However, the analysis in this chapter suggests that life history methods supported learning for some of the learners in the sense that participation in this research prompted reflection on their lives. Furthermore, it affirmed for some learners, by way of their collaboration on the learning charts, that they had indeed learned through it. Merrill (2007) has discussed this, arguing that biographical approaches might play a useful role in community based adult education in particular. She drew attention to the work of Freire (1970) who highlighted the importance of building learning around the lives of learners, and she suggested that sharing biographies could act as “a tool for understanding and challenging inequalities in society” (p. 87). This highlights again, the links between informal approaches to education and life

history research in which learning begins in conversations and is created from the experiences of participants.

It is difficult to ascertain from this analysis the extent to which participation in life history research might support learning, as this was not the focus of this small-scale study. However, the data suggest that being involved in the creation of life stories prompted reflection, learning or action for some of the learners. Therefore, there might be a role for life history methods “as a basis for reflection and learning at all levels of adult education” (Merrill, 2007, p. 86).

Conclusion

The reflexive approach that I have taken in this study, supported by the field notes and maintenance of the research journal, highlighted that my commitment to and experience of the theories and principles of informal education played an important role in the way I undertook this study. By entering into dialogue with the learners, and building relationships in order to work collaboratively with them, I was able to undertake in-depth examination of cbal.

The literature points to the influence of feminism on biographical research, especially on the development of participatory and collaborative approaches, and I have developed this to include the influence of informal education theory on my own investigation. This study suggests that an informal education approach to life history research can be an effective way to examine participation in and progression from cbal. Identified strengths of the approach were constructive relationships that facilitated the collection of rich data, and opportunities for learners to check my interpretations. However, potential weaknesses were identified also, especially where strong relationships might affect interview responses.

This study confirmed the potential role for life history and biographical approaches as effective tools for learning as well as research. However, more research is needed to examine this in depth. In this study, the approach to life history that I adapted, using informal education methods, was an effective way to research cbal. Moreover, this approach supported some participants’ learning, as well as my own.

CHAPTER NINE: LEARNING LIFELINES

Introduction

In chapter eight I discussed aspects of the approach that I took in this investigation. In this chapter I draw conclusions from the study. First I consider the aims of the research identified in chapter one, and I explore the extent to which these have been met in this study. Next I show how this study has contributed to knowledge about cbal in the context of existing research in this field, and I introduce the concept of learning lifelines that I developed in this investigation. Then I discuss the limitations of the research. Finally, I discuss the implications of this study for cbal policy and practice, and I suggest areas for future research.

The aims of the research

The review of the literature in chapter two suggested that not enough was known about participation in and progression from cbal in Scotland. In particular, there was a need to explore learners' views in the context of contrasting perspectives on this type of adult learning provision in the literature as well as in policy documents.

This research investigated the potential contribution of Scottish community based adult learning, and added learners' perspectives to knowledge about this kind of learning provision. I identified three aims for the study:

- Examine the potential role and contribution of cbal in the context of learners' past and present lives;
- Explore learners' perceptions of progression and construct the meaning of progression from the learners' point of view;
- Investigate learners' experiences of participation in and progression from cbal in relation to priorities for CLD and lifelong learning identified in Scottish policy.

I examined these aspects of cbal in light of the contrasting views on this area of work identified in the literature. In the next three sections I address each of these aims in turn and discuss how they have been met in this study.

The role and contribution of participation in cbal

I examined the role of cbal in the context of learners' lives through the construction of the life stories. The stories showed that participation in and progression from cbal was complex, and was experienced differently by each individual. Participation in cbal had been important for each of the learners in this study. However, the life stories highlighted that this can best be understood as one element of the learners' lives, alongside others, such as relationships with family and friends, involvement in voluntary or paid work and, in some cases, ill-health and medical interventions.

I investigated the potential contribution of cbal further through in-depth examination of the common themes identified in the third stage of analysis. This showed that cbal supported the development of human and social capital, as well as the health and well-being of some learners. Others were supported in the recovery of lost or decreased capital. Furthermore, the study revealed inter-connections between forms of capital and showed how these vary in relation to individual learners' circumstances.

Some learners had negative views on aspects of cbal. However, this study suggests an important role for cbal overall, that is intertwined with individual learners' lives.

The learners' perceptions of progression

This study revealed diverse perceptions of progression that were closely connected to the learners' individual situations. Progression from the learners' points of view was complex. In some cases, personal circumstances were a potential obstacle, but in others they formed part of how the learners' perceived their progression. This study suggests a role for cbal in supporting learners' progression in the context of their personal circumstances.

In relation to contrasting perspectives on cbal, economic progression featured in the future plans of some learners, but this was not a relevant goal for others. The study showed that cbal contributed to individual development in terms of the educational and personal progression identified by all of the learners. In this study, cbal was associated with social progression in terms of increased engagement in community

activities, but there was almost no evidence of the development of critical perspectives leading to collective action for social change.

Cbal and policy

The approach adopted for this study facilitated the investigation of the learners' perspectives on progression in relation to policy priorities for CLD and lifelong learning. The study highlighted commonalities and differences between the learners' perspectives and those identified in policy. In addition, it drew attention to the risk that less visible benefits of participation in cbal might be overlooked in policy, especially in the context of increased focus on outcomes and debates about potential cuts to funding for cbal. This study showed that cbal can make a valuable contribution to policy goals, although this may be in different ways than those anticipated by policy-makers.

Learning lifelines and what is known about community based adult learning

This study investigated participation in and progression from cbal from the learners' points of view, and it contributes to knowledge about cbal in three ways. First, the learners' perspectives enhance understanding of the term "progression". This supports the work of MacLachlan et al. (2008) who found that progression was interpreted in a variety of ways but was seen primarily by participants as moving forward in learning. In this study, progression included the achievement of goals in learners' personal and social lives, as well as moving forward in learning. This study has extended understanding of the term to include progression in a range of contexts.

Second, this study builds on the work of Schuller et al. (2004) in that it confirms for cbal what their research found in relation to a broad range of adult learning provision, namely that participation can contribute to health and social capital outcomes for learners. In addition, this study expands on these findings to the extent that it shows that participation in cbal can support the recovery of lost or decreased capital for some learners.

Third, this study introduces the new concept of "learning lifelines". This develops the work of McGivney (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003) who identified personal progression

from informal adult learning, described as changes in lifestyles and personal circumstances. This study suggests that participation in and progression from cbal are linked to the concept of “learning lifelines” both as a lifeline for learners that can support them as they seek to find ways of moving beyond limiting personal situations, and as an integral part of learners’ lives. The progression analysis suggested that cbal can help learners who are experiencing transitions in their personal lives as they adjust to changes in their circumstances, and think about new ways of living their lives. Furthermore, the life stories showed how participation and progression in cbal are bound up with the courses of learners’ lives. The concept of “learning lifelines,” in relation to cbal, highlights that learners’ life histories and progression are closely connected. If we do not see cbal in the context of learners’ lifelines, progression might not be visible.

The life history approach to this research indicates that cbal can be more than the provision of a lifeline, or support, for learners experiencing difficult personal circumstances. It is doing lifeline work, in the sense that it is at the heart of learners’ lives. It captures learners’ experiences and their perspectives, and brings these together with practitioners’ perspectives in order to better understand progression in learners’ terms.

The learners in this study were prompted to consider the outcomes of their participation in cbal through the questions I asked in the research interviews. In addition, I asked them specifically about the meaning of progression from their points of view. It is possible that, outwith this study, cbal participants might not always be aware of their learning and progression, and that the learners in this study were able to describe their perspectives on progression only because of their involvement in the research. However, this study suggests that learners were able to identify their progression when prompted, and that life history questioning might be a useful device to surface progression in learners’ minds.

In addition, the methodology used in this study was novel. It extends what is known about collaborative methods in biographical research (Merrill, 2007; Merrill & West, 2009), in that it suggests that an informal education approach to life history can be an effective method of investigating learning, especially in the field of adult education.

Also, the Life History Progression Analysis developed in this study suggests a way of measuring progression for learners in cbal that takes account of the context in which their learning takes place. The three stages of Life History Progression Analysis each contribute to enhanced understanding of progression. The first stage ensures that cbal and progression are placed in the context of learners' lives, through the life stories. The bridging commentaries in the second stage uncover potential links with policy priorities. The third stage highlights the role of cbal and the meaning of progression from the learners' perspectives. The three stages work together to build a picture of progression that takes account of individual learners' life histories, as well as revealing common themes in cbal learners' experiences that can be explored in relation to policy priorities.

While narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995) on its own would have taken account of the context in which learning takes place for individual learners, the three-stage Life History Progression Analysis process provides an opportunity for these to be investigated in connection with the experiences of others.

This three-stage analysis has potential for providing evidence of "distance travelled" for learners because it takes account of their starting-points in their individual situations and measures what progression means for them. In addition, it can point to the ways in which individual learners' progression fits with policy definitions.

Limitations of the study

While this study has enhanced understanding of cbal, and identified a methodology that was successful in capturing the learners' experiences, there are limitations to the research. First, I discuss issues that arise from the sample that I identified for the study, then limitations in relation to the data I collected. Lastly, I discuss my approach to data analysis and relate this to issues of validity in this study.

The sample

Two issues arise from the sample of learners that participated in this study. The first relates to the size of the sample. All of the learners who took part in this study had participated in cbal, and shared their experiences very openly in the interviews.

However, the sample was small in number. There were advantages to this, as well as limitations. One strength was that I was able to build positive relationships with the learners, and maintain contact with all of them over a period of about one year. This would have been difficult to sustain with large numbers. Another was that I was able to undertake in-depth analysis of the interviews, which involved three separate stages and took two years to complete, which would have been hard to manage with a large amount of data. The small scale of the study is a limitation in that it is not possible to generalise the findings to larger populations of adult learners. However, the method I developed suggests a way of measuring learner progression that is manageable for practitioners working with small groups of learners.

The second issue that arises from the self-selecting sample relates to the learners whose experiences are missing from this research. For example, there were some learners who had volunteered to participate in the study, but I did not select their names from the list I had created. Their different experiences might have added other perspectives to the research. However, in common with the study sample, all of these learners had participated in cbal over a period of several months, and were willing to talk to me about this.

It is equally important to consider those learners who did not come forward to participate in the study. Some of this group simply might not have been interested in the research. However, examination of the experiences of less successful learners, especially those experiencing disadvantage and exclusion, would enhance understanding of the role of cbal in learners' lives further. Others, such as learners who were unable to complete their course of learning and those who were not confident to talk about their experiences are missing from this study also. In this study the focus was a particular type of adult learning provision, and criteria were not set in relation to the research participants. However, it would be interesting to investigate the experiences of less successful, excluded learners in future research.

Three learners agreed to participate in the study but later cancelled their interviews. It is not possible to determine why they changed their minds, but the conversations I had with two of them suggested they had a range of responsibilities and commitments which meant that meeting me for an interview was not a priority. One

of the learners looked after her grandson during the day, as well as supporting her daughter who had a learning disability. The other had a young child and had just started a new job when I contacted her about the study. This highlighted the potential difficulties that some learners might experience in maintaining their attendance in a course of learning, and in participating in research.

A third learner was unwell on the day that we were due to meet but she declined my offer to rearrange the interview when she felt better. This was disappointing, as her surname suggested that she might be from a minority ethnic background, and I thought it was possible that her experiences might add to the research. All of the participants in this study are white and Scottish, and this could be seen as a limitation of the study. It would be useful to include learners from more diverse backgrounds in future research.

The nature of self-reports

The data in this study comprised the learners' self-reports, and this raises two issues for consideration.

One problem is the issue of memory. In the interviews for this study the learners told me what they remembered about their experiences of participating in cbal, as well as aspects of their life history. Although it was the learners' views I sought, it is possible that there were inconsistencies in their accounts as they recalled the past. Therefore one limitation of this study is that the data were accounts of events as they were experienced and remembered (Neisser, 1994). In this study, there were two occasions on which a learner refuted saying something that was clear on the recording of their interview. The details that each of these two learners changed related to aspects of their lives that were not directly related to their experiences of cbal, but this highlights that we cannot treat interview data as straightforward descriptions of reality. Life history interviews are accounts of the past, and therefore are always provisional (Merrill & West, 2009). In this study I used the lifelines and learning charts in the second interviews to jog the learners' memories. This encouraged the learners to reflect again on their stories and provided an opportunity for me to check accuracy with them.

Another issue relates to the distinction that can be made between events as they are experienced and the stories that are told about them. Denzin (1989) refers to these as “fictional statements with varying degrees of ‘truth’ about ‘real’ lives” (p. 25). It is important to remember that the stories in this study are bounded by place and time, and were told in the context of the learners’ relationship with me. A second limitation of this study is that learners’ stories can vary with the circumstances in which the story is being told (Bruner, 1994). However, I worked with the learners over a period of about one year, which allowed me to check their stories over time, as their circumstances changed. By working closely with the learners I developed relationships with them, in which they appeared to feel able to amend their stories, and I hoped that there were elements of the ‘real’ learners (Denzin, 1989) in what I had written.

Validity

The approach I took to the analysis of the data in this study was interpretive. This is a limitation of the research in the sense that the three stages of analysis represented my understanding of the learners’ responses. These are open to further interpretation, and others might find different meaning in the data (West, 1996). The discussion in this chapter highlights tensions in my attempts to represent the learners’ perspectives in this study. At each stage, I was aware of the layers of interpretation in the research process: in the telling of their life stories by the learners, in my re-telling of their stories in this thesis, and in the understanding of the stories by readers. I addressed this at each stage as I developed the method for the research by concentrating on the learners’ perspectives in the first stage of analysis and checking my versions of the learners’ life stories with them. In the subsequent stages of analysis I worked to foreground the learners’ perspectives, and made use of theory to make sense of the data.

This raises the question of the validity of my research. In this I have been influenced by what Merrill and West (2009) have called “a critical realist position” (p. 163). In this view there is validity in creating accounts of the past in order to better understand the experiences of others, but it is important to acknowledge that these are conditional, constructed by the researcher, and could always be interpreted

differently. In this study I defined validity according to Polkinghorne (1988) who claimed that validity in narrative inquiry is found in conclusions that are “well-founded and supportable” (p.174) and I addressed this in three ways.

First, I worked hard to collect detailed and rich data (Merrill & West, 2009), and I focussed on the learners’ views in my interpretive analysis in order to generate knowledge about the learners’ perspectives. Secondly, I made use of theory in my analysis to make sense of the interview data and reveal the complexities of the meaning of participation in and progression from cbal. Third, I used my subsequent interpretations to make links between the individual learners’ experiences and broader concerns (Mills, 1959). The validity of the research lies in the “meaningfulness of the analysis” (West, 1996, p. 13) and the extent to which my interpretations and conclusions are well-grounded and convincing to the reader. The Life History Progression Analysis I developed for this study supported the conclusions through the use of three stages of interpretation and analysis. Furthermore, it was important that my research was useful to policy-makers and practitioners. This latter point, the implications of the study for the field of cbal, is addressed in the next section.

Implications of the research

In this section I consider the implications of this study for those concerned with policy as it affects cbal, and for those who provide cbal opportunities. In addition, I identify areas for future research.

Policy

This study suggests that cbal can make a valuable contribution to the priorities identified in policy for this area of work. However, there is a need to recognise that this might be in different ways than is suggested in current policy documents, in order to avoid the risk that funding for provision is removed before learners have achieved their goals. In this study economic progression, in terms of finding work, was not part of the initial motivation for participation in cbal for some learners. Nonetheless, cbal did contribute to educational, personal and social progression, which allowed others to consider paid employment in future. Furthermore, the study

highlighted the difficulty of separating personal and vocational goals. This does not mean that the principle of progression should be delayed or deferred; this study shows that cbal can support learners' progression from their own starting-points and in the context of their lives. Participation in cbal can lead to different types of progression that were initially unanticipated and are inter-related.

A broad interpretation of progression from cbal is needed in policy to take account of all the potential destinations for adult learners, including those related to paid employment. Also, account should be taken of learners' contexts in policy decisions about the provision of cbal to ensure that this type of adult learning continues to meet the needs of the learners for whom it is provided.

One way in which policy could take account of the findings of this research is through the inspection process. As the review of the literature showed, there has been an increasing focus in Scottish policy on accountability for publicly-funded learning provision, managed through the use of frameworks by HM Inspectors (Scottish Government, 2007c).

The development of a revised framework for the inspection of cbal could support acknowledgement of a broad range of outcomes and definitions of progression. For example, Inspectors could seek evidence of wider benefits of participation in learning related to human and social capital, and health and well-being, as well as economic benefits related to work. In addition, a revised inspection framework could include specific questions about progression, alongside examples of economic, educational, personal and social progression, as guidance for inspectors and providers of cbal. Within the framework, the interconnection between different types of progression could be emphasised.

It might be possible to take account of learners' contexts in policy through this proposed inspection framework. Greater focus on learners' starting-points in cbal, in terms of their chosen level of learning, as well as their destinations would provide a clearer picture of learners' progression towards their goals. As this study has shown these can coincide with policy priorities but might be long-term. A revised inspection framework for cbal could address the potential contribution of cbal to economic, as

well as educational, personal and social priorities. Furthermore, it could provide evidence of the ways in which personal and social progression might be associated with economic progression and vice versa.

Practice

The learning environments that were the focus of this study supported positive outcomes for the learners and facilitated learner progression. However, a minority of learners highlighted potential barriers to progression that poor organisation or insensitivity to individual needs can present, and it is important to consider these. At present, cbal practitioners take account of the circumstances of learners' lives through the process of engaging with them to identify learning needs. This study supports this by showing the complex interrelationship between participation in and progression from cbal and learners' life histories. In addition, it demonstrates the need to continue to embed this approach in cbal practice in order to support learners to achieve their goals in ways that are appropriate to them.

Practitioner research

In the current policy context of increasing accountability and threats to funding, this study provides cbal practitioners with strong arguments about the less visible outcomes of cbal in order to secure continued support for this type of provision. In addition, practitioners need to be able to provide evidence of learner progression in ways that are valued by policy-makers. The Life History Progression Analysis outlined in this study suggests a way for practitioners to measure what matters to learners, by taking account of learners' personal definitions of progression while at the same time providing the evidence of outcomes that is demanded by policy.

A practitioner research version of Life History Progression Analysis could be used to evidence learners' progression. While this study was a detailed investigation that took over five years to complete, a practitioner version could be carried out in a much shorter time, in three steps:

- Individual Learning Plans (ILP) are developed to include questions designed to explore learners' life histories;

- The ILPs are used in the usual way to record learners' progression towards their goals;
- Practitioners, in collaboration with learners, undertake analysis of the learners' ILPs to identify economic, educational, personal and social progression.

Individual Learning Plans are used by many literacies practitioners already to facilitate initial engagement with learners and to identify their goals, and these could be developed to collect life history information. In the first step it would be crucial to explain the reasons for asking for this, and to get the learners' informed consent. Also, practitioners should seek only information that learners are comfortable to share, and ensure that it is stored securely. The three steps outlined above would fit into existing practice relatively easily and would provide detailed evidence of learner progression that could be used by practitioners and learners to plan future learning. At the same time, anonymised information about cbal participants could be collated by practitioners to provide evidence of progression for funders and inspectors.

One argument against the use of Life History Progression Analysis might be that practitioners should not know about learners' individual circumstances in order to ensure that they do not put limits on learners' aspirations. In this view, the use of Life History Progression Analysis would be contested because of the personal information that is sought from learners.

However, this study has shown that progression is closely connected to learners' personal circumstances. Making use of Life History Progression Analysis in practice might support practitioners to take account of learners' situations, as well as provide evidence of learners' progression in the context of their lives. However, it would be important for practitioners to explore with learners whether they wished to participate in this analysis process.

Future research

The need for more research on three aspects of cbal has been identified in this study. First, further research is needed to unravel the links between potential learners'

health issues and their motivation to participate. This study showed that some learners attend cbal in order to move beyond the limitations on their lives caused by their ill-health. However, motivation was not the focus of this research. There is a need to know more about the potential connection between ill-health and participation in cbal as well as investigating the ways in which cbal is associated with health and well-being.

Second, this study drew attention to the potential role for cbal in supporting progression for learners who are experiencing transitions in their personal lives. West (2008) suggested that adult learning provision can provide a “transitional space” (p. 42) in which learners can explore their identities and adjust to change. Further research is needed to clarify how this might take place and to explore the ways in which cbal can perform this important function.

A third area for future research arises from the issues that have been identified in this chapter regarding the sample of learners in this study. There is a need to explore the experiences of learners who were excluded from this research. It might be difficult to make contact with these groups of learners, but it is important that their perspectives are included in debates about the role and purpose of adult learning, especially as CLD and lifelong learning provision is targeted to disadvantaged and excluded learners (Scottish Executive, 2003, 2004; Scottish Government, 2007). Reflection on this study has led me to question whether less confident, less successful learners are likely to respond positively to a written invitation to participate in research. In future studies I would make greater use of personal contact. Perhaps the informal education approach is relevant here, in the sense that building relationships with learners prior to asking them to take part in research would be a more effective way of encouraging their participation.

Research into the experiences of disadvantaged and excluded learners would enhance understanding of the needs of this group. A long-term period of engagement with learners, perhaps for two to three years, would facilitate investigation of progression over time. In addition, meeting with learners several times during this period might facilitate the development of relationships that would allow learners to be confident to share personal information. There might be a need for a larger size of sample in

research of this kind, as this study has shown that some learners have commitments and responsibilities that mean that they might not be able to participate in long-term research. A study of this kind might necessitate the use of a computer-based data analysis system such as N-Vivo in order to manage the large amount of data that is likely to be generated. The findings of such research would be valuable to providers of cbal as they plan provision for excluded and disadvantaged groups. In addition, policy-makers could use information about the experiences of these groups to effectively target limited resources.

In this study, Life History Progression Analysis has shown diverse personal definitions of progression and suggested a way of measuring what matters to learners in cbal. In addition, an informal education approach to life history has uncovered community based adult learning as lifeline work that supports learner progression.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Conferences and seminars attended during the study

June 2007: The times they are a-changin'. Researching transitions in lifelong learning. Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning International Conference, Stirling.

March 2008: The emotional dimensions of learning and researching lives: a neglected species? ESREA Life History and Biography Network Conference, Canterbury.

November 2008: Crossing borders, transforming boundaries. Scottish Educational Research Association Conference, Perth.

March 2009: Wisdom and knowledge in researching and learning lives: diversity, differences and commonalities. ESREA Life History and Biography Network Conference, Milan.

June 2009: Lifelong Learning Revisited: what next? Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning 5th International Conference, Stirling.

June 2009: University of Strathclyde Research Day, Glasgow.

Appendix B

Pilot Interview Guide

Learners' progression from community based adult learning

Pre interview discussion:

- Thank interviewee for attending, general enquiries about journey, comfort of room, offer water/coffee/tea
- Background to researcher
- Background to study – purpose, aims, intended outcomes
- Interviewee involvement - process of interview. Opportunity for follow up, confidentiality, anonymity
- Information sheet
- Consent form
- Any questions

Learner profile

- Gender
- Age
- Employment
- Type of community based adult learning
- Number of courses
- Attendance pattern

Previous experience of education

Can you tell me about your time at school?

- Positive/negative experiences
- Friends
- Teachers
- Achievements
- Feelings

Have you taken part in any other learning since leaving school?

- FE/HE
- Vocational training
- In service training

Participation in community based adult learning

Thinking back, can you remember why you enrolled on the course?

- Goals
- Hopes
- Reasons
- Feelings

What was the course like?

- Subject
- Content (materials and methods used)
- Tutor
- Other learners
- Good things about it
- Bad things about it
- Feelings
- Experience

Progression

What difference has being on the course made to you?

- Family life
- Work life
- Personal life
- Community life
- Feelings
- Attitudes to learning

Do you feel you have changed since your participation?

- (if yes) in what ways?
- (if no) why do you think that is?

Do you think your involvement in community based adult learning has helped you to progress?

- (if yes) how would you describe your progression?
- (if yes) can you tell me more about why you think that is?

Have you been involved in any other learning since leaving the course/class?

Do you have plans to do any other learning in the future?

Advice/support

Have you received any support or advice about your learning?

- Family
- Friends
- Colleague
- Tutor

If yes, what kind of help did they give you?

Post interview discussion:

- Thank interviewee for their time
- Confirm information will be useful
- Describe what will happen next – interviews transcribed, key points identified, check back with interviewee
- Any questions
- Wish interviewee safe journey home

Appendix C

Journal article

“Your brain’s got hundreds of space for more information”. (Sally)

Community based adult learning: learners’ perceptions of participation and progression

Introduction

In this article I report on a small-scale pilot study undertaken to inform a larger investigation. The study aimed to enhance our understanding of participation in community based adult learning (cbal) and to investigate the meaning of progression from participants’ points of view. The learners’ stories, their descriptions of the experience of participating in cbal and their perceptions of progression may be of interest to practitioners as they strive to provide positive learning opportunities which meet the needs of adults in local communities.

A report published in 2003 by Communities Scotland, a Scottish Executive agency, provides a useful definition of the type of provision which is the focus of this article:

Learning opportunities (mainly targeted at excluded/disadvantaged groups and individuals) provided in local communities, developed substantially in negotiation with participants (both in terms of content and delivery), and which empower them to address relevant issues in their lives, and that of their community (2003, p.9).

The study was exploratory in nature. I wanted to examine what participation in cbal is like, and to find out what progression means, if anything, to learners. As this is an early stage of a more detailed investigation, the intention was to open up the variations in learners’ experiences and highlight the issues which arose from them, rather than search for consistency.

Three adult learners were interviewed who had participated in informal learning in their community in the recent past. The initial contact with the participants was made by a community learning worker who explained the background to the study and sought their consent for their contact details to be passed to me.

McGivney (1999) has observed that informal learning can be of particular value to women, especially at a stage when their family commitments allow for participation. McGivney's description fits the participants in my pilot study very well, in that they are all women whose initial engagement with cbal came at a time when their children were old enough to attend a crèche or nursery.

The method used in this exploratory study was semi-structured in-depth interviews. The learners were very willing to talk about their experiences and I interviewed each for about 45 minutes -1 hour, focusing on their participation in cbal and their views of progression. My aim was to engage the participants in discussion and to seek to understand their point of view. The analysis was influenced by Smith's (1995) writing on semi-structured interviewing and analysis of qualitative data, and the intention was to foreground the learners' voices in the research.

In the next section of the article I present themes which I identified in the interviews. Following that I highlight both positive and negative aspects of the learners' experience of cbal. Finally, I outline the participants' plans for the future, and discuss the meanings of progression arising from this study. The learners had their own stories to tell, and I have provided background on them to assist our understanding. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure the participants' anonymity.

Learning as an adult

"Didn't like it, didn't like being told what to do, where to go, what to wear, what to look like, how to think...I just hated school". (Elsa)

Elsa is married with two children. She is not in paid work at present but had a number of secretarial and hairdressing jobs before having her family. After leaving school aged 16, Elsa completed qualifications in secretarial skills and, later, an HNC in hairdressing.

A substantial part of Elsa's interview centered on the differences between learning as a child in school and learning as an adult. She expressed a negative view of her school education and described how restrictive she had found it. However, she was positive about all of the learning she had experienced since leaving school, including

her participation in cbal. The difference seemed to be simply being treated as an adult. She valued being allowed to express an opinion, and learning with others with whom she had something in common.

Learning and work

“It was like, oh that’s finished. I need to go and do something else now. There’s a job – I could do that.” (Sally)

Sally lives with her partner and two school age children. She has two part-time jobs. At the time of the interview she hoped to leave one of the jobs to start a new part-time post. Sally had stayed at school until the end of 6th year and then gone to work. She had worked throughout her adult life, but had combined this with attendance at College, in-service training, and several cbal courses. She had some vocational qualifications but was unable to remember what they were.

In Sally’s interview work was an important theme, and her approach to this aspect of her life was similar to her approach to learning. She had been employed in a variety of ways throughout her adult life, changing jobs when new opportunities presented themselves. A strong theme in Sally’s interview was a positive attitude to both learning and work, but no plan attached to these. She had turned to cbal and other learning opportunities when she was seeking something new to do or considering a change of employment. Sally’s interview indicated that learning and work were important aspects of her life. Furthermore, there were clear links between them. Participation in learning became important when Sally was considering making changes to her working life.

Learning and family

“I couldn’t have attended if I didn’t have the crèche and the crèche was fantastic, it was really impressive” (Anne).

At the time of the interview, Anne’s youngest children were due to start school in a few weeks. Although she has a degree level qualification, she left University earlier than she had planned in order to have her family. She had not participated in any

form of training or education since completing her degree, and had not been in paid employment for several years.

A strong theme which emerged from the interview with Anne was the relationship between her family and her learning. Part of this related to practical considerations. For example, Anne stated that the timing of the cbal courses was important, to allow her attendance to be fitted in to the time available while her older children were in school. In addition, Anne said she could not have attended the cbal course without the crèche which was provided.

Anne also mentioned family responsibilities in relation to earlier hesitancy to participate in learning. She expressed regret that she had not taken up opportunities before and said that fears that her children would not be happy had prevented her from attending. Anne also reflected that she may have used these fears as an excuse when her own lack of confidence stopped her participating.

To some extent it was family responsibilities that had prevented Anne from achieving her goals in Higher Education, and this was expressed in terms of regret and a desire to achieve more in the future.

Participation

The women's participation in cbal came about in different ways. However, all three learners seemed to feel that they had found out about their respective courses almost by accident and that the opportunity easily could have been missed.

A friend told Elsa about the course she attended in her community. She said that wanting to build her confidence had prompted her to go along. However, she referred to getting time to herself, and seeking a new direction as well. Sally attended cbal at first, because her sister was going and it sounded interesting. She too mentioned getting time to herself, away from the responsibilities of being a mother. A leaflet given out at her child's nursery had prompted Anne to go along to a course at her local community centre.

Negative aspects of participating in cbal were identified by the learners. For example Elsa felt that not enough time had been allocated to the learning, and some discussion

topics had brought back unhappy memories of childhood. Sally expressed the view that her group “*becomes a kind of clique*” and that it might be difficult for others to join. The only negative aspect mentioned by Anne was the difficulty she had found in accessing information about courses.

However, these aspects did not seem to detract from the experience. The learners spoke about how much they had enjoyed participating in cbal. This was linked to learning with others in a group, the fact that the content of provision was negotiated and the informal methods used by the tutors. This quote from Elsa sums up the views expressed by the women:

“It’s addictive, you look forward to that feeling that it gives you because after you have done one day of the course you feel better and happier within yourself...I would recommend it to anybody”.

Progression

Increased confidence was identified by all three learners in this study as one important outcome of their participation in cbal. In Elsa’s case, the experience of participating in cbal had helped to put negative memories of learning at school behind her. Anne was determined to achieve what she felt she had missed by leaving higher education earlier than planned. For Sally, cbal was an integral part of learning and work along with accredited, vocational and other types of learning.

In the interviews, the women described their plans for the future. For Elsa, progression related to continuing involvement with learning at the same level and making changes in her family life. For example she described how she praised her children more often, something that she had learned from a course on parenting skills. Volunteering, rather than paid employment also featured in her plans:

Well I want to do another course... I think another course in the community; build my confidence more and maybe a wee bit more voluntary work.

Sally intended to continue with her learning, but had no specific plans. She was committed to the principle of lifelong learning and described progression as a

continuous process, but did not have plans to make the transition to more formal types of learning:

Yes, well I don't think you stop learning. I think you don't necessarily have to go and do a course to be learning.

Anne stated that she was considering moving to more formal education. She had not planned a particular course but she intended to study for a degree or post graduate certificate. Of the three learners, Anne is the only one who had experienced higher education already, and this may be significant in her decision to consider continuing her learning at this level. For Anne, participation in cbal seems to have supported her decision, as she said when asked about the difference it had made:

I am not so negative and hesitant about things. It has been a very positive thing for me...it has come at the right time for me. I was probably looking for a bit of direction and even though it's not necessarily shown me the way, it has been a very positive thing and has made me feel that I am able.

Supporting learner progression has always been one of the goals of community based adult learning. A number of studies undertaken in Scotland (Blair et al, 1993; Communities Scotland, 2003; St.Clair, 2006) identified participation in adult learning opportunities as having played an important role in learners' decision to continue to learn. Research carried out in England and Wales (McGivney, 1999; Bennetts, 2003; Cook and Smith, 2004; Morrell et al, 2004) supports this.

In policy terms, the Scottish Executive has identified community based adult learning as having a key role in supporting learners to take their first steps into formal education and thereby contributing to the achievement of targets relating to educational attainment (2003).

However, it is important to ask participants what progression means to them to avoid making assumptions about learners' goals. As we might expect, progression had a variety of meanings for the three learners in this study. These included becoming involved in voluntary work, making changes in family relationships and applying for part-time work, as well as continuing to learn at various levels. This exploratory

study suggests participants in cbal may move from different starting points backwards and forwards through a variety of learning opportunities. All three learners in this study said they had plans to continue to learn but in a way which was fluid and diverse.

Participation in cbal has increased these women's confidence and, importantly, made progression seem a real possibility. Progression has been interpreted differently by each of the participants. By exploring its meaning with learners, providers of learning opportunities will be able to support individual learners' progression in ways that are appropriate to them.

This was a small-scale pilot study and it has had a direct influence on my plans for a bigger investigation. In particular it has highlighted the fact that adults learn in the context of the rest of their lives and that the meaning of progression should be understood in this context. The next study will take a life history approach to the gathering of data to take account of the circumstances in which learning takes place. In addition, the participants will be interviewed several times over a longer period of time. This will provide an opportunity to gather more in-depth information and to allow the participants to identify progression during the life of the study.

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Appendix D

Information sheet

A study of learners' progression from community based adult learning opportunities in Scotland.

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experience of participating in community based adult learning opportunities, and to find out about any other learning you have participated in since your involvement. It is hoped that this will help all those involved in the provision of learning opportunities to plan and provide classes and courses that are relevant to learners and help them progress.

I am asking you to take part in the study because you have recently attended an adult learning class or course. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and this information sheet is to help you decide whether you wish to take part. If you wish to participate please **sign the consent form** which is attached and **return it to me**. The address is at the bottom of the form.

I would like to interview you on 3 occasions, at a time and place which are convenient for you. During the first interview I will ask some background questions, for example your family, job, early experience of education etc. I will then ask you to tell me about your participation in community based adult learning as well as about any other learning you have undertaken since then. After 3 months there will be a second interview. I will check with you any details which were unclear and may ask you to tell me more about some of the points raised in the first interview. During this interview I will give you a summary of the main points for any comments you may wish to make. After about another 6 months, if you are still happy to participate, I would like to meet with you again to get an update on your progress.

With your permission, I would like to tape record the interviews to ensure accuracy. Interview tapes will be kept securely and the records of the interviews will be seen only by me and my research supervisors. The

interviews will be deleted from the tapes when the study has been completed.

All the information you provide during the study will be given in confidence. Your name will be removed from the transcript of the interview and your contribution will be anonymous in the final report.

I would be grateful for your participation. If you have any questions at any time concerning the study please contact me at the address below. Alternatively you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Rowena Murray at the same address, telephone 0141 950 3066.

Janis McIntyre

University of Strathclyde

76, Southbrae Drive

Glasgow

G13 1PP

Tel: 0141 950 3988

Email: janis.mcintyre@strath.ac.uk

Appendix E

Date 2008

Dear

Study of Adult Learning

We have been contacted by Janis McIntyre from Strathclyde University to ask you to take part in a study of adult learning and progression.

Janis is a PhD student and the purpose of her study is to explore your experience of community based learning and to find out about any other learning in which you have participated. We hope that the results of the study will help in the planning and provision of learning opportunities in the future.

Janis wishes to interview 10 learners about their experience of community based adult learning at a time and place that is convenient to you. Everything that you tell her will be kept confidential and your name will not be in the final report. You may withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. Some participants may be invited to contribute to an informal focus group discussion.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in the study. Please complete and return the slip below in the envelope provided. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact Janis on 0141 950 3988 or at janis.mcintyre@strath.ac.uk.

I hope you will feel able to participate in this study.

Yours sincerely

✂-----

I am willing to participate in the adult learning study

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix F

Participant details sheet

Name	Age	Qualifications at end of initial education	Employment status
Helen	48	O-grades	Self-employed
Alan	64	2 A-levels	Retired (ill-health)
Alison	48	Highers	Retired (ill-health)
Doreen	39	8 O-grades, 2 Highers	Not working
Sam	70	Diploma in Argriculture	Retired
Elaine	47	None	Retired (ill-health)
Melanie	38	O-grades	Unemployed
Sarah	36	Postgraduate Diploma	Unemployed
Linda	40	2 O-grades	Unemployed
Mary	48	8 O-grades	Employed part-time

Appendix G

Interview Guide

Learners' progression from community based adult learning

The information below will act as a guide for semi-structured interviews with learners. The headings indicate the area for discussion, there are some specific questions which will be asked, and the bullet points represent some prompts which may be used by the interviewer as necessary.

Lead in/ introduction

Can you tell me a bit about your life? What is your life like?

- Family
- Work
- Community
- Leisure
- Learning
- Health

Previous experience of education

What was school like for you?

- Positive/negative experiences
- Friends
- Teachers
- Achievements
- Feelings

Have you taken part in any other learning since leaving school?

- FE/HE
- Vocational training
- In service training
- Leisure/interest courses
- Informal

What was it like?

Participation in community based adult learning

Can you tell me about your participation in learning recently, in the community centre?

- When were you involved?
- Which course(s) did you do?
- How often did you attend?

Thinking back, can you remember why you decided to participate?

- Goals
- Hopes
- Reasons
- Feelings

What was it like?

- Subject
- Content (materials and methods used)
- Tutor
- Other learners
- Good things about it
- Bad things about it
- Feelings
- Experience
- Environment

Did you finish the course or piece of learning?

Progression

Has being on the course made a difference to you? (If yes) in what ways?

- Family life
- Work life
- Personal life
- Community life
- Feelings, attitudes,

additional prompt: **Has anything changed since your participation?**

- (if yes) in what ways?
- (if no) why do you think that is?)

Have you been involved in any other learning since your participation the course/class?

- Other community based courses
- Formal education
- Informal learning (by yourself, with friends etc.)

Do you have plans to do any other learning in the future?

- What would you like to do?

- Have you made definite arrangements for this?

Have you received any support or advice about your learning?

- Family
- Friends
- Colleague
- Tutor/community worker/adult education worker

If yes, what kind of help did they give you?

What are your hopes for the future?

- Family
- Work
- Learning
- Leisure/other

Life History

Can you tell me about growing up?

- Parents, siblings
- Friends
- School
- Leisure, sports, clubs, fun

Would it be ok for us to meet again, in about 3 months? At that meeting I could check that I have got accurate information and you can comment on it. Also, I may need to ask more about some of things we have talked about today.

Appendix H

Consent Form

A study of learners' progression from community based adult learning opportunities in Scotland

I agree to participate in the above study

I confirm I have read and I understand the attached information sheet

I agree to my interviews being tape recorded

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason

Name of participant (please print)

Signature

Date/...../.....

Name of researcherJanis McIntyre.....

Signature

Date/...../.....

Janis McIntyre

University of Strathclyde

Department of Educational & Professional Studies

Sir Henry Wood Building

76 Southbrae Drive

Glasgow

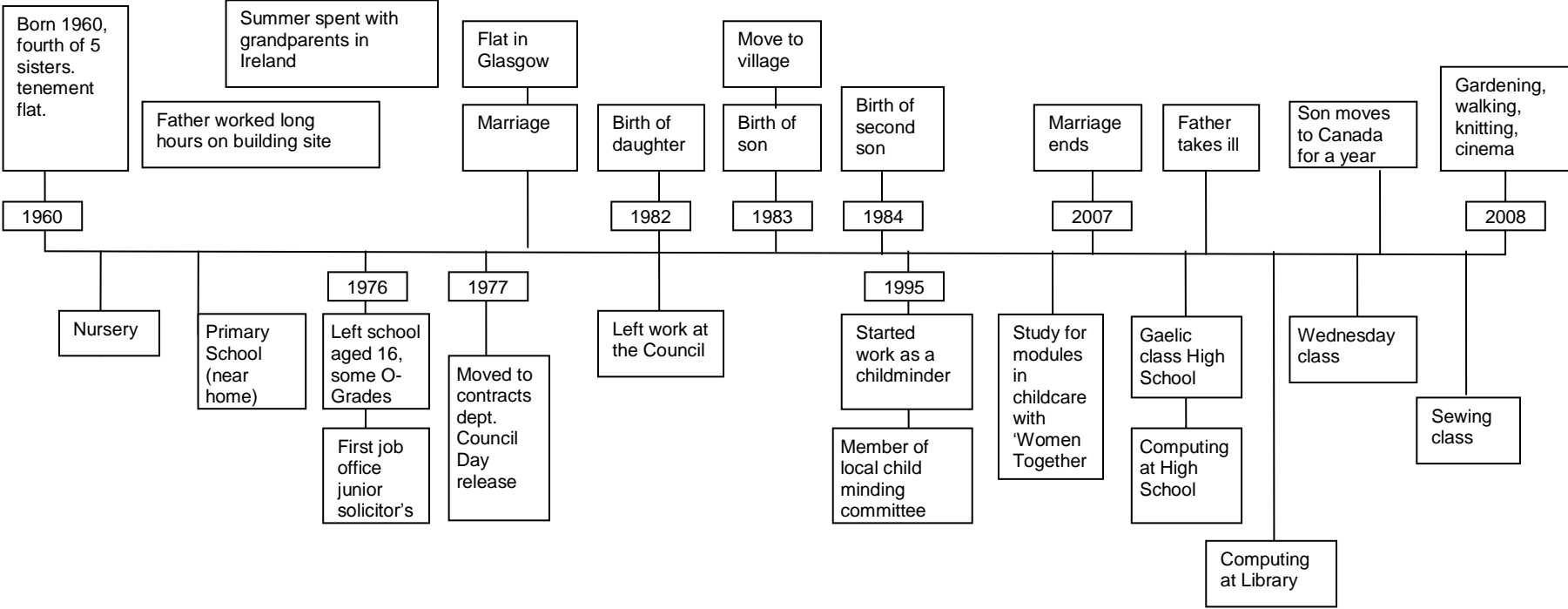
G13 1PP

Tel: 0141 950 3988

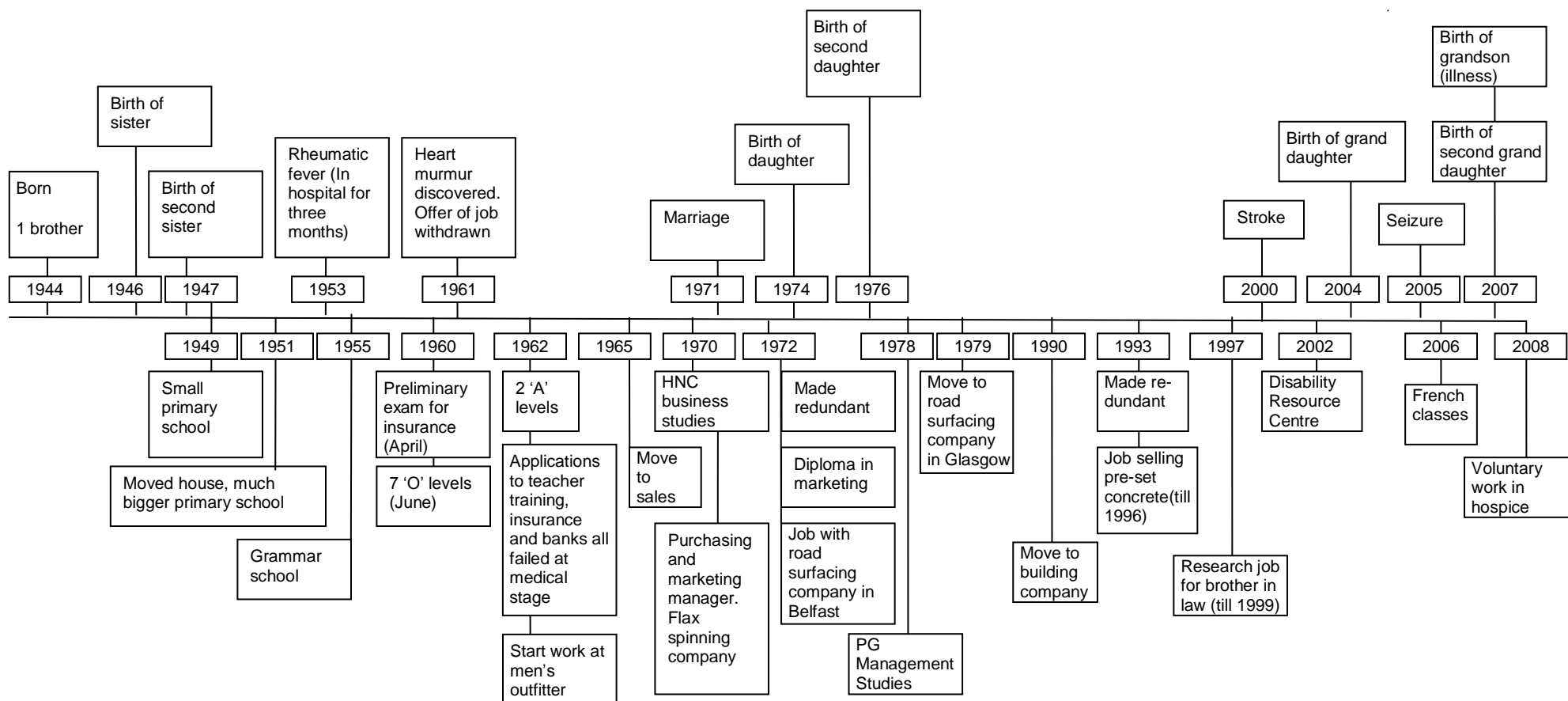
Email: janis.mcintyre@strath.ac.uk

Appendix I

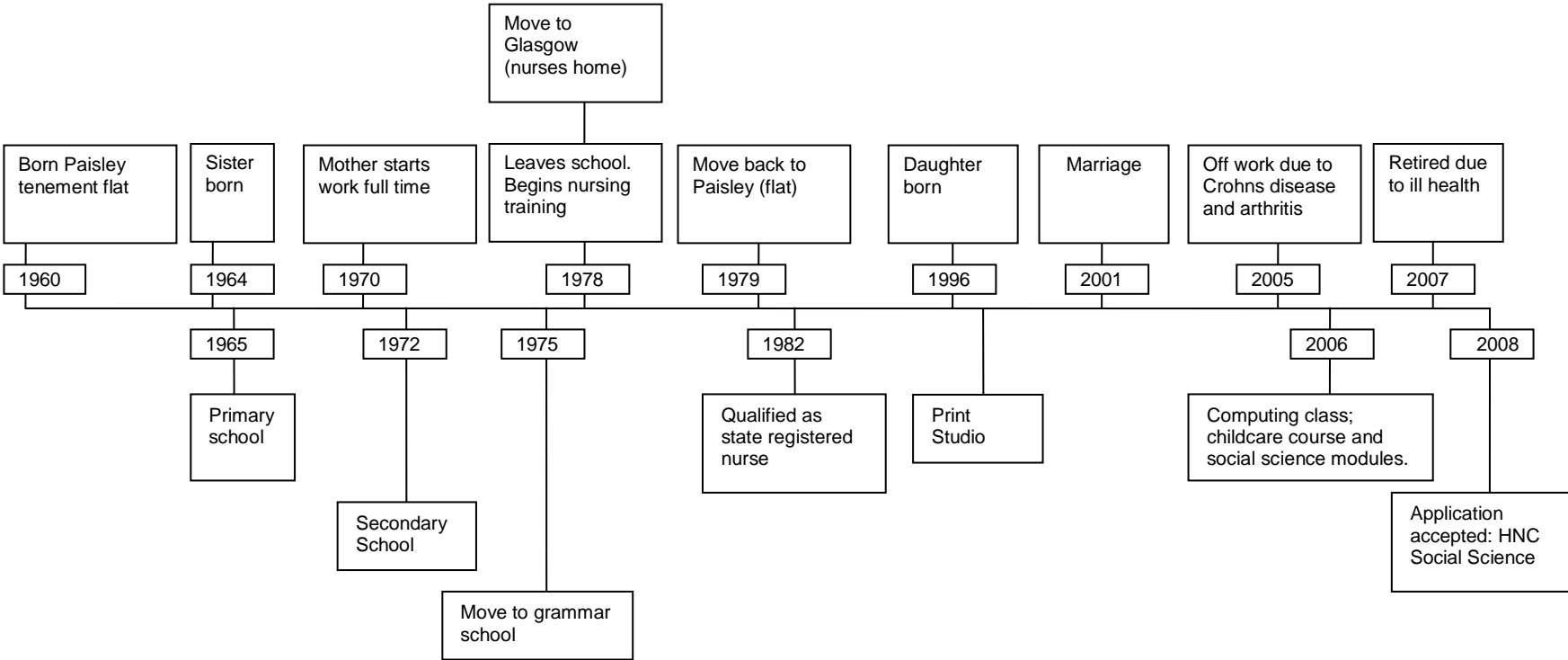
Lifeline for Helen



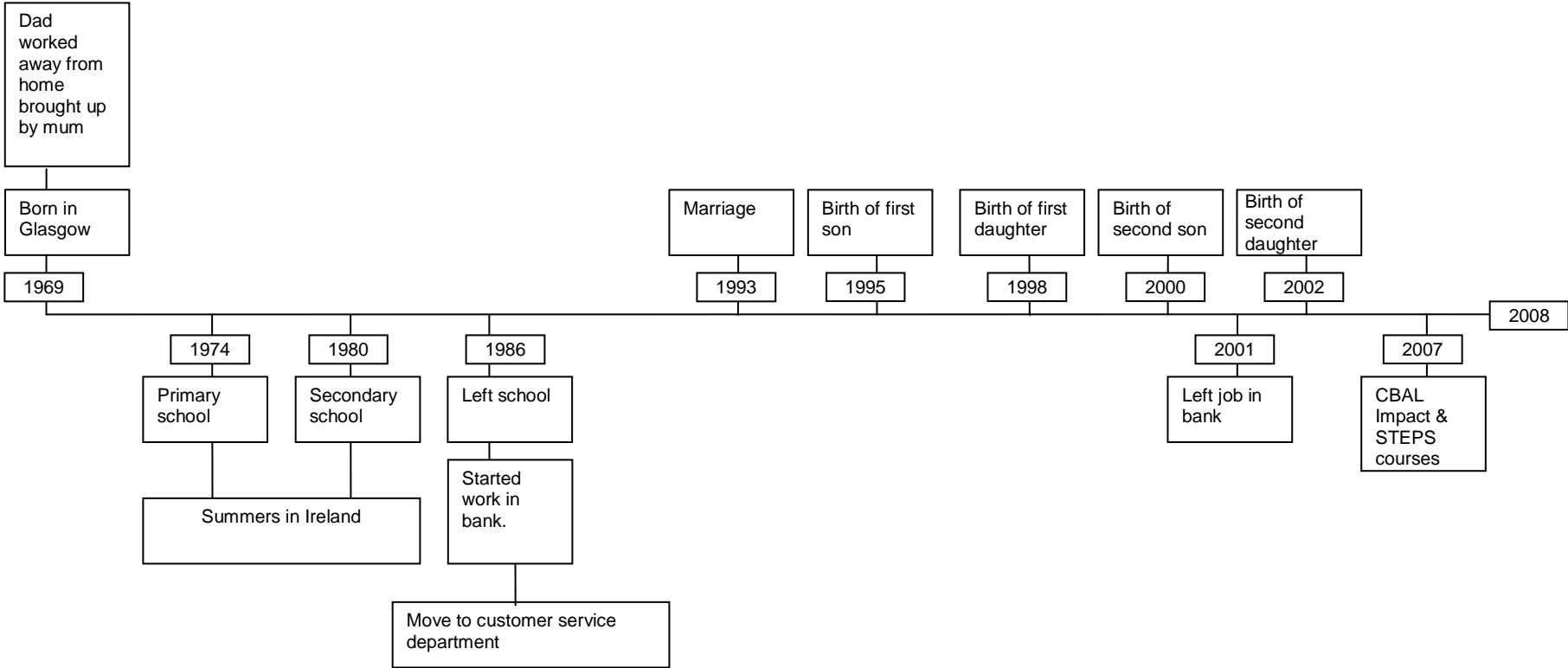
Lifeline for Alan



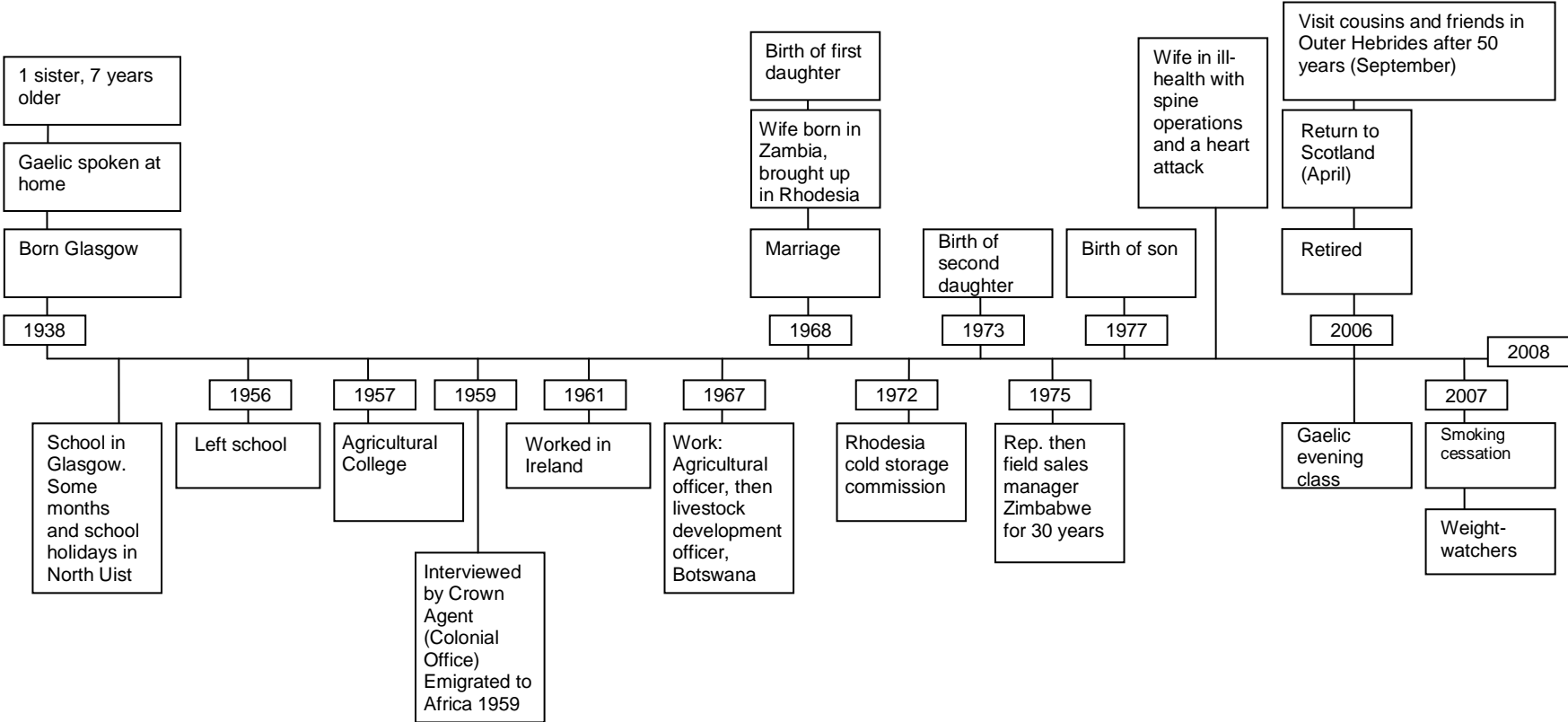
Lifeline for Alison



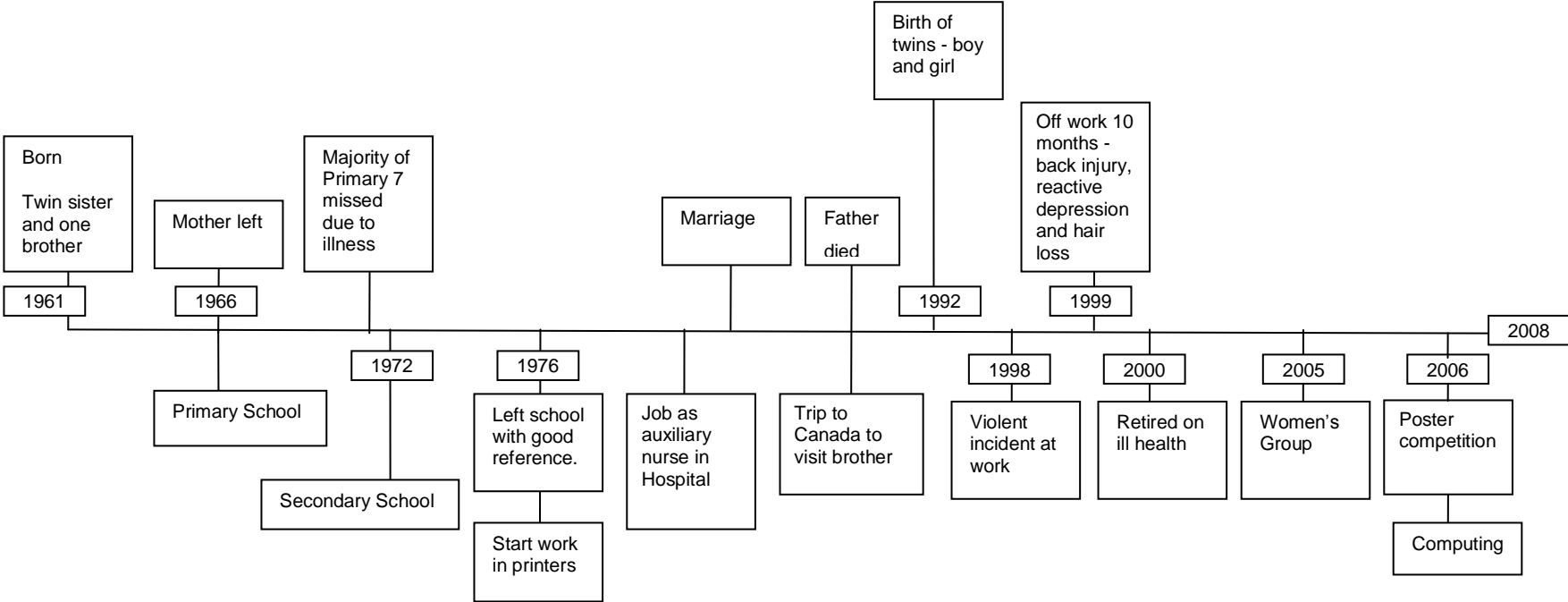
Lifeline for Doreen



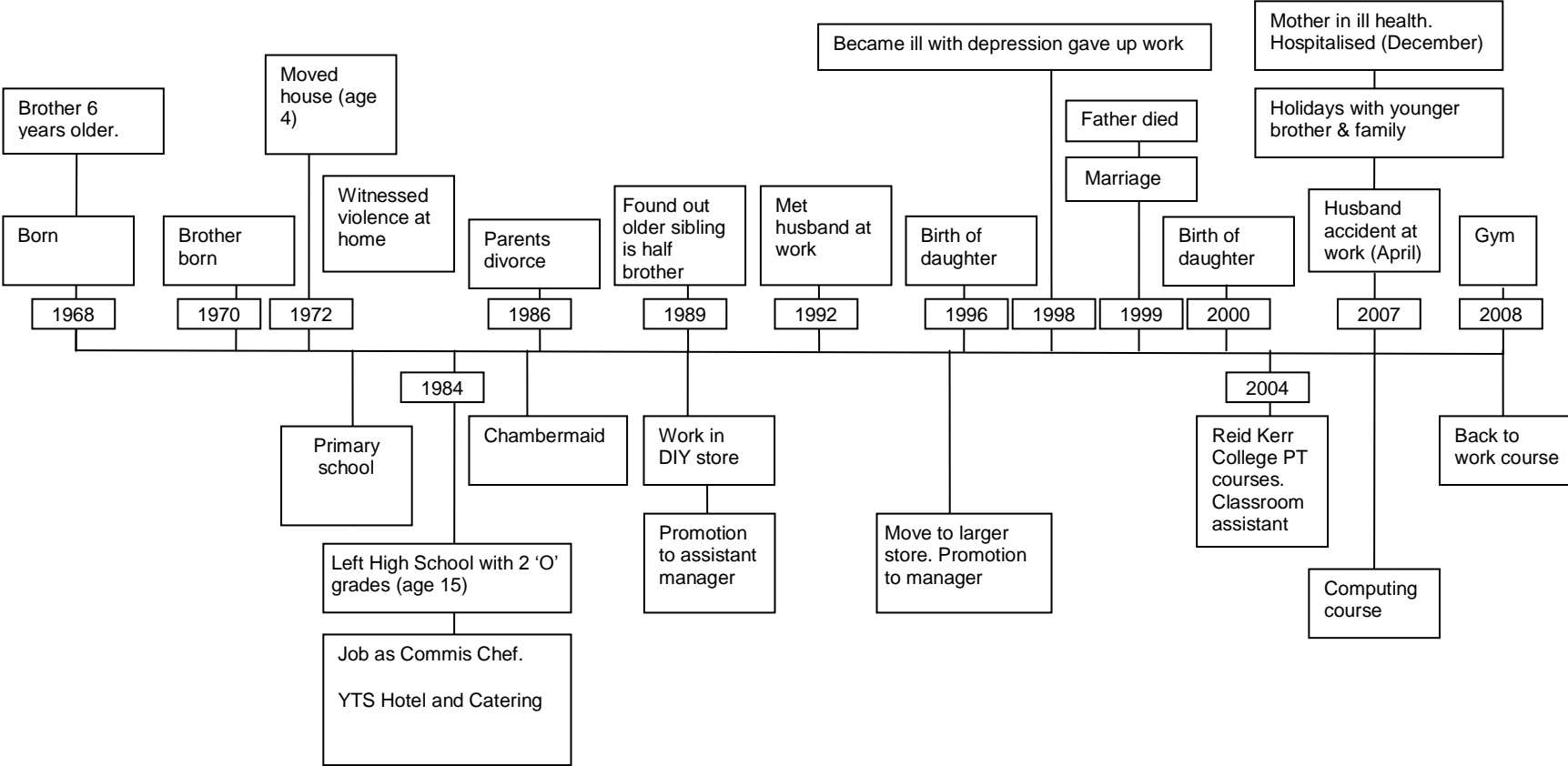
Lifeline for Sam



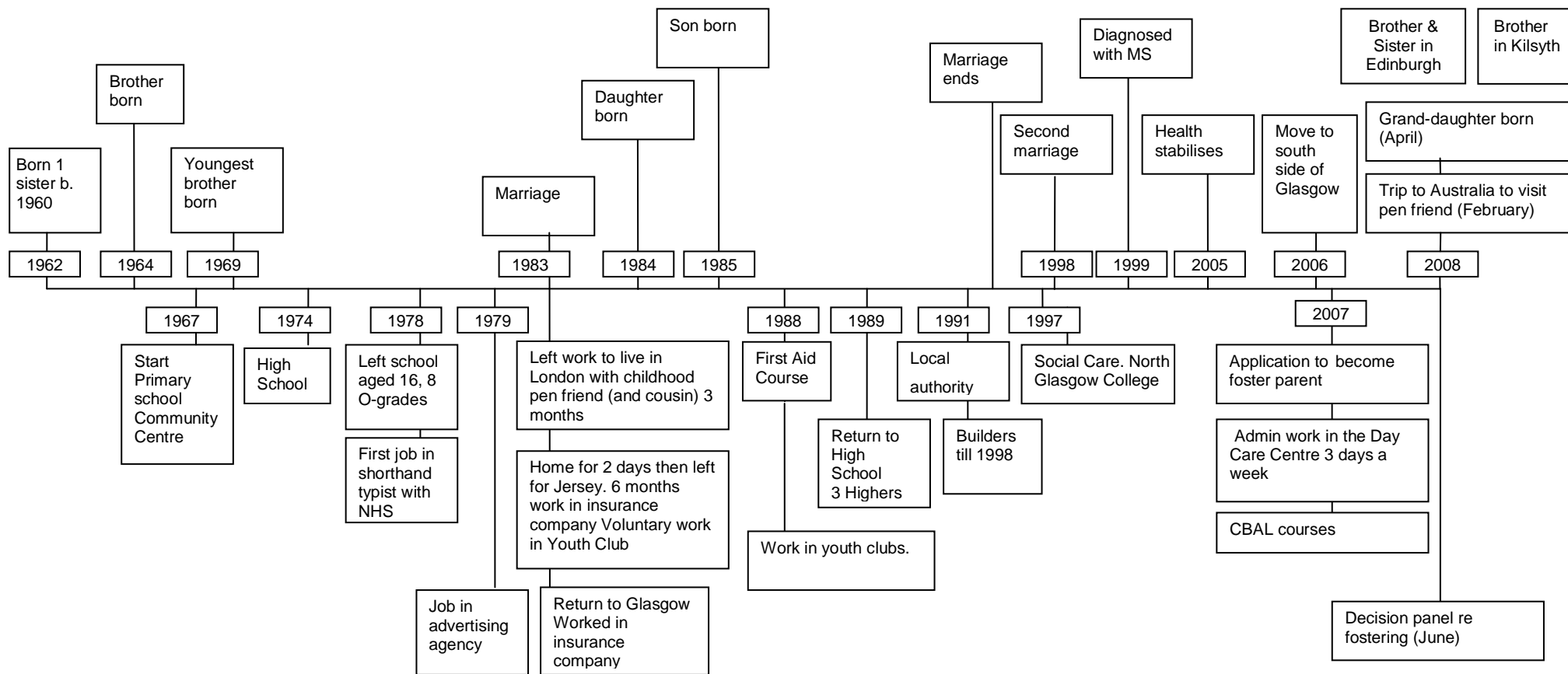
Lifeline for Elaine



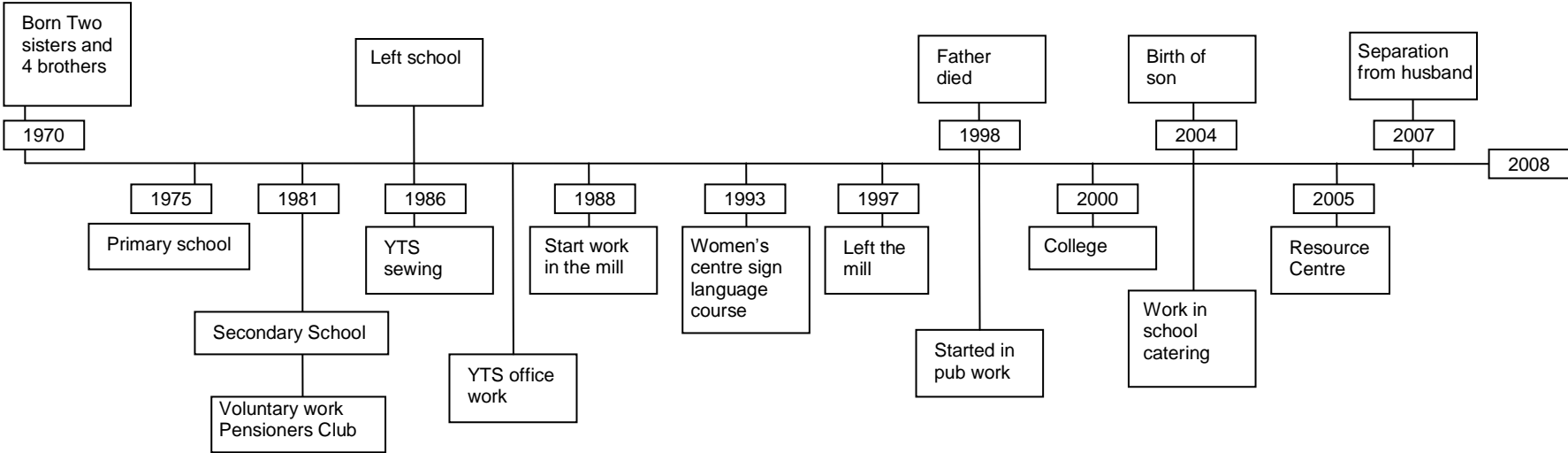
Lifeline for Linda



Lifeline for Mary

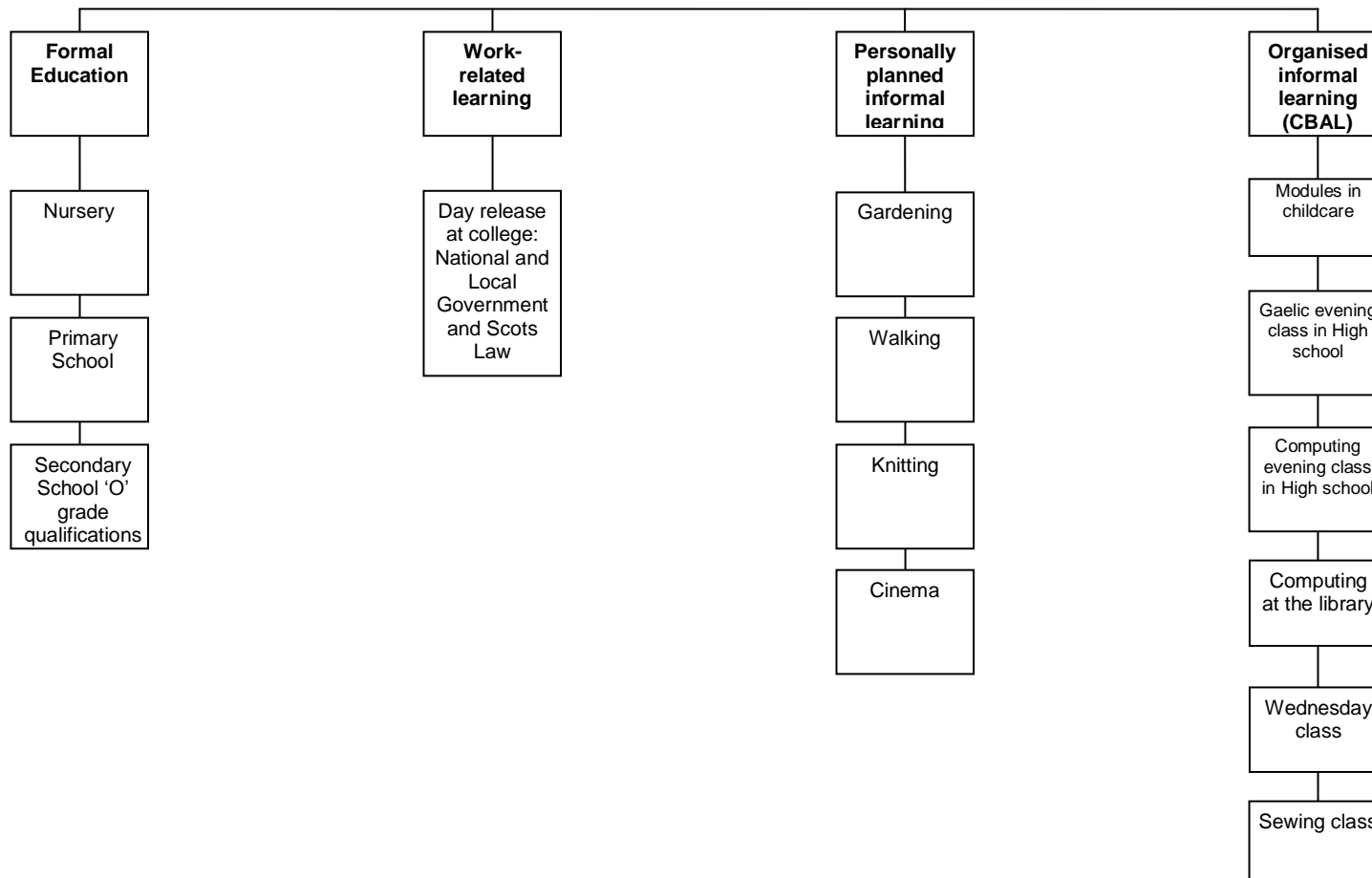


Lifeline for Melanie

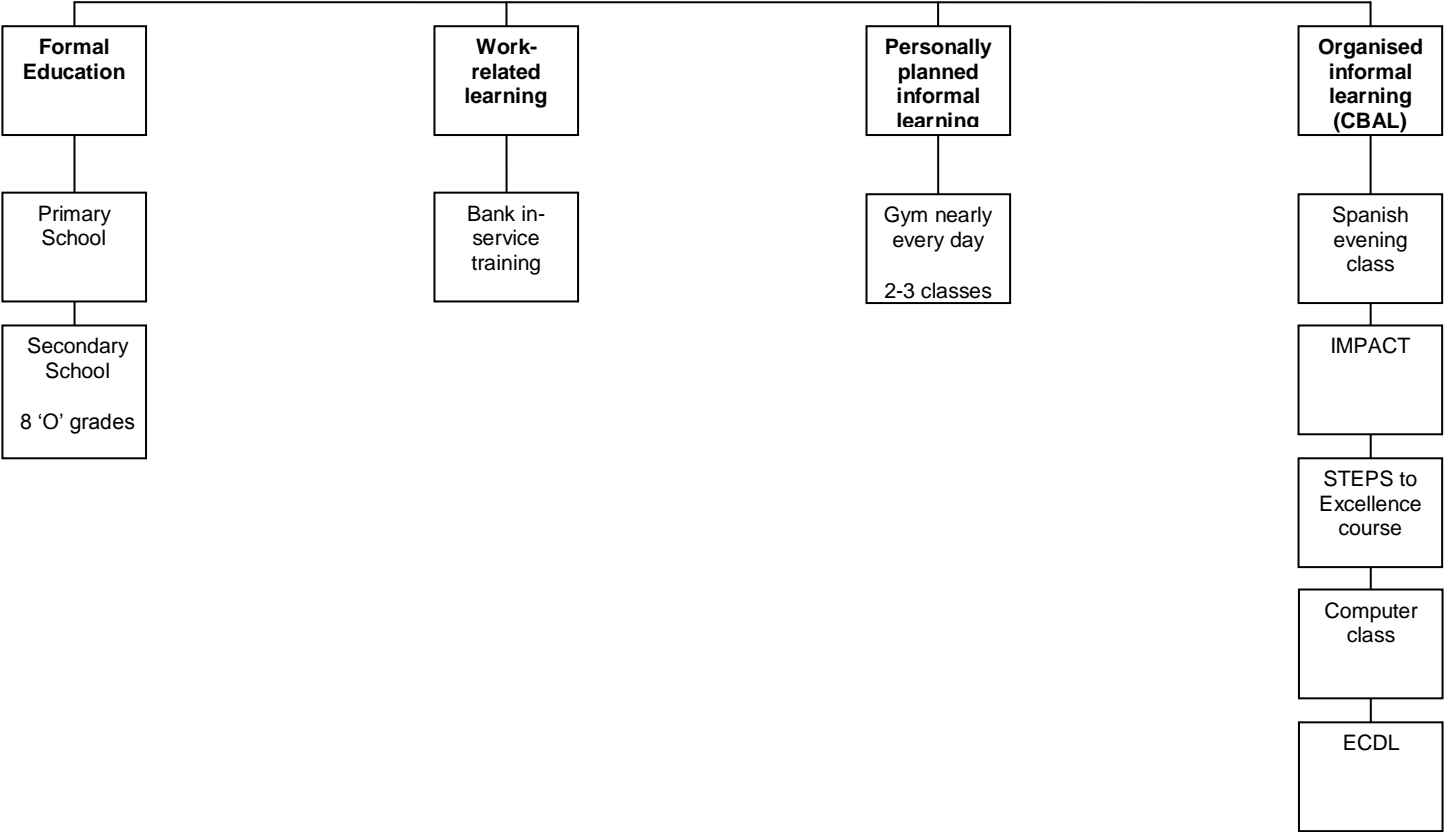


Appendix J

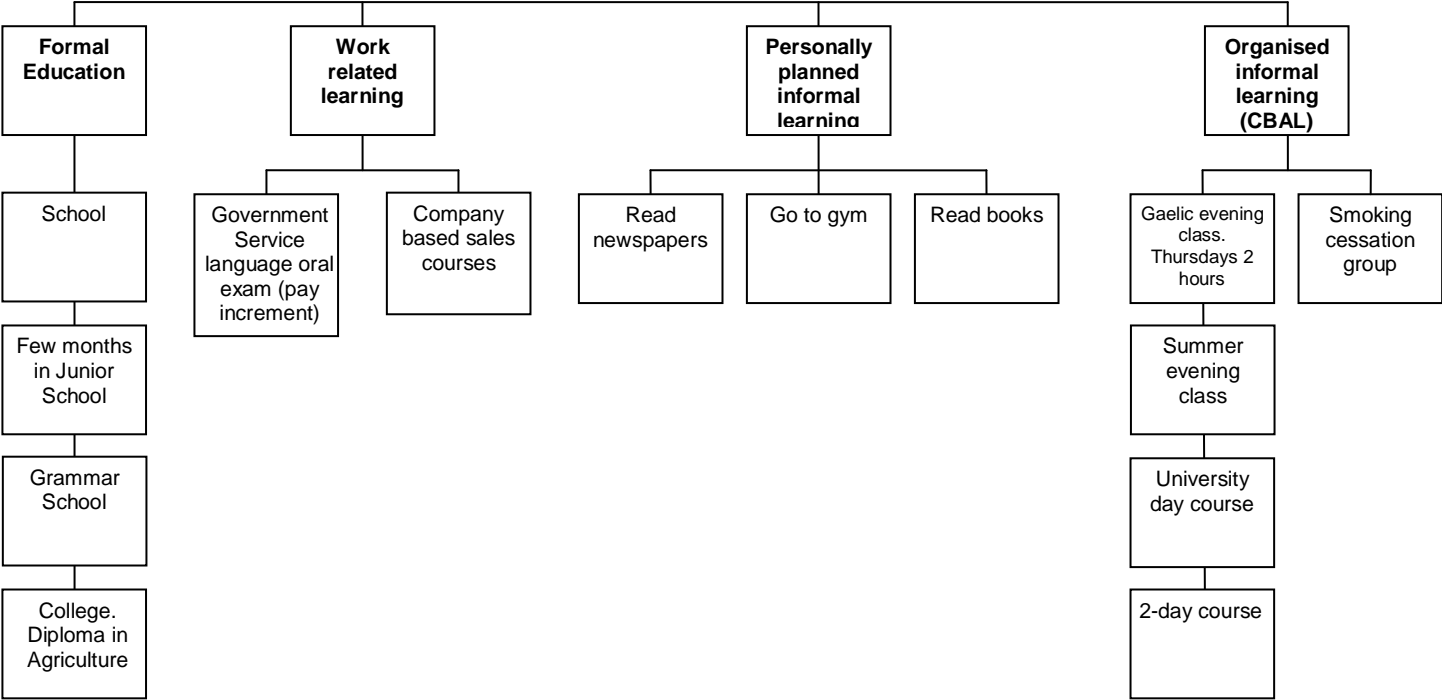
Learning diagram for Helen



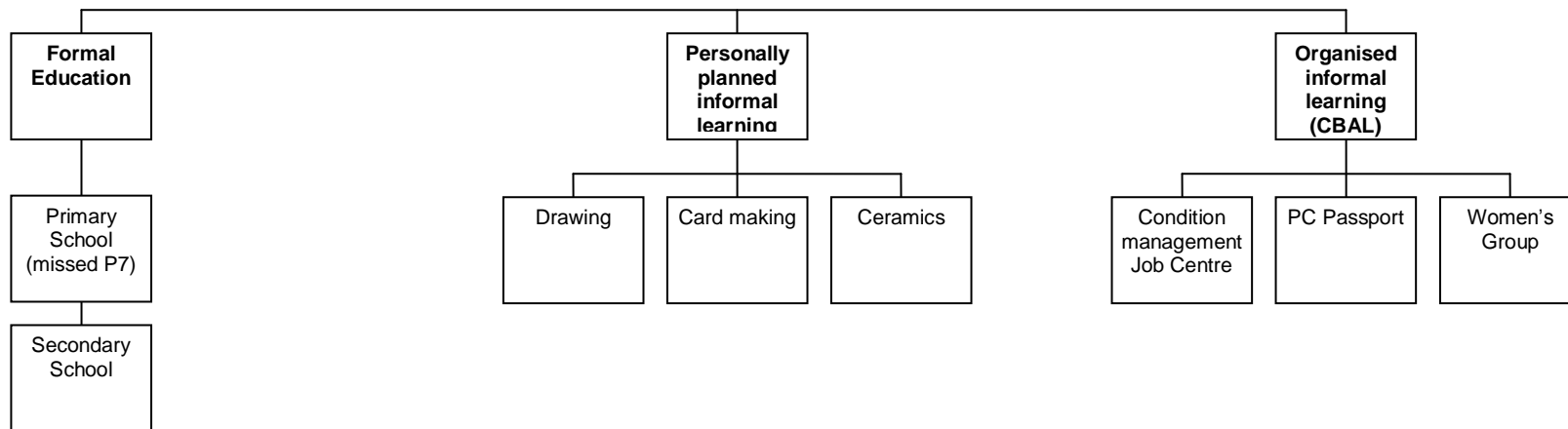
Learning diagram for Doreen



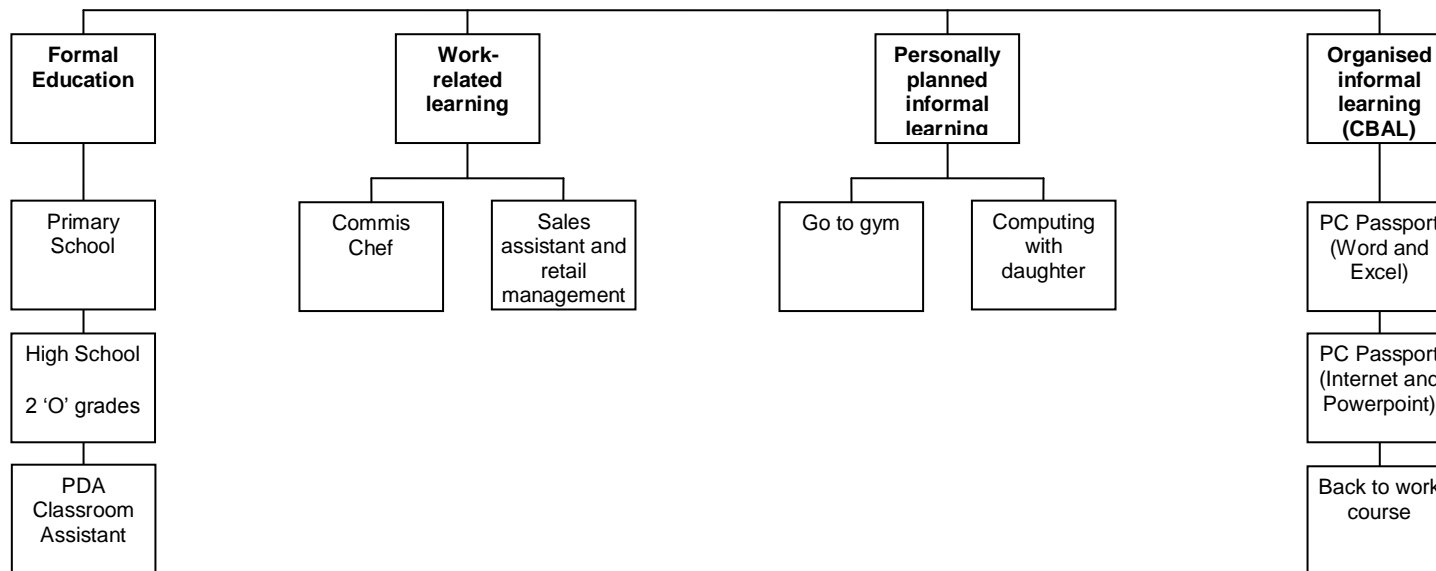
Learning diagram for Sam



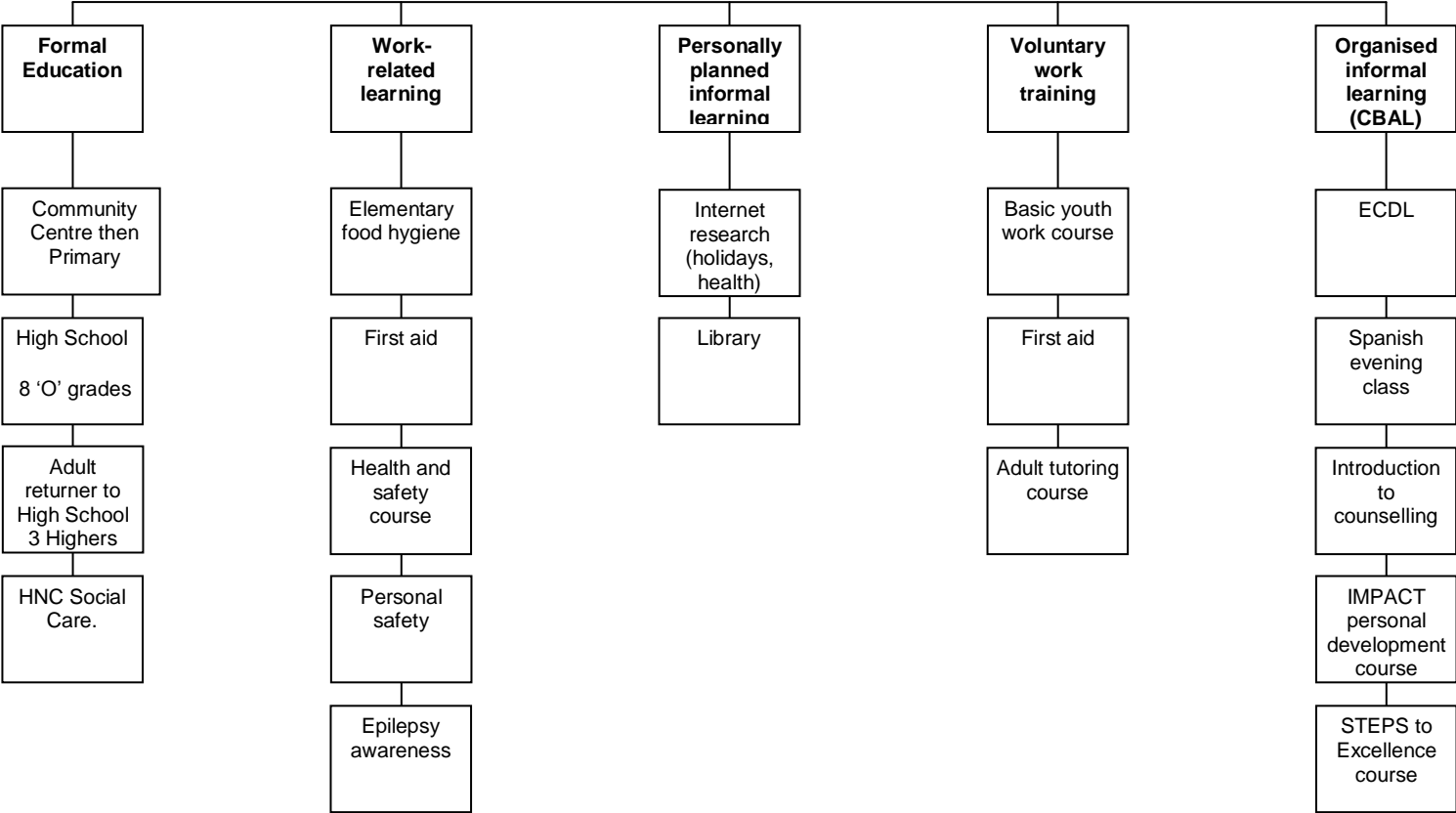
Learning diagram for Elaine



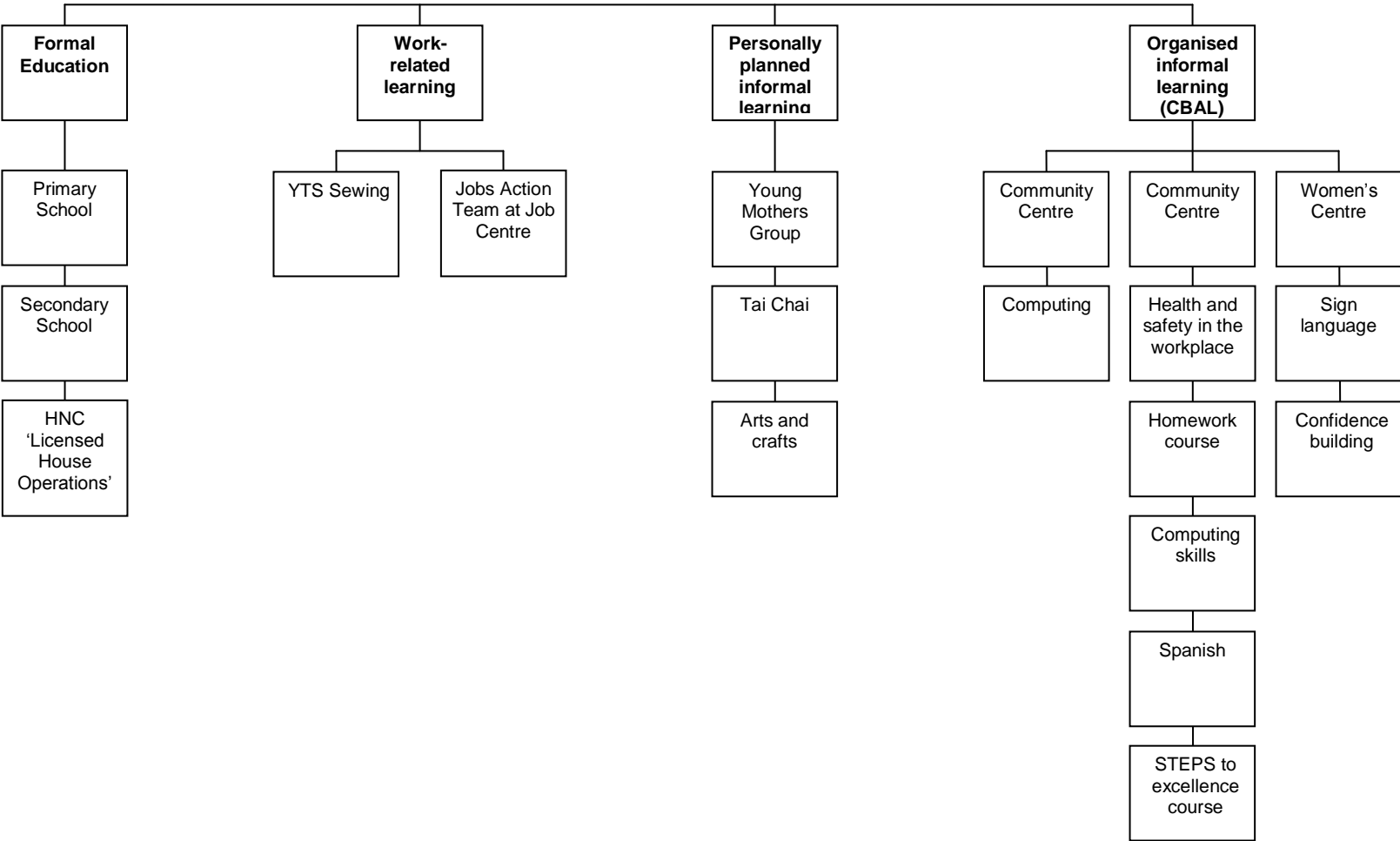
Learning diagram for Linda



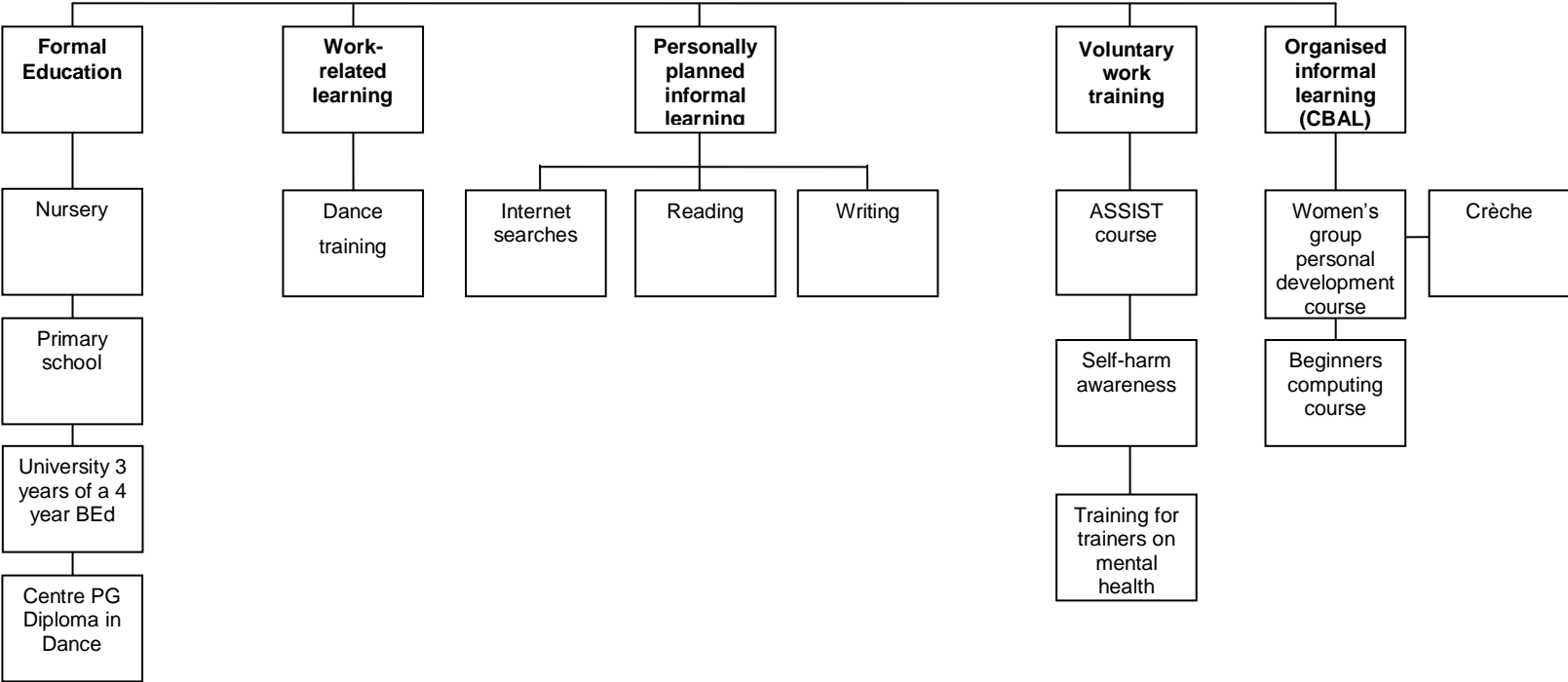
Learning diagram for Mary



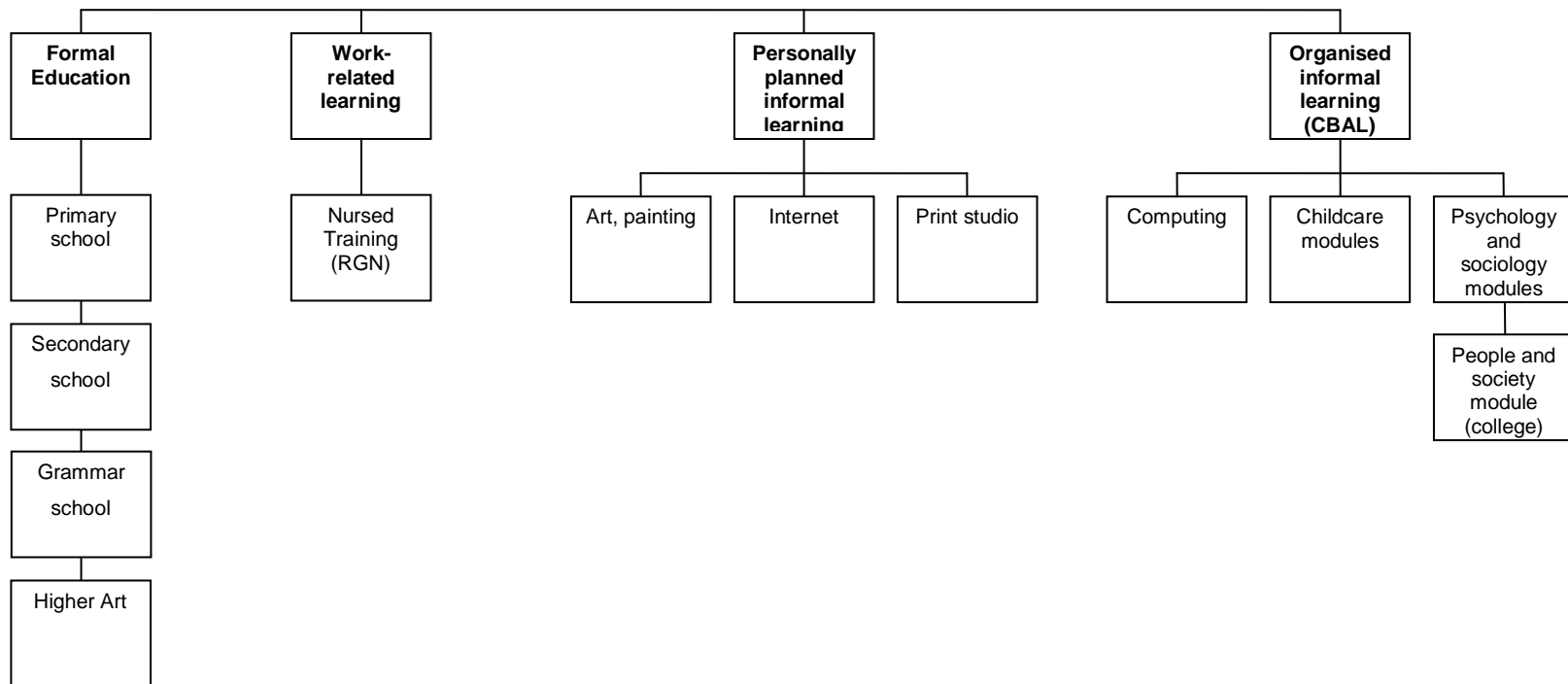
Learning diagram for Melanie



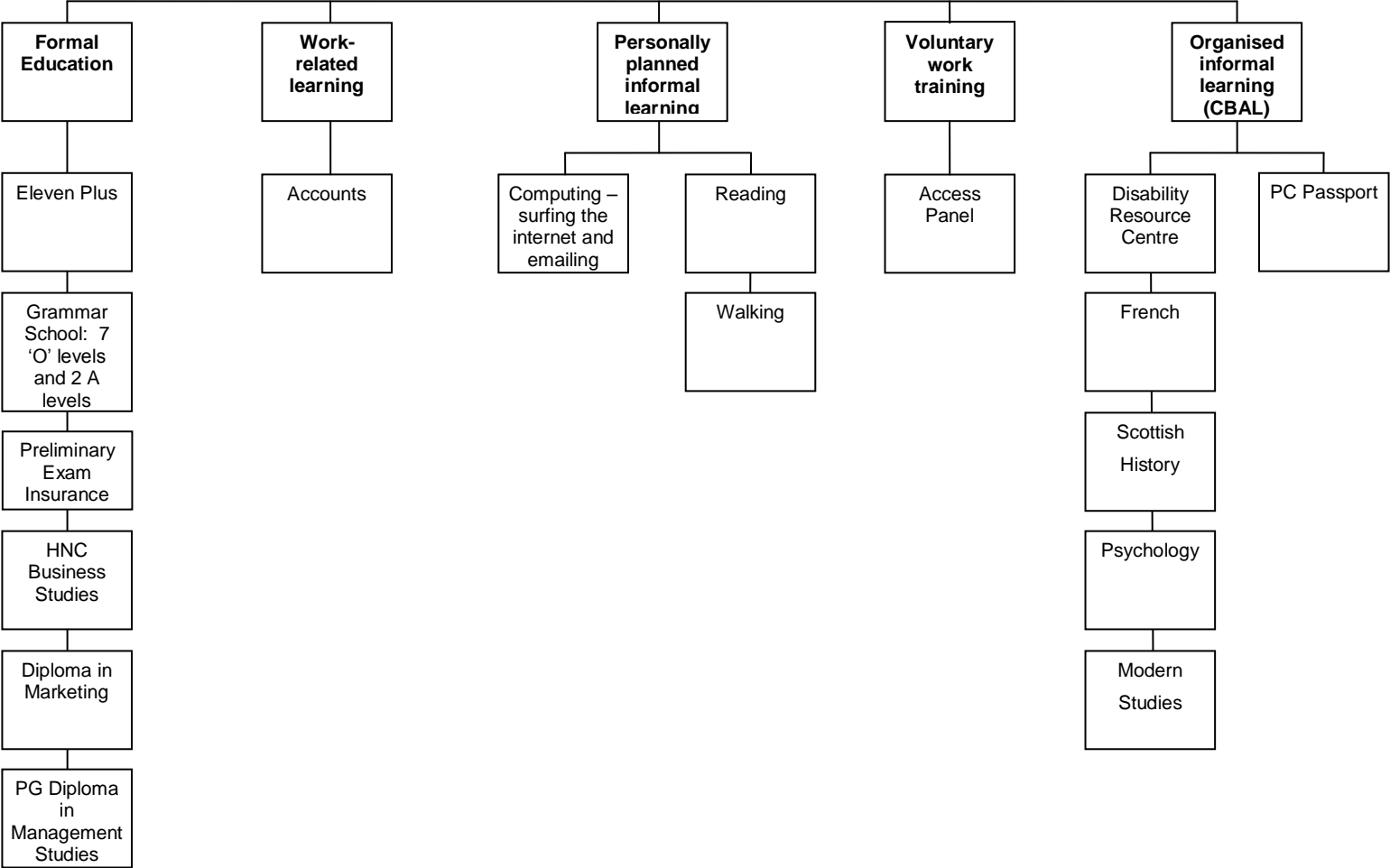
Learning diagram for Sarah



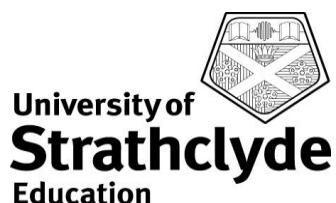
Learning diagram for Alison



Learning diagram for Alan



Appendix K



Thank you for taking part in my study: **learners' progression from community based adult learning opportunities in Scotland.**

If taking part in the interviews for this study has raised any issues for you, additional support is available on the numbers below:

Organisation	Address	Contact number
The Tom Allan Counselling Centre	23 Elmbank Street, Glasgow	0141 221 1535
Citizens Advice Bureau	45 George Street, Paisley	0141 889 2121
Samaritans	210 West George St, Glasgow	0141 248 4488
Renfrewshire Association for Mental Health	41 Blackstoun Road, Paisley	0141 842 3428
East Renfrewshire Mental Health Forum	c/o Causeway, 112b Ayr Rd, N. Mearns	0141 577 5557
East Renfrewshire Victim Support	Municipal Buildings, Barrhead	0141 881 3221
Victim Support Renfrewshire	The Wynd Centre, 6 School Wynd, Paisley	0141 887 0328
The Wynd Counselling Service	The Wynd Centre, 6 School Wynd, Paisley	0141 561 1171
Crisis, Counselling & Advice Services	Riverside House, Old ferry Road, Erskine	0141 812 8474

Janis McIntyre

December 2008

Appendix L

Interview Guide Main Study – 2nd Interviews

Purpose

- Build relationship with interviewee
- Check info/interpretation of first interview
- Explore progression
- Fill in gaps in life history
- Revisit a thing from interview after recorder switched off.

1. To get response to narrative:

What did you think about the writing I sent you?

- How did you feel about it?
- Did you want to change anything?

2. To explore life more:

Can you tell me what your life has been like since our last meeting?

- Family
- Work
- Learning
- Health
- Leisure

3. Learning/life now:

Can you tell me what you're involved in now?

- Learning
- Leisure
- Family
- Work

4. To explore progression:

- What does 'progression' mean to you?
- What would progression be for you?

5. The future:

- What are your hopes for the future?

6. Missing information:

- Dates – on lifeline
- Reasons for things
- Background information.

Appendix M

Questions asked in second stage of data analysis:

1. What are the themes in the interview? What is identified by the participant as important – through repetition or statement?
2. To what extent can the participant be described as part of 'target' group – using definition for my study, and using policy?
3. What reasons did the participant give for their participation?
4. What outcomes were identified by the participant?
5. How do these relate to policy/ to other studies?
6. In the context of participant's life what did progression mean to them?
7. How does that relate to policy?
8. How does it fit with Dewey's (1938) definition of education and experience as growth?
9. How does it fit with McGivney's (1999) types of progression – economic, social, and community?
10. What can we learn from the participant's story that might be important in the wider social context?

Appendix N

Example commentary

The themes in Alison's life story highlighted aspects of her life that were held in apparent tension. The first of these related to her ill-health and early retirement. Alison had not chosen to retire from her work as a nurse, and she was looking for something else to do. She hoped that she could study more or find part time or voluntary work in the future. However, because of her arthritis, she could not take on too much. Her illness meant that she often became exhausted and, because of this, she could not commit to regular hours. In addition, she had to be careful not to earn much in case her benefits were adversely affected, and this made it difficult to find suitable work (field text 1). There was a tension between Alison's desire to find something stimulating to do, and the limiting nature of her illness:

So I'm just trying to find other things to do. It's quite difficult because I'm trying to find things to do that I can do maybe at a slower pace. I don't want to try to dive in and do something four five days a week that I then can maybe do for a month or so and then I'm shattered. Because of the Crohns I tend to get exhausted. Sometimes I'm absolutely fine and then ... it seems to sort of go in a cycle ... one week I'm fine, the next week I'm maybe a wee bit achy and sore and I push myself. The week after that I'm floored for the week, and then after that I'm sort of, maybe just a bit tired but start picking back up again. It sort of goes round. So if I was to do something four days every week, I wouldn't be able to keep it up. So I'm trying to find things that I can do a couple of days a week, or part of a day (field text 1).

Another tension in Alison's story was between her own needs and those of her daughter who had additional learning needs as well as complex difficulties with her sight. Her care took a lot of time, in the journeys to hospital appointments for example (field text 1), and much of Alison's energy. Alison was clear that her daughter's needs took precedence over her own, and this meant that any interests that Alison wished to develop had to fit in with her activities. This could be seen when Alison was unable to attend the art workshops at college because there was a clash with her daughter's music club and choir practice (field text 1).

Threaded throughout Alison's story was her love of art and the frustration that she felt sometimes about being unable to pursue this in earnest. At school she had been

discouraged from taking art seriously as a career or study option, but she had maintained her interest despite this. She continued to draw and paint throughout her adult life but was never able to commit to it full-time (field text 1). At the time of her involvement with this study, Alison still painted as much as she could but she had to stop when the pain in her hands became too much. Also, as mentioned above, she has not been able to commit more time to painting because of her daughter's needs. Continuing to paint was very important to Alison, but it had to take its place among her other responsibilities.

Alison could be seen as fitting well into the target group identified within the definition of cbal used in this study (Communities Scotland, 2003). She was "excluded" (2003, p.9) in that she had been forced to retire from work due to her ill-health, and this had led to social isolation (field text 1). In addition Alison's economic circumstances were difficult. Although her husband was in paid employment, Alison was in receipt of benefits and she worried about her financial security in the long term (field text 1). Alison hoped that she might be able to return to paid employment in the future, but it was unlikely that this would be on a full-time basis, and it was uncertain if it would be possible at all.

Prior to her participation in cbal, Alison could be described as belonging to the group identified in Scottish policy on lifelong learning as being "disengaged from learning" (Scottish Executive, p. 40) as she had not been involved in any form of formal education or training since she had become a nurse, over twenty years earlier (field text 4a). However, Alison's experience resonated with the findings of Sabates et al. (2007) who observed that adults that have been successful in school are more likely to participate in learning at level 2 or higher, later in life. Alison's story showed that she enjoyed school. Also, she had been successful in attaining a scholarship for the local grammar school and later, had completed the training to become a Registered General Nurse (field text 4b). Although Alison had not participated in learning for some time, it was not surprising, perhaps, that she returned to learning later in her life.

At the time of Alison's initial return to learning, she had become socially isolated (field text 2). She described how she had heard about cbal and what had motivated her to attend:

It's actually a neighbour who was going to one of the computer classes that was there had said. At that time I hadn't been retired from nursing, but I was off work sick. But I was getting bored to tears. I was sitting in the house. I wasn't seeing anybody so she said, 'why don't you come to that?' (field text 1).

Alison said that she went to the local community centre to meet people and to have something to do outside the house. At that time it was important, also, that she did not attend anything that could jeopardise her sick pay arrangements, and in this respect, the class fitted well with Alison's personal circumstances. Another part of Alison's motivation to learn was her interest in improving her computing skills, as she could "switch it on and off, but don't ask [her] to press a button on it at that stage" (field text 1).

Alison attended modules in social science subjects, as well as the computing and she identified three main outcomes of participation in cbal. One of these was the development of her skills in computing. She learned word processing, and how to use spreadsheets and the internet. Alison was able to apply this new knowledge to the production of her assignments for the other modules that she was undertaking. Alison enjoyed being able to use the computer, and she used her newly acquired skills for leisure purposes, as well as academic (field text 1).

Alison identified increased self-confidence as a second outcome of her participation in cbal. This outcome has been found by Schuller et al to be "fundamental and pervasive" in many other studies (2002, p.14). Schuller et al (2002) identified the ways in which increased confidence benefitted individuals and communities. One of these was the ability "to put forward one's own view" (2002, p.14) and this can be seen in Alison's story as she said that she was "happier talking to people" (field text 1) than she had been before her participation. Also, Alison's confidence had increased in relation to her ability to learn new things. She had been confident in her role as a nurse but doubted her ability in other areas:

It's given me more confidence, because having been in the one job and doing the one thing all that time ... all right I was quite happy and perfectly confident in what I was doing, but out with that it's a completely different thing altogether. Whereas it's like starting right back at the beginning again. Out in the big wide world, like sort of what do we do now? So at least it gave

you some skills and a bit more confidence, which you just gradually build up as you did things, got to know people and sort of realized that you did actually know and understand a lot of these other things too (field text 1).

Alison valued the social interaction that was part of her participation in cbal, and she had developed some friendships with other participants to the extent that they met out with the class time (field text 1). This was important to Alison as she had not been in contact with other people for much of the period she had been off work. Related to this, a third outcome was that she had found support from the realisation that others were in a similar situation to herself (field text 1). Brookfield (1986) described this aspect of adult learning as “the recognition of oneself in the accounts of others in a group, along with the validation of one’s own experience” (1986, p.61). Alison described how she felt about learning in the community in this way:

It’s very relaxed and friendly and everybody is quite happy helping each other out. You’re all in the same sort of situation really. There’s other people there with families, with children who are going into the crèche. So you’re meeting a lot of people who are in similar situations. That they’re trying to find things to do, and they’ve got families, or for some reason or another they’re not able to go and do full time things. So it’s actually quite good to find out that there are quite a lot of people who are in similar circumstances, that you can actually get talking to (field text 1).

In Alison’s story, progression was linked closely with her personal circumstances. In the context of her life, she identified her participation in cbal as evidence of her progression (field text 7). For example, at the time of her attendance in the computing class, Alison had been signed off from work for two years, and she had become socially isolated. Her time was taken up with the care of her daughter, and her main contact with adults outside her family was with health professionals. In this context it is helpful to consider progression to community based learning, as well as from it:

Well just from starting off going to...it was like a big move for me because I hadn’t gone to anything and I was just in the house and I didn’t know anybody there. So it was a like a big step just to go in and see what was happening and join in and gradually get to know people (field text 7).

Alison had been confident in her work as a nurse, but when she retired she found that she was not as confident in her ability to do something other than nursing. The decision to leave nursing for good had been taken out of her hands and, although she accepted that she could not continue in the job because of her illness, Alison said that she lost part of her identity when she retired (field text 8). Against this background, her participation in cbal can be seen as an aspect of progression.

Alison said also that “you’re progressing yourself” (field text 7) when she discussed the development of her self-confidence, particularly in relation to her ability to learn something new. This aspect of progression was found by Feinstein et al (2003) in their study of the wider benefits of learning. They suggested that progression from supportive learning environments to more challenging types of learning were “enmeshed with a more general progression in terms of personal and social development (p.73). Feinstein et al (2003) suggested that personal and social development through participation in learning as an adult can lead to the intention to continue to learn. This could be seen in Alison’s story. She identified increased self-confidence as an outcome of her participation in cbal. In particular she was more confident about her ability to learn something other than nursing and this had encouraged her to apply to study for an HNC qualification at the local FE College.

Alison identified her application to study at college as part of her progression. She had chosen a course on social science, the subject in which she had developed an interest at the community centre. In addition, it was part time and near to her home which were crucial to her decision, as she was clear that she could not consider attendance at college if it interfered with her care of her daughter. Alison had found a suitable course herself, but the tutor and the community worker with whom she had contact in cbal had encouraged her:

I actually spoke to the lecturer that we had. It was her that actually went on at me and said I should do it: ‘what are you doing just sitting doing this then?’ And the community worker herself had said something, like the ones [modules] that I’d done, like this one, this one and this one, and there we were sitting looking at the prospectus and she said ‘there’s the level, they’re at that level, so all you need to do is just step up one and you’re at that level. So why not? Give it a shot, so... (field text 1).

This intention to continue to learn has been identified by others (Communities Scotland, 2003; McGivney, 1999; Morrell et al, 2004) as one of the main outcomes of participation in learning in the community. Furthermore, McGivney identified an important role for a worker who “is able to straddle both the world of the community and the world of professionals” (1999, p. 106) as can be seen in the roles of both the tutor and the community worker in Alison’s case.

In Scottish policy on lifelong learning (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2007) supporting learners to move from informal to more formal learning contexts is identified as a key role for cbal. Alison had achieved these aims in that she had applied to attend FE provision following her participation in informal learning. In addition, she had considered the possibility of going to university eventually (field text 7) and hoped to be able to work again in the future. However, Alison’s story demonstrated that adults’ progression may not be a straightforward linear path through increasingly advanced levels of study. Alison had been well-qualified when she worked as a nurse, but her illness and subsequent early retirement meant that, for a time, progression meant returning to learning at a relatively low level. Alison attended the community centre for a period of two years before she had gained enough confidence in her abilities to apply to study at college (field text 4a). In her case, it had taken some considerable time to achieve the stated aims of policy.

Progression for Alison could not be separated from her personal circumstances. Although she hoped to progress academically, this intention was contingent on other factors in her life (Gallacher et al, 2000) such as Alison’s health, and her daughter’s personal development. Another aspect of progression identified by Alison highlighted this link with personal circumstances further. Alison had chosen to attend the social science modules at first because they looked interesting. However, she described an unexpected outcome from her studies in that she was able to apply her newly acquired knowledge to her family, and the situation with her daughter:

Just doing that has helped at least understand the things, situation at home with my daughter, which is making it easier for me to follow through some things with her. So it’s making...I don’t know if you’d call it progression or not but it does allow me to progress in a sense with my daughter. It allows us to have some sort of understanding, and also a couple of other people that are doing the course have got children, maybe not in the same situation but one

or two of them have got children with some sort of problem or another, so it means you've got other contacts and you do sort of give each other that wee bit of support (field text 7).

Alison's story demonstrated the close link between her personal circumstances and progression. Progression could not be considered in isolation from Alison's ill-health and early retirement. She described how difficult she had found accepting the decision that she should retire, and she felt a loss of identity when she stopped working as a nurse (field text 8). Cbal appears to have contributed to progression in that Alison regarded her attendance at the courses as a step forward. Progression was linked also to her developing self-confidence which enabled her to make decisions about her future. However Alison's progression was very closely tied to her daughter's needs also, and any progression on Alison's part could not be considered separately from this central aspect of Alison's life.

Appendix O

List of activities that the learners moved to, following participation in cbal

Helen

- Enquired about classes/courses in FE and HE
- Increased the numbers of children in her care, and her hours of working as a childminder

Alan

- Began volunteering at a hospice, and later increased his shifts
- Went on holiday

Alison

- Began an HNC Social Sciences, part time in FE
- Continued with cbal

Doreen

- Enquired about volunteering through the local Council for Voluntary Service
- Continued with cbal

Sam

- Attended weekend courses in Gaelic in FE
- Considered moving to an advanced Gaelic class

Elaine

- Joined a walking group
- Joined a gym
- Continued with cbal
- Signed up to a volunteer website

Melanie

- Began an NC Hairdressing, part time in FE
- Continued to work towards ECDL

Sarah

- Was offered part-time work
- Participated in a consultation exercise for the local Community Health Partnership
- Joined the Visual Impairment Unit

Linda

- Continued with cbal

Mary

- Attended courses in order to be able to encourage volunteers in her workplace to participate
- Continued with cbal
- Began fostering children