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Adult Community Learning Participation and Parental Involvement in Schooling

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ABSTRACT

The argument that adult community learning (ACL) participation plays a part in influencing parents' perceptions and practices with respect to schooling children is appealing but there is little evidence to show whether this is the case and, if so, what form it takes. Statistical studies have revealed mixed findings, ranging from no impact to some changes in behaviour when parents study at university. Yet, the mechanisms by which this process occurs are little understood. Considering the varied findings, this qualitative study aims to explore the nature and extent of ACL, and its influence on parents and children. Drawing on adult education theory and Bourdieu's concept of 'capital', the study focuses on examples of parental ACL participation in Wales. Findings suggest that whilst all parents want the best for their children, some parents struggle to provide support, especially at secondary education stage. Parents typically draw upon a range of support mechanisms; they refer to the school, family and friends, the internet, work and volunteering, as well as hiring private tutors. Moreover, parents participating in multiple episodes of ACL, especially at the higher levels, draw upon and utilise their knowledge, skills, and resources to provide timely and effective support; this prevents slippage in the educational sense. Also, findings suggest that ACL participation stimulates and, in some cases, boosts children's learning. In contrast, parents with low-level qualifications and parents who engage in fewer episodes of ACL, invariably have a far limited range of resources to call upon. Here, parents tend to rely heavily upon the school, family members, the internet, and if finances allow, private tutors. Consequently, when support is delayed or ineffective, this increases the risk of children falling behind at school. However, a solution to create a mutual mechanism of support in the home learning environment is put forward to overcome the problem.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	DEFINITION
ACL	Adult Community Learning
BNIM	Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSE	Certificate in Secondary Education
ESRC	Economic Research Council
Estyn	The Office of Her Majesty's Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
O Level	Ordinary level
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SES	Socio-economic status
SL	Synchronised Learning
TLT	Transformative Learning Theory
TUC	Trades Union Congress
ULRs	Union Learning Representatives
ULF	Union Learning Fund
WG	Welsh Government

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Education and family

This thesis is concerned with adult community learning (ACL) in Wales, and the nature and extent to which participation influences parents and their children. Although much has been written about the impact of education on the family often evidence is linked to parents' prior education attainment before starting a family, for example, see studies by Feinstein et al. (2008) and Dickson and Smith (2011) in the UK, and internationally (Haveman and Wolfe 1995; Holmlund et al. 2011; Carneiro et al. 2013). In contrast to these studies, far fewer studies have focused on understanding the influence of parents' education while raising a family, mainly because adults participate in episodes of learning at different ages, stages and levels throughout the life course. Unlike the traditional education achievement markers used at say, 16 or 18 years, or at university, once the traditional pathway has elapsed, it is more difficult to assess the later impact of the ACL pathway on the family. This is mainly because the adult learner's role is dynamic, changeable, and often transitory; adults dip in and out of learning as and when required, and when circumstances permit (Pallas 1993).

Further, while it is acknowledged that ACL participation can make a difference to adult lives in personal, social and health terms, as well as in contributing to society and a more prosperous economy (Schuller et al. 2004; Connolly et al. 2008), much less is known about the influence of ACL participation on the family. Certainly, ACL participation can equip adults with new knowledge, skills and abilities (Biesta et al. 2011) but far less is known about the role these characteristics play in influencing parent-child relationships and, for that matter, parent-school relationships.

Despite a paucity of research in this area, a number of studies have begun to address this question: notably in the UK, the impact of learning careers on families across the generations (Gorard et al. 1999; Gorard and Rees 2002); the impact of learning on family formation and dissolution (Blackwell and Bynner 2002); family life and learning (Brassett-Grundy 2004a, b); and more recently, studies in the US on the impact of higher education on disadvantaged families (Attewell and Lavin 2007; Roksa and Potter 2011; Domina and Roksa 2012). Taking these studies into account, this study aims to examine the role of parental ACL participation and its influence on the family. In this case, family represents parents, carers, young people, and children. While it is acknowledged that

grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, for example, influence children and young people, the wider family is not considered in this study. Specifically, the study investigates the nature and extent to which parental ACL participation intersects with familial relationships, while aiming to understand the mechanisms inherent within this process. Although the process is highly complex, the subject does raise some fundamental questions, specifically:

- Does the nature and extent of ACL participation influence parenting styles and practices towards the education of their children?
- Do multiple episodes of learning, or does the nature and level of learning influence children?
- Does ACL participation help mitigate the risk of lower-level outcomes for children?
- Does ACL participation boost or hinder children's learning?
- Do parents utilise the knowledge, skills and experiences acquired via ACL participation to support their children through school and beyond?
- What happens when parents do not possess the knowledge, skills and resources to support their children through school? Do they draw upon other forms of support, or do they just give up trying?

These are just some questions of interest. Of course, it would be very difficult to demonstrate a direct causal link between parental ACL participation and children's outcomes in this study. Nevertheless, maybe this question can be addressed in other studies. For the moment though I outline the aim of this study, which attempts to answer some of the questions stipulated above. Therefore, primarily this study will explore:

The nature and extent to which participation in ACL influences parents' perceptions and practices with respect to the education of their children.

The aim is underpinned by three main questions:

- 1) *How do we understand parents' lives in relation to their social background, education, training and work?*
- 2) *Does ACL participation influence and shape parenting goals, styles and practices towards the education of their children, and if so, to what extent?*
- 3) *What are children's and young people's views and personal experience of parental ACL participation?*

Before addressing the three main questions, the next section introduces my interest in the subject, and my personal and professional background in the field of ACL.

1.2 Personal learning and professional background

As a professional working in the field of ACL for over 20 years, I had often wondered what difference learning makes to the lives of adult learners and their families. However, there was never enough time in my busy work schedule to delve deeply into this subject. Certainly, I knew from discussions with students how learning in later life had changed and, in some cases, transformed adult lives but alas I was never quite sure of the impact on the family. Strangely, based on my experiences, I had always held the assumption that ACL participation would automatically improve parent's lives and the lives of their children. Indeed, surely children would benefit in some small way when parents participated in learning.

When the opportunity arose to apply for a PhD studentship that was themed to cover this area, I jumped at the chance. The studentship, which had been conceived in very broad outline between Cardiff University and the Workers' Educational Association in south Wales, resonated well with the experiences I had encountered in my personal learning journey and professional career: a journey that began after my children were born. There was another reason for undertaking the studentship. In my mind, I wanted to claim the ultimate academic prize: a prize I would never have even conceived to claim in my youth. Indeed, failure to reach my academic potential at the age of 18 years has stayed with me to this day. However, on a more positive note, the experience has provided me with the motivation to learn in later life. There is no better incentive than that little voice in my head telling me, 'I could have done better!' This is what drives me and, without doubt, countless others to reconnect with learning. However, learning while raising a family and working places exceptional demands on one's time and energy, and often requires a mountain of strength and resilience to win through. Nonetheless effort and dedication can pay off in the shape of new knowledge, ideas, insights, and new contacts and social relationships. More importantly, the satisfaction of learning combined with the sweet smell of success adds up over time. Consequently, learning can bring adults a new-found confidence and sense of agency: crucial aspects of being that have the potential to 'spill over' into the next generation.

Indeed, taking a moment to reflect on my personal learning journey, I can think of many occasions where I have utilised the knowledge, skills and experiences gained through ACL to help support my children through school and beyond. For example, there was the occasion when my daughter and a friend were struggling to complete their homework on Shakespeare. The friend's mother did not have a clue. I only had limited knowledge however I had an inkling of how to overcome the obstacle. When buying resources for my part-time Community and Youth Work Diploma course I had come across English text guides on Shakespeare. After a trip to the bookshop to purchase a book, I then sat down with my daughter and her friend to explain how to use the book. Suffice to say, after handing in the homework, my daughter and her friend both received top marks. Moreover, this was just the tip of the iceberg. Many years later when my daughters, and a niece, studied at university once again I drew upon my learning experience at university to proofread and give feedback on assignments.

Consequently, had I not returned to learn after the birth of my children I am not so sure to what level or extent I could have provided that much-needed support through their school, college and university years. Looking back at my achievements - several O levels at 16, two A levels at 32, a higher national diploma at 35, on and off the job training and development, a degree by the age of 40, and a Masters degree by the age of 50 – I could appreciate the distance travelled. In fact, I always remember my first learning epiphany: it happened during an A Level Sociology class. We were discussing gender inequality and the pay gap. I remember the tutor questioning the class, and in my naivety, I replied, *'Because that's the way it is'*, at which point the tutor challenged me to explain the rationale behind my thinking. Discussion in class taught me a lot that evening: life doesn't have to be that way. We do not have to accept things just on others' say so. Certainly, from that time onwards I began to question the world around me; for example, no longer was I, or my husband for that matter, influenced by advertising campaigns to buy girly, pink toys for our four and five-year-old daughters. Over the years, we did succumb to requests to buy dolls, toy prams, and such like but we also bought toy cars, a garage, and Scalextric sets.

Unlike my husband and I who had both completed degrees around the age of 40, both daughters followed the traditional pathway, achieving a degree in their early twenties. My older daughter now works in the field of architecture, involved in the design of multi-million-pound buildings, advising contractors (usually males) on design and building matters, while my younger daughter works in the field of social work helping to support

families in crisis. I am immensely proud of both my daughters, and I have learnt so much from them. They have turned out to be such lovely human beings: creative, intelligent, resourceful, thoughtful, helpful, caring, happy young women; and there can be no doubt that this experience has helped me frame the research set out in the following thesis.

1.3 My interest in adult community learning

Against this backdrop then, the motivation to undertake the PhD studentship came from my desire to take some time out to focus on answering the many questions that were whirring around in my head. As previously noted, based on my professional experience, I had always assumed that ACL participation would, in some way, benefit parents however I was not so sure in what way ACL participation benefitted their children. Perhaps I have been blinkered. Certainly, throughout the course of the study I have reflected on this thought, often questioning my assumptions and preconceptions, even to the extent of considering that ACL participation may make little difference to the lives of parents and their children. Perhaps there are other, more important, mediating factors that influence children? For example, nowadays there is a tendency for parents to hire private tutors to coach their children to examination success, albeit those that can afford to pay for private tuition (Kirby 2016; Michaelidou 2016). Nevertheless, from a personal point of view, there were several advantages to undertaking the research study. First, across my working life I have gained a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field of ACL. Second, I have travelled the ACL pathway, and on that path, have participated in multiple episodes of learning since leaving school. Third, as an adult, and a parent, I could appreciate some of the barriers and obstacles related to learning in later life. Fourth, I have a reasonable understanding of the cultural, social, political, educational and economic backdrop in Wales since I have lived in south Wales all my life and know the area reasonably well.

Despite possessing a measure of 'insider' knowledge and experience, especially within the Wales and UK context, I was aware that my assumptions and preconceptions could work against me inasmuch as it could 'cloud' my better judgment or skew my ideas (Silverman 2010). Being an avid, passionate lifelong learner, I certainly have a vested interest in this study. However, as Maso explains, many researchers must face this dilemma since:

Researchers bring with them their own emotions, intuitions, experiences, meanings, values, commitments, presuppositions, prejudices and personal

agendas, their position as researchers and their spontaneous or unconscious reactions to subjects and events in the field.

(Maso 2008, p. 40)

Moreover, there is the problem of how to move away from my ACL professional role to concentrate on a different type of role: the research role. At first, the leap from one role to another was difficult to reconcile however I was fully aware of the dichotomy and tried my best to resolve the issues. I understood there would be further wrestling and questioning in terms of bias, 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', much like Finlay (2008) posits in her discussion about reflexivity in research.

Perhaps it is worth noting here the role of PhD supervisors for aside from providing a whole host of support mechanisms, supervisors also challenge candidates to critically reflect, what Petre and Rugg (2004, p. 49) identify as "the 'insight after the event' phenomenon": moments of clarification and sense-making that occur sometime after supervisor meetings. Certainly, my supervisors, Gareth and David, encouraged me to zone in on the research issues and challenges while offering timely advice and guidance. I elaborate on how I overcame those issues and challenges in Methodology Chapter 4 but for now I move on to explain the rationale for the study, followed by a brief overview of the thesis and outline of chapters.

1.4 Research rationale

The rationale for the commissioning of the study originated from a question posed by Dr Jeremy Gass of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Cymru¹. WEA Cymru is a voluntary organisation committed to promoting adult education in Wales. Funded mainly by the Welsh Government, WEA Cymru is a key training provider, delivering adult community learning courses across the region. Since WEA Cymru works closely with communities, adult learners and their families, this research study is important to understanding whether participation in adult community learning has links with the nature and extent of parental or familial involvement in schooling. Therefore, in collaboration with Cardiff University an application was made to the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) Wales Doctoral Training Centre to fund a PhD studentship, whereupon a few months later I applied and was successful.

¹ Re-named Adult Learning Wales in November 2016.

1.5 Thesis overview

This is a qualitative study: interviews were conducted with 24 parents and 15 children and young people. With help from WEA Cymru staff, eight WEA Cymru learners (a third of the sample) took part, while the rest (18 participants) were recruited via purposive and snowballing techniques. Interviews were carried out at a variety of community venues predominantly throughout south Wales.

In Chapter 2 – *Adult Community Learning* – I discuss key issues in researching the life course, then present a brief overview of ACL in the broader context of lifelong learning, by tracing its historical roots, patterns of participation, and the policy context in Wales. Next, I look at different forms and types of adult learning; the wider benefits of learning; the motivations, barriers, and non-economic benefits of learning, followed by a brief discussion about identity, agency, transitions and transformation in lifelong learning. Lastly, I discuss some theoretical concepts in adult education, arguing that although different concepts like transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1978), and situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991) are useful to understand relationships, these concepts alone do not provide the whole picture. Finally, I maintain that adult learning involves a great deal of ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ effort, however studies often tend to focus on these aspects in isolation, rather than together. Here, I argue that by combining the ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ it is possible to explain personal change in the learning process, as well as identify mechanisms of influence and change across the life course.

Parenting and Education (Chapter 3) explores the subject of parental involvement in schooling, and examines the rationale behind the policy, as well as looking at current frameworks and models. Next, I discuss parents and schooling by looking at: parental school choice; parents’ perception of role and responsibilities; parental involvement from a social class perspective; the home-school relationship, and the subject of parental homework help. This is followed by a discussion on patterns and trends in education, alongside research that refers to the impact of ACL participation on the family. Finally, I discuss the rationale behind my building of a conceptual framework through Bourdieu’s concept of capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), with an emphasis on the ‘social and emotional’, to explain the influence of learning in parent-child relationships.

In Chapter 4, *Methodological Considerations*, I consider my ontological and epistemological position followed by an outline of my research aim, approach and design. Next, I discuss gaining access to the field, recruitment, and interview sites. I identify the risks involved, as well as my ethical considerations. My main method of data collection was via semi-structured interviews with parents, children and young people. Conducting life story interviews with parents lends itself well to 'narrative analysis' and this is the main approach I took to understand parents' lives, but only in relation to their social background, and education, training and work trajectories. Regarding analysis, I explain how I arrived at a suitable method, using the Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) alongside using network analysis techniques, to analyse the parent interviews. In addition, I made use of NVivo software to catalogue and cross reference emergent themes arising from parent, child and young people's interviews. However, these methods were not sufficiently robust to identify the underlying mechanisms involved in parent-child relationships, and so I looked towards other ways to solve this problem. After reading about emotional capital, I did some further analysis work. This led me to devise the NAP² procedure, from which I was able to identify mechanisms of influence, change and transition in and across people's lives.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 form the basis of the empirical findings that link into the three research questions. *Chapter 5 – Parent's Lives* - presents findings from the first part of the interview schedule that focused on life story interviews with 24 parents (16 female, 8 male) but only in terms of social background, education, training and work (Research Question no. 1). *Chapter 6 – Schooling Children* - presents findings from the second part of the interview schedule that explored parent-child relationships, and the home-school relationship (Research Question no. 2). Finally, *Chapter 7 – Parent, Child and Young People's Perspectives on ACL and Schooling* - continues to explore Research Question no. 2. In addition, it draws on findings from nine semi-structured interviews with 15 children and young people (10 female, 5 male) to explore their views and experiences of parental ACL participation (Research Question no. 3).

In Chapter 8 – *Understanding Family Learning Lives* - I discuss my empirical findings in the context of parents' learning lives, and their experience of schooling children and young people. Next, I consider how parental ACL participation was viewed from a child and young person's perspective. Then later I introduce the notion of facilitator, booster,

² N = Negative emotion/cognition, A = Attendant mechanism, P = Positive emotion/cognition

checker and blocker mechanisms in learning, and consider the dimension of timely and effective 'support' without which there is a risk of slippage, in the educational sense.

Finally, in Chapter 9 – *Conclusion and Recommendations* – I present my main conclusions drawn from the empirical findings. Here I consider my findings in light of the literature and question the importance and timing of ACL with respect to children's education. Also, I discuss implications for future policy and practice by suggesting that there is scope for ACL providers and secondary schools to work together to offer a synchronised curriculum of learning in areas of disadvantage across Wales. In doing so, I highlight some issues in the delivery of such a programme. Next, I outline the strengths and limitations of the study then finally close the chapter by presenting implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2 – ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING (ACL)

This chapter examines the area of adult community learning (ACL) within the broader context of lifelong learning: lifelong learning being an umbrella term used to describe learning from 'cradle to the grave' (Tight 1996; Field and Leicester 2000). Firstly, I present key issues in researching the life course. Here I consider ways to understand the life course. Secondly, I present a brief overview of adult education from the beginning of twentieth century onwards, and examine patterns of participation, as well as the policy context in Wales. Thirdly, I discuss different forms and types of learning, as well as looking at the motivations, barriers, and the non-economic benefits of learning. Fourthly, I discuss the notion of identity and agency. This is followed by a discussion on adult learning theory, and the consideration of using social and emotional concepts to understand the process and mechanisms of change and transition in adult lives.

2.1 Key issues in researching the life course

The idea behind how we learn, change and develop over the life course, together with how we pass on what is learnt to the next generation is complex and difficult to theorise. Consequently, during the initial stages of the study, I considered several features that I felt could potentially skew the results of the study. Firstly, given the wide age range of parents in this study - 22 to 51 years - all have lived through different timespans, social contexts, and cultures. This feature alone makes it difficult to make comparisons between individuals; for example, participants that left school in the early 1980s faced a different economic, social, political, educational and technological landscape to those that left school in the late 1990s. However, the focus here is not on examining *in depth* the social forces of power, privilege, disadvantage or inequality in different timespans or social contexts, important as this is, but rather is to understand how adults navigate their way through changing circumstances, while considering the role of ACL participation, and the part it plays in the life process. Yet, as Alheit (2009) points out, it would be dangerous to assume we are in control of our own destiny since as Rees et al. (1997) point out broader societal parameters, to some extent, will always play a superior role in the life course. In Wales, for example, attendance at school is compulsory up to the age of 16 years, while post-16 adult education and training is mainly selective and voluntary. Nevertheless, as Allatt (1993, p. 144) indicates:

Within the institutional framework of the education system... it is possible for some individuals to weave, to some extent, their own pathways and create

additional milestones and openings; for in the passage through the life course, irrespective of social class, individuals and families draw upon what resources they have to ease, shape, and enhance their journeys as best they can.

Likewise, Alheit (2009) argues that even within a somewhat restricted learning landscape, there will always be a range of informal and formal learning opportunities available to us than we can ever hope to fulfil over the life course.

Secondly, although learning lives can be tracked chronologically, by classifying educational outcomes at 16 years, and then comparing educational attainment levels some 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years later, this exercise alone yields little information with respect to the transmission of learning from one generation to the next. Certainly, achievements gained early in the life course - via the traditional route of school, college and university - tend to attract regular attention in the education research literature. Overall trends here show that parents' educational attainments are positively associated with children's educational attainments (Ermisch and Francesconi 2001; Dickson and Smith 2011; Dickson et al. 2013). However, the trends do not of course tell you much about individuals and how they may or may not follow the trend. For example, despite the inheritance of social and cultural advantages, some middle-class children will always fail against the odds (Power et al. 2003) while some children from marginalised backgrounds may do extremely well academically, and throughout working life (Siraj-Blatchford 2010; Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2011). Not to mention children from ethnic minority backgrounds who have outperformed their white working class peers with respect to attainment at age 16 (Department for Education 2015).

2.2 Historical roots, patterns of participation, and policy

To understand ACL participation within the context of education and lifelong learning in the UK, the next section briefly explores its historical roots, patterns of participation, and presents the policy context in Wales.

2.2.1 Historical roots

Adult education in the UK can be traced back as far as the Middle Ages however it was not until a few centuries later that adult learning rose in popularity; mainly due to the growth of public interest in science (Kelly 1992). Subsequently from the nineteenth

century onwards many societies and movements emerged; the most notable being the Mechanics' Institute. Renowned for delivering scientific public lectures across UK towns and cities, this new form of learning was aimed at the middle-classes, or at least to those that could afford to attend lectures (Kelly 1992). Towards the latter end of the nineteenth century the 'liberal' adult education movement gained momentum, championed through workers' education, university extra mural departments, trade unions and others (Gordon et al. 1991). The growth of adult education stemmed from an interest in promoting the idea that adults should have the right to access educational opportunities throughout the life course (Jarvis 2009). Although there was a need to upskill the population, there was also a strong social purpose attached to promoting active citizenship, democracy, and collective action (Stock 1996).

Adult education in Wales has evolved in a similar way to the rest of the UK, albeit mainly channelled through religion and the workplace (Gorard and Rees 2002). In the nineteenth century churches, chapels, Sunday Schools, and voluntary societies had an active presence in many areas across south Wales (Evans 1971). Here adults had the opportunity to attend adult reading classes and tutorials delivered by ministers or other qualified persons, public lectures and debates, and penny readings (Kelly 1992). At this time many works' and colliery schools offered evening classes. These were often set up to address adults' poor skills in literacy since many had left school by the age of 13 years or earlier. Evening classes were met with mixed reaction; some classes across south Wales were well attended while others lived a 'precarious existence' (Evans 1971, p. 275). This was mainly due to the fact that many adults were exhausted or too tired to attend classes at the end of a long, hard day's work. Notwithstanding, Wales has a long, rich history in music and the arts. From as early as 1176, local eisteddfodau groups figured prominently in Welsh life. This led to the setting up of the National Eisteddfod: an event held annually up to present day, to celebrate music and the arts, and dedicated to the culture and language of Wales (Edwards 1990).

At the turn of the twentieth century adult education became more prominent in Wales, as with the rest of the UK. This was mainly due to unemployment and changes in the workplace, especially in industries such as coal, steel, and tinsplate (Kelly 1992). Indeed, many universities recognised there was a growing need to educate communities with the aim of alleviating poverty and hardship, and this is seen in their commitment to provide university extension classes, and later the establishment of university settlements (Kelly 1992). Alongside the work of the universities, several institutions and movements sprang

up in Wales around this time, notably the WEA, Trade Unions, the Labour College movement in Wales, and many others. This fuelled a new enthusiasm for social and political knowledge as prior to this adults had mainly acquired knowledge through schools and religious institutions (Lewis 2007).

Access to new forms of adult education also spurred the establishment and growth in Miners' Institutes and Welfare Halls. Mainly funded from miner's wage packets, Miners' Institutes were well resourced; each housing a reading room and library stocked with books, periodicals and newspapers (Francis 1976). This spurred a great interest in learning amongst the working classes and, as a result, many progressed to university, some notably to study at Ruskin College, Oxford. As Francis (1976, p. 190) acknowledged, "[w]hat distinguishes the South

landscape has changed with education provision now managed by each of the four nations: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Understanding who participates in ACL, therefore, is crucial to determining education and training strategies for the future, especially in relation to the changing needs of the economy. The next section presents an overview of the current picture.

2.2.2 Patterns of participation

Since 1996 the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has recorded ACL participation rates across the UK. Each year a survey of 5000 adults aged 17 years and over is conducted in the UK. Surveys show that participation is unevenly spread across society; it largely depends on area of residence, social class, work status, prior learning record and age (Aldridge and Tuckett 2001, 2009; Aldridge 2015). Although, the number of adult learners in the UK has remained constant since 1996, there is a wide variation in who participates. Socio-economic class (SES) is a main indicator of ACL participation. Consistent with previous years, the 2015 survey highlighted that adults belonging to social class AB³ over the course of the last three years were more than twice as likely to participate in learning than adults belonging to social class DE (NIACE 2015a). Further, although 22 per cent of the adult population participates in learning, a third of the population have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education. Also, the survey highlighted that in relation to employment, working adults (49 percent) are more likely to participate in learning than adults who are unemployed (35 percent), or adults who are not seeking work (28 percent), with retired people least likely to participate in learning in the last three years. Participation rates differ according to age; for example, 67 percent of 20 to 24-year olds participated in learning in the 2015 survey compared to 31 percent of 55 to 64-year olds. In addition, participation varies according to region, for example, in 2015 38 percent of adults participated in Wales compared to 42 percent in England, and 48 percent in Scotland. Also, adults who have access to the internet (47 percent) are more likely to participate in learning against 12 percent of adults who do not have access to the internet (NIACE 2015a). Patterns of participation will also vary according to ethnicity and gender for example, in England a typical WEA learner is white British and female (WEA 2014).

In the UK, the problem of low skills and low education outcomes persists. In Wales, for example, 10 percent of adults possess no qualifications, while only 33 percent of adults

³ Social Grade A includes the upper and upper-middle classes and is generally grouped with Grade B, the middle classes.

are qualified to degree level (Winckler 2015). As Desjardins (2015) puts it:

Patterns of inequality in adult education participation hence reflect broader structural social inequalities in income, educational attainment and more generally the distribution of qualifications. Such patterns tend to mirror the distribution of resources and power, and more precisely exemplify notions of justice, rights, responsibilities and entitlements (Desjardins 2015, p. 15).

In a large-scale study that explored patterns of participation in south Wales, Gorard and Rees (2002) identified five different 'lifetime learning trajectories', namely the: non-participants (adults that reported no engagement in learning after leaving school); delayed learners (adults who delayed learning a number of years after leaving school, at least until the age of 21 years); transitional learners (adults who reported continuing in full-time education or training immediately after leaving school but who later engaged in no further education or training); and the lifelong learners (adults who reported transitional and subsequently multiple episodes of learning throughout the life course). Gorard and Rees (2002) conclude that family socio-economic background is the most important factor in determining participation in lifelong learning. Although they acknowledge that time, place, gender and initial schooling (to a lesser extent) play a part in the process, albeit within the boundaries of different social, political and economic circumstances.

Although the potential to transition and transform our lives through learning is ever present, as individuals we must often navigate our way through highly structured social pathways. Indeed, UK society has become more affluent over the last century, however the poorest fare less well and the trend is likely to continue despite government interventions to alleviate poverty, for example, in 2001 the Welsh Government introduced its flagship anti-poverty programme - Communities First. Designed to improve conditions and prospects for people living in disadvantaged communities across Wales, the programme has been plagued with contradictions and difficulties (Dicks 2014). In attempting to address problems of inequality, care has to be taken to avoid blaming the very people that need help and support. As Haylett (2003) argues, causes of poverty are often attributed to the individual while the economic and structural characteristics of poverty are often obscured, and remain in the background. The consequence of,

[T]his "lumping together" of working-class differences and economic inequalities is that economic inequality partially collapses into "economic difference", and working-class differences are seen as *necessarily* problematic.

(Haylett 2003, p. 58)

Although gains have been made in some areas, commentators believe that the programme has made little difference to levels of poverty in the most disadvantaged communities across Wales (Hincks and Robson 2010). Although, as Dicks (2014) points out community involvement is operationalised through powerful channels and structures, which have a strong influence over what can be achieved in the interests of the community. However, since 2001 levels of poverty have not improved, which has resulted in a Welsh Government decision to phase out the Programme by March 2018 (Welsh Government 2017c).

Decisions such as this can have a devastating effect on participation rates in education and training. Previously, Gorard and Rees (2002, p. 7) have argued that “access to education and training is unfairly distributed in Britain [which means that] it is the same groups of people who are denied learning opportunities throughout their lives,” for example, people from high SES backgrounds are more likely to join in organisations or clubs while people from low SES backgrounds are more likely to be excluded. This has consequences for education and work as, “the continuing low engagement of those groups in post-compulsory education helps to perpetuate inequalities in health and well-being, aspiration and self-esteem” (Lochrie 2009, p. 7). Similarly, adults who are working but who do not hold a qualification are five times more likely to be in low paid employment compared to those who have a degree, while in families where no-one has achieved a qualification there is greater likelihood of poverty compared to families that possess some qualifications (OECD 1999). Indeed, the cumulative effect of poor educational achievement in one generation has the potential to spill over into the next generation. While unequal access to lifelong learning is indeed detrimental to the population’s interests, initiatives to widen participation have attempted to address the imbalances, for example, widening access initiatives to higher education in Wales have been in operation for some years however evaluating the effectiveness of such schemes has proved difficult, predominantly due to a lack of necessary data (WISERD 2015). Considering these difficulties then, it is increasingly important to ensure that funding for ACL is spent wisely and targeted at those who need it most.

2.2.3 Policy context in Wales

In 1999 the UK government devolved responsibility for education and lifelong learning in Wales to the Welsh Assembly (National Assembly for Wales Commission 2011; Welsh Government 2013b). Since the devolvement of educational powers, two key documents have been published on Welsh education. The first, outlined in the paving document *The Learning Country* (National Assembly for Wales 2001) set out to provide a comprehensive strategy for education and lifelong learning in Wales up to 2010. The publication was later followed by the *Learning Country: Vision into Action* (Welsh Assembly Government 2006), which set out a list of further proposals for education and training for 2010 and beyond. These documents provided a strategy to take Wales forward as a lifelong learning nation alongside other nations in the UK, and across the world (OECD 2013).

Within the broader education framework in Wales, ACL is a distinct sector that offers learning to anyone over the age of 19 years. ACL offers a diverse range of learning opportunities through further education (FE) institutions, higher education (HE) institutions, and local authorities. ACL courses are usually held in local community-based venues and on main college campuses. In policy terms, the Welsh Government has outlined six purposes for adult learning that offers adults the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills through accredited and non-accredited learning⁴ through:

- first steps learning
- skills for life and embedded basic skills
- skills for independent living
- skills for work
- personal development and well being
- learning for active citizenship and/or community development.

(Welsh Government 2013a, p. 1)

Much like the rest of the UK, although the number of learners participating in ACL has remained constant, there has been a steady decline in numbers of adults aged over 19 years participating in ACL in Wales. This is mainly due to funding constraints, with funding focused on initial education and the 16-18 age group. For example, the number

⁴ Forms and types of learning are discussed in section 2.3

of adult learners aged 19 years and over studying at FE institutions, Local Authority Community Learning and Work-based learning providers fell from 232,960 in 2006/07 (Welsh Government 2008) to 119,865 by 2015/16⁵ (Welsh Government 2016e); a drop of just under 50 percent over the course of nine years. In addition, since 2009 several FE colleges have merged resulting in the number of FE institutions in Wales dropping from 25 to 14 (Colleges Wales 2013, 2017). Despite the changing educational landscape across Wales, the commitment to encourage adults back into learning remains albeit within an uncertain climate of austerity measures and changing information technologies.

In a recent review of ACL in Wales (Welsh Government 2016d), researchers have highlighted the need for parity of recognition for ACL in the lifelong education framework. First, the report recommends that in light of the “continued low levels of essential skills and high rates of economic inactivity in many parts of the country, Wales needs effective ACL provision that engages with the hardest to reach groups, helps change attitudes to learning and offers people a second chance to maximise their potential”, and secondly, point out that, “there is a need to re-configure the sector to move towards a more effective and equitable model of delivery” (Welsh Government 2016d, p. 9). Indeed, there are two issues here. The first issue is the problem of non-ACL participation, and working with hard-to-reach learners⁶. A recent ACL report by Estyn (2016) highlights the impact of the loss of ACL expertise in local communities through staffing cuts, and a reduction in professional development opportunities for tutors still working in the field. The second, in comparison to other countries in the UK, Welsh adult participation rates trail 10 percentage points behind Scotland, for example, see NIACE (2015a). Therefore, aside from ACL policy being appropriate and adequate to the needs of learners in Wales, there is a need for the country to stay abreast of education and training developments to respond to the rapid technological changes taking place worldwide. However, ACL is only one form of learning. As Gorard and Rees (2002) point out there are equally many forms of learning that adults can access across the life course.

2.3 Forms and types of adult learning

This section gives a brief overview with respect to forms of adult learning, and the types of learning opportunities available to adults.

⁵ These figures do not include unspecified age groups

⁶ The term ‘hard-to-reach’ is often used by government and policymakers. This is problematic as it implies deficit. In addition, this meaning does not necessarily represent my views on the subject.

2.3.1 Formal, informal and non-formal learning

Formal learning is a system of education that features “a prescribed learning framework; an organised learning event or package; the presence of a designated teacher or trainer; the award of a qualification or credit, and the external specification of outcomes” (Eraut 2000, p. 114). Formal adult learning is mainly delivered through government-sponsored training and education institutions, for example, through FE and HE institutions and Local Authority adult education services. It offers mainly, but not exclusively, qualification-based academic and vocational learning opportunities to adults, of which ACL is one sector within the formal learning network.

Informal learning, otherwise known as every day learning or experiential learning as it is sometimes referred to, is where learning occurs at any point and in any place, be it at home, work or outside these places, and “outside of formal programmes of instruction” (Gorard and Rees 2002, p. 105). This type of learning is usually non-accredited, “incidental, preconscious and unplanned” (Jarvis 2009, p.19). This could involve learning a new skill, for example, learning how to cook different foods with the aid of recipes from the Internet, or through keeping up to date with local current affairs, or learning how to use a new computer package at work. A good example of informal learning is where parents referred to the internet to gather ‘expert’ information and advice on their children’s medical conditions, aside from learning about their child’s condition from medical practitioners (Gewirtz and Cribb 2009).

Non-formal learning can best be described as a type of learning mode that signals an individual’s “level of intention to learn” (Eraut 2000, p. 115). Eraut (2000) developed a simple typology that encompasses three types of stimulus: implicit learning, where the learner has no awareness of learning at the time learning takes place; reactive learning where the individual learns by responding immediately to a situation or event; and deliberative learning where the individual sets aside time to fulfil a said purpose. These forms of learning are culturally embedded in social activities to the extent that learning per se is not the focus but a ‘taken for granted’ activity, of which people are unaware of the way in which learning influences their behaviour in the workplace (Eraut 2007).

These learning modes are operationalised through different types of learning opportunities presented in the next five sections.

2.3.2 Employer led education and training

Adults gaining skills in the workplace through on the job training and continuing professional development (CPD), is one form of learning. According to the Employer Skills Survey Wales report 2015 (Welsh Government 2016b), over a year 49 per cent out of 91,000 establishments in Wales had provided on the job training, and 63 percent had funded staff development and training. However, employers did report skills-shortages in certain areas, particularly: people and personal skills in customer handling; time management and team working skills; technical and practical skills; and a shortage in oral Welsh language skills.

2.3.3 Trade union learning

Over the last 100 years, trade union learning has made a significant contribution towards adult learning. In 1998, the Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established through government funding to offer learning via trade unions and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) working with employers, learning providers, and employees; the aim being to encourage learning in the workplace. Currently courses are offered through Unionlearn, an organisation dedicated to improving the education and training needs of workers affiliated to the Trades Union, through targeted learning for trade union representatives at work. In 2016, 180194 union members accessed training at centres across the UK (Unionlearn 2016). Courses offered range from English, maths and functional skills, Information Communication Technology skills, apprenticeships, to opportunities for adults to progress to FE or HE (Neild and Stevens 2015).

2.3.4 Government led education and training initiatives

Aside from employer and trade union learning opportunities, government-funded education and training initiatives also offer opportunities. In 2014, a policy statement on skills announced by the Welsh Government (2014a) highlighted that like other European nations, Wales needs to remain productive and competitive to respond to changes and developments in the global world. The main aim focuses on meeting skills demands to enhance employability, to support business, and to ensure economic growth in Wales. Since 2014 the Welsh Government has invested in a programme of regional skills delivery, which involves delivering learning in line with regional differences and skills needs, through the provision of support for apprenticeships, Essential Skills and support for adults seeking employment. Although the government is keen to point out that

employers and individuals alike have a responsibility to finance training where no government funding is available (Welsh Government 2014b). European funding has also played a part in economic regeneration, with support and funding for schemes like the Communities First programme that aims to reduce poverty in Wales by providing education and training opportunities across many disadvantaged communities across Wales (Welsh Government 2013c). Programmes like the Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) programme aims to support parents and economically inactive adults back into work (Government 2016). Jobs Growth Wales (Welsh Government 2016c) is another programme designed to create job opportunities for young people aged between 16 and 24 years. Indeed, since its inception in 2012, 3729 job opportunities have been generated through this initiative.

Also, Welsh Government has funded many third sector organisations such as: Chwarae Teg (2017) – an organisation dedicated to expanding the role of women in Welsh life; Cardiff Third Sector Organisation (2017) that offers Women Making a Difference courses. These programmes are designed to develop women's confidence and self-esteem in all areas of life, as well as many other smaller organisations across Wales.

2.3.5 Leisure-based learning

Leisure-based learning refers to learning that is not directly related to employment or employability and is undertaken as part of an individual's leisure activities. This may involve interests ranging from sport or gardening, to history and local politics, although this form of learning can and frequently is undertaken in formal settings (Gorard and Rees 2002). These activities are now rarely funded with costs borne by the individual (Welsh Government 2017a).

2.3.6 Learning through volunteering

Nowadays volunteering is a popular activity of choice, and there are extensive opportunities for adults to get involved. Although volunteering is perceived to be an altruistic act of selflessness, individuals can benefit enormously from giving their time to others. A recent report published by NIACE, concluded that:

Volunteering gives adults opportunities to learn and practise new skills. It helps to increase independence, raise self-esteem and develop a range of qualities that make them both more effective community activists and more employable.

(Plant 2014, p. 5).

In addition, volunteering can improve health and well-being, encourage self-help and mutual support, as well as help individuals to form relationships and build social networks (Welsh Government 2015b). For example, many individuals give their time to volunteering in schools. In so doing, this not only supports the school mission but also offers volunteers the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills base, as well as expose volunteers to school processes and practices. Moreover, links between formal learning and volunteering also provide benefits. In 2016, the WEA surveyed 2122 adults, and found that 21 percent of students participating in short courses between 15 and 30 hours later became involved in volunteering (WEA 2016).

2.4 Motivations, barriers, and benefits

Throughout the life course, adults dip in and out of different forms and types of learning, as and when the need arises. However, learning requires a certain amount of motivation, and this aspect is considered next alongside identifying some of the barriers and non-economic benefits of learning.

2.4.1 The motivation to learn

Although learning is often exercised through one's own choice or self-directedness, sometimes learning is imposed or compulsory (Field 2012), for example, it is compulsory that children attend school while adults, when required, must undertake 'on the job' training, CPD, or compulsory work-based programmes. Family intervention programmes are not explicitly imposed but nevertheless they do involve an element of encouragement and persuasion from others, especially from professionals working in the ACL field. Moreover, as Tuckett and Field (2016) point out:

The motivation to participate is affected by the extent of individual self-efficacy, supportive peer groups, access to effective advice and guidance, and easily accessible and affordable provision.

(Tuckett and Field 2016, p. 4)

These factors are important in learning, and ones which can make the difference between participating or not participating. Adults participate for a variety of reasons, for example, to update their knowledge and skills to secure a better paid job, or promotion

in the workplace. Others may want to participate to meet new people, to improve their health and well-being (Aldridge and Hughes 2012), self-improvement, or to help children with schoolwork (Evans et al. 2008). In addition, research by Evans and Waite (2010) argue that the incentive to participate later in the life course often came about because adults had been denied educational opportunities earlier in their youth. Missed opportunities at school also provided parents with the incentive to support and even push their children to learn.

2.4.2 Barriers to learning

The decision not to participate in learning is often affected by personal and institutional barriers, for example, Unionlearn (2015) listed several main barriers to participation citing lack of confidence, lack of time or childcare, disability issues, and the inability to fit learning around work. In addition, there is the question of how individuals and families keep abreast of ever-changing worldwide digital technologies. Although the introduction of the internet and associated technologies has potentially increased people's opportunity to learn according to Eynon (2009) many have been unable to embrace these technologies; this has resulted in a digitally divided Britain. She goes further by saying the digital divide is:

[N]o longer viewed as a dichotomous categorisation between the haves and have-nots but is instead defined as a continuum of access and use where multiple interrelating reasons such as attitudes, skills, quality of access and social support are at work in explaining if, and how, people use new technologies.

(Eynon 2009, p. 278)

Although an increasing proportion of households have internet access in Britain (Eynon 2009) there are still disparities related to access in demographic and socio-economic terms. In Wales, for example, approximately 19% of the adult population (474,000 adults) are digitally excluded, with 71% of households living in the 20% most deprived areas having access to the internet, compared with 86% of households living in the 20% least deprived areas (Welsh Government 2016a). In part, this is linked to financial issues that prevent people, with poor credit ratings or those with no access to a bank account, to buy a computer or sign up to a broadband contract. In addition, the Welsh Government report identified several barriers to non-internet use including: lack of interest, lack of skills or literacy problems, security concerns, cost, and the confidence to set up home broadband connections (Welsh Government 2016a). The issue of unequal access to

current technologies can further undermine adults' ability to engage in learning, formally and informally. Over the past few years, access to broadband has been problematic across some areas in Wales (National Assembly for Wales Commission 2011; Mannay and Wilcock 2015). In response, the Welsh Government has set an ambitious target to encourage people that want access, to get online by 2020 (Welsh Government 2016a) assuming, of course, that broadband is available to all communities across Wales.

To tackle these barriers, the NIACE survey on Adult Participation (Aldridge and Tuckett 2009) asked 5000 adults to identify options that would encourage them to participate in ACL. Twelve percent of respondents indicated they would be more likely to participate if the qualification studied was recognised by employers. While women (more than men) indicated they were more likely to favour learning in the daytime, and to attend classes nearer to home. Research by Fuller et al. (2004) explored disabled students' experiences at university and identified several barriers to learning. In the classroom, for example, lecturers failed to provide user-friendly course materials, or were unwilling to allow lectures to be tape-recorded. Students also reported a lack of appropriate IT facilities, for example, voice recognition software, or anti-glare screens. Students with dyslexia also worried about submitting inferior pieces of coursework. Dyslexia is a condition that is estimated to affect one in ten of the UK population, and four percent in a severe way (British Dyslexia Association 2017). While some students reported feeling stigmatised because of their need to request extra time for examinations. Consequently, these types of barriers can often deter or even cause some individuals to drop out of courses, especially if they do not possess the confidence to challenge the learning provider on such matters.

2.4.3 The non-economic benefits of learning

Economic purposes aside, there is a growing body of research in the UK on the wider non-economic benefits of learning. For example, there is evidence that learning improves health and well-being; it helps learners cope with illness and promotes a sense of fulfilment (Hammond 2004). Research by Preston and Feinstein (2004) compared changes in attitudes to race among adults who had participated in adult learning between the ages of 33 and 42 years against those who had not, and found that learning prevented adults from moving towards entrenched racist attitudes, and thereby become more open-minded about race. Also, learning is associated with reduced crime rates

(Feinstein 2002) as well as creating opportunities for the family and the wider community (Connolly et al. 2008).

Another important dimension of learning is the familiarity aspect. Evans and Waite (2010) interviewed 564 learners participating in Skills for Life programmes in the workplace: employees often cited a preference for learning in the workplace because they felt relaxed and settled in this familiar setting. Learning in the workplace also offered workers the opportunity to discuss learning with their colleagues, especially when they struggled on certain aspects of their learning. Social interaction, therefore, is beneficial to the learning process; individuals learn through observing others, and likewise, learn through discussion and receiving feedback from others. Learning also has unintended influences on other aspects of life. For example, NIACE Cymru worked with 36 Communities First cluster groups to offer learning tasters across Wales in 2014-15. They argue that 'soft' learning amounted to big impacts, for example, 77 per cent of learners reported that participation in learning programmes promoted a culture of learning in the family (NIACE 2015b). Certainly, when a culture of learning is promoted within the family, adults and children stand to gain a sense of learner identity. The next section considers this aspect.

2.5 Learner identities

The notion of a learner identity is formed and given meaning through language and symbolic systems. Our sense of identity or 'who we are' is "predominantly formed early on in life through the influences of family and the experiences of compulsory schooling" (Gorard and Rees 2002, p. 148). In many ways, identities are sometimes conceived in terms of being a participant or non-participant, successful learner or failed learner. However, there is always the opportunity to change and develop over the life course. As Jephcote et al. (2009) state:

We found the notion of identity to be dynamic, in a temporal sense, changing over time, as the metaphors of learning career, learning trajectory and learning journey denote. Identity is also dynamic because it is a multiple construct formed out of personal history, biography, and place, linked to roles and situations compounded with disposition to learn, motivation and aspiration.

(Jephcote et al. 2009, p. 145)

For example, a mother's 'role' and 'identity' in the family is most often defined in the parenting literature as one of being the 'good mother': the carer, nurturer, and protector.

Indeed, historically the identity of women and motherhood in Wales has been strongly associated towards the home. Until the second half of the twentieth century women tended to stay at home to look after the family while men sought employment to meet the family's financial needs. Indeed, the Welsh economy thrived during the days of heavy industrialisation, which was characterised by high levels of male employment (Pilcher 1994). However, changes in the labour market economy in Wales has seen a shift away from heavy industrialisation to an economy based upon low-wage factory and service sector work (Lloyd 2016). In conjunction with the changing needs of the economy, so too have women entered the employment market to undertake full-time/part-time work. Undoubtedly, these changes have altered the role of the Welsh stay at home mother. Despite this shift, responsibility for home and childcare still remains women's work; with women often performing day-to-day multiple roles, at home and at work. However, in struggling to maintain high standards and expectations of the mothering role, and the work that mothers perform in and outside of the home, women are still "blaming themselves and identifying themselves incongruously as the lazy but bread-winning Welsh Mam" (Mannay 2016, p. 82).

Whilst the vision of 'good mother' is a strong feature of the mothers' traditional role in parenting, Vaccaro and Lovell (2010) argue this feature is not the only characteristic of the mothering role. In their study of adult mother's participating in higher education, the mothers' educational investments also formed part of the mothering identity. Here mothers saw themselves as students who "directly influenced the aspirations and educational success of their children. Being a good student was equated to "being a good role model and mother" (Vaccaro and Lovell 2010, p. 169). When children were exposed to seeing their mothers in a different role (the student role) they were more likely to pay more attention at school, and to complete their homework. Furthermore, children sometimes took advantage of completing their homework at the same time as mothers were studying at home. Being directly exposed to a learning culture at home inspired children to want to do better at school. Likewise, some mothers were motivated by the thought of doing something for themselves. Not only did they want to improve their lives in financial, and professional terms, but they also wanted to show their children a vision of the 'good learner'. Finally, Vaccaro and Lovell (2010) recommend that if family is one form of support mechanism that inspires women to succeed, then this should encourage adult educators to think of ways to "incorporate the centrality of kin into their courses" (p.173).

2.6 Agency and transition

The notion of how we change, adapt and develop is rooted in human agency and structure. Bandura (2006) identified four core properties of human agency; intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Important aspects of being that relate to 'becoming somebody' (Ecclestone et al. 2010, p. 7) as we navigate through the life path. Our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are also in constant flux; changing, developing, and adapting to suit our personal preferences, goals, and plans. According to Bridges (2009) identity and change involves three phases: the ending or letting go of the old ways, followed by an interim period of adjustment so called the 'neutral zone', and finally the third phase where "people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that make the change begin to work" (Bridges 2009, p. 5). We might not think too much about the change, transition and the distance travelled until it is brought to our attention, through deeper thought and reflexivity, or via feedback from others around us.

As de Haan and Rotmans (2011) argue, albeit from a societal rather than an individual perspective, patterns of change and development are often viewed through '*one-dimensional snapshots*'. Take, for example, the fact that many individuals transition from non-skilled worker to skilled worker, or from factory worker to professional. Arguably the change is plain to see but the pattern of change and transition is not often examined in great depth. In effect, change is underscored by the 'concatenation process'. Concatenation, in this respect, is understood to be the process of interlinking events and circumstances that alters the adult life pathway, see Schütze (2008a) and Schütze (2008b). However, the process by which the transition is achieved: the what, the how, the why, and the when, is not so obvious. As de Haan and Rotmans (2011) argue there is a need to develop conceptual toolkits to identify mechanisms of change and transition. Therefore, in the next section, I follow up this theme.

2.7 Theoretical considerations

As part of this study is devoted to understanding how adults change and develop over time, it made sense to draw upon adult learning theoretical frameworks to guide my work.

2.7.1 A discussion on adult education theory

The subject of how we define learning, and the processes by which we learn, has been a central focus of interest, for example, Illeris (2007) defined learning as “any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing” (Illeris 2007, p. 3). Likewise, Jarvis (2006), offers a definition of learning across the life course as:

The combination of processes thorough a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetics, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively, or practically, (or through any combination) and integrated into the person’s biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.

(Jarvis 2006, p. 134)

Adult learning theory has also added to the debate, notably concepts introduced in the second half of the twentieth century related to: andragogy (Knowles 1983); learning, reflection and change (Schön 1983); critical pedagogy and emancipation (Freire 1972); experiential learning (Kolb 1984); transformative learning (Mezirow 1978); and situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). While many scientific disciplines have no doubt advanced the ontological and epistemological debate with regard to adult learning theory, Sfard (1998) contests these are at best, interpretations of reality and not representative of the whole picture, and argues that:

We have to accept the fact that the metaphors we use while theorizing may be good enough to fit small areas, but none of them suffice to cover the entire field. In other words, we must learn to satisfy ourselves with only local sense making.

(Sfard 1998, p. 12)

Indeed, how we interpret society and the people living within it, through our preferred theoretical frameworks, is a matter of debate. Initially I drew inspiration from several learning theories to illuminate the points I wanted to make throughout the thesis. Firstly, transformative learning theory (TLT) including the work of Mezirow (1978), and Freire (1972), plus others who have interpreted, and critiqued the idea of TLT and its application over time (Taylor 1998; Cranton 2006; Taylor 2007; Brookfield 2012; Nohl 2015). Freire’s community development approach to learning in South America was, at the time, inspirational: a much-needed tool to help people understand their position in society. Freire (1972) argues that literacy learning is the key to unlocking people’s potential which in turn enables them to overcome oppressive forces within society. It is important to note

the time of his writing since the notion of democracy and freedom aligned well with Western thinking (Field 2009).

Mezirow (2009) too was inspired by the work of Freire (1972). His work on 'perspective transformation'; a process which starts with an initial 'frame of reference' or set of assumptions that encompasses 'habit of mind' (a broad way of thinking, feeling and doing) and a 'point of view' expressed through beliefs, value judgments, attitudes and feelings (Mezirow 2009). Over the years, Mezirow has refined and updated his theory. It involves a ten-stage process starting with:

1. a disorienting dilemma;
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
3. a critical assessment of assumptions;
4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and action;
6. planning a course of action;
7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
8. provisional trying of new roles;
9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
- and,
10. a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

(Mezirow 2009, p. 94)

Although Mezirow (2009) had clearly outlined steps in the transition process he acknowledged that not all learning successfully resulted in change or transformation, for example, a failure to complete or capitalise on learning might result in a learning blockage. As McGivney (2004, p. 45) writes, "those who feel that they failed in the education system the first time round can suffer a repeated sense of failure from which they may never recover". Therefore, hitting blockages may undermine the learning process that, in turn, lowers an individual's level of confidence and self-efficacy (Bandura 2006).

The transitional steps undertaken in the process of transformation were identified via two sources. Initially, Mezirow (2009) had seen his wife, Ella, experience a transformation

when returning to study as an undergraduate in mid-life. On completing the course, Mezirow saw a substantial transformation in “the way she saw herself, the world, and the subject matter” Mezirow (1978) cited in Marsick and Finger (2004, p. 5). At this point it is important to stress that Mezirow would have observed his wife’s learning journey and subsequent transformation over a specific but nonetheless substantial period of over three years or more. Therefore, living in a close relationship afforded Mezirow the opportunity to *watch* Ella’s transformation. Secondly, his work with female college returners later confirmed his findings, from which he formed his theory of transformative learning (Mezirow 1978). While TLT has contributed to the field of adult learning, the theory is not without its critics. Over the years, the theory has fallen in and out of popularity. On the one hand, Taylor and Cranton (2013) argue the research is redundant while, on the other, critics note that TLT has evolved in two distinct ways: as a theory based on ‘perspective transformation’ or as a theory to explain the “more general phenomenon of people changing in dramatic ways” (Hoggan 2016, p. 60). While Nohl (2015) argues the theory is empirically based on work with a specific group of learners i.e. women returners.

In recent years, the limitation of the theory has been acknowledged by Mezirow himself; Mezirow (2009) agreeing with analysts that their criticisms are ‘justified’ to a degree. Nevertheless, since the early 1990s researchers have utilised the theory in practice-based models. In a recent study, Nohl (2015) utilised Mezirow’s ten-phase model as a reference point to identify the ‘incidental’ nature of potentially transformative experiences. Nohl (2015) was guided by the biographical interview method (Schütze 2008a) and interviews were conducted with 80 people living in Germany. The biographical narrative method is unique in that it invites interviewees to produce an unfettered account of how a person interprets their world against a backdrop of ‘macro-historical processes’ (Schütze 2014, p. 227). Here, participants in the sample were selected on the basis that they had experienced a change in their ‘core life orientation’ (Nohl 2015, p. 38). On analysing the interviews, Nohl identified a five-phase transformation process that included a:

1. Non-determining start
2. Phase of experimental and undirected inquiry
3. Phase of social testing and mirroring
4. Phase of shifting relevance
5. Phase of social consideration and the reinterpretation of biography.

(Nohl 2015, p. 39)

Nohl (2015) describes Phase One as the non-determining start: a novel, totally unplanned or incidental event. Here, participants talked about how their lives had changed purely on an incidental basis, for example, one participant described walking past a street Samba percussion group, which years later led to him becoming a Samba percussionist. Another participant described having a 'certain inclination' toward politics eventually became involved with campaign groups involved in issues related to environment and world peace. While Nohl (2015) describes these encounters as nothing special or spectacular, exposure to situations or events in these cases provided the onlooker with the opportunity to *watch* others while gaining an insight into the work that they did. In Phase Two, the period of experimental and undirected inquiry, learners test out new or novel practices to build up their knowledge and experience in a step-by-step way. Here, learners take on board positive and negative experiences, and adjust their lives accordingly. Phase Three is characterised by a period of 'social testing and mirroring where participants reflect on feedback from like-minded others regarding performance, and from this platform test out newfound assumptions and practices. Phase Four describes the phase of 'shifting relevance' where old habits die out, and new habits and practices begin to take hold. Finally, Phase Five is characterised by a period of "social consolidation and reinterpretation of biography" (Nohl 2015, p. 46) whereupon the learner incorporates and embeds the new practice into their social framework. This helps the learner to envisage a future containing 'new biographical horizons'. Although Nohl (2015) acknowledges that not all learners are aware of the power of these potentially life changing situations. Indeed, as we progress through life we may not necessarily notice our life situation changing, that is, until such a moment where we have time and space to reflect on our life experiences.

While TLT is useful to explain change and transformation, Taylor (2007) argues that further research must be undertaken as generally studies have yet not provided a serious critique of TLT. Furthermore, he argues that researchers often interpret the theory in diverse ways, and in different social contexts, for example he points out:

[T]here is a lack of understanding of peripheral consequences of fostering transformative learning in the classroom. For example, how does the transformation of students affect other students, the educator, the institution and other significant individuals in the students' lives?

(Taylor 2007, p. 187)

In a previous study, Taylor (2001) highlighted the importance of relationships and emotions within the transformative learning process. This information is often overlooked in the quest to understand the cognitive and behavioural aspects of learning. Indeed, Merriam makes this very point by arguing that TLT needs to be expanded to include “more ‘connected’, affective and intuitive dimensions [that place] them on an equal footing with cognitive and rational aspects” (Merriam 2004, p. 67). Likewise, Ecclestone (2010, p. 207) is of the same opinion:

While the self and its feelings and awareness about identity and transition is both a significant and dominant subject in debates about transitions, transitions through the subject in its traditional cognitive or intellectual sense is curiously silent.

Nevertheless, while Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (Mezirow 1978) demonstrates how adults can transform their lives through learning, not all adults will experience a metamorphic transformation. Moreover, while it appeared prudent to refer to adult education theories and frameworks to explain adult learning transitions and transformations, this method alone was not sufficiently robust to address the main study question. Essentially, how does ACL participation influence parents’ perceptions and practices with respect to the education of children? Further, while the attempt to contextualise parental learning experiences was challenging enough, an even greater challenge was to identify suitable conceptual frameworks to explain the influence of learning within parent-child relationships. This led to a new line of thought: as parents and children spend a lot of time living and learning in the home environment, work by Lave and Wenger (1991) on situated learning appeared an appropriate concept: a concept worthy of consideration.

2.7.2 Lave and Wenger: theory of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’

Lave and Wenger’s theory of socio-cultural learning and development (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1996) provides a useful framework to understand the power of learning through participation as a social practice. They explored the workplace practices of tailors, midwives, butchers, and U.S. navy quartermasters. Their findings draw attention to the nature of the formal and informal aspects of learning within specific contexts i.e. through the master/apprentice relationship, and other social relationships located within the context. Here learning is viewed as distinctly social and situated; a process they

identify as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 9). They introduce the apprenticeship metaphor to describe the ways in which apprentices learn through observation; what they describe as the 'way in', and the process through which apprentices learn how to do things, in other words, the 'practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 72).

This involves a process by which the novice or 'newcomer' has aspirations to move to the role of expert or 'old timer' within the 'community of practice' (Lave 1991, p. 71). Student nurses, for example, initially undertake theoretical learning in the classroom then later supplement their learning with first hand work experience in hospital placements. Consequently, exposure to social relationships in the hospital enables student nurses to move from the 'periphery' to participate fully in activities related to the day-to-day running of the hospital. In this scenario, emphasis is placed on the social aspects of learning rather than solely on the individual or the environment, which many researchers have commonly paid attention to over the years (Rogoff 2008). As (Wertsch et al. 1995, p. 3) states:

The goal of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other.

Although the model put forward by Lave and Wenger (1991) considers a different way of interpreting learning in the social world, the concept is most often linked to workplace learning. Furthermore, Fuller et al. (2005) point out the concept is not without its weaknesses. First, they argue that the idea of situated learning does not fully take into account learning that takes place outside the workplace. Second, they argue that Lave and Wenger (1991) view formal types of teaching and learning as outside the community of practice, when in reality, formal learning could form another facet of situated learning. Thirdly, the concept focuses mainly on the influence of learning on the individual and not on the skills and experiences an individual brings to their new environment. Fourthly, there is a notable absence in their discussions that refers to "conflict and unequal power relations" (Fuller et al. 2005, p. 66). To all intents and purposes these dimensions will affect the nature of structure and agency, and its associated barriers and boundaries, which has the potential to create tension between the two (Bourdieu 1977).

Nevertheless, while considering the concept of sociocultural learning, the thought did occur to me that the concept could be usefully applied to the home learning environment.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) rightly point out, “children are, after all, quintessentially legitimate peripheral participants in adult social worlds” (p.32): not only do children spend a lot of time observing and absorbing information (way in), but they also imitate parents (practice). Indeed, operating as ‘legitimate peripheral participants’ in their home environment (‘community of practice’) affords children the opportunity to establish their own identity in the social world. Further research on this line of thinking has been explored by Rogoff et al. (2015).

Building on the work of sociocultural theorists Rogoff et al. (2015) put forward a cultural paradigm of learning based on the idea of ‘observing and pitching in’ (p.1). Interested to understand how learning is operationalised among families and communities from different cultural backgrounds across South America and the United States, researchers identified six facets integral to the learning process:

- Children are contributors and are incorporated into adult worlds. They are not seen as separate;
- Children’s motivation to learn is driven by their interest to contribute and belong [to their family or community];
- The social organization in small groups involves collaborative engagement as an ensemble;
- The goal of learning is transforming participation in order to contribute and belong;
- Learning involves wide, keen attention, and contribution to the endeavor; and
- Communication is based on coordination that builds on shared reference.

(Rogoff et al. 2015, pp. 6-9)

Although the study was based on American families and communities that came from different cultural backgrounds, Rogoff et al. (2015) argue that learning by ‘observing and pitching in’ could easily apply to families living everywhere. While this paradigm is certainly new and different, it could be useful to understand the influence of learning in parent-child relationships in this study.

Subsequently, reading about these concepts plus further analysis of the data stimulated new insights. Throughout the interviews I realised that parents attached a significant amount of importance to the socio-cultural aspects of learning, while at the same time

commenting on their emotional reactions to social contexts, situations and events. Indeed, learning appeared to involve a great deal of 'social' and 'emotional' effort. This led me to consider a new line of inquiry: to research learning theories and frameworks that consider these conceptual fields in tandem.

2.7.3 Social and emotional learning in adult education

Although a significant amount of research has focused on the 'social' and 'emotional' aspects of learning, studies have often tended to focus on these concepts in isolation, rather than together. On the one hand, studies of emotion have often resided within the disciplines of psychology, physiology and cognitive neuroscience, for example. While on the other hand, studies of social phenomena have tended to reside, for example, within the disciplines of sociology, philosophy and anthropology (see Leavitt (1996), Sánchez (2014), and Zembylas (2007) for a detailed explanation of this dichotomy).

The idea of combining the 'social' with the 'emotional' in research is not new. Several research studies have used this integrated approach to good effect to understand, for example, the impact of socio-emotional influence: at work (Hochschild 1983, 2012); in advertising (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1984); in retail shopping (Dawson et al. 1990) and, on retail impulse buying habits (Beatty and Ferrell 1998). However, research with respect to social and emotional learning (SEL) in adult, as well as child education, has only recently emerged in the literature. In the next section I give a brief description of the meaning of the term 'emotion', and later argue why I believe the concept is particularly useful to understand the influence of learning throughout the life course.

2.7.4 The affective dimension

The word *emotion* in the Oxford Dictionary is described as *a strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others*. Implicit within this description then, is the idea that emotion comprises two distinct areas. Firstly, in feeling, as expressed through personal disposition or mood; and secondly, in relationships, as experienced in the social world. As indicated, numerous studies have explored the subject of emotion but to date there is little agreement on its meaning and representation (Leavitt 1996; Zembylas 2007). Certainly there is not enough space here to consider the vast amount of literature devoted to emotion but as Kenway and Youdell (2011) suggest, in attempting to break down this 'complex terrain' we must consider emotion from a

number of different perspectives, for example, some scholars “make a distinction between affect and emotion understanding affect as bodily sensation and emotion as the expression of this in language” (Kenway and Youdell 2011, p. 133). Others define emotion as a socially situated perspective, whereupon emotion “is caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (or goal) that is important: the emotion is felt as positive when a concern is advanced and negative when a concern is impeded” (Oatley and Jenkins 1996, p. 96). Here the authors stress the importance of social context, and reactions within that context, rather than an individual’s inner thoughts or bodily feelings while others focus on the language of emotion through the identification of ‘feeling’ words such as happy, sad, relaxed or fearful (Kenway and Youdell 2011).

Indeed, several academics have put forward classification frameworks to describe the language of emotion. Plutchik’s emotion wheel (Plutchik and Kellerman 1980), for example, includes the eight primary emotions of: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust and joy. Ekman (1999) further expands the repertoire to include: “amusement, anger, contempt, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, excitement, fear, guilt, pride in achievement, relief, sadness/distress, satisfaction, sensory pleasure and shame” (Ekman 1999, p. 55). However, in so doing he proposes that there are “probably more emotional words than there are emotions” (p.56). In contrast, Scherer (2005) classified emotion differently, using the Geneva Emotion Wheel to emphasise the intensity of emotion through dimensions of: high/low control or power, and positive/negative valence.

Moreover, there is debate around how emotions interact with other domains, such as cognitive thought and behaviour. On the one hand, Lewis (1999) suggests that “emotions and cognitions follow a fugue-like pattern where emotions lead to cognitions, which in turn lead to new emotions” (Lewis 1999, p. 125) while, on the other hand, Goleman suggests that:

[O]ur brains engage in an emotional tango, a dance of feelings. Our social interactions operate as modulators, something like interpersonal thermostats that continually reset key aspects of our brain function as they orchestrate our emotions.

(Goleman 2007, p. 5)

Lazarus (1966) puts forward a different approach by demonstrating how both stress and emotion provoke us to appraise social situations or contexts. This involves a two-stage

process where (a) we appraise the situation, either positively or negatively, and then proceed to (b) make decisions about how to cope with the consequences of the situation. For example, if a mother cannot read information sent home from her child's school she may decide to enrol on a literacy course. Initially she may be embarrassed about revealing to the tutor that she cannot read. However adult literacy tutors are well trained to respond to this type of situation and will employ strategies to make learning fun and interesting. Once engaged, this helps the student to develop strategies to learn to cope in the classroom. As Dirkx (2001) points out, "emotions are important in adult education because they can either impede or motivate learning" (Dirkx 2001, p. 63). Although Lazarus (1991) points out that appraisal is not static or fixed but is instead flexible, changeable, and dynamic: an ongoing process that involves struggles to make sense of the world, through which we affirm, modify or revise our realities.

In returning to this PhD study, I must stress that this thesis does not engage with theories of emotion or emotion classifications in great depth. Instead here I accept the emotional state for what it is to anchor the emotions expressed in the narrative to the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that occur within social contexts and relationships. In so doing, I argue it is then possible to identify emotion marked action points across and within the life course. For example, the emotion marked action of 'sadness' experienced in childhood, can also be marked in adulthood, albeit possibly with differences in intensity. Whilst the emotion marked 'sadness' is present in both situations - situation, time, place, and context have all changed. Focusing on emotion therefore provides insight since "emotionally arousing experiences tend to be well-remembered" (Cahill and McGaugh 1998, p. 294), and arguably stay with us throughout the life course. However, social and emotional learning is a relatively new concept in adult learning, and as such has not been discussed or researched in great depth. Despite this, researchers are beginning to acknowledge the social and emotional aspects of learning; as Dirkx (2008, p. 9) argues, "in one form or another, emotional issues never seem very far from the surface in adult learning contexts."

2.8 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I identified some of the complexities involved in researching the life course and ACL, pointing out why it is so difficult to compare adult learning lives. Next, I presented a brief history of adult education from the beginning of the twentieth century to the twenty first century. This was followed by a discussion on patterns of participation,

the policy context in Wales, and forms and types of adult learning. As adults, we usually have a choice to learn, however learning is sometimes compulsory and imposed. Here, I explored the motivations, barriers, and non-economic benefits of learning, and considered the notion of identity and agency as we transition through the life course. There are many reasons why we engage in learning throughout the life course. To all intents and purposes a missed opportunity at the initial education stage is sometimes a reason to re-engage with learning later in the life course. Indeed, participation in learning at this stage gives us opportunities to change identity. It is through this transitional pathway we stand to transform our lives, and potentially for the better. So too, are there consequences with respect to non-ACL participation; not only for the individual but also for the family and society. Finally, I presented a discussion on the theoretical aspects of adult learning theory, followed by Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991). This led me to consider the use of social and emotional concepts to understand the processes and mechanisms of change and transition across the adult life course.

CHAPTER 3 – PARENTING AND EDUCATION

In the last chapter I presented an overview of adult community learning (ACL) in Wales, and later explored how participation influences adult notions of identity and agency. I also considered adult education theories and frameworks, and the conceptualisation of ACL through ‘social’ and ‘emotional’ processes. In contrast, Chapter 3 examines the subject of parenting and education. Primarily I consider three aspects. Firstly, I present the idea of parental involvement in schooling, and outline current theories, frameworks and practices related to the concept. Secondly, I explore research on parents’ education with respect to child outcomes and, thirdly, I discuss the rationale behind my presentation of a conceptual framework to explain the influence of learning in parent-child relationships.

3.1 Parental involvement in schooling: parental rights

Although parents have always been involved to a greater or lesser extent in schooling, historically parental rights concerning school education has traditionally been limited. However, since 1980 changes in education policy in England and Wales (DfES 1985; DfEE 1997) have extended parental rights and powers with the aim to position parents as consumers of education (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997). Parents are now entitled to receive accurate information and regular feedback on all aspects of school business, can express a preference as to which school to send their child, as well as have a greater say in the way schools are run through election and representation onto school governing bodies and Local Authority (LA) Committees. However, the introduction of parental rights has bestowed additional responsibilities since parents are now considered to be ‘active partners’ and ‘co-educators’ alongside teaching professionals (Reay 2004a). Yet roles and responsibilities are far from equal: schools still retain the balance of power, with parents expected to play a supportive role in the education of their children (Crozier and Davies 2007).

3.1.1 Parental involvement in schooling: frameworks and models

Alongside policy changes, since the 1980s different frameworks, models and dimensions of parental involvement have emerged in the literature. These studies form the basic foundations of parental involvement in schooling, and currently frame areas of practice related to the concept. Epstein and colleagues (Epstein and Dauber 1991; Epstein and

Sanders 2000; Epstein et al. 2009), for example, argue that when parents, families, schools and communities work together to provide 'overlapping spheres of influence' (Epstein and Dauber 1991, p. 289) this process has the potential to enhance children's learning and development. They put forward a framework of parental involvement that emphasises six critical areas deemed important to children's success, which relate to: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision-making; and collaborating with the community (Epstein and Dauber 1991; Epstein et al. 2009). They argue that schools need to encourage parents to become involved (informally and formally) in their child's education. Further, they recommend that schools pay attention to children's home backgrounds and cultures, as learning at home is an essential part of a child's development. Schools also need to manage school parent relationships effectively, as well as support parents to engage in homework help, and other curriculum-related activities (Epstein et al. 2009).

In contrast, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) present a different model of parental involvement. They identify three major aspects thought to influence involvement citing parents' role construction, levels of self-efficacy, and parents' perceptions around whether the school and child want them to take an active part. Parental role construction is key because it affects parents' attitudes, values, goals, expectations and behaviours towards the ways in which parents feel they should become involved in schooling. Parents' personal sense of efficacy (parents' confidence in their ability) to help their child is another key aspect as low levels of self-efficacy will influence parents' perceptions related to their role (Deslandes and Bertrand 2005) and the role that schools play in helping families become involved (Epstein and Dauber 1991). Also invitations by the child or school will influence whether a parent is likely to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey and Jones 1997). In contrast, Domina (2005) argues that parental involvement may be more to do with preventing children from misbehaving at school rather than supporting children with the cognitive aspects of learning. However, Domina (2005) acknowledges that when parents volunteer in the school there is the opportunity for parents to communicate with teachers and vice versa (Barton et al. 2004). This enables parents to learn more about the school from school staff, and likewise school staff have the opportunity to become 'sensitized' to the needs of parents (Domina 2005, p. 246).

A useful way to understand parental involvement is outlined by Russell and Granville (2005). Here, the authors provide a practical template summarising the types and levels of parental involvement. Table 1 illustrates some of the examples used in their study.

At school	Example	At home	Example
Formal and Active	Parent Teacher Association (PTA) School Board Parents Evenings	Formal and Active	Reading PTA/School Board communication and keeping track of their activities and discussions
Informal and Active	Classroom assistant Helping in playground, canteen Fundraising Sports coaching Helping at extra-curricular activities Helping on school trips	Informal and Active	Helping with homework Encouraging children to learn Encouraging children to talk about their day Providing additional learning resources
Less Active	Watching children playing sport Sports day School concerts	Less Active	Listening to children talking about their day

Table 3.1 Examples of parental involvement (Russell and Granville 2005)

This list is by no means exhaustive, however it useful to understand the types of activities that parents tend to get involved in. There are, of course, other forms of involvement, for example, in Reay's study (2002) of children's primary schooling, mothers set up informal 'telephone chains' of communication to address problems arising in the school. When problems were identified, mothers fed back through this system of communication to address issues of concern with school governors (Reay 2002).

Over the years, several studies have examined the impact of parental involvement on children's attainment (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Sacker et al. 2002). Generally, it is argued that parental involvement does make a difference to children's levels of attainment, especially for children from low SES backgrounds. However, Fan and Chen (2001) argue there are inconsistent and conflictual findings in this field. This view is supported by Desforges et al. (2003), although they acknowledge that where research studies are of a high quality evidence shows that "parental involvement in the form of 'at-home' interest and support is a major force in shaping pupils' educational outcomes" (Desforges et al. 2003, p. 22).

While a significant amount of research has been undertaken on the subject of parental involvement some have argued that much of the work has been studied from a school perspective, or through school-initiated involvement strategies at the expense of understanding the subject from a parent-initiated perspective (Fan and Chen 2001; Driessen et al. 2005). However, researchers have begun to explore parents' views to understand their reasons for becoming involved or not involved, as well as examining the extent to which schools may inhibit involvement (Coldron and Boulton 1999; Reay 2002; Russell and Granville 2005; Crozier and Davies 2007). In practical terms, the subject of school choice has attracted much attention; this aspect is considered in the next section.

3.1.2 School choice

In recent years, government emphasis on the 'marketisation' of education and school choice has become an important feature in policy terms. Although parents have a right to choose where to send their child, in practice parental choice of school is dependent on differentiated choice options that operate within the current neo-liberal education system; for example, choice will vary depending on location of school, area lived, family resources, availability of school places etc. Therefore, freedom of choice in this sense is offered within defined parameters that suits government and policymakers' 'assorted interests' (Reay et al. 2011). Research on school choice has been well documented. Allen et al. (2014), for example, conducted a secondary data analysis survey in England, and found that more affluent parents tend to have access to higher quality information and resources to hand, to secure the best possible education for their children. In contrast, they point out that parents belonging to lower socio-economic groups favour accessibility and friendliness of staff as important factors. They also consider how a lack of financial resources restricts parents wanting to access high performing schools outside their catchment area since they are unable to meet the travels costs. Likewise, Wespieser et al. (2015) found that parents' invariably based school choice on location and schools they felt best suited their children. Although parents with lower household incomes tended to value location, teachers, and community links while parents with higher household incomes tended to value discipline, school results, and effectiveness of school management teams.

In contrast, a study by Reay et al. (2011) on white middle class parenting and schooling found that while school choice "positioned the individual [parent] as more responsible for

the outcomes of whatever choices they make” (Reay et al. 2011, p. 79) in this study parents often made ‘against the grain’ choices. Here school choice was based on parents’ ideas about socialisation and commitment to the values they espoused for themselves and their families. In this sense, school choice was important because parents wanted to do the right thing for their child *and* the community. Therefore, in not following middle class tradition i.e. selecting the best ranked or best quality schools, parental choice was based on a set of values and attitudes more attuned to supporting the comprehensive school system, and the local community. Although sending children to the local school involved a certain level of risk, these parents were less worried about sending their children to the local school, safe in the knowledge that if their child failed to thrive, parents had the resources to move the child to another school at a moment’s notice (Reay et al. 2011).

3.1.3 Parents’ perception of role and responsibilities

Children grow up in ‘powerful environments’ (Bransford et al. 1999, p. 36) that nurture, shape, inform and educate. During the formative years, children learn skills, values, attitudes and behaviours, through interacting with the family, school and community. This is underpinned by family social capital, what Coleman (1987) describes as “the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up” (p.36). It is these environments where children spend most of their time, and which forms the crucial part of children’s development and progression. Parents are heavily involved in socialising children: children spend most of their time with parents, more than any other adult. Parents support, direct and provide structure to new and familiar situations that children encounter in daily life (Bransford et al. 1999). However, some parents can seriously underestimate the vital part they play in their child’s schooling. One particular strategy which can assist parents to understand the importance of their role is demonstrated in Bransford et al.’s (1999) analysis of learning environments. Figure 3.2 shows the percentage time a child spends sleeping, at school, and in the home and community context over the course of a year⁷.

⁷ In the UK, school time is calculated at 6.5 hours per day over an annual attendance period of 190 days.

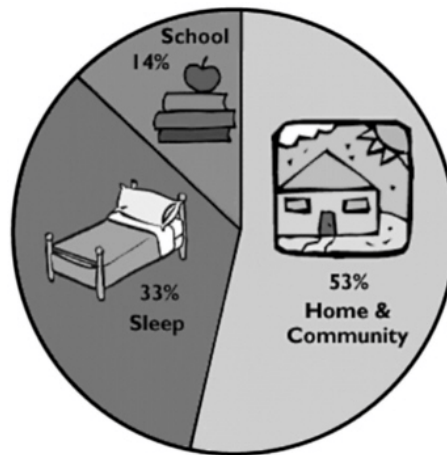


Figure 3.2 Annual percentage time children spend in different environments (Bransford et al. 1999)

Indeed, when parents realised how much time was spent outside of the school environment, some parents began to review their role and responsibilities, and in doing so, were more determined to become involved in their child's education (Russell and Granville 2005). With such little time spent at school, a good home-school relationship is a crucial facet of children's schooling. While many parents provide support for their children during the school years, parents' perceptions and expectations of their role and responsibilities differ widely. Some parents, for example, play a significant part in their children's education and schooling while others believe they need only play a minor, supportive role thereby assuming that the school will take the major lead in educating their children (Russell and Granville 2005).

Therefore against this backdrop it is useful to explore parents' understandings of their role, and what they do in practice to manage their responsibilities. Baker and Stevenson (1986), for example, argue that for parents to be effective managers of their child's schooling, "they must be aware of the demands of school and the performance of their children, and they must know when and how to use their resources" (p.157). However, schooling children involves managing new roles, responsibilities, and relationships in and outside of the school. Consequently, parents must work out how best to respond to these challenges. In doing so, the quality and effectiveness of parents' relationships with the school coupled with the degree to which parents fulfil their responsibilities, will form the basis of children's learning, development and success. Some parents cope well with the challenges that lie ahead and can navigate effectively through the school system

while others struggle. However, difficulties arise when parents are unaware of what is expected of them, as parents new to the school may have little knowledge of educational practices, school rules, systems and procedures. These issues have been well documented from a social class perspective; an area I consider in the next section.

3.2 Parental involvement and social class

Several studies have explored parental involvement from a social class perspective. To understand how social class impacts on parental involvement it is useful to look at a US study by Graue and Prager (1999). Here Graue and Prager (1999) examine the relationship between home and school, by exploring middle class parents' understandings of how they construct and enact their role from the beginning to the end of the school year. They acknowledge that "becoming the parent of a school-aged child for the first time is a jolt that is not foreshadowed in the literature and policy of home-school relations" (Graue and Prager 1999, p. 2) but argue that "families already have in place at the beginning of school ideas and practices that impact their interpretation and incorporation of school culture" (Graue and Prager 1999, p. 3). Firstly, findings suggest that parents relied on their own frames of reference and expertise to understand school systems, and referred to their own educational experiences to gauge and monitor their child's performance, especially in the early stages of schooling (Graue and Prager 1999). Secondly, researchers noted that the parents were adept at manoeuvring their way around the school system, being quick to learn the rules. In addition, parents built up relationships with school staff (in the interests of securing their child's future development), whilst at the same time closely monitoring and supporting what teachers did (Diamond and Gomez 2004). Thus, as skilled professional individuals, knowing exactly what they wanted from the home-school relationship, these parents could exact their sense of entitlement by positioning themselves as equals alongside teaching staff and managers. This maintains the power balance between home and school, ensuring that parents have control and a voice in the running of the school (Graue and Prager 1999).

Studies in the UK have drawn similar conclusions with middle class parents progressively seen as dominating culture and relationships between home and school (Reay 2002). This is in addition to the marketisation of schools as products, with 'best school' league tables a common feature of school choice (James and Beedell 2010) that emphasises parents as individual consumers of education, and active partners with

schools (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997; McNamara et al. 2000). If parents draw upon their own personal, well-developed frames of reference as a starting point, then this may explain why some parents are far more successful at schooling their children than others. Many middle-class parents 'manoeuvre' through the educational system in non-confrontational ways to obtain the very best education for their children. They are able to do so because they have, at their disposal, their own successful biographies to help form alliances and personal relationships with the school, and others in the community (Graue and Prager 1999). Or as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) would argue, they have relatively high economic, social and cultural capital that enables them to engage with schools and teachers in ways that secure or maintain advantage. Indeed, this discourse fits well with current policymakers' idealised notions of parental involvement. Clearly government and schools alike expect parents to be involved in their child's education; education policy plainly stipulates that teachers and parents should be viewed as equal partners, sharing tasks and responsibilities (Driessen et al. 2005). However, as noted earlier, in practical terms parental involvement is often weighted in favour of school requirements with the parent's role "tightly marked out" (Crozier 1998, p. 10) to meet the school's mission, needs and demands.

Further, Lightfoot (2004) argues that parent groups are often portrayed in distinct ways, for example, middle class parents are often perceived to possess the cultural and social capital to support the school system, always ready and willing to help, invariably being "seen as (and treated as) containers overflowing with resources" (p.98). In contrast, parents from lower SES backgrounds sometimes do not fit the 'ideal parent template'. Here, parents are often labelled as passive or unresponsive (Crozier 1999), or are seen as troublesome, "empty or lacking" (Lightfoot 2004, p. 99). This view adds to the discourse of 'lack', especially when parents fail to meet schools' expectations in terms of taking their fair share of responsibility towards schooling children. As Reay (1998, pp. 3-4) points out, "despite the homogeneity reigning in the texts on parental involvement, educational professionals often adopt deficit conceptions of certain parent groups." Several groups fall into this category, for example, working class parents, single parents, minority ethnic parents, asylum seeker and refugee parents, and so on. These parents fare less well in the education system, mainly because their circumstances and frames of reference are usually different to that of their more affluent, middle class counterparts. This affects how particular parent groups relate to the school and, in turn, how the school relates to them. A recent study by Sime and Sheridan (2014) that investigated the support needs of disadvantaged families of 4 to 7-year-old children highlights the issue

well. Findings suggest that despite parents wanting the best for their children in education and social mobility terms, they possessed a limited resource base in the form of “restricted academic competencies, specialist knowledge and qualifications” (Sime and Sheridan 2014, p. 327). Thus, parents from lower SES backgrounds may have fewer resources to draw upon and/or there may be a lack of successful role models within the family to aspire to, which may make it difficult to break the cycle of disadvantage (Hango 2007).

Research in the UK shows that the number of parents⁸ who report they feel very or fairly involved in their child’s education is growing (Peters et al. 2008) however these statistics only reveal part of the story. Although the most identifiable aspects of parental involvement are associated with the home and school, parental involvement is complex. There are other dimensions that should be considered in the broader context, such as: parents’ psychological state (Hill and Taylor 2004); family race and cultural background (Alexander et al. 1994; Diamond and Gomez 2004); gender - mothers are generally more involved than fathers (Crozier 1999; Reay 2002); parents’ cognitive and affective attributes (Seefeldt et al. 1998); and parental occupation and income (Crozier 1998; Eccles 2005; Reay et al. 2005). Although these dimensions all play a part in determining children’s chances of success, some dimensions are not considered in great depth in this study, other than in passing reference. The next section examines the home-school relationship.

3.3 The home-school relationship

This section briefly considers the home-school relationship at different stages of children’s development namely the primary stage, and secondary stage. Generally, it is thought that parental involvement in the form of good home parenting practices and support for the school are essential ingredients required to foster good educational outcomes for children (Desforges et al. 2003). Without effective parental support children stand to lose out, which can lead to “lost potential, unrealized talent, diminished educational and vocational attainment, and widening demographic gaps in achievement” (Hill and Tyson 2009, p. 760). Therefore, it is crucial that parents build and maintain connections, and strong relationships with the school.

⁸ All respondents belonged to two-parent households

Studies have shown that involvement tends to be far higher in the earlier stages of primary schooling, then gradually decreases and changes nature soon after children enter the secondary school phase (Crozier 1999; von Otter 2014). Unlike the cosiness and intimacy of primary school, secondary school is characterised by a period of increasing independence where children are encouraged to develop their own identity. Further, secondary schools are far bigger institutions, employing greater numbers of staff, serving pupils from different areas and cultural backgrounds. In addition, a recent shift in Welsh education policy has seen the amalgamation of several schools to form super schools, in order to achieve education efficiencies and financial viability (Goodwin 2010). This strategy could potentially make it even more difficult for schools and parents to maintain contact.

In a UK study conducted in secondary schools, Vincent and Martin (2002) found that working class parents held fixed assumptions about the school. Here, the school was viewed as detached and separate, having its “own language and procedures” (p.125) which discouraged many working-class parents from connecting with the school. Similarly research by Crozier (1998) found that working class parents tended to play a deferential role, adopting a ‘teacher knows best’ attitude; entrusting teachers to take control of their children’s education. This highlights the unequal dynamics of parent school relationships.

Moreover, when children had issues or problems at school, some parents avoided challenging the school while others challenged the school in an aggressive manner. Even when parents challenged the school, the chances of success were limited. This can deter parents from intervening in school matters especially when they know their efforts will more than likely result in a negative outcome. Similarly parents who appear reluctant to engage with the school are often classed as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘disengaged’ (Tett 2001). However, some parents perceive schools, especially secondary schools, to be intimidating, large and imposing places. This can affect the way parents connect with the school especially if parents lack the necessary confidence to communicate with the school. Furthermore parents with low educational and occupational status may lack skills in educational competence or have basic skills needs themselves (Eccles and Harold 1993). This may discourage parents from connecting with the school since the mismatch between teachers’ and parents’ level of competence may lead parents to feel patronised by school teaching staff. Others may have difficulty engaging with the school

because of language barriers (Hornby and Lafaele 2011). Likewise, homework help is often a site of tension for both parents and children.

3.4 Homework help

Equally, some parents do not possess the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities, or may be too anxious, or lacking in confidence to offer their child help and support at home. This situation has consequences for children's outcomes and achievement. Maloney et al. (2015), for example, reported that children of maths-anxious parents learnt significantly less maths over the course of a school year when parents provided frequent help. When maths-anxious parents were less involved in homework activities their children were less anxious about maths. Two UK studies have reported similar concerns around anxiety and tension in parent-child maths homework activities (Solomon et al. 2002; Hughes and Greenhough 2007). Parents' low level of confidence and self-efficacy in maths homework activities at home contributed to their own sense of failure as a parent in trying to keep up with school demands. This puts further pressure on parents, as Solomon et. al (2002, p. 620) put it:

[P]arents are investing considerable time and emotional effort into supporting a homework agenda that is not their own and which they have little power to influence. They are driven by concerns about their children's futures which create a climate of pressure to succeed.

Certainly, this presents a problem for parents, especially those who previously struggled at school. However, ACL participation can go some way to alleviating the tensions. A WEA impact survey of 2155 students found that 56 percent of parents stated that learning helped them to feel more confident in helping their children to read, and 49 percent stated they were more confident in supporting their children in maths (WEA 2014).

Goodall and Johnston-Wilder (2015) explored the relationships between the school and home. They highlight the disconnect between the school and parent's understandings of the nature of parental support during maths homework tasks. Despite one mother wanting to help her daughter, teachers were reluctant to encourage her to do so because they felt the mother's method of working out maths problems would confuse her daughter. However, Goodall and Johnston-Wilder (2015) did address the problem. As the study progressed they realised that short training sessions might be the answer to help the mother overcome her anxieties about maths. Providing the mother with support helped the mother become maths resilient, and subsequently she felt more at ease

helping her daughter with homework. Moreover, they recommended that schools incorporate the model into the work that they already carry out with parents. However, this approach would put more pressure on schools. One way to overcome this issue could be for schools to work with ACL providers. In doing so, areas for development could be identified with a view to ACL providers delivering tailor made courses to help develop parents' maths skills to enable them to support their children at home.

Indeed, a similar approach has already been trialled, albeit in another area of learning. Lall et al. (2004) reported examination success for a group of five parents and their children⁹ in Hackney who were coached together in GCSE Turkish. The research not only highlighted the benefit of parents and children studying together, but also revealed the advantage of parents learning the same subject specific content in conjunction with their children. In doing so it encouraged better channels of communication and understanding between parents and children. Examination results were impressive, both parents and children passed the examination resulting in two A* grades, seven A grades, and one pass. Success also translated into happier children, proud parents and raised levels of confidence.

When parents exhibit low levels of self-efficacy they may doubt their abilities or may have fears about confusing children if they try to help with schoolwork (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). Helping a child to read at home is a routine that many parents carry out daily. However, a study by Reay (2002) found that some parents (mostly mothers) had difficulty with this task due to:

[M]other's own negative experience of schooling, feelings that they lacked educational competencies, the refusal of some children to see mothers as educational experts and the amount of time mothers had available to undertake educational work with children (Reay 2002, p.29).

Certainly, the issue of children receiving adequate support in the home learning environment is an issue of concern; and one that needs to be tackled at all stages of children's development. In response, nowadays, many parents hire private tutors to help support their children. Historically this was only available to affluent families, who had the funds to afford private tuition or 'shadow schooling' as it is currently known (Ireson 2004). However, the prevalence of private tuition in the UK has increased dramatically over the last 20 years. A report by Kirby (2016) suggests that approximately 280,000

⁹ All the children were of primary school age

(10%) of state-educated pupils aged between 11 and 16 years, living in England and Wales, received private tuition in 2015. For children living in London the percentage is even higher, rising to 18% (this figure does not include privately educated children). For parents that do not have the financial capital to fund private tuition, this can cause problems since, as Sir Peter Lampl - Chairman of the Sutton Trust - puts it, "If we are to create as level a playing field as possible in education, we have to ensure that private tuition doesn't make educational inequality worse" (Kirby 2016, p. Foreword). Although private tuition is one form of support parents also draw upon their own educational experiences to school their children. The next section explores the mediating influence of parents' education on children's learning.

3.5 Patterns and trends in education

It has long been acknowledged that the level of parents' education in one generation is a likely indicator of children's educational outcomes in the next. Several studies have investigated parents' prior education attainment i.e. education before starting a family, in relation to children's academic outcomes (Haveman and Wolfe 1995; Davis-Kean 2005; Feinstein et al. 2008; Dickson and Smith 2011; Holmlund et al. 2011; Carneiro et al. 2013). As Eccles' (2005) points out, parents' personal levels of education are key to influencing children's academic outcomes. Educated parents tend to pass on their knowledge, skills, and values, and often expose their children to various social and cultural activities in and outside of the home. In addition, Eccles (2005) cites family distal factors such as having a better job, a higher income and better living standards, all of which contribute to the well-being and success of the family and the child. Research by Davis-Kean (2005) also echoes this stance arguing that parents' education influences parental beliefs and behaviours that indirectly relate to positive outcomes for children in later life.

Further, research in the UK, by Goodman and Gregg (2010) identified a range of mediating factors thought to make a difference to children's educational outcomes that include: level of parents' education; family background and environment; parenting attitudes and behaviours, and the management of children's education and schooling. Thus, it is widely accepted that children of well-educated parents tend to achieve far better outcomes at school than children of parents with less education. Research by Serafino and Tonkin (2014) highlight that in comparison to children of highly educated fathers, children of low educated fathers were 7.5 times more likely to have low level

outcomes themselves. This is especially concerning since gaps in attainment levels between children from privileged backgrounds and children from less advantaged backgrounds remain persistent and are growing ever wider (Blanden et al. 2015).

Indeed, there is a gap in attainment levels of school pupils in Wales. In 2015/16, the percentage of Key Stage 4 Year 11 pupils achieving GCSE A*- C in the core subjects of science, mathematics and English was 82.4 percent, 66.9 percent and 69.3 percent respectively. However, achievements vary according to geographical area, for example, pupils living in Monmouthshire achieved a pass rate of 72.8 percent in English whereas pupils from Blaenau Gwent achieved only a pass rate 57.4 percent. Although these figures must be understood in terms of area; Blaenau Gwent being the most deprived authority in Wales, with Monmouth being the least deprived (StatsWales 2014). In addition, there are differences in achievement levels across schools in each of the regions. Likewise, in terms of gender, girls outperform boys in all three core subjects, although only marginally in mathematics and science (Welsh Government 2017e).

In addition, Welsh pupils do not perform as well as pupils nationally and internationally; take, for example, the global benchmark study, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA¹⁰) test. Welsh 15-year-old pupils have been tested twice in the last decade. In 2015, the average score in science was 485 points, 20 points lower than in 2006 (505), while scores in mathematics and reading remained relatively stable. However, Welsh school pupils still perform worse than pupils living in other parts of the UK, for example, in 2015 pupils in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland achieved significantly higher scores in science, ranging between 12-17 points higher than Welsh pupils (Jerrim and Shure 2016). Thus, alongside improvements in schools much work still needs to be done to engage parents in their children's learning to enable school pupils in Wales to catch up nationally and internationally. Perhaps one way to improve scores is through at home discussions with parents (OECD 2011). The report stresses that 15-year-old children were more likely to attain higher average PISA scores, including children from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds, when they had discussions with parents on subjects related to social and political issues, books, films, and television programmes (OECD 2011).

¹⁰ PISA is a worldwide study by the OECD that tests 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance in mathematics, science, and reading.

Furthermore, there is yet another dimension to consider with respect to how children fair as they transition through school. As Blanden et al. (2015, p. 1) point out:

There is clear evidence that initially high-attaining poorer children fall behind richer but lower-attaining children between 11 and 16. Much of this is attributable to differences between the types of secondary schools attended by richer and poorer children, and some of it to differences in educational values, aspirations and expectations of pupils.

Certainly, this issue is complex and difficult to address however studies on ACL participation have begun to look at the ways in which parental learning can go some way to addressing these issues.

3.6 ACL participation and family life

While much has been written about the benefit of adult learning on health and well-being, income and social integration (Schuller et al. 2004; Schuller and Watson 2009), for example, much less is known about the impact of ACL participation on family life, and parenting. However a number of studies have begun to address the gap in the literature, for example, some studies have highlighted the pressure of learning while raising a family - see for example, learning and tensions in family relationships and relationship breakdown (Brine and Waller 2004) as well as pressure from close family members to delay learning until children are older or have left the family home (Gorard et al. 1999). While participation in ACL is often an enjoyable, fulfilling experience, juggling family and/or work commitments around learning can increase tension in the household (Reay et al. 2002). As Harden et al. (2014) point out in their study on work and responsibility in family life, failure to be the 'perfect parent' is stressful in itself; this was the case in research by Mannay and Morgan (2013) who found that mothers studying higher education courses often felt guilty about "neglecting or compromising their familial relationships and role as mother" (p.68). Nevertheless, several studies have begun to explore the influence of ACL on parenting practices. Here researchers argue that participation in ACL activity can change some parenting practices and behaviours towards schooling children (Desforges et al. 2003; Brassett-Grundy 2004a; Attewell and Lavin 2007; Roksa and Potter 2011), especially when parents study at the higher levels. These studies are considered in the following sections.

3.6.1 Education and the family: quantitative studies

Studies in the USA have focused on the impact of maternal education on parenting at different ages and stages of children's development. Magnuson (2003) argues that if mothers on welfare benefits increase their education it can influence their parenting style and behaviours, for example, Magnuson found mothers were more responsive to children; had higher quality verbal interactions; provided a more cognitively stimulating home environment; and possessed more learning resources at home. In addition, a cluster of US studies has focused on higher education and parenting. First, Attewell and Lavin (2007) drawing upon data from the City University of New York (CUNY) study and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) Mother-Child Sample, conducted a 30-year longitudinal study to explore the impact of maternal higher education (HE) on children. They investigated the extent to which achievement of a college degree obtained mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds, would impact on the family. Although many women in the study achieved a degree through the traditional pathway, some 29 per cent of women completed their degree over a period of 10 years or so after first entering college, and another 10 per cent after a period of 20 years or more. Taking these trajectories into account, Attewell and Lavin (2007) argue that no matter the origin of a mother's background, ethnic grouping or disadvantages faced throughout the life course, mothers who study at university stand to increase their children's chances of success. Moreover, although they believe that participation in HE influences mothers' parenting behaviours and practices towards schooling children, they cannot fully explain the mechanisms involved in the process, and deliberate by saying:

There is something about the college experience, beyond class origins or differences in background that affects how women later raise their children. (Attewell and Lavin 2007, p. 123)

They did however identify nine parenting practices thought to boost children's educational outcomes. They are:

- Cultural enrichment
- Social capital (intergenerational closure)
- Extended discussions with children (communicative parenting)
- Parental involvement in schooling
- Residential moves
- Parental involvement in community organizations
- Church attendance with children and
- Parental emotional support

(Attewell and Lavin 2007, p. 124)

Second, in a later study Roksa and Potter (2011) suggest that mothers from working class backgrounds who acquire middle class status will, during their lifetime, adopt highly cultured parenting practices, which enables children to close the gap with children from established middle class backgrounds. The authors argue that mothers achieve this status through their own educational attainment however they do not make explicitly clear at which point in the life course mothers do so, whether through the traditional pathway or the ACL pathway. However, the research does provide insight in that it strengthens Bourdieu's social and cultural mobility theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Third, a study by Domina and Roksa (2012) aimed to understand the extent to which learning influenced parenting attitudes and behaviours towards schooling their children. Domina and Roksa (2012) argue that parents' social background and practices towards schooling children is not static or fixed; rather, these dimensions constantly evolve and change over time. Thus, they argue that exposure to higher education after childbirth can change some parenting behaviours towards schooling children. When mothers participated in learning they became more involved in schooling children, had more books in the home, and engaged in 'out of school' family activities more often. However here again, the authors acknowledge that the mechanisms through which mothers changed their behaviour are not fully understood (Domina and Roksa 2012).

In contrast, findings from a study conducted in the UK by Sabates et al. (2011) are less optimistic. Using data from the UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), researchers found no association between mothers' participation in learning and improvements in the test scores of their 14-year-old children, although they acknowledge there may be benefits at other stages of children's development.

3.6.2 Education and the family: qualitative studies

Few research studies that have explored the impact of ACL on the family in the UK, nonetheless some studies have begun to explore this area. In a study of families and patterns of participation, Gorard et al. (1999) interviewed 200 children to explore the influence of family on children's educational performance. Gorard et al. (1999) identified several influences in the parent-child relationship, for example: parents' university education; parents' work and employment, and parent desire for children to achieve

better outcomes at school than they did, were all found to influence children's education. Further, Brassett-Grundy (2004a) interviewed 72 white British parents to explore the effect of adult learning on children's learning. Five themes emerged from the interviews, namely: *valuing* - parents placed more value on children's achievement; *supporting* - parents offered children support through direct and indirect means in their involvement with the school; *role-modelling* - children saw parents as good role models; *reciprocating* - children supported their parents in their learning activities; and lastly, *enjoying* - both parents and children found learning together satisfying and enjoyable. In addition, Brassett-Grundy (2004a) reported that during episodes of learning parents felt more confident and capable in their abilities, they communicated better with children, and were more patient with children. Moreover, when parents and children learned together it provided a highly enjoyable, positive atmosphere for parents and children alike. Although, it is worth pointing out here that while support for learning is often perceived to be unidirectional (flowing from parent to child), Brassett-Grundy (2004a) also found evidence of bi-directional support with children providing motivational support and encouragement for parents at home.

Other studies have looked at the impact of learning through other processes. There is a large body of evidence on the benefit of parental education on school involvement. A review undertaken by Desforges et al. (2003) suggests that intervention-based work with parents and children at primary school level can enhance home-school links, and increase parental involvement in school activities. However as Desforges et al. (2003) point out there is uncertainty as to whether this type of intervention has a significant impact on school children's levels of achievement.

3.6.3 Child-parent influence in the home learning environment

Although this PhD study is concerned with the influence of parental ACL participation on children's learning, it is worth acknowledging the important role that children play in the home learning environment. When researching parent-child relationships, attention is often directed towards understanding parents' influence on children and less so towards understanding children's influence on parents. However, some studies have begun to explore this area. Istead and Shapiro (2014) identified positive child-parent influences related to eco knowledge and behaviours. When children discussed with parents school topics related to new technologies and the environment, they acted like learning catalysts. This prompted parents to re-think, and in some cases, change their

behaviours towards the environment. Demick (2012) has taken the idea of bi-directional learning one stage further by introducing the notion of a transactional model that explains the “cumulative effects of ongoing two-way influences between parents and children” (p.1). Here, Demick (2012) argues that we should not underestimate the powerful role that children play in parents’ learning and development. Indeed, this notion is supported by a Belgian study by De Mol and Buysse (2008). The research, involving 30 children aged between 11 and 15 years and their parents, looked at family socialisation processes. Evidence suggests that children had a significant and powerful effect on parents’ cognition and behaviours. Further, they argue that children’s influence is often played down in parent-child relationships. Here they found that some children saw themselves as “full agentic persons and partners in the parent-child relationship with [their] own specific contributions and influences (De Mol and Buysse 2008, p. 375). Indeed, a US study by Ochs et al. (1992) has highlighted the importance of learning in parent-child relationships, and points out that we should not underestimate the value of everyday family discussions in the home environment since these discussions form the very basis of children’s intellectual skills, critical thinking, and perspective taking. In considering the paradigm of family influence, I next present theoretical concepts and frameworks to understand the influence of learning within the context of socialising children.

3.7 Conceptualising the influence of learning in parent-child relationships

Initially the attempt to conceptualise influence in parent-child relationships was difficult to overcome since decisions had to be made about which conceptual framework to use. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Lave and Wenger (1991) explained the influence of learning through the theoretical concept of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ in situated learning experiences at work. However, as stated earlier, they could equally have presented this theory through the lens of parenting and socialisation. Indeed, Rogoff et al. (2015) build on this theory through presentation of a cultural paradigm of learning in families by ‘observing’ and ‘pitching in’.

Early on in the study, I searched for ideas on how to conceptualise the influence of learning in the family by combing through other studies for inspiration; for example, on the one hand, the three US studies (Attewell and Lavin 2007; Roksa and Potter 2011; Domina and Roksa 2012) referred to a socio-cultural perspective (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) to conceptualise the influence of parents’ education on children’s

educational outcomes. Feinstein et al. (2008), on the other hand, adopted a different approach by integrating ideas from a range of interdisciplinary studies related to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development.

Whilst quantitative research studies are useful to understand patterns and trends in education across the generations, these studies do not necessarily identify the underlying mechanisms that support the trends and patterns. Brassett-Grundy's (2004a) use of a triangular framework that incorporates human, social and identity capital into a life matrix provided some answers, but even here it was difficult to untangle some of the processes and mechanisms. Nonetheless, taking a step back, I realised the concept of 'capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) - as referred to in the next section; Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991); and research by Rogoff et al. (2015), both outlined in Chapter 2, would be helpful to understand the influence of learning within the context of parent-child relationships at home since these concepts related well to what I was seeing in the data.

3.7.1 Pierre Bourdieu: theory of social, cultural, and economic capital

Towards the latter end of the twentieth century, the work of Pierre Bourdieu and colleagues has had a significant impact on sociological thinking and understanding in the field of education (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Bourdieu used a number of theoretical tools to explain the social world, some of which are noted here: specifically, the concept of capital, field, habitus, structure and agency. Bourdieu argues that three forms of capital exist in the social world: economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Firstly, economic capital is expressed in terms of material worth that refers to money, property and possessions. Economic capital can be acquired over a significant period of time and, if maintained, is transferable from one generation to the next. Secondly, cultural capital is expressed in three ways, namely through: mind and body, for example, the ways in which individuals conduct themselves in terms of vocabulary, accent and deportment (James, 2011); the possession of cultural articles such as books or resources, or through visiting museums and art galleries, and so on; and the institutionalised form, for example, through the acquisition of educational qualifications, or an individual's links to educational establishments. Thirdly, social capital is expressed through the networks or connections that individuals or groups can access – in Bourdieu's words, this encompasses “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” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248) . Combined together then, these three capitals play an important and powerful role in the social reproduction process, and in education (Reay 2004a).

Capital resides within the concepts of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’. On the one hand, Bourdieu describes ‘field’ as a socially constructed phenomenon that refers to space and time, relationships and interactions with others, within different contexts and circumstances. Habitus, on the other hand, is described as being “both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 19) or as James puts it, a system “whereby individuals acquire and *carry* ways of thinking and being and doing from one place to another” (2011, p. 2). Habitus, therefore, is acquired through family and institutional socialisation. Bourdieu also refers to class habitus - ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that relate to the person’s social position or standing in society (Bourdieu 1977) . For example, as explained earlier in the chapter, middle-class parents often utilise their social, economic and cultural capital to support their children through school which, combined together, has the potential to influence children’s outcomes throughout school and beyond. Therefore, forms of capital operate within the field and offer explanations as to what is at stake within the field.

Lastly, Bourdieu offers a way to *combine* structure and agency in an approach to understanding social life. Structure, on the one hand, refers (in the collective sense) to the established fabric of society, with its own set of rules and limits (social, economic, and political) that command an “adherence to the established order” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 164), which is orchestrated through daily customs, rituals and social practices. Agency, on the other hand, refers to people’s individual agency; the idea that people are in control of their own destiny, free to make choices at will. Although society is shaped by individuals, their behaviours and actions, so too are individuals shaped by the structure of society - through class, race and gender, or through government policy and practice. Take, for example, the idea that every adult in the UK has the opportunity to participate in learning. While this may hold true in theory, in practice some adults may find it difficult to access education because they may lack the support, finance or time to participate in educational activities (Gorard and Rees 2002). Therein lies the tension between agency and structure.

In returning to the concept of capital and why it is helpful to understand people and society, Reay (2000) argues that there is little mention of 'emotion work' and capital in Bourdieu's writings. Although, as she rightly points out, Bourdieu always intended researchers to form their own empirical frameworks out of the "imprecise, fuzzy, woolly reality" of social science research (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 23). In drawing on Bourdieu's concept of social, cultural and economic capital, I next consider Diane Reay's paper on emotional capital (2000). Here, Reay articulates the importance of emotional capital in parent-child relationships.

3.7.2 Diane Reay: understanding emotional capital

In a study about mothers' involvement in children's education, Diane Reay's utilisation of Bourdieu's concept of capital (2000) provides a useful starting point to build a framework of understanding. During the study, Reay discovered that mothers paid constant attention to the emotional side of schooling their children. However an important challenge was to understand how to conceptualise "the relationship between emotional involvement and educational achievement" (Reay 2000, p. 574). Reay refers to 'emotions' and 'emotional capital' to understand "the emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement" (Reay, 2000, p. 569) at home and in relationships with the school. Indeed, while analysing mothers' accounts of schooling children Reay noticed both positive and negative emotions in mother-child relationships and mother-school relationships. For example, Reay noted that when one child struggled with reading, his mother was unable to support him because she too struggled with reading. This led both mother and son to become frustrated, angry, and worried about reading. In addition, the situation was further exacerbated by differences in school teaching methods where teaching methods in the mother's initial education were different to the teaching methods employed at her son's school. While considering this thought, and in an effort to understand the nature of the influences at play in the mother child relationship, I next looked at Darling and Steinberg's contextual model of parenting style (1993).

3.7.3 Darling and Steinberg: a framework for socialisation in context

Reading the work of Darling and Steinberg (1993), I began to understand the parent-child relationship in a different light. By drawing on Baumrind's typology (1966) related to authoritative, permissive and authoritarian parenting, Darling and Steinberg (1993)

developed a contextual model of socialisation. In doing so, they move away from the 'family address' or whole style approach to parenting, and instead focus on three aspects of parenting. Here the authors argue that:

[T]o understand the processes through which parenting style influences child development, one must disentangle three different aspects of parenting: the goals towards which socialization is directed; the parenting practices used by parents to help children reach those goals; and the parenting style, or emotional climate, within which socialization occurs.

(Darling and Steinberg 1993, p. 488)

In educational terms, parental goals and values are reflected in a parent's desire for children to acquire certain skills. Parenting practice relates to parents' behaviours and actions towards schooling children such as attending school events, volunteering for the school, and helping with homework. While, on the other hand, parenting style relates to the ways in which parents communicate with children and the school, within differing climates of emotion. Further, parenting practices towards schooling children are direct behaviours while parenting style is indirect. Parenting style here is best understood as a context within which socialisation occurs, which in turn moderates the effect of parenting practices, for example, as discussed earlier, one study found that when parents were anxious about maths children learnt significantly less maths throughout the course of a school year (Maloney et al. 2015). Moreover, in considering these constructs separately it is possible to understand the extent to which positive and negative affect, as well as cognition influences parent-child relationships.

There is another dimension to consider: the nature of parenting. Baumrind's typology of authoritative, permissive and authoritarian parenting (1966) is useful to understand children's learning and development. As Darling and Steinberg point out:

[A]lthough most parents hope that their children will excel academically, authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian parents may differ in the relative importance they place on the goals of academic excellence and social success or in the ways in which they help their children succeed.

(Darling and Steinberg 1993, p. 494)

As part of the job of socialising children requires a significant amount of 'emotion work', hoping for the best does not necessarily help children to succeed at school. Therefore, parents need to navigate their way through the education system to get the best possible support for their child. As outlined earlier, how they achieve this will depend on parents'

experiences of education, and the extent to which they understand school systems, practices and procedures. To illustrate the socialisation process, in the next section I present a working model to understand the influence of parents' education and schooling practices, on children's education and outcomes.

3.7.4 Influence of learning in parent-child relationships: a working model

In the humdrum activity of daily life we may pay scant attention to what we do, how we influence, or even less to how others influence us. Goffman (1968) describes these "non-biography creating areas of life" (p.88) as thus:

In the everyday life of an average person there will be long stretches of time when events involving him will be memorable to no one, a technical but not active part of his biography. Only a serious personal accident or the witnessing of a murder will create moments in these dead periods which have a place in the reviews he and others come to make of his past.

(Goffman 1968, p. 89)

These 'dead periods', whilst unremarkable, make up the very fabric of our lives yet often pass by unnoticed. But it is these very moments that need to be brought to prominence. Only then can we begin to understand our social selves, our relationships and the influences that surround us. Perhaps a good example of influence is demonstrated in the Welsh education campaign entitled *What you say counts* (National Numeracy 2014). The campaign was launched to encourage parents to be more positive about maths. It stems from a Welsh poll undertaken in February 2014 that found just under a third of parents talk negatively about maths in front of their children (BBC 2014). Indeed, what parents say and do in the presence of their children is vitally important. If it becomes part of a normal routine to talk negatively about maths in the household, then sooner or later children will come to believe that it is acceptable to be bad at maths.

Parents will school their children in different ways and through different forms but in education terms, parents draw upon three main sources: their initial education (school); daily life, work and volunteering; and learning acquired via the traditional or ACL pathway. Parents also draw on other forms of support to help their children; they may hire private tutors, refer to family members or friends, or obtain information from the internet, for example. However, as this study is concerned with initial education (school) and ACL participation, for the moment, I will primarily focus on these two aspects. Drawing on Darling and Steinberg's (1993) contextual model of parenting framework, I

present a model to explain the influence of learning in parent-child relationships - see Figure 3.3.

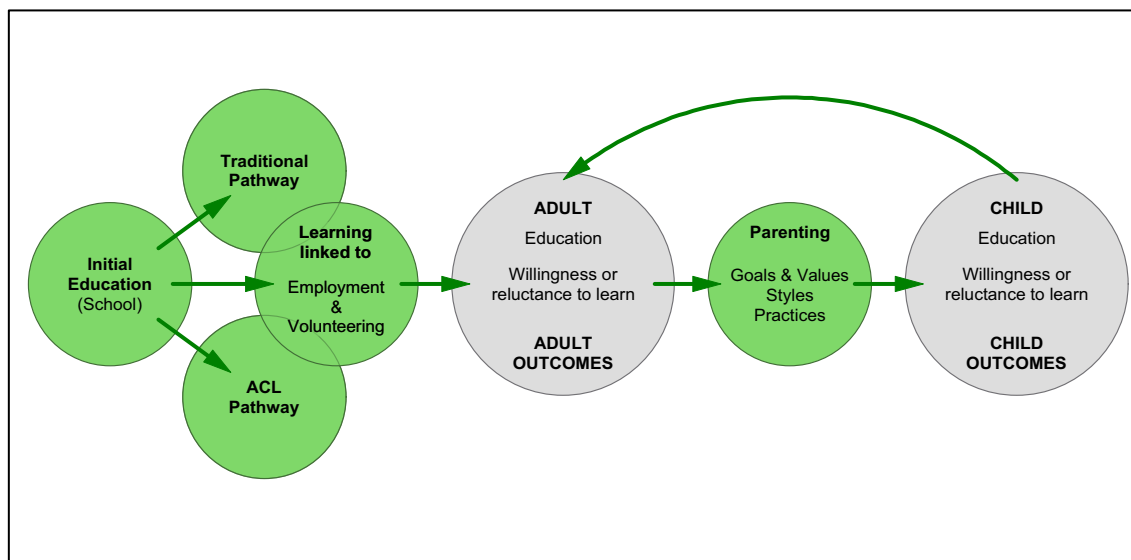


Figure 3.3 Model to understand the influence of learning in parent-child relationships

By including the main source of parents' education (for example, initial education, work and learning acquired via the ACL pathway) to parenting, goals, styles, and practices, the framework can be used as a heuristic tool to identify the processes involved in parent-child relationships. To explain my point further, I provide a simple working example to highlight the process of influence in the mother child relationship.

In this example both Mother A and Mother B perceive homework to be a necessary task towards getting a good education (goals and values) and believe that helping their child to complete homework on time is important to each child's success (parenting practice). Mother A has taken the ACL pathway and during this period has built up a considerable bank of knowledge and resources. At home the emotional climate towards learning is positive. Mother and child have shared learning interests, they work well together, and the child is openly welcome to the mother's offers of support. Homework tasks are thus completed with few problems or arguments (parenting style). In contrast, despite trying her utmost, Mother B is unable to help her child with homework mainly because since leaving school with no qualifications, having only been involved in 'on the job' training at work, she lacks the knowledge and confidence in her abilities to help her child academically. Therefore, in this scenario, the homework task is blighted by a negative emotional climate; the mother expressing a sense of frustration and worry in her attempts

to support her child (parenting style and emotion). In this case, Mother B has two options: to either give up and admit defeat, or alternatively to seek help from elsewhere, for example, through private tuition, help from family members or friends, or to trawl through the internet for information. If one or more of these processes is successful, then the problem of support will likely be resolved, and the child can move on.

3.8 Summary of chapter

In this chapter I explored the concept of parental involvement in schooling, outlining changes in education policy that led to the increase in parental involvement from the 1980s onwards. Next, I looked at frameworks and models of parental involvement in schooling, illustrating Russell and Granville's (2005) template which summarises the types and levels of involvement. I then looked at the literature on school choice, parents' perceptions of role and responsibilities in schooling, the effect of social class on schooling practices and behaviours, the literature on home-school relationships, and help with homework. In the following sections, I outlined patterns and trends in education and presented a brief overview of the Welsh education context. I next presented research on ACL participation undertaken to date, and briefly looked at child-parent influences in the home learning environment.

To conceptualise the influence of learning in parent-child relationships I looked towards recent literature for inspiration. Most studies focused on patterns and trends, much less about understanding the processes and underlying mechanisms that support the patterns and trends. However, the model presented in Brassett-Grundy's research (2004b) provided a foundation of thought that led me to consider looking at other ways of interpreting the influence of learning in parent-child relationships. Later, drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Reay's concept of emotional capital (2000), along with Darling and Steinberg's work on parenting style (1993), I created a working model to use as a heuristic tool to understand the process of influence in parent-child relationships. However, the model was not necessarily useful to identify the underlying mechanisms of influence. Further work later needed to be undertaken to find a way to uncover the mechanisms. I outline the procedure of how I achieve this in the next chapter, entitled Methodological Considerations.

CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter I present my methodological considerations. First, I consider my ontological and epistemological positioning in relation to this study. Second, I outline my main research aim, and the three broader questions underpinning the main aim. Third, I put forward a rationale and justification for choice of research approach and design. Fourth, I discuss how I gained access to the research sites, consider the risks involved in the field, and outline a number of ethical considerations. Lastly, I present the methodology including my method of analysis and interpretation of data.

4.1 Ontological and epistemological position

Before embarking on this research study, I first considered my ontological and epistemological position, which ultimately would inform the nature and scope of my research. Ontology is concerned with the nature of being, and what exists; it involves beliefs about reality based on truth, while epistemology relates to a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. Any study in the social sciences will incorporate a view of what is knowable and worth knowing. This is often seen as a broad dichotomy in social science: according to Fisher (1991) and later Cohen and Manion (1994), epistemology in social science involves two conceptions of social reality: 'positivism' and 'constructivism'. On the one hand, supporters of positivism believe that truth and reality is 'out there'; it exists independently of the observer. Knowledge is gained through categorisation and conceptualisation of variables that can be measured and verified, for example, generally the applied sciences like physics and maths employs a positivist approach. Constructivism, on the other hand, is concerned with relationships and experiences that can involve multiple realities. Truth is therefore relative to the frame of reference employed by the observing systems and is subject to change; knowledge being constructed through social and individual beliefs. In this case, individual behaviours will be shaped by recursive processes relative to the self and the environment (Fisher 1991). Therefore, social inquiry focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences, and the world in which they live. Although, as Miller (2016, p. 369) points out, "[r]elations between the social scientist and a social practice are not the same as relations between the distanced observer and the observed object. The social scientist has to become something of an apprentice to learn the rules of the practice."

For the purposes of this study, to adopt an etic approach, which is concerned with objectivity and measurement – a line of inquiry synonymous with experiment and survey methods - would be contra to what I wanted to achieve since it is inappropriate given the nature of my research aim and questions. However, adopting an emic approach would reveal more in-depth information as it involves interacting with people to gain an understanding of their lived lives, and their relationships with others around them. To make an analogy, it is akin to swimming with fish in a fish tank to understand the subjective nature of how fish operate within that context, in contrast to objectively observing what fish do from outside the fish tank. This led me to discount the concept of realism as a tool to conduct my research because rather than focusing on measurement and statistics I wanted to unearth people's perceptions and dispositions towards education; in particular ACL education, and the extent to which these dimensions played out in the family context.

Moreover, this form of inquiry would involve an element of looking back through time and history, to understand present and future intentions. This pointed towards understanding parents' lives through biographical research processes and narrative expression (Elliott 2005; Schütze 2008a, b); a form of inquiry that is discussed later in the chapter.

4.2 Research aim and questions

In previous chapters we learned that children of parents with higher levels of education tend to be more successful at schooling their children than parents with low levels of education (Gorard and Rees 2002; Eccles 2005). However frequently the literature refers to parents that follow the traditional pathway i.e. initial education (school) followed by further and/or higher education: a route taken before childbirth. In contrast, very little attention has been paid to parents that study through the ACL pathway: a route generally undertaken after childbirth.

Indeed, few studies have explored the benefit of ACL learning on parent-child relationships. That is not to say that ACL participation automatically confers benefit. Many studies have shown that parents often feel guilty about learning (Reay et al. 2002; Dunne et al. 2008; Callender et al. 2014; Harden et al. 2014) especially where studying involves making sacrifices, for example, spending less quality time with the family. Even so, in the UK a number of studies have begun to explore the impact of ACL participation on parents and vis-à-vis, their children (Gorard et al. 1999; Desforges et al. 2003;

Brassett-Grundy 2004a; Feinstein and Duckworth 2006; Sabates et al. 2011). However, results are mixed. Yet, US researchers Domina and Roksa (2012) argue that learning at the higher levels can change some parenting attitudes and behaviours towards schooling children, however the mechanisms by which this change occurs are little understood. Thus, this indicates a need to understand the processes and mechanisms of influence inherent in parent-child relationships. Considering the findings then, this study has an overarching aim to address the gap in literature through exploring:

The nature and extent to which participation in ACL influences parents' perceptions and practices with respect to the education of their children.

Further, the aim is underpinned by three main research questions, namely:

- 1) *How do we understand parents' lives in relation to their social background, education, training and work?*
- 2) *Does ACL participation influence and shape parenting goals, styles and practices towards the education of their children, and if so, to what extent?*
- 3) *What are children's and young people's views and personal experience of parental ACL participation?*

Before moving on, it is important to make clear at this point that the study does not include individuals that followed the traditional education pathway of school, college, and university; rather, this study focuses *only* on individuals that followed the ACL pathway after leaving school. In addition, and to fully appreciate the ACL pathway, we must understand parents' initial education (school) since this will help distinguish the extent to which ACL participation benefits parents throughout the life course (question no. 1).

With regard to question no. 2, although a considerable amount of evidence has been published on parental involvement in schooling, here evidence is often presented from a 'school centric' perspective that tends to emphasise what parents do, or conversely not do, to support the school mission (Reay 1998). Consequently, I explore parental involvement in schooling from a different perspective. Here I focus on what parents do to support their children and further, explore the extent to which ACL participation influences and shapes parents' goals, values, styles and practices towards schooling children.

Finally, after interviewing parents, I concluded that it was vitally important to give children and young people a voice in the study¹¹. Question no. 3 was included because I was interested to understand their views on being schooled as well as understanding their personal experiences of ACL participation, and whether children and young people welcomed (or not, as the case may be) parents' participation in ACL. This approach, I hoped, would provide an element of triangulation, and an added dimension to the study. Having outlined the main aim of the study and the broader study questions, next I present my research approach.

4.3 Research approach

Before setting out on the PhD journey, I realised I needed to develop a 'strategic path' to guide me through the research process. However, at first, this proved to be a bigger challenge than anticipated. Indeed, PhD researchers can easily get lost under the mountain of literature devoted to research methods and design. As Schostak (2002, p. 3) explains, initially the "territory itself is not yet formed, and there is no recipe for trying to visualize or realize it." This makes the task at hand far more difficult to envisage. In a similar way to the main literature review, methodological considerations and deliberations involves reading the literature so that one can arrive at a point where decisions can be made about the structure and building of the path, and the direction it might take. As Gorard (2013) points out ultimately choices made at this juncture will impact on one's research findings, claims and recommendations.

My first thought was to employ a mixed methods approach; conducting a survey followed by selective interviews. However, after considering this option, I decided against doing so since gathering primarily quantitative data would not uncover the 'nitty gritty' of parent-child relationships. Perhaps one good example that highlights the difference in gathering qualitative as opposed to quantitative data can be seen in the work of Bertaux (1981) who wanted to understand how political preferences in France were formed and maintained. Although Bertaux had spent a lifetime studying voting behaviour via large data-sets, he felt he knew very little about why people voted the way they did. At the time, there were literally tens of thousands of small bakeries in France however by focusing on interviewing a small group of people in the bakery trade, eventually he found answers to the bigger research question.

¹¹ Initially I was undecided whether to include this aim but as the parent interviews progressed I realised that children's views were integral to this study.

As I wanted to explore two arenas: parents' learning lives and practices towards schooling their children, it made sense to gather qualitative data, especially as the primary aim was to understand perceptions, views, attitudes and experiences (Yin 2014). Further, since the focus of the study aimed to understand relationships over the life course this pointed towards a narrative enquiry or life story approach. As Elliott (2005) argues, "the aim of analysing an individual biography is... to develop an understanding of social groups, classes, and cultures, and the structural relationships between them." In choosing this approach, I could compare adult learning lives against trends and patterns in the broader population, while examining their practices towards schooling. Although, as Silverman (2010) rightly points out, this would not account for representativeness but would allow room to make larger claims at the end of the study. In addition, while narrative enquiry is useful to understand people's social worlds, like all other forms of research data, it should not be celebrated as some form of divine information, but be subjected to rigorous analysis (Atkinson and Delamont 2006). Adopting a biographical narrative approach would offer parents the opportunity to reconstruct their past while focusing on the present. As Rosenthal (2004, p. 50) points out:

In order to be able to understand and explain the statements of an interviewee... about particular topics and experiences in his/her past it is necessary to interpret them as part of the overall context of his/her current life and his/her resulting present and future perspective."

In this way, I could compare parents' initial education against the later experience of ACL participation. In doing so, the process would help identify what forms of knowledge, skills and experiences parents draw upon to support their children educationally. More importantly, I wanted to know the extent to which ACL participation played a part in the process. After deciding to employ a biographical narrative inquiry approach, I next set about considering the research design.

4.4 Research design

In considering design options, I did think about interviewing parents at the beginning and end of a study phase, but in choosing this design parents who were not involved in learning would be excluded from the study. I was keen to include parents who had not engaged in ACL since leaving school. As Gorard (2005) argues, "adult non-participants are routinely excluded not only from learning but also from the very research that is intended to find out why" (p.6).

Moreover, I considered conducting focus group interviews however selecting this option would involve devoting considerably more time to gathering, transcribing and analysing data, which would detract from the very important task of understanding parent-child relationships. Thus, at this stage I decided to reserve judgement regarding this option until I had a clearer idea of how I wanted to proceed.

4.4.1 Design frame

Next, I considered the design frame. Here I questioned whom to include (or not include) in the study. Do I research mothers, fathers, carers and/or guardians? Do I compare parents from different social backgrounds? Do I include children? After deliberating these questions, I decided that it would be prudent to include: (1) mothers and fathers who had left school by the age of 16/17 years or earlier (2) a range of ACL learners and non-ACL participants and (3) parents living in disadvantaged areas across south Wales, since parents and children living in these areas tend to hold lower and fewer qualifications (Egan 2013). Again, at this point I was unsure whether I wanted to interview children and young people, so delayed making a decision until a later date, as I wanted to be sure about reasons for including them in the study. In addition, as I was new to interviewing, I wanted to gain some experience with adults before attempting to interview children and young people.

Once I made decisions about whom to include, and from where, I then considered the range of parents I wanted to target. After reading a report about motivations and barriers to learning (BIS 2013), I had the idea to establish a 'snapshot classification framework' (Appendix 2). Here I could position parents in a framework that included 'non-ACL participants¹²' and 'learners'. Establishing this type of framework would serve as a guide since it would meet three requirements. First, I could compare parents' experiences of ACL, for example, between lower level and higher-level learners. Second, assigning parents to a notional place in the classification framework would help me identify differences and similarities in the way that parents schooled their children. Third, the framework would also provide guidance on recruitment. Here, I could identify the sample in two ways by adopting a 'purposive' approach (Silverman 2010) where I would invite learners to take part in the study, and then later by adopting a 'snowball approach'

¹² Here the term 'non-ACL participant' refers to parents who were not undertaking any form of ACL at time of interview.

(Thomas, 2009) where I would concentrate efforts on asking learners, professionals, or others to recommend parents who were not studying.

Indeed, adhering to the classification framework would be a constant, and timely reminder that I needed to recruit parents from a broad spectrum; ranging from those who were involved at different stages and levels of learning, as well as those that had engaged in few or no episodes of ACL since leaving school. In setting out the research design I then concentrated on a strategy to find a way to gain access to the field, and to consider the ethical issues and research risks related to the study undertaken.

4.5 Gaining access to the research field

Gaining access to the research field was made easier through partnership work with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Cymru¹³. WEA Cymru is Wales' largest voluntary sector provider of adult education and is funded by the Welsh Government. A senior management team, supported by a democratically elected group of council members manages the organisation, which offers ACL courses in community and workplace venues across four geographical regions of the East, Valleys, South and West regions of Wales.

As WEA Cymru was involved in the ESRC studentship bid, the organisation agreed to provide in-kind support. Also, as I would be working directly with WEA Cymru learners and their families, WEA Cymru requested I apply for an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check¹⁴. This I did, via WEA Cymru, prior to entering the research field in May 2014.

4.5.1 Recruitment

Project information and flyers were distributed to WEA Cymru staff, and others in the field, along with a letter of invitation to take part in the study. At this point I was hoping individuals would contact me however no-one came forward. Undeterred, I set up meetings with a few ACL providers and Communities First teams. In addition, I visited a careers advice centre, asked colleagues and friends, as well as making speculative

¹³ WEA South Wales and Cole Harlech WEA (North Wales) amalgamated in January 2014 to form WEA Cymru.

¹⁴ Formerly the Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB).

enquiries, for example, through schools, community initiatives, and on one occasion, attending a summer fete.

On entering the research field in late May 2014, I did experience difficulty finding WEA Cymru learners to take part in the study since most WEA Cymru classes by this point had ended. Therefore, at this point I decided to resume recruitment once classes started back in September 2014. Through working with other agencies and with the help of friends in the field, I did manage to interview five parents over the summer. Later, in October 2014, I was invited to visit several WEA Cymru classes across the south Wales region. Here I spoke to people directly, and from these visits managed to interview a few WEA Cymru learners. During this time, I was also aware that I had not managed to recruit parents who had engaged in few episodes of ACL. At this point, I considered ways in which to recruit these individuals and later, through 'snowballing', I asked participants I had interviewed to recommend people who might want to take part. Also, I approached advice and guidance officers as part of their job entails signposting adults back into education and training. However, this line of enquiry was not particularly effective. Despite my best efforts, I received no referrals from this source.

It is important to point out that the rationale for interviewing parents not associated with WEA Cymru was mainly because whilst WEA Cymru is core, it is not the sole provider; there are 13 other ACL providers in Wales (Colleges Wales 2017). Indeed, after liaising with several organisations in the south Wales area, asking former work colleagues, and through speculative enquiries, I managed to recruit eight learners and further eight participants who were not engaged in learning at time of interview, see Table 4.1 – Participant grid, page 73.

Name of Respondent	Age	Employment Status	Marital Status	School Qualifications¹⁵	Episodes of ACL¹⁶ Includes CPD	Highest level qualification studied to date	Number of children
Amy	33	P/T librarian	Single	No qualifications	Medium	Level 3	2
Bernard	48	Unemployed	Single	City & Guilds in Construction	Medium	Level 4	1
Caroline	26	P/T cleaner	Single	4 GCSEs (D-G)	Multiple	Level 2	1
Debbie	34	Teaching assistant	Single	9 GCSEs (A-C)	Multiple	Level 6	2
Eleanor	37	P/T cleaner	Single	No qualifications	Few	Level 1	3
Frances	31	Teaching assistant	Married	8 GCSEs (A-C)	Few	Level 2	2
Gail	24	Full time student	Single	4 GCSEs (D-G)	Multiple	Level 6	1
Hope	24	Full time student	Single	No qualifications	Multiple	Level 6	2
Isobel	45	Self-employed	Married	2 GCSEs (A-C) RSA Wordprocessing	Multiple	Level 3	2
John	36	Council worker	Cohabiting	No qualifications	Few	Level 2	2
Karen	32	P/T accounts officer	Single	8 GCSEs (grades not known)	Medium	Level 2	2

¹⁵ GCSE = General Certificate in Secondary Education, CSE = Certificate in Secondary Education

¹⁶ Few = less than 3 episodes, Medium = more than 3 episodes but less than 5, Multiple = more than 5 episodes

Liam	43	Car manufacturing worker	Married	No qualifications	Few	Level 2	2
Mary	42	Unemployed	Single	1 GCSE (A-C) RSA Wordprocessing	Multiple	Level 3	2
Nanette	23	P/T cleaner	Married	3 GCSEs (A-C) 5 GCSEs (D-G)	Multiple	Level 3	2
Owen	36	Council worker	Married	No qualifications	Few	Level 2	3
Polly	42	Disability officer	Married	No qualifications	Multiple	Level 4	2
David	45	Family support officer/trainer	Married	6 CSEs	Multiple	Level 4	1
Robyn	45	Self-employed	Married	6 GCSEs (A-C)	Multiple	Level 6	4
Sharon	35	Work-based trainer	Married	7 GCSEs (A-C)	Medium	Level 3	3
Tom	35	Unemployed	Married	1 GCSE (D-G)	Medium	Level 2	4
Veronica	51	Foster carer	Married	2 'O' levels, 2 CSEs	Multiple	Level 6	2
Whitney	26	Full-time mother	Co-habiting	7 GCSEs (D-G)	Multiple	Level 2	3
Yvonne	33	Full-time student	Married	1 GCSE (A-C)	Multiple	Level 6	3
Zoe	24	Full-time mother	Single	8 GCSEs (A-C)	Multiple	Level 2	3

Table 4.1 – Participant Grid

4.5.2 Interview sites

All participants were recruited from the south Wales area apart from one participant who lived outside this area. Adult and child interviews were conducted in a variety of places ranging from community centres or halls, colleges, training centres, and libraries to workplace premises. Finding a quiet place to conduct interviews was challenging at times, although not insurmountable. In the event, I managed to conduct the majority of interviews in a private room on these sites apart, that is, from one interview which took place at the back of a busy library and another, in a quiet corner of a leisure centre. Although these interview situations were not ideal and could very well have impacted on the interview session, these places were the only option available to me at the time.

As interview space was at a premium I did consider interviewing participants in the home but as I identified as 'a lone worker', I decided that I would only do so as a 'last resort'. Entering people's homes, especially where individuals are unknown to me, involves a certain level of risk. As Bahn and Weatherill (2013) point out, "it is the unknown that causes the greatest risk" (p.23). Even though the researcher may have established a relationship of mutual trust and rapport with a potential participant, once the researcher enters the participant's home she/he has little control or influence in this space, and even less if there are other occupants in the home (Bloor et al. 2010). However, due to time constraints, three parents could not accompany their children to a designated venue. Although this was not ideal, there was a need to interview more children and young people, and so rather than lose out, I decided to interview six children and young people in their own home (three interviews in total). To minimise the risks, I put in place extra precautions by giving details and time of the visit to a colleague. In the event, the interviews went ahead with no hitches.

4.6 Research risks and ethical considerations

Before entering the research field, I considered two elements essential to the research process - the risk, to self and others, as well as the ethics of the process.

4.6.1 Research risks

I made every effort to carefully consider the risks before entering the research field (Corbin and Morse 2003) since there were multiple risks to consider. Entering people's

worlds to gain access to personal and confidential information was one aspect but there were also other aspects to think about. Since I used to carry out risk assessments in my former education manager role, I drew upon this experience to identify the hazards, and the people who potentially could be harmed. Areas of immediate concern were robbery, violence and threatening behaviour towards the researcher, when visiting or carrying out interviews in public places. Also, I needed to consider the possibility of psychological or emotional issues arising out of the interviews, including the disclosure of instances of abuse¹⁷. Procedures for dealing with these risks are outlined in my risk assessment (Appendix 1). Part of the process in assessing risk involves the responsibility to ensure research standards are met, which was my next consideration.

4.6.2 Ethical considerations

An application for approval to conduct the fieldwork was made to the School of Social Science Ethics committee at Cardiff University. In accordance with the university Ethics committee and the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics (ESRC 2017), I ensured that all aspects of the study adhered to the agreed code of conduct and research standards.

When working in partnership with organisations, it is important to question who is in control of the study, how power is shared and how decisions are made. As Silka (2009) points out, the initial stage of the research cycle is an important opportunity to gain an all-round understanding of the research objectives since often people have different goals and agendas. In addition, there is the question of research protocols, for example, what kind of data should be collected, from which individuals or groups, and from which areas? Lastly, ethical dilemmas associated with the final stages of the research cycle related to the use of data collected, and how and to whom it should be distributed to all need to be considered (Silka 2009). In this study decisions were made in conjunction with my supervisors, along with help, and in-kind support from WEA Cymru. WEA Cymru advisor, Dr. Jeremy Gass, was especially helpful and supportive. Dr Gass made no demands on how the research study should be carried out, other than requesting I interview a proportion of WEA Cymru learners.

¹⁷ For children, the duty to report abuse adhered to legislation laid down by the Children Act of 2004, in line with Welsh Government guidelines.

With respect to anonymity and confidentiality all participant information - that includes contact details, audio recordings and transcripts - was stored in a secure, locked cabinet in accordance with university rules and regulations. In addition, all participants were assigned a pseudonym, and reference to other names and places were changed to protect anonymity. However, I did point out to participants before interviews began that in accordance with the Children Act (2004) I had a professional duty to pass on information if I considered that they or anyone else mentioned in the interview were at risk or in danger.

In keeping with ethical guidelines, I informed participants that the results of the study would be written into a report to be submitted to Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, as part of the requirements of PhD study. In addition, participants were informed that a version of the report would be presented at different events, and that findings may be published in academic journals or in a book. Participants were also asked to indicate if they would be happy to release part of the interview audio recording, for use in presentations to other researchers, or to people who work in education. Those that indicated they were not happy to do so were given the opportunity to opt out at this stage. Participants were also notified that the information given would not be used for purposes other than that stated, that they would remain anonymous, and that they were entitled to a summary of the findings, on request. In accordance with university regulations I informed participants that the study data would be retained for no less than five years or at least two years' post-publication.

All participants were informed prior to the interview commencing that there would be no payment for taking part. However, as a learner and parent myself, I did offer to share my learning background should participants be interested to know more about me. Despite no recompense (apart from the offer of tea, biscuits and sweets) I explained that agreement to participate would give people a unique opportunity to provide information to services that may find their experiences valuable when planning the delivery of education and learning across Wales.

I wanted participants to feel comfortable talking to me so pointed out at the start that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions, to finish the interview at any time, or to withdraw from the study at any point after the interview. Moreover, conducting research that asks people to talk about private and personal aspects of their life can engender thoughts and feelings that people may find distressing (Corbin and Morse 2003). During

the interviews, a few participants were tearful. When this occurred, I gave participants a moment to compose themselves or, as in some cases, offered to stop or cut short the interview. In the event, no one reported that they wanted to stop or cut short an interview.

4.7 Methodology

As explained earlier, one of the first decisions I made was to gather evidence via the interview method. However, as Yin (2014) points out, selecting the interview method is not without its problems. Like all other forms of evidence, it has its weaknesses and pitfalls, given that there is limited time and resources. Also, Cohen and Manion (1994) point out there are other problems to overcome such as: interview bias and validity; respondents may want to please the interviewer by saying things that the interviewer wants to hear; or indeed questions may be framed by the interviewer in such a way that influences the respondent. In considering these weaknesses I did not rule out entirely the idea of collecting other forms of data, for example, by asking parents to keep a diary to log thoughts about homework help, but was open to reviewing further options should the need arise (Yin 2014). Nevertheless, the selection of the interview method as a main source of data was, I felt, essential to understanding the meaning and context of people's lives. However, in choosing this method, I next had to consider how many interviews to conduct.

4.7.1 How many interviews is enough?

Once again, I scanned the literature for ideas. In their discussion paper - *How many interviews is enough?* Baker and Edwards (2012) presented this very question to a group of expert academics experienced in the field of qualitative research. The overwhelming answer to the question was it varies depending upon what one wants to find out. Certainly a lot will depend on: the researcher's available time to gather the data; the scope and the breadth of the research; understanding the 'saturation' point, the point at which no further information can be gained from conducting another interview; and the consideration that different approaches will influence the number of interviews, for example, the life story approach, which requires a smaller sample size and so on (Baker and Edwards 2012).

To illustrate the point of how difficult it is to make decisions about how many interviews is enough, it is useful to look at research conducted by Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame

(1981) who interviewed people working in the bakery trade in France to find out how bakery workers lived and worked. In this study, it took researchers 15 interviews to perceive what themes were common to all, and a further 15 interviews to confirm the patterns. Later they interviewed bakers and bakers' wives but took twice as long to establish patterns amongst this group mainly because the variation in the trajectories of bakers was greater than that of the trajectories of bakery workers. This example serves to illustrate the complexities of researching different groups of people on the same topic of interest (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981).

This brings me back to the point about deciding how many interviews is enough. In this study it largely depended on the time and money I had at my disposal, the context of people's life circumstances and how long it would take before I could be satisfied that a trend or pattern was emerging, what Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) term as 'the process of saturation' (p.187).

4.7.2 Interview schedule

Once I had decided that I wanted to conduct semi-structured interviews I next considered the structure of the interview. My main aim at this point was to interview a minimum of 15 parents on two separate occasions, conducting at least 30 interviews in total. In the first interview, I wanted to explore parent life stories¹⁸ (question no. 1), and in the second interview, explore parent-child relationships with respect to schooling children (question no. 2).

To give more structure to the interview process, and to get the best out of the time allotted, I prepared a set list of questions and prompts (Appendices 4 and 5) taken from an example provided by Thomas (2009). After devising the interview schedule, I asked friends and colleagues for feedback on the structure and questions. One colleague, Jessie, was especially supportive, and went through the schedule with a fine toothcomb to iron out discrepancies. Next, I conducted a couple of pilot interviews with friends; to gauge responses and to re-word, omit or add further questions. Once I was satisfied with the interview schedule, I contacted people I knew in the field to arrange interview dates.

¹⁸ But only with respect to social background, education, training and work

After conducting the first two interviews, I decided that it would be prudent to interview each parent only once, on the understanding that if I needed further information there would be room to negotiate a second interview. The rationale for changing my mind at this point was that parents were keen to cover the interview schedule in one session rather than two. Also, as parents are busy people, I wanted to capture as much information as I could since there was no guarantee they would return for a second interview. Therefore, I decided if further information or clarification was needed, I would contact parents by phone or email; or as I eventually did, ask parents questions when I interviewed their children (see Hollway and Jefferson 2001; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Although it was difficult to know at the outset how many interviews would be needed to establish patterns and themes, as the interviews progressed I realised that conducting only one parent interview would enable me to interview more parents. In total I conducted 24 parent interviews. I interviewed each parent only once apart, that is, from conducting a follow up 10-minute interview with one parent.

4.7.3 Interviews - parents

Prior to the start of the interview, I handed parents the Project Information Sheet (Appendix 5) and gave a brief overview of the study, and then invited parents to ask any questions. This is a routine but important step in qualitative research (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Next, when parents signalled they were happy to go ahead I asked them to fill out a Personal Contact Details form (Appendix 6), and to sign the Consent Form (for adults and young people) - Agreement to Participate in a Research Interview (Appendix 7). Here I checked with parents that they understood what they were signing up to, that they gave permission for the interview to be digitally recorded and transcribed, and for the data to be used for presentations and publications. Also, at this point I was not sure whether I wanted to make use of parts of the audio recording for presentations. My intention at the time was to include audio to press home certain points when presenting my research to researchers and/or educators. Therefore, the last part of the Consent Form included a section for parents to indicate whether they wanted to opt out of releasing sections of their audio for this purpose¹⁹). Once all forms had been completed, I invited parents to ask any further questions, and to confirm they were happy to go ahead

¹⁹ Despite many parents agreeing to release their audio recordings for presentation purposes, in the interests of anonymity I decided not to use audio recordings. Instead I reverted to the interview transcripts, which all parents had agreed to make available.

with the interview. When the parents indicated they were happy to move on to the next stage, I set about the task of interviewing.

During the interview process I wanted to keep the narrative simple and to the point, to help guide parents to talk about events and situations (Elliott 2012), which primarily focused on social background, education, training and work. I understood that parents needed the time and space to express their thoughts, and therefore tried my best not to interrupt the interview process. The interview schedule was useful as it helped to keep the interview on track and provided direction while introducing a modicum of uniformity across each interview. However as Rubin and Rubin (1995) point out each new interview “can be wonderfully unpredictable” (p.7); when this happened I decided to go with the flow rather than interrupt parents to ask questions.

The interview was split into two sections. The first part of the interview focused on question no.1, see Parent Interview Schedule 1 (Appendix 3) that aims to explore parent life stories related to their: social background; experiences of initial education and school outcomes; education and training since leaving school; and work i.e. periods of employment and unemployment, and voluntary work. On completion of the first part of the interview I offered parents the opportunity to take a break. At this point, some took up my offer while others signalled they were happy to continue.

The second part of the interview focused on question no. 2, see Parent Interview Schedule 2 (Appendix 4) which aims to explore participants’ lives as parents: primarily their goals, values, styles and practices towards schooling their children. Initially I was keen to explore parents’ views in terms of where they thought responsibility for schooling children rested: with them, the school, or a combination of both (Reay 1998). Following on from this question, I asked questions about the home-school relationship: how important parents felt it was to be involved; the ways in which they were involved with the school, and to ascertain whether they perceived relationships with school to be positive or negative. Next, I focused on life at home, for example: home routines, parental help with homework, and activities outside of the home. Also, I wanted to know what forms of support parents relied upon, as I was interested to know whether they drew upon the knowledge and skills gained through ACL to help their children, or whether they relied upon other forms of support. This would help to identify the commonalities and differences in the way that parents schooled their children. Towards the end of the

interview I asked parents about their hopes and aspirations for children, academic or otherwise. This I felt would give me an insight into thoughts about their child's future.

Finally, I asked parents to undertake a quick pie chart exercise. The main purpose of the exercise was to make parents aware of the fact that children only spend 14 percent of their time at school in a calendar year, as opposed to 53 percent at home and in the community, and 33 percent of the time spent sleeping (Bransford et al. 1999). The motivation to ask this question stemmed from two sources. Firstly, on reading about this statistic, I was shocked to learn that children only spent 14 percent of their time at school, so wanted to communicate this to parents. Secondly, just prior to starting the fieldwork phase, I attended a seminar entitled, 'Engaging with Low Income Learners', along with 60 education professionals. During one of the presentations the audience was asked the question, *what percentage time do children spend at school?* No more than half a dozen professionals put their hand up to answer and, even then, some of the answers given were way off course. This led me to question, if the professionals were unaware of this statistic then how would parents know? Further, in policy terms, this experience made me wonder whether information like this should be communicated across the wider population in Wales. It certainly warranted further consideration.

To return to the study, each interview lasted from just over one hour to anything up to three hours, although most interviews were completed in around one and a half hours. At the end of the interview I asked parents if they would like a copy of the transcript. Most declined, however a few parents indicated they would like a copy. On transcribing the interviews, where possible, I personally delivered a copy of the transcript to the parent (sometimes this happened when I arranged the child interviews). At this stage, I was keen to give parents a say in the production of the data, and to offer parents an opportunity to change parts of their transcription, if they so wished. Initially, I had mixed feelings about offering parents this option, mainly because I feared parents may want to retract some of the information given. However, after asking myself the question: if I were to participate in an interview that focused on my life, would I want the opportunity to change or withdraw my data? After pondering the question, the answer was a resounding yes. Despite the risk that I might not be able to use some of the data, at this point my need to be fair to participants was stronger than the need to use the data. In the event, thankfully, I received no requests from participants to change the data or indeed, to withdraw from the study.

Bearing in mind the research framework, after interviewing several learners (here the levels of learning ranged from level 1 up to level 5/6), I then switched attention to how I might recruit other parents to the study. To maintain an even spread of participants I kept to the plan to target parents with different levels of education, as well as targeting parents that had been involved in few episodes of ACL since leaving school. Although recruiting ACL learners to the study was by no means easy, I found it even more difficult to recruit parents with low level qualifications, or no qualifications to their name. This did not surprise me as I knew from professional experience how difficult it is to encourage adults back into learning. However, after making enquiries with colleagues and ACL contacts in the field, a few parents did eventually agree to take part in the study (see details below).

Parent pseudonym	Interview Length*	No. words transcribed	Child pseudonym	Interview Length*	No. words transcribed
Amy	1hr 12 mins	9471	Craig/Louise	25 mins	3253
Bernard	1hr 21 mins	11055			
Caroline	1hr 14 mins	12479			
Debbie	1hr 20 mins	10987	Heather	21 mins	3168
Eleanor	1hr 40 mins	21337			
Frances**	1hr 32 mins	16461	Bethany/Joshua	25 mins	3865
Gail	1hr 51 mins	20128			
Hope	1hr 26 mins	15874			
Isobel	1hr 47 mins	18185	Marie/Emily	24 mins	3321
John	1hr 20 mins	13379			
Karen	1hr 4 mins	10785			
Liam	1hr 35 mins	12666			
Mary	1hr 32 mins	10872	Felicity/Stephen	28 mins	4629
Nanette	1hr 20 mins	11263			
Owen	1hr 7 mins	10874			
Polly	2hrs 32 mins	24682	Bethan/Aled	31 mins	4345
David	1hr 9 mins	10459			
Robyn	2hrs 18mins	23182	Lizzie/George	33 mins	5536
Sharon	1hr 35mins	16467	Leah	32 mins	4655
Tom	1hr 37 mins	14075			
Veronica	2hrs 44 mins	27649	Catherine	53 mins	9129
Whitney	1hr 21 mins	13067			
Yvonne	1hr 12 mins	13071			
Zoe	1hr	10308			
TOTAL	36hrs 49 mins	358776		4hrs 32 mins	41901

*Interview length is rounded up or down to the nearest minute.

** I conducted a 10 minute (1826 words) follow up interview at home with Frances. This is included in the total minutes and words recorded for Frances.

Table 4.2 Interview transcript information

After each interview, I logged my reflections: this helped me to think about how the interview had gone, and whether I needed to adjust anything for the next interview. Indeed, after the first three interviews a theme around bullying emerged, and in response to this information I included a question about bullying in the interview schedule. Also, reflection at this point helped me to think about my qualities as a researcher; although it was not until much later in the interview cycle did I begin to critically, as well as objectively, question my role as a researcher in the interview²⁰. Indeed, some months after completing the transcriptions, and well into the analysis stage, I appreciated the powerful role researchers play in the interview process. Even to the point of questioning why I laughed at certain points; being horrified at the number of times I interrupted people; and on a few occasions, posing long-winded, sometimes complicated questions. In addition, it was fascinating to see how, on one occasion, I stood up for policy, taking for granted the notion that as long as policy was in place, what could possibly go wrong? For example, one of the participants, Polly, talked about how a lack of institutional support led to her dropping out of one course (see Appendix 15). In this exchange, I questioned why her support needs were not met since I had naturally assumed that, as Polly is disabled, she would automatically be entitled to support, subject to her putting in a request. However, in practice Polly's needs were not met due to a lack of communication and staff training on the ACL provider's part. This issue made me realise why some people might not want to participate in learning. Indeed, Fuller et al. (2004) identified similar barriers related to disabled students' experiences at university. Not only must students have the confidence to summon up the courage to ask for support but also there is the question of whether students have the confidence to challenge the institution when support is not forthcoming.

After each interview, I transcribed, and part analysed the interviews. Each transcription took at least three to four days to transcribe, sometimes longer. However, I found the process of transcription useful, since the act of transcribing introduced me to the parents, their lives, and their children. In fact, some of the data generated at interview resonated deeply with my life. Like me, I could see how some individuals had transformed their lives, while others had encountered life obstacles that sadly they were still grappling to overcome. At certain points, I could see my life through theirs; it almost felt like being transported back in time during some interviews. This is what Grenfell and James (1998) describe as self socio-analysis, whereby the researcher objectifies their relationship of

²⁰ It was only during the latter stages of transcription that I began to objectively question my role in the interview process. At the beginning, my attention was focused on completing and transcribing the interviews.

self, and the research object, in terms of the work of others like Bourdieu. For example, in one of the interviews, a participant described feelings of disappointment when her employer refused to fund and support her learning, even though the course was directly related to her job. Here I could see how the concept of social and cultural 'habitus' had shaped my life too since I had experienced discrimination as a part-time worker in the mid-1990s, where allocating funds to train part-time staff was denied in favour of training full-time staff. Not long after leaving the job, the Council of the European Union (1997) issued a directive giving part-time workers equal employment rights and entitlements, which, I felt, was a step in the right direction.

As the parent interviews progressed I realised the importance and necessity of including children and young people's voices in the study. Initially, I felt out of my depth at the beginning of the interview phase since it was the first time I had ever interviewed adults, let alone children and young people. Even though I had no problem speaking to strangers, the very thought of interviewing people seemed a terrifying prospect: this new challenge made me feel out of my comfort zone. However, after completing the parent interviews I began to feel more confident, which accounted for my change of heart at this point. However, interviewing pre-school children felt like a step too far. In the event, I decided not to interview pre-schoolers, and instead switched my attention to interviewing children in the current school system²¹.

4.7.4 Interviews- children and young people

Before inviting children and young people to take part in the study, I tried to gain a sense of the data emerging from the parent interviews. This would serve two purposes. Firstly, I could ask parents to clarify any information I was not sure of, as well as ask them further questions down the line. Secondly, I could use the data from parent interviews to obtain a different perspective, for example, one mother explained that her children wanted to follow in her footsteps to study the same degree as she had studied. Interviewing her children would offer me the chance to find out why. Although, I had to bear in mind not to reveal what had been discussed in the parent interview.

Subsequently, data for question no. 3 were gathered from nine interviews with 15 children and young people comprising six child dyads and three individual children – see

²¹ However, I did make one exception by interviewing Veronica's daughter (aged 24 years).

Table 4.2. This is quite low considering potentially 39 children over the age of five could have been interviewed. However, recruiting children and young people to the study was more difficult than I had first anticipated especially when, after seeking approval from two parents, three young people later declined to be interviewed.

On reflection, it would have been better to make parents aware at time of interview that I might be interested in speaking to children and young people. It would have at least primed parents to expect a request from me some time later. However, during the initial stages of the study I was unsure whether I wanted to do so. My indecision was to prove costly: when I later contacted parents to seek permission, most parents either declined or did not respond to my request. Also, I want to point out at this stage that the children and young people who did eventually come forward to be interviewed were children and young people of the higher-level learners. Only Frances²², who had participated in very few episodes of ACL since leaving school, agreed to let me interview her children.

Nevertheless, this was a golden opportunity to explore children's and young people's thoughts about school, as well as thoughts about their parents' learning. It is especially relevant considering guidance published by the National Association of Head Teachers and Family Action, which highlights the special role parents play in helping shape children's learning. Entitled *Giving your child a helping hand: a short guide for parents*, the guide focused on a number of actions parents could take to support children in the home, as well as giving practical advice on how best to connect with their child's school (Sellgren 2014). With this in mind I was interested to understand children's views about the nature and level of education support received at home, and in particular whether children welcomed or refused support (Reay 1998). Lastly, I was interested to find out children's thoughts about their parents as learners, and whether they perceived ACL participation to be of benefit, a hindrance, or of no consequence.

Prior to commencing the child interviews, parents were asked to sign a form to agree to their child being interviewed (Appendix 8). As with parent interviews most child and young people interviews were conducted in a public place, usually a room in a community centre, or a safe place where parents, children and young people felt comfortable. Once a parent had given his/her consent he/she was asked to wait outside the room. All appeared happy with this arrangement. I did ask the younger children if they wanted

²² This name is a pseudonym.

their parent to remain with them during the interview however all indicated they were happy to be interviewed without the presence of a parent. As with the parent interviews, the format stayed the same. I handed out a Project Information Sheet for Young People (Appendix 9), explaining what the study involved, and next invited them to ask questions about the study. Once they signalled they were happy to go ahead, they filled out a Personal Contact Details form (Appendix 6), and a Consent Form (Appendix 7). For younger children, I devised a user-friendly information/consent sheet – see Young Child Project Consent Form (Appendix 10).

Initially the intention was to interview school age children. Indeed, the age of children and young people interviewed ranged from seven to 17 years. However, during the recruitment stage I decided to interview a 24-year-old female. This added depth to the study as some years had passed since the individual had left school, which meant that she had time to reflect on her schooling. In general, children and young people interviews were less intensive and overall lasted anything from 20 to just over 30 minutes per interview with the exception of the interview conducted with the 24-year-old female, see Child/Young Person Interview Schedule (Appendix 11). In preparation, I provided a few pots of Play-Doh to give the younger children the opportunity to express themselves in different ways, and to avoid them becoming bored or restless during the interview. Using construction materials like Play-Doh can be a useful way to explore children's 'mental models' of cognition and understanding (Trundle and Saçkes 2012). Some children took the opportunity to make objects out of the Play-Doh as they answered questions, as did I on several occasions. I found the activity to be relaxing and soothing, which helped me connect with the younger children.

During the interviews, primarily I focused on three areas: school life; home life; and learning. I was interested to find out what children and young people did at school, and whether they liked school. Next, I asked questions about home: what they did after a typical school day, and whether they had help with homework. I also explored their future intentions: whether they had any plans to go into work or to university. Lastly, I wanted to know what children and young people thought about their parent as learners; whether they knew what parents were studying, and whether they had received any homework tips or advice from parents. At the end of the interview, and as a thank you for taking part, I offered each child and young person a bag of sweets or chocolate. Also, at this point I asked each individual if they would like a copy of the interview transcript. Some indicated that they would like a copy therefore once transcribed I personally delivered a

copy to each child and young person that wanted one. The rationale for doing so was that I wanted them to have a say in the production of their personal data. As in the case of adult interviews, here was an opportunity for children and young people to indicate whether they wanted to withdraw or change parts of the transcription. Once again, on distributing the transcripts, I did not receive any requests to withdraw or change the data.

On completion of the interview, each interview was later transcribed verbatim although not all intonations, pauses, 'mms' and 'aahs' were recorded; the transcriptions being some way in between "the attempt to record every detail of the verbal interaction to... preserve only the words which were spoken" (Elliott 2005, p. 52). Once a transcript was completed a printed copy was produced and filed, and an electronic copy imported into NVivo to aid in the analysis process at a later stage.

4.8 Analysis of data

Without doubt, the most challenging part of this study has been to figure out how best to analyse the data. Even though I had analysed a small amount of data (mainly quantitative) at Masters level, this did not prepare me fully for the considerable task ahead. Therefore, at this juncture I decided it would be in my best interest to attend at least one or two training courses on data analysis.

4.8.1 Biographical narrative interpretative method (BNIM)

After completing around 75 percent of the interviews, I signed up to attend a training workshop on biographical narrative interpretative methods (BNIM). Here I learned that the BNIM approach operates quite differently to the standard interview procedure. Unlike semi-structured interviews where the interviewer asks questions throughout, in the BNIM approach the researcher first asks respondents to recount their life story (without interruption) while listening and making notes. As Schütze (2008a) explains, once the respondent has given an uninterrupted account of his/her life story, otherwise known as the 'narrative coda', only then does the interviewer ask questions. The whole point of following this particular sequence is to allow the respondent to talk freely since interruption would, in effect, "set a new external theme" (Schütze 2008b, p. 8), upon which the thread of the respondent's storyline would be lost. The BNIM approach can still be used to analyse semi-structured interviews, although semi-structured interviewing is not as effective as the recommended BNIM interview approach.

Before embarking on a full analysis of the interviews I wanted to gain an overall view (or gestalt) of people's lives, based on information gathered from the first part of the interview. The underlying intention here was to not only understand parents' views and attitudes towards education before and after leaving school, but to understand whether parents had changed in any way as a result of participating in ACL. Drawing on Wengraf and Chamberlayne's BNIM template (2013) I analysed the data in three different ways. Firstly, by capturing: the 'objective' side of the interview i.e. the timeline of events and phases that occur within the lived life; secondly, the 'subjective' side of the interview i.e. the subjective account of events as told in the person's own words; and finally, the interviewer's interpretation of the subjective flow of the text. This relates to a person's justifications and arguments, life action scheme, institutional action scheme, trajectory of suffering, and metamorphosis. Indeed, I became so fascinated with the BNIM that I later signed up to attend a three-day workshop on BNIM analysis in Nuremberg, Germany with Professor Gerhard Riemann. Here I had the opportunity to analyse one of my transcripts alongside a group of European researchers. The trip was very worthwhile in as much as it was interesting to listen to others' interpretation of the transcript I had provided. In turn, this process threw light on aspects I had not considered in the interview, for example, someone noted scenarios in my transcript where people learned through watching one other. This led me to consider the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on 'legitimate peripheral participation' and situated learning contexts, and the work of Nohl (2015) on the subject of transformation featured in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, while I found the BNIM process to be extremely useful to gain a sense of parents' social background, education, training and work lives, the exercise was not sufficient to understand the processes inherent in parent-child relationships. Indeed, this required a different analytical approach, which I later present in Section 4.8.5.

4.8.2 Identifying themes

After reading through the parent and child interviews, several themes began to emerge from the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Once I was satisfied that a theme was present I created a node in NVivo, and later transferred the data under the appropriate classification node. While I acknowledge that NVivo cannot be used as vehicle to interpret data, it was at the very least, a valuable tool that assisted in the process of data management and investigation. For example, as bullying had featured highly in the interviews, I could see at a glance by running an NVivo query how many interviews contained the word 'bullying', and how many did not. This enabled me to collect all

accounts of bullying, which were later placed under the appropriate classification node for analysis at a later stage.

Whilst this exercise produced many insights, it was not sufficiently robust to systematically identify the mechanisms inherent in life course transitions and, for that matter, the process of influence in parent-child relationships. On completing the exercise, I could see the points at which parents' attitudes and behaviours towards learning had changed, and even how parents had transformed their lives through learning. I knew there was more work to be done however this problem would be tackled at a later stage in the analysis phase.

4.8.3 Network analysis

After reading through the interviews a couple of times, and looking at the themes in NVivo, I transferred some of the data onto a flip chart pad. Here I developed a network of ideas, for example, under the theme of help with homework (Thomas 2009). This overview helped me pinpoint the similarities and differences in the data. When I had a grasp of what I wanted to say, I looked for 'good quotations' (Thomas 2009) to highlight the significance of the points I wanted to make. Although this exercise was useful to connect ideas and themes emerging from the data, I still needed to find a systematic way to reveal the mechanisms. As explained in Chapter 2, reading the literature on SEL theory and emotional capital turned my attention to focus on the affective aspects of learning. This was one of the defining moments in the study since, after reading papers on 'emotion', I began to consider the data in a different light. This is a feature that Hodgkinson refers to in his reflexive account of the research process after reading Bourdieu's concept of culture, field and habitus, whereby:

The language and ideas we were beginning to use changed our thinking and some of our practices. We began to read our interview transcripts differently, and to analyse them differently.

(Grenfell and James 1998, pp. 141-142)

4.8.4 The case for bringing emotion (in social transactions) to the fore

After reflecting on the data, I began to consider an argument for bringing 'emotion' in social transactions to the fore to identify the mechanisms that reinforce, or indeed,

undermine learning. At this stage, I felt the strategy could be useful to identify emotionally marked action points (Leavitt, 1996) located in situations and events across the life course. There is an absolute need to do this since “emotions play an important political role in enabling resistance and transformation, two aspects that are currently missing from many accounts of emotions in education” (Zembylas 2007, p. 67). When bringing emotion to the fore, it is possible to reveal the ways in which positive emotion acts as ‘a facilitator’ or ‘booster’ to learning, while negative emotion acts as a ‘blocker’ or ‘checker’. Moreover, I argue that when affect and cognition are considered together instead of apart, then a slightly different picture emerges.

After paying attention to the affective characteristics in narrative sequences, I noticed that positive and negative affect tended to crop up time and again regardless of social context, time, and place. Interested to learn more I scoured the literature again and came across two papers of interest. First, after reading a paper on ‘emotional capital’ and mothers’ involvement in children’s education (Reay 2004b), I learned that Reay too had experienced similar problems trying to disentangle the emotional aspects of mothering from the process of schooling children. Using the references outlined in the paper, I conducted another literature search. This time, I found a paper by Darling and Steinberg (1993). Here the authors put forward a contextual model of parenting that outlined several distinct characteristics inherent in the socialisation process. They identify these characteristics to be: parental goals and values; parenting style and practices, and adolescent’s willingness to be socialised, which they argue affect adolescent outcomes. The model appeared to fit well with my earlier thoughts about adults’ ‘willingness to learn’ while, at the same time, tying in with Reay’s emotional capital’ through parenting style (Reay 2004b). It also reaffirmed my ideas about the importance of ‘emotion in education’. Indeed, drawing on this new information further crystallised my thoughts, from which I later devised a framework that reflected what I was seeing in the data (see Figure 3.3). Furthermore, although I could see some mechanisms in the data, there was still more work to be done to find a way to easily uncover the mechanisms. In the next section I propose a procedure, which I hope will encourage debate and discussion.

4.8.5 The NAP procedure

Up to this point I had made use of the BNIM and network analysis to make sense of my data. However, the process was very time-consuming and, if anything, even after

employing the methods it was difficult to systematically identify underlying mechanisms of change across the life course, or indeed, the mechanisms of educational transfer inherent in parent child relationships. Although I had gathered a lot of data, the data appeared flat and uninteresting. After several weeks and months of attempting to make sense of my data, I came across Darling and Steinberg's framework of parenting style in context (1993), from which I created a basic empirical tool to explain the influence of learning in parent-child relationships - see Figure 3.3, page 62. Taking the concept of positive and negative affect one step further I had the idea to apply a traffic light colour coding system. When highlighting specific words and text sequences, I could see situations in the narrative containing negative emotion/cognition (red) and positive emotion/cognition (green). Moreover, this process not only helped me identify the points at which emotion/cognition had occurred, but also the points at which emotion/cognition had re-occurred or changed across the life course. Later I assigned the 'amber' colour to represent neutral affect/cognition but on analysing the data there appeared to be no point in doing so. Nevertheless, after highlighting words and text sequences in red and green, a thought suddenly struck me: sandwiched in between the red and green highlights were the *attendant mechanisms* (see Table 4.1). From this point onwards, employing the same procedure repeatedly speeded up the process of identifying the mechanisms. In addition, highlighting the mechanisms also revealed the source of facilitators and blockers to learning. In some situations, it was the individual who showed a willingness or resistance to learn, while in other situations the source could be traced to, for example, other people, groups, agencies, or institutions. Sometimes it was a combination of mechanisms.

While the procedure was useful to identify mechanisms in the narrative, of course, it is contingent only on the nature of the narrative. If the narrative contains few or no sequences of cognition or emotion, then it will be difficult to pinpoint the mechanisms. Indeed, out of the 24 interviews conducted, I experienced difficulty analysing Zoe's interview transcript. At first, I could not pinpoint the reasons why but later realised that unlike the rest of the interviews, Zoe's transcript contained fewer moments of cognition and emotion. Much like research undertaken by Bertaux (1981) where he focused on understanding what bakers did in the bakery trade, Zoe's account focused squarely on what she did as a mother. Subsequently, this made it far more difficult to pinpoint processes and mechanisms of change. However, where cognition and emotion was present in other narrative accounts, the NAP procedure enabled me to see the underlying mechanisms of change in attitude and behaviour, as well as change and transformation

throughout the life course²³. Further, on applying the procedure to data presented in other studies, depending on the nature of the sequence, employing the NAP procedure helped to identify and reveal mechanisms in that data also. This was my breakthrough: my ‘Eureka’ moment (Thomas 2009).

N - Negative Emotion/Cognition	RED
A - Attendant Mechanism	AMBER
P - Positive Emotion/Cognition	GREEN

Table 4.3 NAP procedure

For example, on applying the NAP procedure to a section of Caroline’s narrative (see Appendix 12) I could immediately identify ‘facilitators’ and ‘blockers’ to learning. During the sequence, Caroline describes her anxieties around learning to read. In tackling ‘blockers’ and ‘resistors’, we must appreciate the role that ACL plays in helping students like Caroline to overcome anxieties about learning. Whilst fears are still present, the tutor’s nurturing attitude and support allows Caroline the space to develop a coping strategy that works best for her. As Merriam (2005, p. 8) states, “Learning from a life event or experience in our lives begins with attending to and reflecting on it.” One of the most important *attendant mechanisms* identified in Caroline’s narrative is the statement that she does not want feedback²⁴ since knowing that she is ‘doing badly’ would set her back, or worse still, lead to course drop out. Further, by the tutor continuously supporting and reassuring Caroline, it is possible to understand how she overcomes her fear of learning. Indeed, some months after joining the literacy class Caroline had not only moved up a level but had also signed up to study other courses. Indeed, research by Salisbury (2016) demonstrates well how female FE teachers invest a considerable amount of ‘care’ and ‘emotional labour’ into the teacher student relationship. Here she found that female teachers were often willing to share “their private lives for public good” because often they too had trodden the ACL pathway. This enabled the teachers to better understand, empathise and connect with their adult students.

²³ The NAP procedure can only be used when emotion/cognition is present in the narrative.

²⁴ In this situation, Caroline does not want to know her test mark.

Once I had applied the NAP procedure to sequences of narrative, especially where emotion and cognition appeared quite regularly throughout the text, I could see patterns emerging across the interviews. Here, I identified different types of mechanisms, for example, I could see support mechanisms and coping mechanisms. Moreover, in drawing together the mechanisms, it became apparent that two types of mechanism were beginning to emerge. They were: (1) the 'facilitator' and 'booster' mechanisms; and (2) the 'checker' and 'blocker' mechanisms, which I discuss in the three empirical findings chapters, and Chapter 8.

4.9 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I outlined the research approach and design. During this process, I created a snapshot classification framework to use as a point of reference to guide the study in terms of recruitment, then later for analysis and discussion purposes. Next, I set out the rationale for my method of data collection, selecting the interview method as my main source of data. Later, I drew upon my ACL managerial experience to identify research risks, being careful to observe the ethics of the process in line with ESRC and Cardiff University. The process of recruiting participants to the study was by no means straightforward however working in partnership with WEA Cymru, and other learning providers made my job easier. In the event, support from WEA Cymru turned out to be invaluable.

Next, I presented the process by which I analysed the data. Completed in three stages it included: firstly, the use of the BNIM model as a reference to understand parent life stories; secondly, the coding of data to capture emerging themes and patterns; and, thirdly, the creation of an analysis procedure to identify mechanisms inherent in life course transitions, and parent-child relationships. The identification of the NAP procedure was a major turning point in the study since knowing what the mechanisms were, helped me to understand people's lives as well as explain the processes apparent within parent-child and parent school relationships. Critical reflection and 'reflexivity' was essential to this process. At every stage I wrestled with ideas, searching for innovative ways to interpret the data in a fair and objective manner. Also, I kept in mind my decisions throughout the process as these would be questioned at the viva stage (Schostak 2002). Having outlined the methodological considerations, I next present my empirical findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

CHAPTER 5 – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS 1: PARENT LIVES

This chapter and the following two chapters address the three underpinning questions outlined in Methodology Chapter 4. In this chapter, empirical findings are based on 24 life story interviews that relate to parents' social background, education, training, and work trajectory only. To avoid confusion with the generations, and from section 5.1.1 *only*, I refer to parents as 'participants'.

5.1 Parent life stories

Listening to parent life stories offers me a unique opportunity to understand how people attach meaning to their lived experiences during different life stages (Elliott 2005). Firstly, I look at parents' social background, and initial education. These contexts are important as they form the foundations of learning, which together shape the individual's understanding of, and attitudes towards learning later in the life course. Secondly, I examine their lives between the ages of 16 and 18 years, then proceed to explore their lives from 19 years onwards.

Before moving on to the next section, it is necessary to keep in mind that although we often exercise a personal choice to learn (self-directed learning), there are situations where learning is sometimes imposed on us by other sources or influences (Field 2012). In this instance, I interpret 'imposed' to be necessary or compulsory, for example, learning delivered through: schools; government mandatory back-to-work initiatives and learning delivered through mandatory intervention-based programmes.

5.1.1 Family and social background

During the adult interviews, I was keen to learn more about participants' social background so asked individuals to comment on their parents' education, training, and work life. In response, most participants reported that very few parents had achieved academic qualifications on leaving school, and some were even unsure whether parents had even sat examinations. In terms of employment, most parents had progressed into low paid, low skilled jobs. These jobs mainly included: factory work; manual work; retail; catering; cleaning; and care and driving work. However, three fathers had undertaken training apprenticeships on leaving school, from which they then progressed into skilled work, and higher paid employment. In social mobility and financial terms their efforts

can be rewarded, as seen in Mannay's research study (2013) where leaving home to go to university can result in a more affluent lifestyle, albeit at the cost of being "physically and socially removed" (Mannay, 2013, p.96) from the family. As Robyn (whose father was a skilled employee working for a large car manufacturer) explained:

[W]e lived on the private side of [place name]. We'd never been rich, and I think it was always a struggle for my mum and dad to get a house there. To my dad, it was very important that it was the private side, very important. (Robyn, 45-year-old)

In this context, being perceived as socially and upwardly mobile is often important to the family although, for many, not necessarily in terms of actually changing social class. In contrast, several participants reported their parents had not worked for significant periods throughout their childhood. Some parents had opted to stay at home to care for the family, while others were unable to work due to ongoing illness and health problems.

5.1.2 Family separation and divorce

One important theme that emerged from the interviews was the subject of family separation and divorce. Nearly 50 percent of participants had experienced family separation at some point during childhood, which is just above the average in relation to divorce rates for England and Wales²⁵; the latest available figures showing that 43 percent of marriages ended in divorce in 2012 (ONS 2014). When families broke up, participants either lived with one or other parent, a parent and step-parent, grandparents, or progressed into the care system. The effect of family separation and divorce has been well documented in the literature however research evidence differs in relation to how far it affects children's development. Barrett et al. (2011, p. 18), for example, point out:

Where conflict between parents has led to separation and/or divorce, researchers stress how difficult it is to accurately determine how much children may have been affected by the conflict, the separation, a combination of both, or other, perhaps related, factor.

Recent evidence suggests that family separation and divorce can affect children in the short term, in terms of a deterioration in physical and emotional health, changes in behaviour, increased risk of poverty (Stock et al. 2014), and poorer levels of educational achievement (Anthony et al. 2014). In addition, Amato (2005) argues that children living

²⁵ Figure based on estimated 2011 marital status population estimates.

in two parent households are “less likely to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems” (p.75) than those growing up in single parent households. Family separation affected participants in different ways. Some reported coping reasonably well with the home situation, while others like Whitney found her life to be dominated by this event (Ball et al. 2000). Here Whitney reflected on this time by saying:

[I]t was really hard, when all you’ve known when you’ve grown up is a mother and father together, and now they’ve split up and you’re left with this... The backlash. (Whitney, 26-year-old)

For Whitney, coping with the ‘backlash’ was a major challenge so much so that she never bothered going to school after this point. Also, the trauma of family separation sometimes led to children being excluded or expelled from school. Many described experiencing feelings of anger, frustration, and grief as they struggled to come to terms with the changed circumstances. Consequently, at least six participants reported having to move home and schools, with one participant moving schools at least 12 times. There were other problems too: three participants spoke about spending time in care during this period of turbulence.

While many participants reacted negatively to family separation and divorce, others reacted quite differently; in this respect, perceiving school to be a haven away from the calamity at home. As Robyn put it, ‘There was a lot of craziness going on. The only stable thing in my life was school, and I loved it.’ I shall return to this subject later in the chapter but for now I present life at school.

5.2 School life

This part of the interview explored participants’ experiences of education starting from their earliest recollection of primary school up to, and including, the secondary school phase.

5.2.1 Primary and secondary school experiences

With respect to the type of schools attended, none of the participants had been privately educated, and all had attended schools in the state sector; either faith-based,

specialist²⁶, village, valley or city schools. Reflections of school life were varied, but generally responses fell into three main categories. Some participants described their school days, especially the primary school phase, as being a wonderfully happy time in their lives: a place where they enjoyed learning. Others described school as a 'haven' away from the problems faced at home; for example, two participants had been tasked with the responsibility of caring for younger siblings. A few were not so complementary, describing their time at school as one plagued with difficulty, worry, isolation and confusion. These difficulties were not only attributed to problems within the school but were also due to other factors such as the challenge of living in poverty, living through different education periods, or struggling to cope with tensions in family relationships.

Aside from these challenges, it was also apparent that many had been bullied during childhood. Bullying in and outside of school was, and still is, a nationwide phenomenon and a topic of concern for government, parents and educators alike.

5.2.2 Impact of bullying

Fourteen participants (just under two thirds of the sample) reported they had either been bullied at school by fellow pupils or schoolteachers, bullied outside of school by family members, or bullied by children outside their friendship circle. Instances of bullying mainly occurred towards the latter stages of primary school, and during the secondary school phase. This is in line with a recent report on bullying published by the Oxford Open Learning Trust (2014) that polled 2305 people aged over 18. The study aimed to determine the scale of bullying at school, and how it had affected individuals in the long term. Over two thirds of respondents reported that bullying had affected their self-confidence, with more than a third saying it had affected their academic performance over the life course. Indeed, research on the effects of bullying throughout childhood reveals that victims of bullying suffer an "increased risk for adverse health, financial, and social outcomes in adulthood" (Wolke et al. 2013, p. 1968), especially children that endure chronic episodes of bullying at school. When participants disclosed they had been bullied, I probed further to understand the reasons why. In response, mostly participants knew why they had been bullied, although two reported they were still unsure. Participants were bullied because they did not have the latest designer branded clothes or shoes; had ginger-coloured hair; were overweight, or because they had

²⁶ This school catered for children with disabilities and learning difficulties between the ages of three and 16 years.

difficulties with reading and writing. One participant reported she was bullied because of her disability, while two others felt they were bullied because they belonged to a different racial group or background, and because other children were jealous of their position.

However, not all participants had been affected by bullying, and not all believed the experience had been detrimental to their learning. Some recalled being able to 'hold their own', finding creative ways to prevent the bullies from winning. Forty-two-year-old Polly, for example, recalled showing the whites of her eyes to scare off the bullies, while 26-year-old Whitney, on advice from her father to 'go and deck 'em one', did just that, and was never bothered again. Nonetheless, others like Amy reported they were unable to stand their ground; for example, Amy's experience of bullying became so intense she suffered panic attacks, and by the age of 14 had dropped out of school altogether. Unable to procure family or school support, Amy spent the next four years at home, waiting for the time when she could officially leave school.

5.2.3 Parental support at home

With respect to homework, I wanted to know what help participants received from their parents. This question elicited a mixed response; a few remembered their parents being very supportive, while others received a modicum of support. As Liam explained, it was a case of "yeah, whatever, get on with it." Similarly, Amy, who had been brought up single-handedly by her mother, explained the family's attitude toward learning at the time stating:

[E]ven though I wasn't in school, I don't remember my siblings sitting and doing homework, or reading, or anything. We kind of just went to our rooms and that was that. There was no educational interaction, none that I can remember...
(Amy, 33-year-old)

It is interesting to note Amy's choice of words here: 'no educational interaction'. Amy could not recall having homework help or getting involved in discussions about learning at home, which suggests that for Amy, educational interaction at home would have been helpful. Others like Frances explained how a lack of warmth at home impacted on her as a child. Although materially Frances had everything she needed, emotionally she felt rejected by her parents.

I think the problem with my parents was because their parents, they grew up in a time when they didn't have nothing. You know there was no presents for them:

they didn't have nothing. They just focused on getting out to get to work to get money to buy us everything. (Frances, 31-year-old)

Many participants talked about difficult relationships with parents, schoolteachers, and peers during their schooldays. On reflection, some parents appeared very determined to protect their children, and went to great lengths to avoid their children having to experience what they endured as a child. Indeed, these reactions towards childhood appeared quite regularly throughout the interviews (Reay et al. 2011).

While some participants talked about the issue of parents never being around to offer support, others did receive help but were acutely aware of which parent they could best rely upon for support; for example, 32-year-old Karen described her father as 'pretty intelligent' while her mother was described as 'dull' and 'unable to spell'. Likewise, 45-year-old Ryan explained differences between his mother and father as being, 'Mum's sort of old school basically, you know basic stuff, and my dad tends to sort of add on top.' Even when parents were perceived as having the necessary skills to help with homework, this sometimes led to tension in the household. Veronica, for example, remembered a time when she was struggling with mathematics homework. She explained:

I had this problem and my father was trying to explain the maths problem to me, and he just got really, nasty and shouting. Because I couldn't understand it, he really, got really, really, nasty with me, and didn't understand why I was bringing home problems that should be done in school. It wasn't to be done in the house, there's a teacher paid to do that for you. And I can remember a really, really, vivid memory of calling my cousin to come up and help me. (Veronica, 51-year-old)

Likewise, Isobel also encountered the same problem.

I can just remember dad sitting down, and then we'd start off doing maths and then all hell would break loose then because he couldn't, he didn't have the patience. (Isobel, 45-year-old)

Perhaps the reason why these situations were so tense could be attributed to the period since Veronica and Isobel had been raised in very different times, socially and educationally. As explained in Chapter 3, during the 1970s parents played a less strategic role in schooling, with responsibility for education largely resting with schools. Nevertheless, while homework was a sometime source of tension in the household, there were positive examples of parental help and support, but *only* at certain stages in the education cycle, for example, Gail commented:

My Nan would sit down with me and do it but... primary school anyway. But when I got to high school, no and I didn't, didn't bother either. I didn't do my homework and I think may be that was the bit of the problem... (Gail, 24-year-old)

Further, when Veronica moved to secondary school, the homework regime moved up a gear. Veronica explained:

[I]t was then that the work would start to come in. As I said bigger pieces of homework to be done but no it was up to me to get my homework done. If I didn't do it, then it didn't get done. (Veronica, 51-year-old)

While it was clearly Veronica's responsibility to do her homework, here a lack of parental guidance and support indicates the possibility of the first sign of 'slippage', in the educational sense. At this point it is important to keep this aspect in mind when, many years later, Veronica proceeds to help her children with homework.

5.2.4 Careers advice and guidance

Regarding careers advice and guidance, just under 50 percent of the cohort could not recollect receiving any advice at secondary school. However, for those that could remember, careers advice and guidance appeared to be less than adequate; even the room designated for advice and guidance left a lot to be desired. When I asked 35-year-old Sharon, she immediately recalled going to the 'school dungeon' for careers advice, a 'little, tiny, pokey room,' situated at the bottom of a flight of stairs. Karen, on the other hand, vividly recollected her peers flinging their information packs across the street at home time. She commented:

I can remember sitting in the room like a sort of library thing and he gave us this pack and he said, 'Take it home and read it with your parents.' And that's all we did... (laughs). There wasn't, what's the options out there, what funding is out there, what's this, what's that? It was nothing; it was a pack and that probably went in the bin 'cause nobody wanted to read it with me, and that's what our careers advice was. It was just, take this pack home and read it, there was no in-depth careers advice at all. (Karen, 32-year-old)

Others were persuaded against following their aspirations, for example, Veronica had her sights set on joining the police force at 17 years of age. On revealing the aspiration to her Religious Education teacher (who happened to be the school careers officer) she was promptly discouraged from even contemplating the thought. Veronica commented:

I really, really, wanted to go that way and I was told no, no, no. There's plenty of factories around here for nice little girls, and that would be a lovely little thing because there was loads of jobs around then. (Veronica, 51-year-old)

Here we see how the economic period, and the attitude of teaching staff together played a part in influencing Veronica's future. In the 1980s, factory work was in plentiful supply across south Wales, and many young people were encouraged by family members to leave school to find work (Adamson 2016). In addition, two participants recalled being pushed into vocational routes by careers advisors; a route they had no interest in pursuing. Against this backdrop then it is interesting to see how participants fared academically in terms of school outcomes.

5.2.5 School outcomes and achievement

By the age of 16 years all but seven of the 24 participants interviewed had sat the Certificate in Secondary Education²⁷ (CSE), the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) examination, or a combination of both. Those that did not sit examinations had generally dropped out of school by this point due to bullying, expulsion, pregnancy, or to begin their work career. Polly was the only exception. Polly attended a specialised school that catered for children with disabilities aged between five and 16 years. Emphasis was placed wholly on skills-based learning offering, for example, subjects in sports, typing and cookery. Polly reported that at the time the opportunity to study academic-based qualifications was not an option.

Academic achievement at 16 years is not as simple or straightforward as one might expect. As explained earlier, bullying, illness, family separation and divorce were some of the issues participants had to face. Understandably these situations often prevented participants from focusing on the important task of learning at school. Despite the problems, many participants did achieve – Figure 5.1 reveals school outcomes for all 24 participants.

²⁷ Although the CSE qualification is lower than GCSE, Grade 1 at CSE is equivalent to a GCSE Grade C pass.

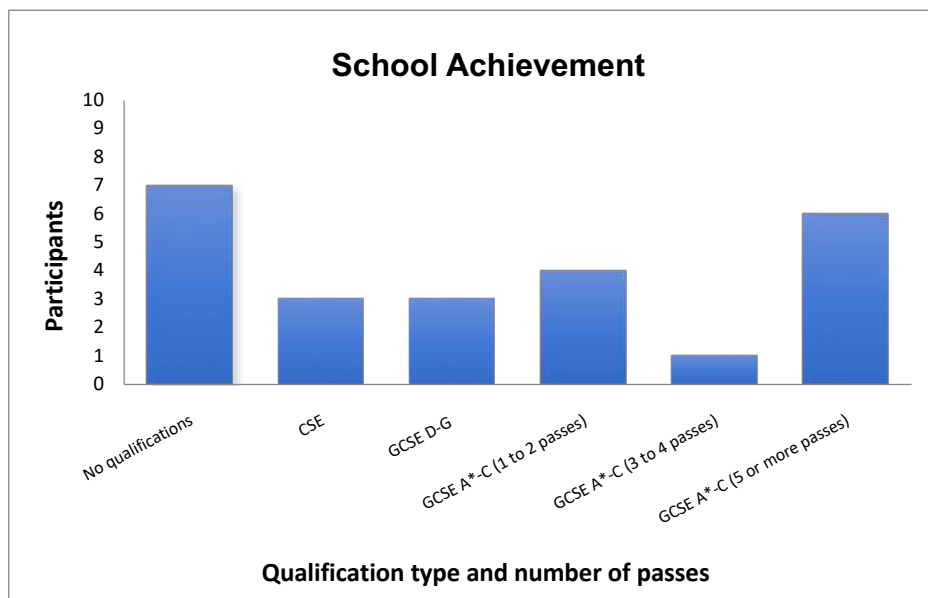


Figure 5.1 School outcomes at 16 years

Achievement at 16 years is a defining moment in a young person's life since at this juncture outcomes tend to shape future learning patterns across the life course. Moreover, parent and child's hopes and aspirations are equally important in setting goals for the future. This aspect is discussed in the next section.

5.2.6 Parental hopes and aspirations

In this section of the interview participants were asked to reflect on what they thought their parents' hopes and aspirations were for them at the age of 16 years. In response to this question, participants explained that parents generally:

- Were happy to go along with whatever they wanted to do;
- Actively encouraged and supported them to make choices for the future;
- Encouraged or forced them to leave school to find work; and, in a few cases,
- Pushed them to progress into further/higher education.

For the most part, participants followed their parents' advice and guidance, although some reported being steered into employment by teachers or siblings. Here again, it is important to consider the social, political, educational and economic climate of the time, for example, when unemployment rates are high young people tend to remain in education far longer (Tumino and Taylor 2015). Unlike the youth of today however most

participants in this study had left education by the age of 17 years. In the next section I explore the pathways they followed.

5.3 Post-school, education, training and work: 16 to 18 years

As mentioned in the previous section, post-school experiences varied in relation to the nature of the social, political and economic landscape of the time. Children that left school in the 1970s and 80s faced a very different economic landscape to children that left school in later decades. Despite the fall in demand for coal and, to a lesser extent, steel during the 1970s and early 80s, factory work was in plentiful supply across the south Wales region (Adamson 2016), which meant that young school leavers had a good chance of securing work immediately after leaving school. Albeit, the nature of the employment landscape was undergoing radical change that led to a decrease in skilled jobs - jobs that were mainly occupied by men - to a growth in unskilled and semi-skilled part-time jobs in the service sector mainly occupied by women (Rees 1994). During this time, however, parents and relatives were often able to 'put in a good word' to employers on behalf of the young school leaver. Several participants recalled finding work via this method. True to tradition, Veronica followed her parents into the factory; this is echoed in her mother's words, "If it's good enough for all the rest of the family, you can do it too." However, from the early 1990s onwards, work and employment patterns have changed significantly. Since the advent of neo-liberalism and globalisation there have been paradigmatic shifts in the economic landscape; characterised by new information communication technologies, which offer new and personal ways of connecting across the globe. Currently, young people who enter the workplace face a far more uncertain and challenging future. This is due to changing work and skills demands linked to automation and technology; where jobs emerge in one area, at the cost of destroying jobs in another area or industry (OECD 2017).

Indeed, by the age of 16 (and in some cases, prior to their 16th birthday) 15 participants were working or following a youth apprenticeship. In keeping with employment patterns of parents, participants worked primarily in: factories; retail; building and manual work; hospitality and catering; bars, restaurants and nightclubs; care, and in cleaning jobs. Even though Debbie and Frances wanted to progress to college they were prevented from doing so by their parents, and instead forced into work. Here we see the attitude of parents valuing work over education: parental demands playing an influential part in the life trajectory of both women.

Of the nine remaining participants, two fell pregnant at or just before their 16th birthday; one participant decided to take a year out but later found work at a local factory, while six continued in education. Of the six participants that progressed to sixth form or college, three dropped out after a few months to look for work; two completed the first year of their studies then later dropped out to look for work, while one participant opted to attend a specialist boarding college.

By the age of 18 years, some two years after leaving school, 21 participants were in some form of paid work or apprenticeship, two were caring for children, while one was still attending boarding college. From this point onwards, their lives diverge, and each follows a different life trajectory. The next section focuses on participants' lives as they unfold. Here we learn more about their lives as learners, workers, and volunteers.

5.4 Post-school, education, training and work: 19 years plus

It is relatively easy to track the learning lives of participants up to the age of 16 years because of the homogenous nature of the group however after this point each follows a unique pathway. Therefore, to overcome this problem, I decided to set up a 'Snapshot Classification Framework' (Appendix 2). This approach aided the process of participant recruitment, data analysis and presentation of learning lives (see Methodology Chapter 4) since here I could place participants under one of two categories: 'non-ACL participant' or 'learner'.

In adhering to the design framework, I first introduce the lower-level learners who were not participating in ACL at time of interview. Following this, I present the other categories in the framework, leading to the higher-level learners.

5.4.1 Participants not involved in ACL at time of interview

At time of interview eight individuals reported they were not participating in any type of formal ACL activity. That is not to say they were actively opposed to learning. On the contrary, everyone had engaged in some form of learning since leaving school. However, as the interviews progressed it appeared that some participants were less enthusiastic about learning than others. Indeed, on analysing the narratives it became clear that four of the participants in this group were willing to learn at some point in the

future, while the rest produced an argument for not learning, effectively displaying a reluctance to learn. Consequently, I proceed to explain why the reluctant learner group appeared to be different from the other groups.

5.4.2 Participants demonstrating ‘reluctance’ to learn

In this category I present four participants: 32-year-old John, 36-year-old Owen, 38-year-old Eleanor, and 43-year-old Liam. Before we look more closely at why these four participants were somewhat unenthusiastic about learning, first I present their educational backgrounds. By the age of 16 all four, except Owen²⁸, had left school with no qualifications. Eleanor had no choice but to leave school early because of an unplanned pregnancy, while John and Owen both left school at the earliest possible opportunity to step into low paid, unskilled employment. Liam, on the other hand, signed up to a YTS apprenticeship working, in his words, for ‘a backstreet garage’, and later achieved a Level 2 qualification in car mechanics.

While this group of participants talked about the benefits of learning, on analysing the narratives they each staged a defence for not learning (Hollway and Jefferson 2001). Moreover, they put lack of achievement down to factors outside of their control, citing family separation, negative experiences at school, and lack of support as the main reasons for failing to reach their potential. Arguably, their reasons are valid ones: John attended a school that was later closed due to falling standards; Owen had problems with literacy that were not addressed by the school or his parents, while Liam and Eleanor both had issues to contend with at home. The experiences outlined give an insight into their struggles, and how they saw themselves as learners. As, John explained, his time at secondary school had not been productive in any sense of the word:

I didn’t like [secondary school] that much. I mitched²⁹ a lot... because I didn’t learn a lot from the previous [primary] school... I didn’t understand a lot of it. I was struggling a lot so the friends that I got involved with were the same, like... the same mind set and, I dunno we just used to get together, and we’d just enjoy going down the tree swing. Instead of going to lessons we were always down the tree swing. (John, 36-year-old)

Likewise, Owen, hated school.

²⁸ Owen said he achieved a vocational certificate in gardening.

²⁹ Here the word ‘mitched’ refers to playing truant from school.

Ah some of the teachers, well they've gone now obviously, they were dragons like. Some of them would make you look a bit stupid as well like. You know you felt like they'd make you look stupid. I don't know if they did, perhaps it's just me, innit. I wouldn't put my hand up. (Owen, 36-year-old)

On the other hand, Eleanor and Liam were more concerned about home life rather than thinking about learning.

[A]lthough I was going through the motions of being in secondary school, I wasn't really, concentrating... I wasn't interested because I was angry... I walked around with a chip on my shoulder 'cause, obviously, I felt angry with my mum and dad [who] were breaking up, but at the time I didn't know that. It was just mad. (Eleanor, 37-year-old)

I was coming to my exams and my parents got divorced... at that time, at that age, you think your parents are the best things since sliced bread but when they drop that *bombshell* on you, and you've got these crucial exams going on. It just messes your head and I think that's the reason why I, kind of, had poor grades. (Liam, 43-year-old)

Negative experiences at school and difficulties at home can interrupt children's concentration and ability to focus at school, which in turn, impedes learning. What is noticeable here is that within these four statements all have one thing in common. They all contain a degree of suffering, negativity and negative emotion: their circumstances portrayed in words like 'didn't learn a lot', 'struggling', 'stupid', 'angry', and 'poor'. Nevertheless, most individuals at some point during the life course have a window of opportunity to engage in ACL; whether offered through ACL courses, Continuing Professional Development, 'on the job' training, volunteering, or through other interests or hobbies. Despite the false start in childhood all four had several opportunities to access education and training while working and raising their children.

Owen, for example, had participated in a few low-level courses since leaving school. Mainly this was due to a growth in funding for ACL, initiated by the newly appointed Labour Government in 1997. South Wales also received an injection of European Objective One funding of just over £1579 million in 2000 (European Commission 2016), which generated thousands of jobs and training opportunities across west Wales, and the Valleys' region. Under this initiative, Owen secured a job working as a leisure centre assistant³⁰. As part of staff development, Owen was put forward to study a Sports Instructor qualification (imposed learning). However, learning at the higher level (Level 3) ends in disaster. Owen explained:

³⁰ At school Owen excelled at sport, and later in the interview mentioned he was the head coach for the local children's rugby team.

I'd done all the practical, and I hit all marks, top marks. I come to the theory then and I struggled. Well the first time I tried it I missed out on 1 percent on it, and that hit me back miles then because I didn't tell them when I done that, that I think I'm dyslexic or anything. I just tried to see if I could pass it like but that was gutting then 'cause it was just like I didn't want to go again for it. (Owen, 36-year-old)

Unable to admit that he needed help with writing, Owen struggled through the course. Indeed, failure to pass the course severely undermined Owen's confidence and self-efficacy; so much so that Owen was resigned to thinking, 'anything with the pen scares me'. As Bandura et al. (2001, p. 81) note, "Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them"; a situation from which Owen may never recover (McGivney 2004). Consequently, when funding for the job came to an end, Owen reverted to what he knew best: manual work, and later finds work as 'handyman' working for a local authority. Therefore, considering Owen's experience, it is understandable why he avoided the academic side of learning. Similarly, encouraged by a friend to 'get out of the house', Eleanor had participated in a few low-level ACL courses since leaving school, while bringing up her family and working part-time, doing cleaning and bar work. However, during the interview Eleanor appeared fed up with life, and moaned:

I wanna have a job where I go, and I like don't come out of it feeling like dirty, and, you know, I don't wanna go home and do my own housework. Do you know what I mean? Or like I'm working in a nightclub, so I'm working all night so I'm tired in the day when my kids come back from the sitter. I wanna do something 9 to 5. I wanna pick my kids up and do tea, and that's the end of my evening til I wake up next... do you know what I mean? I find that the jobs that I've had to have, are those sorts of jobs. It's like that long slog where I'm just dragging myself. (Eleanor, 37-year-old)

Here we see the dissatisfaction in Eleanor's life expressed in words like 'dirty', 'tired', 'long slog', and 'dragging'. However, later in the interview there appeared to be a glimmer of hope that Eleanor's circumstances were about to change since she was planning to go to college to study a course in Beauty Therapy in the new academic year. Despite her best intentions however here she gives an insight into her real intentions.

I've still got to think about a career and making money, and if I make this move and come off, come from this place and go to that place, is it going affect...? So, it's difficult... You can't just look up and say, 'Right I'm going to do this now', 'cause it might not work.

Here there is an inconsistency in the narrative. As a single mother of three children³¹, Eleanor was clearly worried about studying full-time since this would affect her social

³¹ At time of interview, Eleanor's eldest son had left home.

security benefits. Indeed, after making a few enquiries some months later, I learned that Eleanor had not started the course. Although the reasons why are unknown, the fact that Eleanor pulled out of the course further emphasises the difficulty in making personal life changing decisions that might affect the family. Likewise, John had not participated in ACL since leaving school, other than 'on the job' training and participating in one day health and safety courses: a necessary part of his job working for the council. Despite this, John has had opportunities to learn. During the interview, he commented:

I was gonna be a union steward... 'cause like I'm close with the union, not through loads of trouble, just 'cause we deal with them through a lot of contacts and they really want me to do it as well but because of work commitments, I can't really commit myself to that. (John, 36-year-old)

Here, John backs out of learning citing work commitments as a priority. Indeed, throughout the interview I got the impression that John spent a significant amount of time in work; so much so that when I asked if he ever took time off work to go on holiday, he nodded, but then added:

But we're afraid as well. I've never been on a plane. I've always been afraid of 'em but I am, well I'm not ready but I'm willing to do it for my children so they can go away.

Here, John's words are telling: although he is 'not ready' to fly on a plane, he is willing to take the plunge for the sake of his children. Thus, if I focus for a moment on education perhaps it is the fear of the unknown that prevents John from learning. Later in the interview I asked John if he had ever considered becoming a school governor, to which he replied:

I'd love to but for a minute I always think my age will go against me. It's like if I volunteered for school governor and then someone like, I'd say late 40s, 50s who've got a bit of education behind them and you know qualifications, I'd always just assumed they'd be, I don't know... Do you know, 'cause I've got nothing under my belt, I never feel like I can achieve anything.

Indeed, the thought of 'nothing under my belt' undermines John's confidence and self-efficacy, and he is resigned to thinking he can never achieve anything. Thus, in educational terms, it is perhaps understandable why people like John and Owen show reluctance to learn. Likewise, Eleanor had similar confidence issues.

I mean I've had jobs where people have said to me, Eleanor, you could do this job with your hands tied behind your back, but I think because of the lack of confidence that I've got, I'm too scared... So, you just stick to what you know. (Eleanor, 36-year-old)

Much like John and Owen, so too was Eleanor scared of learning. This aspect cropped up in the narrative from time to time, which may explain why this group of participants appeared reluctant to learn; preferring instead, to stay within the comfort zone of settling with what they knew best. On the other hand, Liam reported passing a few exams at school but when I tried to find out what examinations they were, he skirted the question. Nevertheless, unlike the others in the group, Liam continued in education by following a YTS apprenticeship in car mechanics. Here, Liam found college life different and far more supportive. He said:

If you struggled, they would take you back and say what are you struggling with? Why are you struggling? Let's show you how to do it. Let's show you what it does. And I think that's the reason why I become better off from college than I did in school. (Liam, 43-year-old)

However, since completing the course Liam has not participated in any form of self-directed learning apart from 'on the job training', possibly because over the years he has been heavily involved in youth volunteer work. To sum up, while participants in this group had clearly struggled in school, failure to later address worries and concerns about learning in the formal sense, was problematic. As we learn in Chapter 6, this situation has direct repercussions in terms of the ways in which Owen, John, Eleanor and Liam school their children.

5.4.3 Participants demonstrating 'willingness' to learn

In this category I present the other four non-ACL participants: 31-year-old Frances, 32-year-olds Karen and Amy, and 48-year-old Bernard. Although this group of individuals were not learning at the time of interview, and had no immediate plans to engage in learning, they were nevertheless open and willing to participate in ACL, subject to the right opportunity coming along. Once again, one of the features common to all in this group is evidence of difficult childhood experiences, and the knock-on effect of problems at school. Amy recalled:

[F]rom 10 upwards, there was issues with bullying and things in school... and just silly things in the beginning, just name calling and things like that, which sort of escalated and sort of by the last year of primary school then, I suffered with panic attacks quite a lot going into school. (Amy, 33-year-old)

After leaving the village school to attend 'a huge big building', and with bullying issues continuing to be a problem because Amy 'didn't have the latest trainers or silly little things like that', Amy feigned illness to avoid going to school. As Amy was one of four children,

her mother (a single parent) gave in to her demands to stay at home. Consequently, by the age of 14 Amy had dropped out of school. She commented:

[The] teacher's kind of, at that point, had given up, because to them it was just distracting their lesson or whatever. Somebody had to be found to take me to a different room and to sit with me. So, it was easier just to say if she's not here, she's not here. So, I didn't then. I did some pieces of GCSE work and such at home but I never actually sat any of the exams then because my education had sort of, was so far, so much missed then.

Here, a lack of support at home *and* in school affects Amy's education. This situation has serious consequences not only in terms of maintaining continuity in education but also in terms of the ways in which Amy can 'catch up' educationally on the time lost. Likewise, Bernard experienced difficulties at school. Placed in a 'special class' in primary school, he described his educational experience by saying:

[N]one of us learnt anything and even when I got put back into the main [class], in the last year of the Junior School, I got put back into that class because the teacher was hitting me, and I realised how far behind I was behind everyone else. (Bernard, 48-year-old)

Here again, there is evidence of serious slipping however by this stage Bernard's struggles with literacy and numeracy were noticed by teaching staff, who responded by organising special reading sessions to help Bernard catch up. However, Bernard's problems were further compounded on transitioning to a boys' only secondary school³². He commented:

[E]very ceiling you look at, there's chewed up bits of paper spat at the ceiling... The boys ran that school: the teachers didn't run that school. The headmaster was never seen. We were allowed to get on with whatever we wanted to get on with. (Bernard, 48-year-old)

Consequently, poor school management and poor teaching reduced Bernard's chances of success at secondary school: as a result, Bernard left school with no qualifications. Unlike Amy and Bernard, both Frances and Karen achieved the benchmark of five GCSEs and over. Nevertheless, despite achieving good outcomes, life at home and school was far from perfect. As a child, Frances hardly ever spent time with her parents as she reported they worked long hours. Brought up by an aunt, emotionally Frances described that she was neglected by her parents; pushed aside almost to the point of being called the 'black sheep in the family'. Although Frances was never naughty at

³² Due to falling standards the school eventually closed sometime after Bernard left.

primary school, she was labelled a 'disturbed' child, and later described her condition as 'mass depression with suicidal tendencies': a condition that requires continuous medication, and clinical support. Moving on to secondary school, Frances characterised this period in terms of 'not going to school, or if I was in school, just so much else going on that I'd blank out'. Despite her difficulties and with a low attendance record at school, Frances reported passing seven GCSEs (all at grade C). She put this down to the fact that she only needed to be told things once, and she would retain the information.

Karen, on the other hand, did recall having support from the family. Although Karen enjoyed primary school, on transitioning to secondary school she encountered difficulty making new friends, since she was placed in a class above her primary school friends. At school Karen described herself as a 'loner' and 'like a little shy, retiring wallflower in the back of the class'. Despite her shyness, Karen passed several GCSEs with good grades. However, with few friends and fearing that college would be just like school, Karen decided to get a job. Although her parents wanted her to go to college she commented, 'they didn't push me. They said it's up to you. Do what you want to do'. Here, a lack of steerage at this point plays a part in Karen's life trajectory and, much like the others in the group, on leaving school she finds a job working in a local factory. Since leaving school, Karen has progressed no further in education terms, apart from taking a few online courses associated with her present job, working as a part-time accounts officer for a small voluntary organisation.

On leaving school, Frances initially worked in a factory with her mother but keen to get away from factory life has since worked in a range of jobs, mainly in the catering industry. As explained earlier, on leaving school Frances was forced into work by her mother. Despite this, over the years Frances has always been keen to learn, being eager to participate in 'on the job' training, as well as studying a few short ACL courses offered through Communities First (CF). Set up in 2001, CF is a Welsh Government programme designed to help narrow the education, economic, and health gaps between the more affluent and most deprived areas across Wales (Welsh Government 2013c). Although, at the time of interview, Frances was not participating in ACL, she was nonetheless an enthusiastic learner. She commented:

I've hit 31, and I'm a sponge now 'cause I think I know nothing. I know nothing about the world around me; I know nothing at all. So now I'm like a sponge. I'm forever Googling and researching stuff, just so I know stuff because it hits you. (Frances, 31-year-old)

Despite achieving good GCSEs passes, over the long-term Frances said she had forgotten much of the information learned at school, to the extent that throughout the interview I got the impression Frances relied heavily on the internet to get information. In terms of employment at time of interview Frances was working as a lunch-time supervisor in the local primary school, as well as volunteering a couple of days a week at the school.

In contrast, both Amy and Bernard had participated in several episodes of ACL after leaving school. After leaving school with no qualifications, Amy pursued a YTS apprenticeship as a nursery worker but dropped out after six months as life at home was difficult. After leaving home at the age of 17, Amy worked as a café assistant and some nine years later was still working in the café. However, after splitting with her partner, and with two young children, Amy moves to another area, a few miles away from her home community. Then later, on advice from a health visitor, Amy enrolled on basic ACL courses to make her curriculum vitae, 'look a bit better than it did'. At the same time, Amy volunteered to work with a Social Services children's play team, and after a few months, was offered a paid position with the team. While volunteering, by chance Amy received a college prospectus through the post. As she was interested in health and fitness Amy signed up to a Level 3 course at her local FE college. However, as Amy had only engaged in a few episodes of ACL since the age of 14 years, initially she found the college course challenging. She commented:

[I]t was a lot harder to write assignments and things like that, and I found it harder to sort of have the free time then that perhaps you may have time to study when you're younger. Once having a family and a job and studying part-time as well, I found it kind of hard to juggle everything then. (Amy, 33-year-old)

As explained in Chapter 3, learning while managing family and work responsibilities is a challenge. However, unlike school, Amy enjoys learning, and from this experience gains the confidence to apply to work part-time for a local authority library service.

Unlike the three females, on leaving school Bernard worked on a building site, then later signed up to a YTS apprenticeship in Bricklaying, and for the next 10 years worked in the building trade. However, after sustaining a life-changing accident at work, Bernard was unable to continue in the job. With few options available to him, Bernard was advised to go back to college to study an Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) in Building and Civil Engineering. Although he was initially worried about learning, he decided to 'have a go' and commented:

I was in with kids that had just left school that had got As and Bs in the year GCSEs so I'm in with them now, and this is A level standard, and I'm struggling but I managed to get through it. (Bernard, 48-year-old)

On passing the course and with jobs in short supply, Bernard applied to study a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Building Studies at a Post-1992 university³³. After passing the course Bernard again looked for a job, as by this time he had a partner and daughter to support. However, as Bernard was registered disabled, and had not worked for some years, finding a job proved difficult. Later, Bernard was referred to a training and employment organisation that specialised in helping disabled people find employment. To familiarise himself with the world of work, Bernard undertook a placement in a training agency teaching young people bricklaying skills. This fuelled his interest from which he considered thoughts about training to become an NVQ Assessor. However, with no funding available, and unable to personally pay the £300 course fee Bernard's progression into the world of work was blocked. Therefore, in terms of ACL participation, Bernard had travelled the furthest amongst the group since leaving school but, at time of interview, was classed as long term unemployed, and still looking for work.

5.4.4 Participants engaged in ACL

The last two sections have explored the lives of participants who were not involved in ACL at time of interview. In contrast, the following sections focus on participants that were engaged in ACL at time of interview.

5.4.5 ACL learners participating in intervention-based programmes

In this category I present the first group of learners: 24-year-old Zoe, 26-year-olds Caroline and Whitney, and 35-year-old Tom. Here again, school outcomes were poor against the benchmark five GCSEs grades A*- C. Tom reported passing a couple of CSEs while the rest achieved several D and E grades at GCSE level. What is common to this group of individuals is that all had been encouraged back into learning through intervention-based programmes offered via government and agency funding³⁴.

³³ Formerly known as polytechnics until 1991.

³⁴ In Tom's case, learning was imposed: failure to attend a parenting course would have placed his children at significant risk of being admitted into the care system.

First, I introduce Tom. Adopted at a young age, Tom left school at the first opportunity to find work. Tom has always worked in retail and, over the years, had worked his way up to a store manager position in a health food shop. Part of the job involved sitting online multiple-choice examinations to demonstrate his knowledge of the products. Although passing the test qualified his position as store manager Tom's struggles with dyslexia posed significant challenges at work. He explained:

I hate sitting down in the office writing out paperwork. It takes me hours. You know I can't do that. I've got to try it but you've got to do it because you're getting paid to do it sort of thing. (Tom, 35-year-old)

Here we see how Tom's struggles with dyslexia affects his work life. Although he *hates* writing he has no choice but to complete the paperwork since it was part of his managerial responsibilities. Caroline too suffered similar problems. She said:

I did struggle all the way through school, all the way through school. I thought I weren't good enough just because I couldn't read. I got bullied as well but my father helped me a lot. (Caroline, 26-year-old)

Despite help from her father Caroline was placed in a 'special needs' class at secondary school. Thus, separated from her primary school friends, from that time onwards Caroline found school life challenging, especially since she could not read or write very well. On leaving school Caroline signed up to a college army cadet course but illness prevented her from completing the course, therefore a career in the army was ruled out. Despite this setback, Caroline eventually found a job in retail however here again struggles with maths and English held her back as, unable to use the till register, she was consigned to working in the stockroom. However, after being made redundant, contact with a local job advisor encouraged Caroline to sign up to a basic skills literacy class. Caroline was somewhat unenthusiastic towards learning mainly because of problems with bullying at school, and difficulties with reading and writing however the advisor's proverbial 'push' coupled with a measure of persistence paid off. In doing so, this helped Caroline move forward in terms of learning to read and write - for a detailed account of Caroline's return to learn see Appendix 12.

Unlike, Tom and Caroline, Whitney reported that she had few problems at school but, like Eleanor and Liam, she reacted badly to the news that her parents' marriage was about to end. She explained how she dealt with this news.

I had a really good childhood up until a certain point. We were, you know, we had a loving home. We were very clever children, very academic, always done

well and then when I was 15 or 16, just on my GCSE year, my mother and father divorced and I went off the rails. Umm it was an absolute nightmare; I never went to school then. I'd stay at home. I'd phone the school myself and tell them that; pretend I was the parent and tell them that I wasn't coming in, pretending I was my mother. (Whitney, 26-year-old)

Despite this, Whitney reported passing several GCSEs at grades D and E. Perhaps this is a fair result considering the strained circumstances at home. Nevertheless, after leaving school Whitney progressed to college to study hairdressing, then childcare but dropped out soon afterwards to work part-time in a bakery and a pub. Consequently, by the age of 20 Whitney had two children, and was trapped in a turbulent, unpredictable relationship with a partner who worked all night and slept all day. During the interview, Whitney reflected on this time:

I mean it was violent. I'd throw everything; I'd throw glass blocks out the window at him. You know, and it was horrible and... my oldest daughter then, her behaviour had become very violent. She'd got thrown out of playgroup for trying to strangle the children, and a worker was sent out to home to work with her, and I just come to a point one day and I thought, do you know what? You've totally lost yourself. (Whitney, 26-year-old)

Witnessing her parents' relationship breakdown, then having two children in quick succession coupled with her own relationship breakdown, and money worries, sent Whitney into crisis mode, which resulted in panic attacks. At this point, Whitney described family life as 'rock bottom', the end process of which I liken to the 'tumbling effect', see Whitney's tumble (Appendix 13); and a subject I shall return to, towards the end of this chapter (Section 5.7).

Likewise, on leaving school, Zoe, undertook a hairdressing apprenticeship however, on completing the first year, she had a change of mind and left the training agency to look after her sister's children. Then, sometime later she fell pregnant with her first child, having two more children in quick succession by a different partner. Zoe also worked part-time in a nightclub, supported by a friend who looked after the children. However, later in the interview, Zoe reported that she was no longer living with her partner, and that she was bringing up three children under the age of five, single-handedly. Having children so soon after leaving school can place pressure on families. However, several Welsh Government interventions have been instrumental in tackling poverty and disadvantage. For example, since 2000 the Welsh Government Communities First programme, has helped individuals and families, living in disadvantaged communities across Wales to get involved in education, training and work (Welsh Government 2017b).

Despite this help, the Programme will cease to operate in March 2018 (Welsh Government 2017c); for a more detailed discussion of the reasons behind the closure of the Programme see Dicks (2014). Likewise, Flying Start (Welsh Government 2017d), a programme designed to support families with children under the age of four years³⁵, has also been instrumental in supporting parents and young families. Considered 'at risk' by Social Services³⁶, both Whitney and Zoe were referred to a family learning initiative. Here professionals work with families to offer parents support and training in parenting skills to help prepare children for school life. Indeed, since joining the initiative both mothers had studied several ACL courses. On the one hand, 24-year-old Zoe had been involved in civic engagement activities campaigning to stamp out Pay Day loans. Whitney, on the other hand, was in the middle of completing an NVQ course in Childcare and was at time of interview on her course placement at a local school. She explained how working in the school had exposed her to a different side of learning.

I'm seeing it from the other side of the door, isn't it, rather than being an outsider. One thing I've always said is, as a parent, unless you set foot in that school, you would never understand the amount of work, time, effort those teachers put in to make sure them kids learn. You really don't understand from the outside 'cause from being in there now I can see how my children are where they are today. You think that they just play and with young kids, you know, it's all structured. (Whitney, 26-year-old)

Here, being situated in the school classroom introduces Whitney to a new context; a learning context that involves structure, time, and effort. By participating in this type of intervention programme, both Whitney and Zoe have managed to move forward with the help and support of specialist workers, education and training professionals. While Zoe and Whitney (as well as Caroline) had a choice to participate, perhaps in these three cases, social circumstances and pressures dictate, to a certain extent, their proclivity to learn. Certainly, during interview, all three women appreciated the help and support received from professionals.

Likewise, Tom's partner was struggling to bring up a family of four sons. Considered at 'serious risk' by Social Services the family was at crisis point since Tom spent hardly any time at home due to working a 60-hour week. In this situation, the learning intervention is 'imposed' and 'compulsory'. Thus, Tom had no choice but to give up work to concentrate on supporting his family³⁷. Here, Tom and his family were being supported

³⁵ Living in disadvantaged areas across Wales.

³⁶ Whitney and Zoe attended a project that supported young families at risk.

³⁷ According to Tom's keyworker, failure to do so would have resulted in his children being placed up for adoption.

through a local dad's support initiative organised by the Social Services team. The initiative is designed to offer fathers (and indirectly their partners) a programme of education, training and support with the prime aim of keeping the family together.

In sum, all four learners - Caroline, Whitney, Zoe and Tom - benefitted from support agencies that had good links with ACL providers. What is important to keep in mind at this stage is that without timely and effective intervention followed by significant encouragement, help and support from the professionals, it is likely that all four families would have continued to flounder, and perhaps would have tumbled even further into crisis.

5.4.6 Learners participating in medium level courses: Level 2/3

The next group in the learner category are learners participating in medium level courses, Levels 2 to 3. Nanette (23), Sharon (35), Mary (42), and Isobel (45) all left school with qualifications. Sharon achieved the benchmark of over five GCSE (A*-C) passes; Nanette achieved a mixture of GCSEs below the benchmark, while Mary and Isobel³⁸ achieved two GCSEs apiece. Unlike the intervention-based learners, all four had exercised a choice to learn (self-directed learning) since leaving school.

First, I introduce Isobel. At interview, Isobel could not recall many memories of school other than muddling along and hoping for the best. Although she did remember revising for examinations. She said:

I remember my mother sending me up to my room to revise, and then she'd come up like an hour or two later, and I'd be fast asleep on the bed, you know, because I had switched off. (Isobel, 45-year-old)

Isobel failed to pass most examinations however undeterred, she opted to stay on at school to study a one-year secretarial course as she did not want to 'waste two years doing A levels and flunk it'. Aside from school, Isobel also enjoyed going to Air Cadets and after successfully completing the secretarial course, had plans to join the Air Force as soon as she was old enough. However, destiny played a part soon afterwards, as on meeting her future husband she decided not to apply for a Forces job. Since that time, Isobel has undertaken significant CPD, on the job training, and has participated in several episodes of ACL. In addition, over the past 20 years Isobel has been self-employed, running several small businesses while raising a family. Nanette, on the other

³⁸ Isobel achieved 'O' levels, which is equivalent in level to the current GCSE qualification.

hand, 'absolutely despised' secondary school because of issues with bullying. When I asked Nanette why she thought she had been bullied at school, she said:

They did the usual as primary school children, they call you names, they pull your hair and things like that. I had one year where they stuck staples in my legs and this was primary school, and the teacher's reaction to it was, 'Stop wasting the staples'. (Nanette, 23-year-old)

On moving to secondary school, life at school did improve, and Nanette managed to pass some GCSEs, but failed maths and English. On leaving school, she progressed to college to study Childcare but after completing the first year decided to leave to get married to start a family. At time of interview Nanette was caring for two young children, both under the age of four, while working part-time as a cleaner a few hours a week. In addition, Nanette explained she was attending ACL classes at her local community centre, and in the past year had passed GCSE English (Grade C). When I asked Nanette if going to classes had changed her in any way, she said:

Well, I think that I've obviously found the confidence in myself but being in this learning environment, umm I don't have to speak if I don't want to. Yes, we are encouraged to, but I can openly say in front of a class, 'Oh well this is my opinion' and we do agree to disagree but I say, 'This is my opinion, this is what I think', and start a conversation with anyone, rather than, whereas before, when I first started I just sat in the corner, didn't get involved or anything.

When I asked Nanette to explain the change in attitude, she replied:

I really don't know. I think it's just, I don't know. I think it really depends on the people you're with, and the person who's teaching you.

It is interesting to see how Nanette cannot pinpoint why her attitude has changed other than saying she was inspired by her social network i.e. her tutor and fellow classmates. Again, it is worth noting the understanding, empathy, and willingness to share life moments and struggles in the teacher student relationship (Salisbury 2016). Being situated in this environment Nanette is encouraged to speak up in class, safe in the knowledge it is acceptable to agree to disagree. Indeed, encouragement from the teacher and others in class gives Nanette the much-needed confidence to participate. No longer a shy retiring wallflower at the back of the classroom Nanette reported that she now plays a full part in class discussions.

Similarly, Sharon loved primary school but like Nanette, was bullied at secondary school because she lacked the right type of clothes and trainers. Although Sharon passed her GCSE examinations, she did not want to continue to college, much to her parents'

disappointment since they wanted Sharon to go to university. Over the next few years Sharon worked in several low paid, unskilled jobs but after failing to find her vocation, returned to college to study a Level 3 Business Administration course. This enabled her to apply to study at a post-1992 university but after spending three months hating every minute of university dropped out to go back to factory work. However, not long after and with a Level 3 qualification under her belt Sharon was promoted to an office job in the factory, then a couple of years later was successful in securing a job working for an ACL provider in work-based learning. Since dropping out of university Sharon has been involved in 'on the job' training and CPD activities, although as a full-time worker and mother, she had doubts about committing to longer periods of study. Here she provides an argument for not learning.

I really have got no intention of going back and doing any more learning, I haven't. I've decided that... I've got a mortgage to pay, I've got, you know, I think you've got to commit to it when you're young for a lot of stuff, or until you've got time later and the ability to do it financially. (Sharon, 35-year-old)

Citing finance, time and family commitments as the main obstacle, Sharon has no plans to participate in prolonged episodes of learning, at least for the time being. Mary and Isobel, on the other hand, had both participated in multiple episodes of learning to the extent that, at time of interview, they were both considering moving on to a higher level of learning. Mary, had enjoyed going to primary school but was bullied at secondary school. During interview, she described how she lost confidence at secondary school, and slowly started 'slipping' after getting involved with the 'wrong crowd'. She explained:

I hated school in the end. I didn't think I was good enough to do anything. So, I just wanted to get out and get a job and earn some money. (Mary, 42-year-old)

Here, Mary's mind set, 'I didn't think I was good enough' highlights her lack of confidence. Like many in the study, Mary, began her career working in a factory after being encouraged by her mother to follow in the family tradition. However, working in a dusty environment affected her health, and on medical advice she left the factory to study Childcare at college. After managing to complete one year, Mary fell pregnant, which prevented her from continuing to the second year. Subsequently, over the past 20 years Mary (and now a single mother of two teenagers) has been involved in multiple episodes of learning while working, and volunteering. This exposed Mary to new people and places, which enabled her to draw upon this form of social capital (Bourdieu 1986) to find a job working with disadvantaged families. However, after divorcing her husband sometime later, Mary suffered a breakdown and had to give up work. Nevertheless, two

years later, encouraged by a friend Mary returned to study and has since studied several courses, notably achieving GCSE English and Level 2 maths. At time of interview Mary was studying the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) course, after which she hoped to find work as an ACL Arts and Crafts tutor. Since leaving school Mary has participated in substantial episodes of ACL up to Level 3, and as we learn in the next chapter, she draws upon this dimension to help her children.

5.4.7 Learners participating in higher level courses: Level 4 and above

In this section, I present the higher-level learners. Gail (24), Hope (24), Yvonne (33), Debbie (34), Polly (42), David (45), Robyn (45) and Veronica (51) have all studied courses at Level 4, and above. Much like the rest of the cohort, achieving good outcomes at 16 had been difficult. Despite the odds however, Debbie and Robyn passed the benchmark of 5 GCSEs or more. While the rest of the group failed to reach the benchmark, they did achieve a mixture of GCSEs and CSEs. Once again, family separation, divorce, and illness impacted on Gail, Hope, David, Yvonne, and Robyn's lives. Hope, for example, lived intermittently with each parent, moving schools at least 12 times during childhood. Expelled from school by the age of 15 years, Hope was barred from sitting GCSE examinations. Polly, on the other hand, left school with no qualifications mainly because the school she attended only offered a vocational curriculum of learning. Therefore, on leaving school Polly had three options: first, to work for a local government-based organisation that offered training and work opportunities for disabled people; second, to stay at home; or third, to apply to study at a specialist boarding college. Not wanting to take either of the first two options, Polly wanted to continue her education. This was an important milestone for Polly since, for the very first time in her life, she had the opportunity to attain academic qualifications.

For the other participants, in terms of employment, David signed up to a YTS apprenticeship in car mechanics, while the rest found jobs in retail, cleaning, care and factory work respectively. Like Frances, Debbie had been forced into work by her 'biological mother'. After spending time in and out of care during her teenage years, Debbie left home soon after leaving school to start a new life, away from the family. Lastly, just after leaving school Yvonne fell pregnant, which meant employment was out of the question, at least for the next few years.

Like the medium level learners, this group of learners had exercised a choice to engage in self-directed learning throughout the life course; some committing to multiple and prolonged episodes of learning. At time of interview Gail, Hope, Debbie, Yvonne, and David were studying at degree level. Robyn and Polly had both achieved a Higher National Diploma, while Veronica had achieved a degree some years previously. Also, in terms of career advancement, many had transitioned from one job field to another. As David commented at interview:

[I]f I hadn't had education along the way, I wouldn't be able to do this now. So, that's how much it's changed my life. I enjoy my job now. (David, 45-year-old)

David's transition from car mechanic to Social Services support officer and trainer is described in more detail in Chapter 6, section 6.5.2. Likewise, Veronica had transitioned from factory worker to social worker over a period of 12 years while Yvonne, a former retail worker, was still in the throes of studying a nursing degree. During the interviews, I was keen to understand in what ways ACL had influenced this group and whether learning had instilled a sense of confidence and agency. Apart from Robyn, who felt that dropping out of the degree programme had undermined her confidence, most agreed that learning had been positive and worthwhile, for example, studying over the past five or six years had given Yvonne the confidence to apply for a school governor role. She explained:

I wouldn't have said boo to a sheep before... I think it's given me more confidence to do it... Before I would think, like I say about getting up and saying things in front of people, and I say I'm shy and things and then when you talk to my friends and things they say, 'Look, you're not shy at all'... As long as I know a subject, or I know what I'm talking about, I'm more than confident to get up, and I'll talk about it and I'll discuss it and I'll argue the point... I am a lot more confident, but I do think it's because of the course as well. Definitely, I weren't confident before I was doing it. (Yvonne, 33-year-old)

When I asked Yvonne why she felt so differently she explained:

Because you're meeting people and you've got to be quite... you can't... shy away from things. You've got to be there, you've got to just get involved, and you've got to be chatty, and talking to people, and doing things like that. You can't be... somebody who's just going to cower in the corner and not be confident. You've got to be confident, and you've got to be confident in what you're doing...

It is interesting to note at the beginning of the extract, where Yvonne describes herself as shy e.g. 'wouldn't have said boo to a sheep before' however on receiving feedback from others in her social network, her attitude changed, and it is here that Yvonne starts to believe in herself. However, later in the interview, Yvonne explained how illness had

led to a crisis in confidence to the extent that she questioned her skills and ability, and seriously contemplated whether to return to the nursing placement.

[A]fter... being ill and things, I was like, oh I don't know if I can do this anymore. I think I'm going to have to knock it on the head, and my husband was like, 'Oh don't be stupid', but literally I was sweating going into the [hospital] 'cause it was my first day back... I was shaking, I was like, I really don't know if I can do this. And then I was there. I was there for an hour and I was like, I know I'm back now, I'm back with a vengeance... I know this is for me. Definitely. So, any doubts I had were well gone.

This temporary state of worry affected Yvonne's confidence however fear soon subsided on getting back into the routine of work. Her words, 'I'm back with a vengeance' signalling she was ready and willing to take on the challenges before her. Likewise, Debbie drew on her academic social capital (Bourdieu 1986) to try out new ideas related to her children's learning in the home. When I asked Debbie what she had gained from studying a degree in education she replied:

[F]or my academic achievement, obviously, that comes from the tutor but then when we have group discussions, and they say what they do and how they do it. I do take a lot from that at home but obviously if it wasn't for the course I wouldn't gain any of that... (Debbie, 34-year-old)

I probed further to find out what Debbie had gained from the discussions. She said:

[J]ust obviously teaching strategies. How other teachers, sort of, approach a lesson because I see how other people are dealing with certain situations with certain people... I think I'm very much a watcher, and I very much think, ooh I'll try that, or I'll take that home, and see if that'll work and if it don't, I'll try something else.

In this context, watching others gives Debbie ideas that she later trials and tests out in the home, evidence of which is captured in the parent-child relationship featured in Chapter 6. Likewise, Veronica drew on her social capital by garnering support from her social networks. On signing up to study a degree in social work she said:

I had my pal, so I could have a shoulder to lean on. I know she used me, as in, I can get a better score than her all the time. Fine that didn't bother me really, we'd share books, we'd have a natter together, but I was determined then that I could get through this, and again I had two really good female tutors in [name] and [name] who also could see potential there, and I didn't want to let them down. (Veronica, 51-year-old)

Tutor, family and peer support is a critical dimension in learning; without timely and effective support, it would have been far more difficult for participants to negotiate and navigate their way through the learning trajectory. The support dimension is an important

facet and is central to learning across the life course; a dimension that appeared time and again in the narratives.

5.5 Adult community learning: some emergent themes

In this section, I briefly look at some of the themes related to ACL participation that emerged from the interviews.

5.5.1 Support and guidance

Support and guidance whilst studying ACL courses was a theme that cropped up time and again in the interviews. As explained earlier, on the one hand, Liam attributed his success at college to the support he received from tutors. On the other hand, even though Zoe had participated in many courses since joining her local parenting group, it was the informal side of learning that Zoe valued the most. She explained:

The group's more than my education because [leader name] gives us things to do with them. Like all the little things we learn here like I'll go home, and I'll try it with the girls, or like [leader name] will give us ideas. Like if you ask [leader name], she'll give you a booklet on all different things you can do with them to keep them occupied. (Zoe, 24-year-old)

In this example, the group leader's timely advice and support gives Zoe ideas that she takes away to practise in the home setting. Likewise, when Veronica was unsure about her coursework, she looked towards her tutors for guidance. She said:

You could go to them and [say] I'm struggling with this and I'm struggling with that and I'd explain what I was feeling, and they said, 'Yeah you've got it right, you've got it right.' I'd say, Oh, right okay... (Veronica, 51-year-old)

Getting it right was confirmation that Veronica was heading in the right direction. Although, looking back Veronica had not always had this level of support during her schooldays. She recalled:

I can remember having to do a project and it was about a summer project... This was in primary and I decided to do, I loved horses and I wanted to do a project on horses and I just didn't have no help, no guidance, nothing; no sit down and get a scrapbook and work... Although I did have a cousin living, this is where I got the idea from... he had everything, and he had horses and he had umpteen books and everything. And I can remember the last week of the holidays my mother said, 'What have you done about your project?' Nothing, I haven't got nothing. 'Well you've left it too late now', and she took me down then to get a book, to see if I could borrow some books off my cousin to write something up, and I had about two pages in my project! Failed... (Veronica, 51-year-old)

To produce a successful piece of work, especially a project, requires a fair amount of time, planning, preparation, and resources. At such a young age, Veronica stood little chance of succeeding without the help and support of an adult. This is perhaps the difference between success and failure. Had Veronica received adequate parental support and guidance over the course of the summer holiday she may well have returned to school with a few more pages in her project.

5.5.2 Proximity of ACL courses

For some participants, learning closer to home was beneficial as it not only avoided the expense of travelling to venues outside the community, but it also reduced the time spent away from the family. Even though Hope was a keen learner, there were still several barriers to overcome. As she explained:

The money to get there, the having to get there extra early to get there, especially when you've got kids... 'Cause when I had my first child I was travelling to [name of campus]... it was two buses but I'd have to be on the bus by five past eight to get there for nine. So, it's a long, good long hour to just get somewhere and an hour to get back. I mean that's two hours of travelling, and it's exhausting... (Hope, 24-year-old)

For Hope, studying closer to home would have made a big difference. As she said:

I think is a good idea to have small educational places in communities. I think it's a very important part of life, you know, to help people especially people who feel like they don't really want to go to college. If it's in their community they'll do it... especially if it's run by the people in the community. People are more comfortable to go and that's just through experience, which I'm saying that.

Although much has been written about barriers to learning in terms of time and money, here the difference between accessing learning opportunities in and outside of the community is seen in the positive word 'comfortable' and negative term, 'don't want to go to college'. This underscores the importance that people attach to learning in the community. Further, if the vital first stepping stones are missing i.e. no courses available in the community, then it is unlikely that adults with confidence issues will summon the courage to seek learning opportunities elsewhere. Likewise, being able to access classes closer to home encouraged participants to progress onto other courses. As mentioned in Section 5.4.6, attending courses in the community helped Nanette become more confident in class. Being 'comfortable' and settled in this environment encourages her to continue learning. As Nanette explained:

Well after I had my second daughter, I was supposed to go back to college to do GCSE English, and then I found out about [name of ACL provider] course. So, I joined the [name of ACL provider] and did the life support programme with the [name of ACL provider], which I ended up doing my GCSE English anyway, with the same tutor I would have had in college, and I've just been basically doing courses with [name of ACL provider] since then. (Nanette, 23-year-old)

While it may be relatively easy to move ACL provision out of the community and back into main college campuses, the availability of learning opportunities in the community can make the difference between individuals participating or not participating in courses. These accounts serve to highlight Bourdieu's thinking (Bourdieu 1977) about the tensions between agency and structure.

5.5.3 Reward and recognition

Another theme that emerged from the adult interviews was the subject of reward and recognition. When participants successfully completed courses, there was a sense of achievement and a rise in self-esteem and confidence. For example, some months after interviewing one participant I learned the person had won a national award for inspiring other learners to achieve. Others like Veronica had been inspired through gaining recognition from tutors and teachers. Veronica explained:

[T]he greatest honour I had then, [course facilitator's name] said to me, 'If I have to have a social worker, she said 'if ever something happened out of my classroom', she said, 'She [meaning Veronica] is one of the ones I would definitely pick. I thought wow, you know, I thought well, and she was very articulate: she was wonderful. (Veronica, 51-year-old)

Positive feedback from others helped participants like Veronica to gain a sense of identity and this is seen in the satisfaction in Veronica being singled out for recognition in the words 'wow' and 'wonderful'.

5.6 Regrets: I could have done better!

Regret about not fulfilling one's potential in the teenage years was a major theme that emerged from the interviews. In 2014, the WEA carried out a research survey on 659 students (WEA 2014). Findings show that 64 percent of learners wished they had continued learning to a higher level after leaving school. Much like my regret outlined in Chapter 1, several participants were annoyed that they had missed an important learning opportunity.

I do wish that when I was in school I had listened and gained qualifications. I really, do wish I had because like when I was a family support worker we were doing the work of social workers, and then I thought, well why didn't I bloody stay in school and do it? (Mary, Level 2/3 learner)

I do wish I'd worked harder in school. I wish I'd gone on to do my A levels. I wish I'd had them in the bag, to be honest.... I wish I had this mentality when I was in school. You know, this is what makes me cross with myself really 'cause I know how hard-working I can be and how I have been, and now I'm thinking, pulled your finger out a bit, you would have been a bloody doctor or something! (Isobel, Level 3 learner)

That's my biggest regret in life. Should have done my A levels, should have gone to uni when I was younger. (Debbie, Level 5/6 learner)

Yeah paid more attention, studied for A-levels went to college, got better opportunities. If I could go back it would be totally different, totally different. (David, Level 4/5 learner)

In many respects, this theme is key to understanding the rationale behind the goals and aspirations these participants harboured for their children; a point I refer to in the next chapter. In contrast, some had few regrets. When I asked Tom whether he had any regrets, he replied:

Probably gone to college instead of to work maybe, get a full qualification in... you know, but nothing I regret, I don't regret doing it, going into work. No that's the way we were, that's the way we all go, into work and decide from there. (Tom, 35-year-old)

Here, Tom stages a defence for not learning, and further accepts the notion 'that's the way we were': a similar notion I refer to in Chapter 1, where my acceptance of the social world was challenged by the adult education Sociology tutor. Similarly, Liam and Owen expressed few regrets about not achieving their potential at school. This could be due to fears about learning, where fear acts as a resistor, which then blocks the motivation to learn. Although, as we saw in Caroline's case, learners can overcome negative attitudes towards learning with, of course, the right kind of support and encouragement. In the next section I give two examples of how a lack of support acts as a blocker to learning, but then demonstrate how negative attitudes towards learning can be replaced by a positive learning attitude, subject to the right kind of support and encouragement.

5.7 The 'slipping' and 'tumbling' effect

Before moving on to the next chapter I present another dimension that emerged in the study. At interview, I learned that four participants – Sharon, Debbie, David, and

Veronica – all worked in the field of education and training, mainly working with learners that required extra support and a ‘push’ to succeed. Sharon, for example, who co-ordinated work-based learning courses, talked about the effect of young people failing to turn up to sessions; a process likened to Amy and Whitney’s experience of not going to school. Sharon continued by saying:

It seems a very similar effect. When you start missing school; it’s a knock-on effect. You miss something one day, you go in, the teacher’s a bit off with you; you don’t know quite what you’ve got to do. You might not want to go in again, and it’s a sort of tumbling effect. (Sharon, 35-year-old)

Likewise, David, an education and training officer, also referred to the ‘tumbling effect’ when working with disadvantaged dads to improve their parenting skills. Here he explained how he encourages the dads to think about their children’s future.

[W]hat do you think a child who has low confidence going through school is going to achieve? What do you think they’re going to achieve as an adult? And it really does make them think about their behaviour as dads... what are they going to achieve in school? And they all say, ‘Oh, it’s going to be poor achievement, they’re going to be bullied or they will be the bully, and they’re going to be labelled the naughty kid.’ So, what happens in school? ‘They have poor chances.’ So, what happens in senior school? ‘They’re labelled the naughty child.’ And then what happens? What sort of job are they going to have? And they all say, ‘They’re not going to have any job.’ So, you can see them sitting there, and it’s a big eye opener for them. (David, 45-year-old)

The example above describes in perfect detail the process of the ‘tumbling effect’ in action, where lack of achievement at school impacts on later life outcomes. However, in the next example, I demonstrate how the ‘slipping’ or ‘tumbling effect’ can be counterbalanced and potentially halted via school support. During interview, Veronica mentioned she had over four years’ experience working as a school LSA. Here she explains how she supported one young pupil.

Right, what he would do for a Freddo³⁹ bar. He was working with me; he’d have peace and quiet but what I found out... it’s my terminology, *he had everything that he wanted but not what he needed* [emphasis added]. He had the PlayStation, he had all the cars and the games; whatever he wanted he had. He didn’t have his mother and father. They were working shifts, working. Mum had her life, dad had his life, and this little boy was just there, all this business, and he couldn’t read. This little boy now I’m talking, at this time he was about 10 hitting comp; couldn’t read, didn’t have a reading age of six but he would work like a trouper with me... (Veronica, 51-year-old)

³⁹ ‘Freddo’ is a type of chocolate bar.

What is interesting about this account is the way in which Veronica sets the context: here 'peace and quiet' signals a learning context that allows the pupil to concentrate. Further, the use of the phrase, 'this little boy was just there', indicates there is a lack of stimulation and interaction in the home. However, I must be careful in making this assumption: there may well be other good reasons as to why the pupil had a reading age of a six-year-old. Nevertheless, what happens next is of more importance since this context forms the basis of the discussion chapter. With help and support, we learn that the pupil worked like a 'trouper'. Moreover, in the next breath, Veronica revealed that while working at the school, she studied a Teaching Assistant course at her local FE College. She continued:

The kid couldn't read; he couldn't access the work; he just couldn't do it... [however] 'cause they'd⁴⁰ seen I was working well with [pupil's name] they gave me another little group then to work with. And it was the same thing, give them a Freddo, they had a bit of quiet time, they had a bit of one to one, they loved it innit, and it was a little bit of competition then. Like I had a couple of these naughty boys, a little bit of competition with them, they were good as gold with me, plus they were thrilled to bits to think that they were helping me 'cause I was in school, I'm this grown woman now. I was Catherine's mum, I was coming into school and they were helping me 'cause I had to go to school, and my tutor was coming out, and I was being watched. They thought that was amazing...

At the beginning of the sequence Veronica's opening sentence focuses on the negative; the word 'couldn't' featuring three times. In contrast, the next few sentences signal a change in attitude and behaviour. Encouraged by the prospect of a chocolate bar, a measure of 'quiet time' and 'one to one' support, coupled with an element of 'competition', the pupils turn out to be as 'good as gold'. However, there is a further twist. When Veronica switches from the role of learning support officer to the role of learner in the classroom, the pupils are exposed to a different situated learning context. Watching Veronica perform not only offers the pupils an insight into the world of the adult learner, but also offers the pupils an opportunity to 'pitch-in' to help Veronica (Rogoff et al. 2015). In doing so the pupils draw a sense of satisfaction when supporting Veronica; the words 'thrilled to bits' and 'amazing' indicating positive thought and emotion. Consequently, in this situation reciprocal support is integral to the successful staff/pupil relationship. Further, the pupils understand what it feels like to be supported (exemplified in the phrase 'good as gold') and, more importantly, realise what it feels like to support others (Goleman 1996). This dimension is exemplified through the emotion of being 'thrilled to bits'. Hence, in the context of this learning situation, when negative thought and emotion is replaced by positive thought and emotion, the resistors to learning no

⁴⁰ 'They', in this case, refers to school managers.

longer play a significant part in the process. Reference to this process is outlined in the next chapter.

5.8 Summary of chapter

To summarise, this chapter explored participants' social background, home life, education, training and work. Through the creation and utilisation of a snapshot classification framework, I was able to highlight the differences and similarities in participants' learning and work lives in order to gain an overall understanding of the distance travelled throughout life. Navigating the ACL pathway was by no means easy or straightforward: there were always obstacles and hurdles to negotiate along the way. However, for participants willing to learn, the opportunity of change and transition was never far away. For those that embraced opportunity, several underlying mechanisms were apparent in this process. One common feature that played a significant part in the process was interaction with others, in different situated learning contexts; individuals learned by observing others (Lave and Wenger 1991). There was also evidence of participants requesting and accepting help; receiving feedback; and receiving effective and timely support from others. For example, participants drew support from family members (including children), tutors, peers, friends, employers, and others prepared to help. Also, some like David, thrived on the element of competition, being motivated and determined to beat their peers. On the other hand, those that were unwilling to learn, or those unwilling to accept help from others, or those who could not find appropriate support, were often blocked by doubts and fears. In turn, this placed limitations on what they could or could not do. Nevertheless, once problems were identified, intervention-based initiatives did go some way to overcoming the obstacles.

Finally, in the last section, I refer to the consequence of the 'tumbling or 'slipping' effect and, in doing so, presented two examples to explain how this process might be halted through effective, timely support. Subsequently, in the next chapter, I explore participants' lives as parents, while considering the nature and extent to which ACL participation influences and shapes their goals, values, styles and practices towards schooling children (Darling and Steinberg 1993).

CHAPTER 6 – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS 2: SCHOOLING CHILDREN

Having explored participants⁴¹ lives with respect to understanding their social background, education, training, and work (including volunteering), I now turn to explore their lives as parents. Here the main aim was to understand whether ACL participation influenced and shaped parenting goals, styles and practices towards the education of children and young people, and if so, to what extent ACL played a part. In addition, I was also interested in investigating the ways in which non-ACL participation might influence and shape parents' involvement in schooling.

In this chapter, findings are drawn from the second part of the interview session that aims to understand the nature of parental involvement in schooling. First, I investigate the reasons behind parents' choice of school, their expectations of the school, their role and responsibilities, as well as hopes and aspirations for children and young people. Second, I explore the dynamic of the home-school relationship in order to discover the extent to which parents draw upon and, indeed, utilise ACL experiences in their everyday educational practices at home. Finally, towards the end of the interview I conduct a simple pie chart exercise. The rationale for doing so was to draw attention to the fact that children spend significantly less time at school in comparison to time spent at home and in the community. This, I hoped, would raise awareness of the fundamental role parents play in educating their children⁴².

6.1 School choice

At the beginning of the session I was interested to understand the reasons behind parents' choice of school. Just under two thirds based their choice on locality, convenience and familiarity, although parents also considered different types of schools, for example, Welsh medium, faith-based or multi-cultural schools. Karen and John chose convenience and familiarity over all other considerations.

I chose it only just because it was next to the house in the beginning but because I'm in [name of area] now, I've just kept them in the school just until I get a school nearer my address and because their friends are there. It is always about keeping them happy, isn't it? (Karen, mother of two)

⁴¹ From this point, onwards participants will be referred to as parents.

⁴² On a personal note, I had always assumed that children spent significantly more time at school. Therefore, it came as a surprise to learn that children only spend 14 percent of their time at school per calendar year (Bransford et al, 1999) – see Figure 3.2, page 39.

On the other hand, John, valued familiarity and the reassurance of extended family support as important.

I thought it would be nice if [son's name] went to the same school I did but he only spent, I think was it about four months, and then they closed the school then. So, we didn't have much time to choose between I think, it was [school 1] and [school 2] but we favoured [school 1] because he had cousins and other family members in the same school. So, for support I obviously thought [school 1] would be the best school. (John, father of two)

In sharp contrast, just under a third of parents in the study actively sought out the best schools in their area. Decisions were based on information gathered from: school visits; ESTYN⁴³ reports; friends of family that worked in the school, and via the experience of working in school settings i.e. some parents had undertaken school placements as part of their ACL training. Parents also referred to childhood experiences of initial education (good and bad) during the decision-making process. This 'reaction to schooling' dimension (Reay et al. 2011) appeared continuously throughout the narrative and, in many respects, is key to understanding parents' motivations and actions towards school choice.

As we learned in Chapter 5, Amy's childhood memory of bullying was a tale of lost potential. To avoid history repeating itself, Amy took great care to choose the right school for her children. Since Amy had undertaken a six-month youth training placement in a primary school some years before having her children she knew what to look out for. She explained:

I made sure that I knew the structure of the classrooms, the size and the number of children who would be in the setting, what he would be doing each day and things like that... And basically, tried to find out as much as I could to make sure that the school was right for him.

Indeed, after sending her daughter to Welsh Meithrin⁴⁴ and being impressed with the setup, Amy later decided that both children should be educated through the medium of Welsh, much to her parents' shock and surprise⁴⁵. She said:

⁴³ Estyn inspects quality and standards across schools and further education providers in Wales.

⁴⁴ Welsh Meithrin is a type of nursery provision that specialises in teaching children of pre-school age through the medium of Welsh.

⁴⁵ Amy broke with tradition: no other child in the family had been educated via the medium of Welsh.

[A]fter reading the pros and cons, I felt that it was in their best interest to give them every opportunity that I could give. The provision was there. Again, it was a fantastic school; head teacher's enthusiastic. (Amy, mother of two)

As explained earlier, failure to reach one's potential at school is often a key motivator to participate in ACL. Here Amy's negative experience of initial education combined with exposure to later experiences in the school setting (via a youth training placement) play an important role in the decision-making process. Likewise, the experience of poor initial education influenced Polly's choice of school. In Chapter 5, we learned that through following a vocation-based curriculum at a specialised school some miles from home, Polly was denied the opportunity to achieve academically. Considering this aspect then, it is not surprising why Polly wanted her son to attend the local mainstream school. She explained:

I wanted him to go local (1) because he would be with the children that lived locally plus it was (2) easy, even though he would have a taxi to school and stuff... And, because I liked our local school and that's where I wanted him to go, and I didn't really know much about the other school, and I didn't feel that he needed to go to a specialist unit because... physically he had a problem but intellectually he was very clever. (Polly, mother of two)

Since both Polly's children are disabled, Polly was determined to ensure they would have the best possible chances education-wise. However, on registering her son at the local mainstream primary school, the application was declined (mainly because, in accepting her son, the authority would have had to make several adjustments to accommodate him). After a long legal battle, Polly eventually won the right for her son, and later her daughter, to attend both local mainstream primary and secondary school. Nevertheless, entering a costly legal battle requires a certain amount of confidence and fortitude. At interview, Polly explained that although she was a confident child, who thrived on competition, she had not always been so confident in adult life. Certainly, volunteering as a school governor had helped raise her confidence but it is interesting to note that when she first started working in this role, she felt 'totally out of my comfort zone'. Polly explained:

I mean in that space of ten years I've done my Women into Public Life training, and I've done so many other different things. So, I have far more confidence now... In fact, I don't think there's any meetings where I don't go to, where I don't, you know, maybe challenge something or say something about something that I feel needs to be questioned, or umm or thought about. So, as a governor now, I feel much more confident... and I will ask questions whereas back then I was a bit kind of like, ooh not sure about this. (Polly, mother of two)

Whilst it is easy to acknowledge the distance travelled in confidence terms in this extract, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent ACL had influenced Polly, as age and experience has likely played a part in the process over the last 10 years. However, interested to know more I drilled down further by asking Polly to what extent had learning helped her gain in confidence. Polly was an active member of a women's support group. Here she had access to a variety of training and development courses, which helped her grow in confidence. Since the nature and extent of ACL cannot be explained in one or two sentences here, see my analysis of Polly's account where I highlight 'facilitator' and 'blocker' mechanisms inherent in the learning process (Appendix 15). In contrast, the next example, shows how happy memories of school, coupled with a desire to secure a different type of education for one's child, influences the decision-making process. Here, Robyn, one of the higher-level learners explained the rationale for choice of school:

I would have loved to have had a Welsh medium education I think, and my partner's a Welsh speaker. To me why not give your kids the opportunity to learn languages and, you know, like to be able to speak two languages fluently by the age of seven. I hoped it would open doors for them in their minds to pick other things, or like a kind of Montessori thing; you know just be a different way, their mind would develop differently, and their learning skills would develop differently... The school we chose was just outside the catchment area, our catchment area... it was just sort of a pretty little school and I think my first primary school was very small and [husband's name] was from a small village, small school. Just loved the idea of it. (Robyn, mother of four)

Indeed, all four of Robyn's children were attending Welsh medium schools at time of interview, even though Robyn understood very little Welsh. All three mothers considered a combination of factors when selecting their school of choice and clearly, experiences of initial education played a significant part in the decision-making process but of note also, is the ACL aspect, where a youth training placement exposed Amy to school practices and methods. Debbie also drew on this aspect.

As we learned in the previous chapter, Debbie had a tough childhood; spending time in and out of care during her teenage years. Despite this, at the time Debbie perceived school to be a happy, safe environment: a place of sanctuary away from the troubles at home. This context therefore underpinned the main goal and motivation in choice of school. Only here ACL participation helped her make that choice. Just prior to her first child starting school, Debbie had completed a teaching assistant course. This involved undertaking a placement in a school just outside her local catchment area. She commented:

I got an insight of the school before she went: how it worked, what the teachers were like, what sort of things they taught, how they taught it... It was a very family sense there, very community. They were very much for each other and helping each other out, and they seemed to care about the children. Umm that was what I liked initially and obviously, the results, the school, the children leaving like in Year 6, umm the levels that the children were leaving at were at a very high level as opposed to primary schools within my area. (Debbie, mother of two)

In this context, learning helped Debbie to develop an understanding of the school in question. By *observing* what happened in the school setting Debbie was exposed to the school's values, systems, methods and practices, what Lave and Wenger (1991) would describe as 'legitimate peripheral participation.' This experience ultimately made Debbie's decision regarding choice of school that much easier and, here again, there is a strong sense of emotional support on display; an ingredient essential to enhancing and boosting development and learning.

Unlike most parents in this study two fathers played no part in the decision-making process. Bernard (48) was estranged from his partner at the time, so had no say in the matter, while Liam recalled leaving the decision up to his wife. Nevertheless, all parents (apart from Polly who battled through the court) were successful in securing their school of choice. However, three parents later reported moving their child to a different school. This was mainly due to issues with bullying or inappropriate behaviour by peers, which school staff and management had failed to address.

In this section, we learned how parents drew on a combination of factors to make decisions about their child's education. All parents drew on their experiences of initial education to make those decisions however parents with lower level qualifications tended to base choice of school on familiarity and convenience, while parents with higher level qualifications considered a range of factors. In addition, a few parents considered experiences linked to ACL school placements that, in turn, influenced school choice. To sum up, most parents put considerable time and effort into the choosing the right school for their child; in some instances, even moving their child to another school when issues at the school could not be resolved. This challenges the idea that parents from working class backgrounds do not care about the choices they make for their children. Indeed, for some parents, even those with limited finances and resources, choice of school was important as most wanted the best education for their children and wanted their children to be happy. The next section explores parents' expectations of their selected school.

6.2 Parents' expectations of school

As discussed in Chapter 3, when children start school parents already have “ideas and practices that impact their interpretation and incorporation of school culture” (Graue and Prager 1999, p. 2). Subsequently when I asked parents to comment on their expectations of the school some parents, especially those with higher level qualifications, were very clear about the type of education they wanted for their children, for example, see Robyn's account in the previous section.

In contrast, when I put this question to parents with lower level or no qualifications, the answers elicited were very different to that of their higher educated counterparts. Owen, for example, struggled to give an answer.

I don't know if I had any expectations. I just wanted them to, I don't know, I just wanted them to have the best of everything like; that's why I work, you know, I work hard for it like. Whatever they want, they have like sort of thing. I don't know. I don't know how to answer it. (Owen, father of three)

Despite wanting the 'best' for his children (parenting goal) Owen held no expectations (parenting style) with respect to his children's education (Darling and Steinberg 1993). This is seen in his struggle to answer the question. Likewise, Liam had no real expectation other than believing that parents had to be in a *'privileged type club'* to access the school in his catchment area. He commented:

I didn't know much about the school: my wife did... I thought this is going to be a posh school, you know, you've got to wipe your feet before you go into the gate. That's the expectation... that was put over to me.

Indeed, exposure to a very different type of school culture was a revelation for Liam. He went on:

After my child was actually in the school and he was learning, I found that they were just like any other school, but I found that they were like encouraging the children more, which was a little bit of a shock culture for me because I didn't really see that when I was in a primary school. (Liam, father of two)

Here the difference in school cultures is telling: this is seen in Liam's *'shock'* at learning the schools were so different. Maybe the reason for his shock can be put down to the fact that Liam's former primary school was situated in a highly-disadvantaged area while his son's school was situated in one of the most affluent parts of town. Other parents like Karen, were also not too sure about what to expect from the school. She said:

[W]ell they gave us a booklet to explain about the Foundation Phase⁴⁶ but still nobody understood what it was. Because we wasn't... our education was different when we were small, so we always think of our education to their education. I know it changes but that's just how I thought. So, I thought they'd be the same but it's not, it's changed a lot. (Karen, mother of two)

Even though Karen left school with good GCSE passes, her attempt to conceptualise her child's education in light of her education presents a problem: a problem she cannot solve. Just like Liam, Karen saw a difference in school strategies, methods and practices. However, what she cannot work out is how to respond to these differences. Consequently, when parents do not understand how current education strategies work, for example, in 2010 the Welsh Government introduced the Foundation Phase curriculum for all three to seven-year-olds (Welsh Government 2015a) therein lies a problem. Nevertheless, there are ways to overcome this barrier. Family-learning initiatives are particularly effective in helping parents understand what is taught in schools and are a useful source of support for parents. Indeed, work here has significantly boosted parents' and children's learning provided, of course, that parents are available, ready, and willing to take part in the initiatives (NIACE 2013). Taking responsibility for children's education was another area of interest. Next, I wanted to explore parents' perceptions of what those responsibilities were.

6.3 Parents' perceptions of role and responsibilities

In response to the question, 'Where do you think responsibility for educating your child(ren) lies?' most parents believed it to be an equal partnership between themselves and the school. Only two parents, Amy and Frances, felt that responsibility for educating their children lay solely with them, with the school providing the teaching element. However, during the interviews it became apparent that parents' perceptions varied greatly.

Drilling down further, I wanted to know more about what parents thought those responsibilities were. This question engendered a variety of answers. Some parents felt it was important to teach their children basic manners, to be truthful, to have respect for others, and to help children understand boundaries and rules. Others stated that, in addition to their children acquiring these qualities, it was their responsibility to teach

⁴⁶ This is the statutory curriculum for all 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales.

children to read, write, count, and to understand colours of the spectrum. However, some parents placed greater emphasis on the softer skills, for example, of wanting their children to be well mannered and respectful, more so than helping their children with the basic skills of reading, writing and counting. A gendered aspect of parenting also came to the fore in the interviews: for example, three fathers in the study interpreted their responsibilities to be the 'earner' and 'protector' rather than the 'educator' in the family (Medved et al. 2006). Higher-level learner Bernard was the exception. After gaining custody of his daughter from his estranged partner some years previously, he discovered his daughter was two years behind her peers. Here he explains how he managed to help his daughter catch up at school⁴⁷.

I'd had her a couple of years. Because I brought her reading up, I went to the headmaster and asked if she could have help with her maths. I can't do both. I'm already hammering this child with her reading and thinking she's behind with her maths as well. So, she needs help with that; so, I went to the headmaster. No, she can't have any help with her maths because she is up-to-date with her reading. (Bernard, father of one)

Although the reasons are unclear why Bernard's daughter was not entitled to support, it appears that Bernard's request was fulfilled in part. He explained:

[My] daughter was put the other side of the teaching assistant although she is not employed [to support her] but if she needs anything she can... get a little bit of help from the teaching assistant. It did kind of work because the boy that was in the class who was STF⁴⁸, there was competition between the two of them then, which pushed my daughter, pushed her to come along, and it did work. Even though I was doing it at home with her as well. (Bernard, father of one)

There are three mechanisms of support identified in Bernard's description. First, Bernard worked at home to support his daughter to catch up; second, the school places his daughter next to a learning support assistant in the classroom and; third, sitting next to another pupil introduces an element of competition, which pushes his daughter to want to do better. This combination of mechanisms not only helped his daughter catch up but also halted further educational slippage. In contrast, John (who had no qualifications) initially thought it was the school's responsibility to educate his child. John only became fully aware that he and his partner were responsible for their son's education when his son changed schools, whereupon soon afterwards they discovered he had fallen behind. During the interview, John explained:

⁴⁷ During the interview, Bernard's reported that his daughter had passed her GCSEs, and was currently studying at college, with a view to progressing to university.

⁴⁸ STF= specialist teaching facility. In this case, Bernard is referring to learning support assistance.

[W]hen we first went there he was two years below what he should've been. So, I don't know what they were doing in the other school with him. But like, so we know we can't blame the school as well 'cause we should have known as being parents but 'cause we were young, we were relying on the school really to educate him more than us. (John, father of two)

Indeed, once staff in the new school identified the problems, his partner was offered a place on the school's family learning programme. Since attending parenting classes both parents now understand the role they must play in their son's education. Through discussions with his partner, John had come to realise his educational responsibilities as a father. He commented:

Now that we know, we do a lot more with him... I think we were a bit too daft the first few years of his school life. I think we did, we did secretly think it was the school's job to teach him not us like, but we understand now it's not; it's *our* [emphasis added] son. (John, father of two)

As explained earlier, family learning plays an important role in Welsh education. Designed to raise levels of literacy and numeracy amongst parents and children; family learning offers parents a chance to learn new skills to support their children as they progress through school. The Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme in Wales, for example, is one such initiative designed to help bring parents, teachers, children, and members of the community together to support children's education in the home, and at primary school (Save the Children 2016).

6.4 The home-school relationship

In this section, I explore the home-school relationship in primary and secondary education, including the monitoring and tracking of children's progress; the school report; parent evenings, and parental volunteering in schools.

6.4.1 Home-school relationships in primary education

Overall, parents reported home-school relationships during the primary education stage to be effective, supportive and good-natured although, as discussed earlier, some parents did express dissatisfaction with some primary schools that resulted in children being moved to other primary schools.

The literature on home-school relationships tends to focus a lot on schools reaching out to parents, and likewise on parents maintaining active partnerships with the school (McNamara et al. 2000), but this is generally easier said than done. In this study, parents that worked full-time had no time to commit to the school during the day. Sharon, for example, found it extremely difficult to get involved. She said:

How many half days I've had to take to go down for a reading club? It takes place in the middle of the day so that's not aimed at me as a working parent. However, my child then is the one sitting in the room with no parent there, and I feel so *guilty* [emphasis added] with reading cafes and lots of different things that take part during the day to involve parents. However, if you're working, it's not a possibility.

Certainly, employment commitments were an issue for many parents; their noticeable absence at school indicated in feelings of guilt, characterised through images of the 'selfish mam' (Mannay 2016, p. 79). Karen, for example, found it difficult to attend some school events. This problem was further compounded by the fact that Karen's relationship with the school had always been distant and tenuous; mainly because Karen perceived the school to be uninviting and unapproachable. Irritated by this situation, she said:

They've just started this thing, Learning Together, where they do maths but it's always on one day, in the daytime when I couldn't go there because I got to go to work. Do you know what I mean? I couldn't have a day off every week just to go there. If they could do like in an afternoon, or spread out a different day, or after school even, it's better but that's the only thing I know they do. There's nothing. They don't like, invite you to the meetings and the PTAs, and things like that, it's... No, nothing at all, and if you've got a problem it's always, 'Oh, see us later, see us tomorrow.' Always trying to rush. You can never just go and chat. (Karen, mother of two)

Unlike Karen, Frances, on the other hand, had found it relatively easy to connect with her children's teachers mainly because she worked as a part-time lunch-time supervisor in the school⁴⁹. Subsequently, her relationship with school teaching staff had been a very close and productive one, especially since the school had an 'open door' policy. She commented:

Any concerns you've got you just go in and you have a chat about it but also, they... it's not the kind of school... It's like right we'll do this and this and this, to get this stopped. They involve you, they say right what do you think will be best for your child, how we handle it? And they really do listen to a parent's opinion. (Frances, mother of two)

⁴⁹ The head teacher later offered Frances a temporary teaching assistant position.

Spending time in the school environment certainly had its benefits. Volunteering for the school helped parents (although mainly mothers in this case) to learn more about school life, as well as keep an eye on their child's progress. Also, being employed by the school granted privileged access to teaching staff. Liam's wife, for example, was a lunch-time supervisor; here any sign of slippage enabled his wife to 'have a few quiet words to say - look what's happening with...?' However, not long after his wife left the job issues around their son's learning surfaced. Liam explained:

[W]hen it came to the end of that school, so like 5 or 6, then we started to find out that there was a bit of lapsing going on 'cause my son didn't have the education for English. He was getting left behind. (Liam, father of two)

Maintaining good communication links between home and school is vital. Schools therefore need to be consistent in their approach towards keeping parents informed and, likewise, parents must show interest in their children's learning. Without a good system of monitoring children can easily slip behind in their work. At primary school stage, children are most often monitored through weekly learning logs. This is an effective way for parents and teachers to keep in touch. I shall return to this aspect in section 6.4.3 – monitoring and tracking children's progress.

Depending on how well schools and parents work together, the home-school relationship can be a close or a rather distant one. However, at primary education stage, working together tends to be far easier because parents liaise only with a small number of staff at each key stage. In contrast, home-school relationships at secondary school level are far more tenuous. The next section explains the reasons for this difference.

6.4.2 Home-school relationships in secondary education

While home-school relationships at primary school level were generally good, when children transitioned to secondary school, here the home-school relationship was tenuous and far more difficult to maintain. Even when parents took an interest in their children's education, there were still issues to contend with. As Isobel, a Level 3 learner at time of interview⁵⁰ remarked:

[W]hen they started high school, I just felt it was like a big break. You know it was like, Oh! My god, right okay! And of course, the girls now they're teenagers. Everything okay with school? 'Yeah!' Says it quickly, and what's happened with so and so? 'Yeah, nothing!' Oh right, what did you do in science or what did you

⁵⁰ Isobel is currently studying a degree at university.

do in English? 'Nothing, mmm, just talked.' And you just... they're not going to tell you, are they? They don't want to know; they don't want to get into conversation with their parents at that age.

Isobel continued:

I don't feel as if I've got enough input... At home, obviously [because] I can help them with homework, but I don't feel... I feel broken off a bit. (Isobel, mother of two)

For children, the move to secondary school is a major transition phase. During this phase schools encourage children to gain a sense of autonomy and independence; a loosening of mothers' apron strings so to speak. Indeed, the extracts above give a clear example of the beginning of this separation (Crozier 1999). Nevertheless, home-school relationships still need to be maintained at this stage. However, maintaining good communication links at secondary level is more difficult. This was a major source of frustration for some parents. Polly, for example, pointed out the issues by saying:

It's a bigger challenge to speak to the teachers at the comprehensive school as well because you can leave a message saying I'd like to speak to them. Then it either doesn't get to them, or they just don't bother phoning you back.

However, undeterred Polly continued:

I tend to only get a response when I send a, not a necessarily stropmy email, but a 'to the point email' of this is my concern, and I would like this... It's much easier in primary school. The differences between the two are quite; well, they're just poles apart really.

Likewise, a lack of contact between schools and parents also created educational 'slippage' problems. Isobel, for example, was clearly annoyed to find out her daughter had done badly in a French test, and questioned the teacher's poor communication skills by saying:

So why didn't you contact us before then? You've got my e-mail address, you've got my phone number. Why didn't you ring? Why didn't you contact me? Why leave it a whole year before telling me that there was a problem? You know... there should be a bit more contact. Definitely.

However, herein lies the problem. As mentioned in Chapter 3, unlike primary schools, secondary schools are far bigger institutions, with more staff and pupils. Maintaining good lines of communication therefore can be more difficult (Crozier 1999).

6.4.3 Monitoring and tracking children's progress through school

In this section of the interview, I was interested to find out how parents monitored their children's progress at school. At primary school, parents were kept up to date through children's weekly learning logs, and daily discussions with teachers at the school gate. However, parents found it more difficult to monitor progress in the secondary education stage. During interview, Robyn (a higher-level learner) appeared to be very switched on to education matters. In fact, all her children were doing extremely well at school. However, the risk of educational slippage seemed never very far away. Robyn explained:

[I]t turns out that [son's name] has just been doing the absolute basic that he needs to do, particularly in science. I have an issue with the school that they should have flagged up that he had an issue in science at parents' evening and whatever. We didn't know that he was struggling at all. To be in Set 4 like he's with the children who have the greatest difficulty learning. Anyway, I've been doing physics with him this last term and, yeah, it's not been easy, and he doesn't get it. So, for me saying to the school, I know he can do it. I think the school has let him down, and they've failed him, but I took my foot right off the gas. (Robyn, mother of four)

In this extract, Robyn highlights an important issue; neither her son, George, nor the school alerted her to the slippage issue. However, on discovering the problem Robyn quickly reacts to the situation. She continued:

So now he has to write his homework diary in English, so I can understand it and, really, I'm checking up on him constantly, and actually he's had difficulty, he doesn't understand what his teacher needs him to do, and he will not ask for help. So, I'm much more on top of [son's name]. We have two revision sessions a week and then my 10-year-old joins in, he does maths and he does it because he wants to be with us which is lovely. (Robyn, mother of four)

Here Robyn has put in place the necessary support mechanisms. By monitoring her son's homework diary and putting in place not one but two revision sessions a week. In effect, this gives George an opportunity to catch up. Incidentally, there is another bonus when Robyn's younger son joins the revision session; here the opportunity to sit next to his mother and brother helps George's brother concentrate on his maths' homework. This is important as later in the chapter we learn how situated contexts in the home stimulates interest in learning (Lave 1991). Also, parents sometimes clashed with teachers. However, in the following example, exposure to learning over the past six or seven years had equipped Yvonne with a newfound confidence. She explained:

They've got reading journals now that the teacher is supposed to write in and they made a comment once in there, 'Your son hasn't read.' So, I was like, right

okay, fair enough and I said umm... okay, sorry. You know I felt like awful I got to apologise... So, as the week went on I thought he hasn't read in school, she hasn't written this down, and I put a comment back, 'No I'm disappointed my son hasn't read in school this week,' and the teacher sent me a note back and she said, 'We don't always document in the reading journal', and I put back, 'If it's not documented, it hasn't been done.'

In this scenario, learning helped Yvonne feel differently; considering that she wouldn't have said 'boo to a sheep' prior to learning, we can see how far Yvonne has travelled in terms of confidence since she is now no longer afraid to challenge the word of the professional. While monitoring and tracking children's development was difficult at the secondary education stage, the one area where parents could get concrete information was the school report.

6.4.4 School report

For the most part, parents with higher-level qualifications reported few problems understanding the report although Debbie (who is dyslexic) admitted that she had struggled in the past. When I asked whether studying a degree had helped her to better understand the report, she said:

I think I can understand it more so now because I'm more in the academic type thing but beforehand no, I don't think they, teachers make reports accessible for everybody. You know, for the normal Joe that have got, you know, haven't got degrees and what not, I think some people will find it really difficult to read what they're trying to say; as I do, or have done in the past. (Debbie, mother of two)

I asked Debbie to further explain how learning had helped her.

Well I've just become more aware of the words I suppose they use and the approaches to, you know, education as a whole. Because I'm in the education role as well, I think, you know, I know where they're coming from whereas before it's quite hard to decipher what they're trying to say. (Debbie, mother of two)

For Debbie, ACL participation and working in an educational role has helped her to understand the language of the school report. In contrast, many parents with lower level qualifications reported they had experienced difficulty in understanding the school report. John, for example, could not understand why the school, on two occasions, had written another child's name on his son's school report. While the school is clearly at fault here, the fact that John had not picked up on the teacher's 'cut and paste' to save time regime, highlights his lack of understanding of the way in which school reports are written nowadays. On the other hand, Caroline, who was learning to read at time of interview, was struggling with the language of the report. She said:

Sometimes I don't understand most of it. So, I have to take it to my English class and say look [tutor name], I don't understand what she's trying to say by here. (Caroline, mother of one)

Here participating in ACL has its advantages since Caroline can address the problem directly by asking others for help to decipher the report. Similarly, Frances also encountered the same problem when her 10-year-old son brought home his last ever primary school report. She explained:

[T]here was a lot of big words in there and I was a bit like I don't know what that means, and I have to go Google it and stuff. My daughter's, because she's in year 7, it's kind of just basic stuff but my son, he's really, really, good at maths. So, they're writing all these massive words in, and I'm just like, yeah, I don't know what that means but then it helps them because I say to my son, oh, what does that mean? And then he tells me, and he's like, 'Oh, why don't you know what that means?' And I say, because I didn't do well in school boy. So, it's kind of a balance because if he helps me it's showing him you've got to do well in school because I don't know it. (Frances, mother of two)

Despite achieving the benchmark 5 GCSE passes or more some 15 years ago, Frances continually mentioned throughout the interview that she '*knows nothing*'. However, what is interesting here is the context through which Frances communicates the idea of '*knowing nothing*' to her son. In asking her son to explain what the '*big words*' mean he duly reciprocates by answering the question. However, this is not the main point. The main point I want to make here is how Frances presses home the concept of not doing well in school. Here she is telling her son, you will not be able to understand the '*big words*' in future if, like me, you do not do well in school⁵¹.

Since leaving school, Frances has not participated in any lengthy episodes of learning, apart from 'on the job' learning. Neither has she studied any courses past Level 2. However, during the interview, I was amazed to hear that both children were doing so well in school. She said:

My son he's just done the national tests and he's above average. He's on everything. He's well at the top of the bar and then my daughter's coming in average for her age, but the high-end average for her age. (Frances, mother of two)

⁵¹ Although Frances passed her GCSE exams at 16, throughout the interview she often talked in terms of failure. Maybe this was due to her mental health problems. Had she not suffered as badly as she did as a child, she may well have reached her potential, and perhaps even exceeded expectations.

Initially I found this situation perplexing; I could not understand how Frances had managed to school her children so well, considering her remark about 'knowing nothing'. However, on closer examination of the narrative I realised how Frances had managed to circumvent the problem of 'knowing nothing'. In fact, Frances' educational goal, style and practices were geared distinctly to the school's mission. Here Frances outlined her strategy.

I find, what I've always done is when my children move up a class I'll go and talk to the teacher and find out right, like what stuff are you going to be using? If they are talking, what will you say to quieten them down? You know, [teacher's name] is, you know, right, listening ears on. So, I use that then in the house with my daughter. You know I'll use what the teachers do and lead it on into the house so almost (1) she can see we are sticking together but (2) If she does it in school for 'listening ears on', she'll do it in the house. So, it's almost like a continuous. I try and put stuff in.

Here we see the process in action: at the beginning of the school term Frances speaks to the teachers to find out what methods they use in class (parenting style). She then mimics what the teachers do in the home context (parenting practice). Also, Frances worked as a lunchtime supervisor and volunteered for the school a couple of hours a week. This was another avenue she exploited to great effect. Much like David's strategy of observing others in the workplace Frances did the same, but in the school setting. This mechanism appears to support conclusions drawn from a review by Gorard et al. (2012) where they point out that parental involvement could affect child outcomes by "parent-school alignment": in which the cultural norms of communication and behaviour in the home may be made closer to those expected in school" (p.35). During the interview, Frances mentioned she had recently received a letter from the school, pointing out she was helping her children 'a little bit too much'. Even so, while Frances has worked out a way to help her children at the primary education stage, it remains to be seen how well she can support her son when he transitions to secondary school. Later in the interview, Frances seemed unsure, 'I don't know if that's going to be the same when he goes to comp mind.'

Likewise, Liam had difficulty understanding the targets in the school report. However, he managed to overcome this problem by drawing on economic capital to access social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Possessing the finances, allowed Liam access to his son's private English tutor who could explain what the targets meant. Even higher-level learner Robyn was unsure about certain aspects of the report. She argued:

And this idea of levels, they're always giving levels. Never really sunk into my head and then suddenly they're in secondary school and the levels are mentioned and now with [son's name] in his science group, for example, 'Well we told you he was level 5', and I said, but for me even though I've got four kids, that's got no context. It could be at level 5 out of 5 or it could be level 5 out of fifty. It's your responsibility to tell me what that means. It means nothing.
(Robyn, mother of four)

Understanding how to interpret the school report was a site of contention for some parents as were their experiences at parent evenings.

6.4.5 Parent evenings

In this section of the interview I asked parents the question, 'How do you find parent evenings?' Many parents had experienced parent evenings as being informative and useful at the primary education stage, although even here there were some issues.

[My daughter] had a lovely teacher last year. So, she had a good parents' evening where you could chat without being like a robot. You could chat like it's nice and friendly. Then I remember her reception teacher she is quite... I don't know, she wasn't very nice, so it makes it harder then. (Karen, mother of two)

And when attending his children's parents' evening, Liam explained:

I found as if they wanted to rush it to get you in, say what they had to say and fob you off. It was like yeah... okay thanks now, bye and that was the type of attitude.
(Liam, father of two)

Parents' evenings can be very rushed affairs and often there is little time available for parents and teachers to have a good chat, much less to establish a rapport, especially at secondary school stage. As Sharon put it:

They're a bit of a joke really, I've got to say. This early one is: I don't think they knew who they were in the comp. You know they've got so many, haven't they? And they're like do you want to write the name down, some of them take a quick look, and you can see some of them wing it. One or two of them knew. I know the Art teacher knew who she was because she's good at Art, and she talks to her all the time however she doesn't like sports. The sports teacher didn't even know who she was. (Sharon, mother of three)

Lack of time was also an issue for some parents. Isobel, clearly frustrated, moaned:

Oh, I hate French, she's horrible, and you go to see her, and you ask her questions, and she sits there and says, 'Your time's up.' That's what she said to me last time, 'Your time's up.' (Isobel, mother of two)

On the other hand, Amy had other issues to contend with. Here we see how Amy's initial education affects the way she interacts with the teachers.

I find them quite daunting when I go... when the teachers explain things and if I think, if I don't fully understand, I have to ask them again or do they think that I'm stupid then or something... it does take me back to my education... and I do struggle with that side of things. (Amy, mother of two)

Amy is committed to getting the best for her children education-wise (goal) however in the above extract, we see Amy's emotional state highlighted in negative words like 'struggle' and 'do they think I'm stupid?' This is a major blocking mechanism, which undermines Amy's confidence and self-efficacy (Bandura et al. 2001) that, in turn, limits the extent to which she can support her children in subject areas she is not familiar with. There were also issues around specific needs for children during transition from primary to the secondary education. Prior to starting secondary school, Mary had informed the new school that her daughter was dyslexic. At parents' evening Mary was curious to check out whether the teachers had received the information. She said, 'I told everyone as I went around, every tutor and they were like, 'Oh I didn't realise, I didn't realise'. In this scenario, Mary's efforts might well be enough to avoid slippage. However, if teachers are unaware of pupils' support needs, there is a real danger that children can quickly fall behind.

A good home-school relationship is an important feature of schooling. However, as indicated this was dependent on whether parents felt comfortable and confident to deal with school and staff, whether parents felt staff showed interest in their children, and whether lines of communication between home and school were good. Despite this, some parents overcame these issues by volunteering for the school. The next section considers this aspect.

6.4.6 Volunteering at school

In this section parents were asked the question, 'Have you ever volunteered for the school?' In total eleven mothers and one father had volunteered but only at the primary education stage. Six mothers had been involved with parent teacher associations while two mothers had served on school governing bodies. In addition, and as part of ACL, five mothers had completed a voluntary placement in a school. Activities focused mainly on assisting teachers in the classroom by listening to children read, and by helping at school fetes, and school trips. Unlike mothers, due to work commitments, fathers tended not to get too involved in school related activities, which links in with the gendered nature of schooling and parenting (Medved et al. 2006).

Aside from parents undertaking ACL placements, parents volunteered for several reasons. First, some parents felt their children would receive better treatment from staff if they volunteered. As Veronica stated, 'I felt it didn't harm one little bit... to be seen around the school'. Second, others were curious to know more about the school, and what their children were learning. Therefore, spending time in the school setting offered parents an insight into teachers' methods and practices. Third, having a presence in the school also meant that parents could keep a close eye on children. As Frances pointed out:

I feel that my kids, seeing my face around the school... gives them that extra push because they know I am out and about, and they do know that the teachers are talking to me. So, if they misbehave it's going to get back to me. (Frances, mother of two)

Certainly, volunteering for the school paid dividends for parents in the shape of better communication, and in knowing what went on in the school. Having investigated the school context, I now focus on exploring life at home.

6.5 Educational support at home

This section explores the learning in the context of the home including after-school home routines, homework help, and other forms of educational support, for example, private tuition.

6.5.1 After-school home routines

In this section of the interview I asked parents to talk about their after-school home routines. Here practices differed enormously; some parents appeared to be very organised, having a set routine, while others appeared to have no clear set routine. Frances, a married mother of two children, approached the after-school routine in almost military like precision. After school, she allowed the children to play for an hour, after which the family sat down together for an evening meal. This was followed by homework hour, bath and bedtime story.

In contrast Eleanor, single mother of three, took a completely different approach; what the family did after school very much depended on her children's mood, for example, sometimes they played on their iPad, watched a movie, or just 'chilled out' and did

nothing. Similarly, Karen, single mother of two young children, had no set routine in the home. She said, 'After school is not usually a time when we do a lot of stuff 'cause I'm tired from work, they're tired from school; they just want to see their friends and play'. Here we see how different attitudes towards learning affect parenting styles and practices.

Regarding children's involvement in after school activities, most children were or had been involved in some sort of community activity, for example, after school groups, sports clubs, swimming, gymnastics, Scout and Guide groups, and so on. However, many parents were restricted financially, which meant that some children missed out on the more expensive activities like weekend football academies or ballet classes. Despite this, Robyn, married mother of four children, found a creative way around the problem of finance; referring to her well-established social network (Bourdieu 1986) she offered to look after her neighbour's child (neighbour is a piano teacher) in exchange for free piano lessons for her son.

Even when parents had the money to pay for activities, there were still barriers to overcome. John, for example, explained that very rarely did his two children go swimming because his partner could not manage both children in the swimming pool at the same time. When I asked if he could accompany the family he shook his head, explaining that he was too embarrassed to go swimming because of his 'skinny legs'. Likewise, Frances rarely let her 11-year-old son out of her sight. Much to his chagrin, she would not allow him to join the local football club since she feared the older boys might influence or lead him astray. Later when I interviewed him he pleaded with me to convince his mother to let him join. Not wanting to take sides and being careful to observe the ethics of the situation, I concluded that it was best not to get involved, and instead encouraged him to talk to his mother about the issue. This situation is not unique: research by Eccles (2005) highlights people's fear of living in disadvantaged areas, arguing that it is only when "parents can trust the schools and neighborhoods to provide many opportunities and few risks for their children, they are likely to allow their children to participate fully in these resources" (Eccles 2005, p. 192).

6.5.2 Homework help

Having established what parents and children did after school, I was interested to drill down further to explore the subject of homework help. While most parents had helped

their children with homework at some point, it became increasingly evident as the interviews progressed that a few parents were clearly struggling to help their children, even during the early years of primary school education. Parents with no or low-level qualifications appeared to be struggling the most: the major barrier being parents' low-level literacy and numeracy skills. During the interview Owen, Tom and Eleanor talked about their difficulties. Owen explained:

[I]f they've got homework, I'm not that, I've never been that type, see. I don't know, it's never been drummed into me, you know, the homework. Never liked it anyway, I don't expect them to like it so I'd rather take them to the park. (Owen, father of three children)

Here Owen's attitude is to bury his head in the sand, preferring to focus on doing 'fun activities' with his children while delegating the responsibility of homework help to his wife, Yvonne. Likewise, Tom and Eleanor looked to others for support.

[I]f it's something like he's had homework on Friday night... I'll look at it and say, 'I can't do it. We're down Bampa's tomorrow'... I said, 'Bampa⁵² will go through it.' (Tom, father of four)

[I]f I've got maths and I was really stuck, and [older son's name] wasn't around and I didn't know, I'll ring my brother. I'll say, [brother's name] you need to help [younger son's name] with his homework, and he'll say, 'Put it on online speaker', and then he'll sit there and do his homework with him (laughs). (Eleanor, mother of three)

Although family members were an important source of support, not all parents relied on this method. When I questioned Liam about homework support, his first port of call was the internet.

I go on the internet and I find out, or what I tend to do is I get this off my son, yeah. I type it into the internet obviously, you know, and then I start exploring different ways around it, like is this website the better one to go for? Let me look at that website. I'll open up another window and say right, let's go to a different website and let's find out that little bit more, and 90 percent of the time, it's about the same. There's a few, slight differences but then you've just got to, you know, extrapolate from that. Umm, but other than that, umm no I don't, you know, I mean if I said to my father-in-law, I say, 'Do you know this person?' Again, he'd be going, 'Haven't got a clue'. (Liam, father of two)

⁵² 'Bampa' in this context means 'grandparent'

Like many parents in the study, Liam referred to the internet for information however this is his *only* source of support since relying on support from other family members did not appear to be an option.

Effective homework support is vital to children's development however these three examples show that when parents struggled they often delegated responsibility to other family members or, as in Liam's case, referred to the internet. From time to time this strategy may work well however to rely *only* on the internet, or on other family members is a gamble, for example, a couple of months after interviewing Tom I learned that his father had passed away. Certainly, when avenues of support are limited it does beg the question, what other forms of support do parents rely upon? Even when parents had achieved a good level of education at school, it was no guarantee of support. Despite passing several GCSEs at school, Karen still found it difficult to support her children. She said:

[W]hen I try teaching my daughter things, she's like, 'We don't do that in school', and then I'm stuck then because I'm like, well if I don't know what you're doing in school, then I can't really help you. (Karen, mother of two)

For Karen, not knowing 'how to' help her children is a challenge. Further, at time of interview Karen explained she had minimal family support since her parents lived some distance away, and her estranged partner worked long hours. A weak home-school relationship also added to the pressures, which made life even more difficult for Karen. She explained:

[I]t's hard if you don't know what you're doing. I find it hard to teach my kids things especially if they don't understand. It gets quite frustrating. Umm yeah teachers are a bit better at teaching than me, and then some mums, I know some mothers that find it so easy to teach their kids.

As explained earlier, work commitments prevented Karen from attending the school's family learning programme. When I asked Karen how her children were getting on at school, I learned that while her five-year-old son appeared to be doing well, her seven-year-old daughter had slipped behind in English. This is concerning especially since Karen was unaware of the urgency to provide support. While parents like Karen were clearly struggling to support their children at primary education level, most parents appeared to have few problems at this stage. However, when children progressed to secondary school, here again many parents found the level of learning challenging. As Liam commented:

[W]hen... my boy was doing his homework when he was 4, 5, 6, then we'd both sit down and we'd encourage him, and work it out. Now he has maths, which is completely over my head. I don't have a clue. (Liam, father of two)

Likewise, Amy had the same problem. She explained:

I hate the fact that my son is at this stage and I know nothing... I can't draw back on my GCSE years because there wasn't any.

As we learned in Chapter 5, Amy dropped out of school due to bullying. Although she is a devoted mother and wants the best for her children, she is limited in terms of the educational support she can offer her son, Craig, at secondary school because she is unable to draw upon her initial education, nor has she studied maths since leaving school. Amy is a single parent, with no immediate family living nearby, which means that Amy must consider other options. She said:

I've looked into maths, especially for my son now, towards GCSE but it's the expense side... I've said to him, if it means sacrificing other things we will because I feel that it's important. (Amy, mother of two)

When funds are limited, harsh choices have to be made. Fortunately, as Amy had a good relationship with the school, and was active involved (McNamara et al. 2000) she was able to procure support from the school; the school stepping in to organise extra maths lessons for Craig. However, it does beg the question, what would have happened if the school had not provided the extra support?

Schooling several children over a period of years also placed parents at an advantage but even here some parents still struggled, for example, Sharon, has three daughters aged five, nine and 11 years. Having supported her two older children through primary school, her youngest child had just started primary school. However, changes in the school curriculum and teaching methods still presented a challenge. She commented:

Well the maths now, they've just completely changed the way you work out, I really don't know what they're doing there. I really don't understand this Read Write Inc. either. I know we do it together, but I don't really know how it works. (Sharon, mother of three)

Further, Sharon revealed the tensions around homework help, and her daughter insisting that teacher's methods are best. She said, 'You can advise but not get too involved 'cause if they've got a pre, sort of, embedded off their teacher that's the only way they'll do it.' As several studies have reported, tensions around homework help can be counter-productive (Solomon et al. 2002; Hughes and Greenhough 2007). Indeed, several

parents talked about the worry of keeping pace with new initiatives and teaching methods.

Schooling children was by no means plain sailing however the higher-level learners appeared to have fewer worries. Yvonne, who was studying a nursing degree at time of interview, provided a good example of how she drew upon her ACL course to help her daughter with homework.

That's a big thing I think with learning, trying, you know, with the kids and trying to make sure they know like you've got to set aside so much time, you can't just leave. Like my daughter, she's had projects to do... I'm like you can't leave things... I was like, 'Now how long do you think you're going to take to do this?' And she was like, 'An hour?' And I was like, 'You've got to draw it, then you've got to type it up, and then you've got to do the writing,' and she was like, 'Oh, maybe a couple?' But I was like, 'Yeah, maybe a day I would leave for this now. You can't leave it all just last minute'... And she was like, 'Oh right.' So, I think with things like that you've got to try and plan and stuff like that. So, I try and tell them things like that as well. (Yvonne, mother of three)

Understanding how to plan and manage project deadlines is a necessary skill that students must learn if they are to be successful. As we saw in Chapter 5, when Veronica failed to complete her summer project to an adequate standard, she did not pass. Thus, if I juxtapose Veronica's example of failing her school project on horses against the above example, the advice and support that Yvonne gives her daughter is tangible.

Likewise, the next example demonstrates the difference in support offered by higher-level learner, David, and Liam who has engaged in few episodes of ACL since leaving school. Incidentally both men left school with low-level qualifications, and both proceeded to complete a Level 2 apprenticeship in car mechanics. However, from here on in the similarities end. Although David did progress onto the next level he later failed to complete the course because his employer would not sanction day release for him to attend college. However, some years later both men decided on a change of career. At present, Liam works in car manufacturing while David is a family support officer/trainer working with disadvantaged dads.

The following example compares David and Liam's parenting goals, style and practices with respect to homework help. In this context, both fathers want the very best for their child (parenting goal) however parenting styles and practices are noticeably very different. Here we see how David draws upon, and indeed, utilises his experience of

ACL to help his teenage daughter that, in turn, strengthens the parent-child relationship. Liam, on the other hand, struggles to support his teenage son in homework tasks. This situation initially acts as a blocking mechanism in the parent-child relationship until, that is, Liam eventually finds a way to address the problem.

Before presenting David's account, it is worth pointing out that his transition from car mechanic to dad's support officer and trainer has spanned over a period of ten years or so⁵³. David first had an inkling of a career change after speaking to his wife's work colleagues. This is what Nohl (2015) describes as a 'non-determining start.' Also, to appreciate the distance travelled in educational terms, it is worth keeping in mind David's words that before 'taking the plunge' [into education, I] 'had to learn how to do joined up writing again 'cause in the garage it was always capital letters'. Consequently, when I asked David whether he had helped his 16-year-old daughter with homework, he had this to say:

You know, we'll try and have a go together. You know on the internet then seeing what we can do. So yeah that happens quite a lot. She's done, I've been able to help her quite a lot recently 'cause she's doing the Welsh Baccalaureate, and she's doing a bit on communication, and she's doing a bit on the kind of work we do here. So, I was able to help her with that, it was quite nice actually...

Like many parents David's first port of call is to explore the internet with his daughter. Then later, he links aspects of his work as a project officer to the Welsh Baccalaureate (parenting practice). While it is difficult to disentangle ACL from experiences at work, we must acknowledge the part that ACL plays in complementing work practices; evidence of which is captured in David's career transition (Appendix 14). Almost in the same breath, David continued:

[M]y wife started doing her Masters just as [daughter's name] started senior school, and I started this job about the same time. She would have been 12 when I started this job. So, I've been really focused on learning since I've started this job. So later, you know, from about 11/12 on, she's really been in an environment that's focused on education...

Learning alongside his wife also brings additional benefits in the shape of mutual support and encouragement, not to mention an element of 'competition'. Therefore, in this context the distance travelled in terms of learning and work is palpable because together these two aspects influence and shape David's parenting style and practice. Thus, when David utters the words, 'it was quite nice', this signals the emotional high of helping his

⁵³ David returned to learn at the age of 36.

daughter: a positive learning experience that results in a satisfactory outcome for both parent and child.

In contrast, when I put the same question to Liam, his response was, by comparison, starkly different. While Liam noted that he felt confident about helping his son with homework at the primary education stage, helping his son with homework at secondary school stage had been far more challenging. Liam described the reasons why.

Well my boy now, like I say, he's in his last year of school, comprehensive and his homework is *restricted* [emphasis added] to us. We can't help him because it's way over our head. Umm, he's got like Art, he's got IT, he's got Graphic Design. Do you know what I mean? His English, they teach you on like Shakespeare, and I never had that when I was in school. It's just like, phew! Straight over the head... (Liam, father of two)

There are three points to consider in this extract. First, Liam's acknowledgement of the problem - the words, 'restricted' and 'can't' indicate that he is out of his depth and unable to help his son (parenting practice). Second, the fact that Liam refers immediately back to his schooldays i.e. 'I never had that when I was in school', suggests that he did not then, nor has he since, studied Shakespeare after leaving school. Third, the use of the words, 'phew' and 'straight over the head' implies that the situation is too overwhelming: he just cannot cope (parenting style). Consequently, at this stage Liam has two options: either to admit defeat and do nothing, or to obtain help from another source, for example, obtain help from the school, a friend or family member. In this situation, Liam drew on his financial capital (Bourdieu 1986) to hire an English tutor to help his son, however it does beg the question, how do parents manage to overcome obstacles like this when financial resources are limited? As explained earlier parents did find ways to obtain support. Amy, for example, asked the school to step in to provide extra maths lessons for her son, and Tom asked his father for help. Finally, when I juxtapose Liam's account alongside *my* personal experience of helping my daughter with her homework on Shakespeare (outlined in Chapter 1), it is possible to understand the ways in which ACL can assist parents; assuming, of course, that parents feel comfortable and confident enough to work with study aids.

6.5.3 Private tuition

In this section of the interview I asked parents whether they had employed the services of a private tutor to help children through school. In response, most parents said they

had not because their children were too young or, depending on the age of the child, some felt confident enough to offer support, especially at the primary education stage. Other parents reported that their children just tended to get on with their homework, so were not sure if they needed support or otherwise. Parents being unsure of what children are studying is an important point: a point I shall return to Chapter 8. As we learned previously, Isobel, had no idea what her teenage daughters were studying because she received limited information from the secondary school and her daughters.

However, four parents - Liam, David, Veronica and Mary – had engaged the services of a private tutor to help their children through secondary school, in the core subjects of maths and English. Even though David was confident in his skills, he explained that the maths had changed considerably since his schooldays, which is why he opted to hire a tutor. However, not all parents could afford to pay for private tuition. When parents faced this dilemma, they sought other ways to overcome the lack of financial capital, for example, Robyn offered to look after her neighbour's child once a week in exchange for free piano lessons for her son.

As the interviews progressed it became clear that parents wanted the best for their children however not all parents were able to provide the necessary support to help children and young people reach their potential. Despite this, most were hopeful that they would do well at school, and in the future.

6.6 Parents' hopes and aspirations for children and young people

Towards the end of the interview parents were asked to comment on their hopes and aspirations for their children. Most parents stated that they wanted them to be safe, secure, healthy and happy, and to enjoy life while some pressed home the fact that they wanted their children to be morally good, respectful and honest, and to care about others. As some parents had very young children at time of interview many expressed no clear thoughts about the future other than wanting their children to be happy and healthy.

In terms of education, generally parents wanted their children to achieve a better standard of education than they had achieved at school. For parents that had children of secondary school age, most were happy to go along with whatever subjects the children and young people wanted to study. However, there was evidence that some parents had actively directed and 'pushed' teenage children to achieve at school. For

example, since leaving school with few qualifications, Veronica and her husband had both achieved higher-level qualifications, up to degree standard. During an interview with their daughter, Catherine, we see the parental 'push' in action as she talked about her experience of school sixth form. Catherine said:

So, I was just mucking around, and I think for my AS's I had U's and E's. So, I had to, I had a stern talking to by both my parents and then I went and re-sat loads of my exams in January and then I got B, C's. (Catherine, 24-year-old)

In contrast, parents that held lower-level qualifications were very unsure about how best to guide their children. Since leaving school with low-level qualifications, thirty-six-year-old Owen has participated in few episodes of ACL. During the interview, Owen explained that, like him, his 11-year-old daughter was struggling with reading and writing at school. Attempts by the family to liaise with the school to obtain support for the daughter had been very stressful however Owen told me the school had begun to address the issues. Conscious of his daughter's difficulties at school, Owen explained how he had managed the situation by telling her:

I'll look after you; you don't need to move out babe. You can stay with me forever, 'cause it's my girl see, and she said, 'I'll just go on the dole and you can pay for me. I said, 'Yeah, no problem.' (Owen, father of three)

Although Owen wanted the best for his daughter, this conversation is a reminder of the ways in which parents can undermine children and young people's hopes and aspirations. The subtle messages conveyed are extremely influential since in this context Owen practically gives his daughter permission to give up trying to overcome her battles with literacy. In this case, Owen's attitude may well have exacerbated the situation since his solution deflects attention away from the problem at hand. An in depth analysis of the influences at play within this particular family context is outlined in my working paper on ACL participation and schooling (Samuel 2015).

6.7 The learning environment: an exercise for parents

At the end of each interview I was curious to know whether parents were aware of how much time their children actually spend in different learning environments over the course of a year. Bransford et al. (1999) provide a useful breakdown of the time spent at school (14 percent), home and community (53 percent), and sleeping (33 percent). Using this information, I asked each parent to perform a short task, which involved placing three labels (1) School (2) Sleeping and (3) Home and Community, onto a pie

chart diagram divided into three sections of 14 percent, 53 percent and 33 percent respectively (see Figure 3.2, page 39).

Results of the exercise showed that many parents were unaware of the time spent in different learning environments. Of the 22 parents that took part in the task⁵⁴, six parents successfully married up the labels to the correct percentages while 14 parents incorrectly labelled the percentages. Many parents were surprised to learn that children spent such little time at school in comparison to a large part of time spent at home and in the community. As one parent put it, 'That's incredible, well I'm shocked', while another questioned, 'This is why it's important you help them with their homework?' Certainly, the exercise provided food for thought and, at the very least, drew parents' attention to the fact that learning at home is a vital activity: an activity integral to children's development.

6.8 Summary of chapter

This chapter examined parents' educational goals, styles and practices with respect to understanding the nature and extent of ACL participation on parent-child relationships. First, parents drew upon a range of factors to school their children. They referred to: experiences related to initial education; experiences related to ACL participation; the internet; family and friends; private tutors (but only in a few cases); work experience, and volunteering.

Moreover, parents utilised the knowledge, skills and experiences to educate their children. There were two important dimensions to this process: first, parents drew upon and utilised their skills and abilities to help their children with homework; second, and more importantly, evidence suggests that ACL encouraged parents and children to have informal, everyday discussions about learning, outside of the normal homework routine. In effect, children were subsumed into a learning habitus: a habitus that was stimulating in a non-threatening way, and one that allowed children to become 'legitimate peripheral participants' in their own home (Lave and Wenger 1991).

In contrast to the ACL learners, many parents with lower levels of education struggled to support their children at different ages and stages of learning. Some parents found

⁵⁴ Unfortunately, two parents were unable to perform the exercise, as there was no time left at the end of interview.

primary education level challenging, while others managed to muddle through, sometimes with help and support from others. The situation was further exacerbated as children progressed to secondary school. Here again, parents struggled to cope with higher-level learning and in desperation turned to others to provide the support they themselves were unable to offer. In these cases, parents mainly relied on the school, the internet, friends and family members and, in some cases, private tutors but only if they had funds to do so. Others, like Eleanor, sometimes relied on the support of their older children. When parents struggled to find the appropriate support, children were at a distinct disadvantage. When difficulties arose at interview parents immediately put up a defence citing poor experience of initial education and home life as a reason for the lack of support. In many ways, these parents were justified to an extent by the social and emotional experiences encountered in childhood.

In contrast, one parent, Frances, did buck the trend. Despite having participated in very few episodes of ACL, her children were doing extremely well in school, which I corroborated when I later interviewed the children. Basically, Frances was successful because, in her experience, she mimicked the primary school teachers' methods and practices, and supplemented her learning by obtaining information from the internet. Whether Frances will be able to continue to support her children in this way is debatable, especially as her children progress to secondary school, bringing home more complex pieces of homework. Perhaps this is seen in Frances' comment about her son's impending transition from primary to secondary school. This phase gives an inkling of the anticipated challenges ahead, as Frances stated: 'I don't know if that's going to be the same when he [her son] goes to comp⁵⁵ mind.'

⁵⁵ 'Comp' is short for comprehensive or secondary school.

CHAPTER 7 – EMPIRICAL FINDINGS 3: PARENT, CHILD AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVES ON ACL AND SCHOOLING

In the previous chapter I explored parents’ motivations, goals, styles and practices towards schooling their children. In Chapter 7, I continue in this vein while referring to children’s and young people’s perspectives on being schooled and their thoughts about parental ACL participation. With respect to these views, findings are drawn from nine semi-structured interviews with 15 children and young people⁵⁶ (10 female, 5 male). Their ages range from eight years to 17 years. This was in keeping with the original design however I did make one exception; by interviewing Veronica’s daughter, Catherine (24-year-old). As some years had passed since Catherine had left school, she had had time to reflect on her initial and subsequent education. Indeed, her reflections produced an added dimension to the study.

During the interviews, I wanted to understand children’s and young people’s attitudes towards learning; their experiences at school, what they did after school, and the support received from parents at home with respect to homework help. In addition, I wanted to explore what they thought about their parents as learners, and whether ACL had been beneficial or detrimental to the family, for example, whether parents had passed on any learning tips or resources on to them or whether parental studies had hindered home life.

At the beginning of the interview, I wanted the younger children of primary school age to feel settled. Therefore, as an ice-breaker I invited them to join me in making figures out of the Play-Doh supplied. Some children were happy to do so while others declined.

7.1 School life and aspirations

Initially, I asked children and young people general questions about school; whether they liked going to school, and the subjects they liked studying. Most children and young people reported they enjoyed going to school. Only Mary’s teenage daughter, Felicity, did not like school. When I asked why, she refused to answer. The only thought that sprang to my mind at that point was that Mary had explained to me at interview some weeks prior that Felicity was dyslexic and had been identified as borderline special needs

⁵⁶ This includes five male/female dyads, one female dyad, and three single females. All names are pseudonyms.

by the school. This could provide a possible explanation why Felicity did not like school although, in this case, I was unsure. Nevertheless, most children and young people appeared to be doing well. They talked about the schools and colleges attended, the subjects studied, and their favourite subjects. I also asked children and young people what they hoped to do for the future. At least eight children indicated they were planning to go to university. I did think it might be premature to ask children of primary school age to comment on whether they wanted to go to university however 10-year olds, Heather (Debbie's daughter) and Joshua (Frances' son), had already thought about it. Heather wanted to be a maths professor, while Joshua, since the age of eight years, had set his sights on becoming an accountant. This prompted me to ask him whether he knew what he needed to do to become an accountant. Joshua knew from discussions with his mother that he had to do well at school, but he was unsure of the steps needed to reach his goal, although he mentioned he had started saving to go to university. He mused:

I can't go like to Oxford or something like that 'cause I won't have enough money unless I get a scholarship... I went onto this university website and it compared like loads of different unis and colleges to find out which is the best. Well in Wales, Swansea and Cardiff are one of the best. So, I think I'm going to go to them. (Joshua, 10-year-old)

When I asked Joshua whether he had talked to his parents or a teacher about university, he replied that he had only discussed his plans with a friend at school since his friend also wanted to go to university. In Chapter 6, we learned that Frances supported her children at every opportunity, however she also lacked confidence in her skills and abilities. She explained:

My son, he excels in maths. He's just had top marks now for the local tests that they've done. And sometimes he comes out with equations or you know, simple mathematical questions and I just don't know the answer [and] part of me is thinking right, I can't count on my fingers now because he needs confidence in me. I can't teach him about learning if I don't know the stuff. So, it can pull me down and drag me down sometimes when I think, oh, I just know nothing about it all, you know, and I should. (Frances, mother of two)

Not knowing how to help her son to the best of her ability undermines Frances' confidence, and self-efficacy (Bandura et al. 2001). Nevertheless, much like Amy, Frances is determined to support her children. She does so by constantly referring to the internet, the school or, on the odd occasion, asking her father for advice. However, apart from the support mechanisms outlined there are no other avenues open to her, which limits the type of support she can offer her children. Consequently, when she is unsure, blocking mechanisms appear in the narrative, as seen in the words 'pull me down' and

'drag'. We can see further influences at play in the next section whereupon I explore the theme of homework help.

7.2 Help with homework

During this part of the interview, I was keen to understand children's and young people's views related to parental help and support received at home. Research on parental involvement by Crozier (1999) found that children generally valued and welcomed support from their parents when children requested help. While interviewing Frances' children, Bethany and Joshua, I got the sense that they knew they had the support and backing from their mother but at times I knew Frances was struggling to help them. When I asked what they would do if they were stuck on a homework task, they both said they would ask their mother for help (see Appendix 16 – Frances' example of homework help) however Joshua mentioned that when they were doing 'hard stuff', he said, 'It takes her a while to think of stuff.' Therefore, if I focus on Frances for a moment, maybe it would be beneficial for Frances to look towards other mechanisms of support to supplement her knowledge base. In doing so, this would enable her to support her children more effectively. A possible answer to this problem is offered in Chapter 9.

Likewise, when brother and sister, Craig and Louise, needed help with homework they would sometimes ask their mother (Amy) to help, but as they were learning through the medium of Welsh there were further barriers to contend with. As Louise explained:

Sometimes I need help with what the words mean. Like if sometimes I always have spellings and I got to put my words in sentences. So, I ask Craig if he could help me to think of sentences 'cause they're in Welsh and mammy doesn't really understand Welsh 'cause she hasn't learnt it. (Louise 10-year-old)

Craig also mentioned that he sought help from his friends if his mother could not provide the support. Clearly, this was a barrier for both children as they could not rely on their mother to help them. Robyn's children, Lizzie and George also had the same problem, but life was that little bit easier because their father spoke Welsh. While, on the other hand, for Leah (Sharon's daughter), different teaching methods at school sometimes caused confusion. She explained:

[M]y mother one day came up to me 'cause we had dividing homework and I wasn't finding it too easy, and then she divided in the way that I didn't divide in like there are ways of like setting up in, so I didn't understand. And umm she was, she kind of, she probably thought that like I couldn't, I didn't know how to set it

up to work it out. So, I knew how to but then she did it in the way she was taught, and that confused me a bit. (Leah, 11-year-old)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, confusion as well as tension often arises when parents are unaware of school teaching methods (Hughes and Greenhough 2007; Goodall and Johnston-Wilder 2015). Potentially, this can deter children from asking their parents for help with homework.

7.3 Negative influences in parent-child relationships

Two themes that emerged out of the parent narratives was the lack of parental support at home in childhood, and the feeling of guilt in almost abandoning the family when they committed to episodes of learning in later life. Taking this into account, I was interested to learn if children had any concerns about a perceived lack of support at home.

7.3.1 Lack of parental support at home

Although the theme of 'lack of parental support' emerged in several parent interviews it did not emerge in the child interviews. A possible answer as to why this was the case may lie in the fact that not enough time had elapsed for children to reflect on their school days. Furthermore, children who agreed to be interviewed tended to be put forward by parents with medium to high level qualifications. Children of parents with low level or no qualifications did not come forward to be interviewed.

Despite the lack of evidence in child interviews it is worth exploring the theme from the parents' perspective since time, age and opportunity to reflect over the years had clearly shaped their views on the subject. Indeed, many were annoyed and even upset about the lack of interest shown by parents during their school years. The following extracts highlight some of the issues.

Why weren't they in going through homework with me and my brother and really pushing us? But it was a case: no there's plenty of factories around here at that time. (Veronica, mother of two)

[E]ven though it was a broken family, I could still have achieved but it wasn't a focus for us, it wasn't a priority. (David, father of one)

[W]hen I was 13, things were really awful at home, really bad... I had no uniform. I used to do my own ironing, my own washing. It was shit; it was awful. (Robyn, mother of four)

[M]y mam, with her like her bad nerves, and she's suffered a lot with depression. We didn't really have the support and the backing of her. (John, father of two)

[M]y mum and dad never helped me with my homework, never ever. They never ever helped me with my homework 'cause there was no time I can ever remember them helping me with my homework. (Eleanor, mother of three)

[T]hat's all I had was, well okay, you do what you want to do. We don't care. And that's what the feeling, that's what I had then, and even now I challenge my mother about it and she said, 'Oh well, well I can't change that now.' (Liam, father of two)

Again, what is interesting in these accounts is the lack of 'help', 'push', 'focus', 'support', 'backing', and 'priority'. Even to the extent of having 'no uniform' highlights the issue of a lack of support. Consequently, this indicates that effective and timely support is a critical mechanism; a mechanism necessary to fostering successful outcomes. Without these elements the chance of success is somewhat reduced.

Finally, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these circumstances had an impact on participants' learning lives, however it is worth noting that considering these experiences parental practices in schooling over the next generation varied widely amongst the group. In Chapter 6 we saw how Veronica, David, and Robyn, for example, appeared to experience very few problems helping their children with homework while John, Eleanor and Owen all struggled, even at the lower levels, to support their children.

7.3.2 Negative impact of learning

Although children generally perceived ACL participation in a positive light, I was interested to explore whether ACL had impacted negatively on children. One of the themes that emerged out of the parent interviews, were feelings of guilt and frustration around having to forego spending quality time with family and children to focus on studying. Debbie, for example, questioned her motives for wanting to study a part-time degree. As a single parent, Debbie had no choice but to rely on others to look after the children while she studied two evenings per week. However, this arrangement did not suit daughter, Heather.

[A]t times I thought, is it really worth it? Because in the beginning she was quite upset, and I didn't want her to be upset but yet, I want to do this for me, for her, you know to... so [sigh] I carried on, and she's okay with it now but she feels as though she misses time, you know. The evenings after my son had gone to bed we always had at least half an hour where we read, and we'd just chat, or we

done something just me and her, and twice a week she felt she'd lost that.
(Debbie, mother of two)

Having to make sacrifices to secure a better life for the family was a common theme among female adult returners. Indeed, mothers often had to defend their decision to learn (Mannay and Morgan 2013), for example, 24-year-old university foundation students, Gail and Hope, both tried to rationalise their feelings of guilt for not being there for their children.

[I]t's upsetting me that I won't be able to go to [nursery name] and pick him up because I'm going to be in uni whilst they [child minders] are going to do that job for me which is, you know, it's frustrating because I wanna be there doing those little things with him. But I can't because to better our lives, I've got to go and do that. And I've got no other family support really to do it. So, I have to rely on umm, you know, the people in the private nursery... he'll hardly see me... which is a bit sad but sometimes you have to make sacrifices you know.
(Gail, single mother of one)

[M]y young one did used to get really upset when I used to try and study, but I used to say, I have to. It needs to be in two days, so I've got to do it. So, you know, it's not easy working with kids but I try to do it when they're not there or when they're asleep. I usually stay up until one or two o'clock in the morning, just doing the work when I can. (Hope, single mother of two)

As Garland (1994) found in her study of women returners at university, in all cases mothers firmly put the family first before attending to university studies. Mannay and Morgan (2013) make a similar point by highlighting the challenges women face when they return to learn with home routines often re-configured around learning. Parental learning also impacted on children in other ways. For example, Veronica's daughter, Catherine, was expected to look after her brother while her mother studied. Catherine explained:

[It] was different because... some days a week I would have to pick up [brother's name] from school, when he was in primary school and that was a bit odd 'cause I was used to just strolling home, stopping off in my mates and things... At the time, I found it extremely frustrating; as I would want to be out with my friends and having 'me' time, so I got quite stroppy. (Catherine, 24-year-old)

Although it would appear on the surface that Catherine was understandably frustrated by the change in family routine, it was not until I dug deeper that I discovered why this situation irritated Catherine so much (see Chapter 8, section 8.2.1). Nevertheless, despite the frustrations, some children and young people hoped that parental learning would lead to a better-paid job, and a better lifestyle for the family.

7.3.3 Parental stress

While there are many benefits to be gained from learning, there is sometimes a price to be paid in terms of managing the family and other responsibilities while studying. While most children appeared generally pleased and proud that a parent was learning, some children noticed parents getting stressed when learning. Certainly, the 'stress' theme tied in well with the parental accounts outlined in Chapter 5 and, consequently, children and young people had picked up on this aspect. Catherine, for example, now aged 24 and a secondary school teacher, reflected on the time when her mother, Veronica, was studying a degree. She explained, '[M]um went back when I was 16ish and she was just stressy (sic), completely stress.' Likewise, Craig recollected his mother becoming 'more stressed' studying at college. So too did Debbie's daughter, Heather, pick up on the pressure and frustration of studying. When I asked Heather, 'Does your mum studying make you feel happy?' she replied:

Sometimes like because I know like she's doing it so she can get like a better job and everything but sometimes it's not, 'cause she gets like angry with the computer, and then she starts shouting at the computer.
(Heather, 11-year-old)

In many respects exposure to the stresses, anxieties, and worries about learning led some children to consider their future learning trajectory. Take, for example, Lizzie's reaction when her mother, Robyn, studied a full-time degree at the age of 40. In this scenario, exposed to seeing her mother spend time at home working on assignments, while juggling family responsibilities had an impact on Lizzie's thoughts about learning. During interview, I learned that Lizzie was planning to go to university after sixth form. When I asked her why she wanted to go to university, she replied, 'I want to do it when I'm younger so then I can get it over and done with in a nice way.' Here we see the influence of parental learning on the next generation. Indeed, later in the interview Lizzie described the family's sense of relief on finishing the course⁵⁷.

Well after she did it she was a lot more laid back... less stressed... I don't think the degree made her stressed, but I think... I don't know, maybe it was managing us and doing that at the same time... I think she was just, kind of, just a bit relieved to get it. (Lizzie, 15-year-old)

⁵⁷ Due to family pressures Robyn decided to drop out towards the end of the third year of her degree course however she was later awarded a Diploma in Higher Education in recognition of the first two years of her studies.

Exposure to seeing her mother juggle responsibilities alerted Lizzie to the pressures of learning later in life; especially the time, effort and level of commitment needed to meet learning deadlines alongside competing family priorities. This led Lizzie to conclude that it would be far easier to achieve a degree through the traditional pathway by going to university sooner rather than later in the life course. Likewise, Stephen, a 17-year-old FE college student, was of the same opinion. Over the past three years his mother, Mary, had studied several Level 2 courses at her local adult education centre. When I asked Stephen what he thought about his mother returning to learn, he replied:

She gets really stressed. She gets really stressed and she's like, 'Stephen come here. Can you help me on this? Can you help me on that?'

Later, when I asked Stephen whether seeing his mother study had motivated him, he commented, 'I'm not being disrespectful to my mother, but I don't want to be in that situation where I'm going back into learning.' Next, he proceeded to explain how exposure to his mother learning had influenced and shaped his thinking.

It has motivated me because I'm like this is what I want to do now, and I think that I could do the job that I want to do for the rest of my life, and I wouldn't have to change courses or go back into learning. (Stephen, 17-year-old)

Just like Lizzie, first-hand exposure to seeing his mother juggling responsibilities around learning influenced Stephen's thinking. During the interview, Stephen was adamant that he wanted to learn through the traditional pathway rather follow the ACL pathway like his mother. Indeed, having recently applied to university, Stephen was intent on pursuing a career in sports coaching or PE teaching. He also wanted to travel abroad, in his words, 'to see the world.' In doing so, pursuing academic qualifications earlier in the life course, would avert the hassle of moving in and out of employment fields, much like his mother had done over the course of her life.

Likewise, teenagers Marie and Emily were aware of the pressures of learning. Their mother, Isobel, who at time of interview was studying a part-time sign language course, was contemplating a career change, and had plans to go back to college, then on to university to train as a physiotherapist⁵⁸. Both daughters were pleased about their mother's decision to change career but at the same time were mindful about what the future might bring. Marie explained:

⁵⁸ Isobel studied and passed the college course, and later successfully secured a place at university to study the degree.

I didn't even think people like her age would go back. I didn't think they were like allowed to. Like now I've learnt a bit more thinking like that it is possible to go back but it might just be a bit harder... And there'll be more work like for her, and she'll have to study more. (Marie, 13-year-old)

Similarly, 16-year-old daughter, Emily, anticipated that studying returning would be a 'bit more stressful but I guess once she's like there and she's done it, I think she'll be like glad that she's done that.' Certainly, both daughters were impressed with their mother's determination to take control of her career. As Emily noted:

I think it's good because it shows that like, even if like in the future, if you want to change job and you're not happy, then she like works hard to change it and she can. So, it's just proving that. (Emily, 15-year-old)

Here Isobel's actions are influential: by demonstrating determination and commitment, she is showing her daughters that they too can take the initiative to change their lives, if they so wish. Like Lizzie and Stephen, both Emily and Marie were planning to study via the traditional pathway. Marie perceived this choice of route as easier as it would enable her to continue in 'learning mode' since taking time out from learning might result in the temporary loss of skills and abilities. As Marie pointed out:

I don't know whether it would be harder may be like having a job for a bit and then going back. It might be like you're out of like the working [mode]... like exams. (Marie, 13-year-old)

Here Marie makes an important point. Since both teenagers have been studying continuously for the past nine years or so, to all intents and purposes, they are firmly in 'learning mode'. However, as we learned in Chapter 2, there is no pattern to ACL participation, and learning continuously is not a strong feature of the ACL pathway, at least for most learners since adults tend to dip in and out of learning as the desire arises.

When parents returned to learn, it required a significant amount of planning, determination, and commitment to succeed and, as indicated, children perceived this process to be somewhat difficult and stressful. As indicated, all four children are currently in 'learning mode' and want to study through the traditional pathway since choosing this pathway was perceived to be easier than following the ACL pathway. Further, it not only ensured continuity but more importantly, it avoided the pressure of juggling, sometimes intense periods of learning, alongside personal and professional commitments later in the life course; issues which have been highlighted by Garland (1994) and Morgan (2016). While children acknowledged the stress of juggling learning

around home matters, they also talked about the ways in which they supported parents during episodes of learning.

7.4 Reciprocal support

Much has been written about parental involvement in education and the impact it has on children's outcomes (Desforges et al. 2003; Davis-Kean 2005; Harris and Goodall 2008; DSCF 2009), however evidence from interviews with children and young people suggests that support for learning, as is commonly perceived, is not one-way, with knowledge and skills transferred from parent to child, but also that support is bi-directional: children and young people support their parents. Previous studies have reported that children and young people can act as learning catalysts; providing encouragement and emotional support when parents are learning (Brassett-Grundy 2004a). Children and young people also bring home current information from school on topics of interest such as the environment and information computer technologies: topics of discussion that have the potential to influence and shape their parents' understanding of the world around them (Istead and Shapiro 2014).

Although not all children in the study helped their parents there were nevertheless instances where parents relied upon the support of children and young people. Support, which was usually provided by teenagers, fell into two broad categories. The teenagers provided academic related support i.e. help with writing assignments, preparation for tests or examinations, as well as general support with day to day activities, for example, some teenagers looked after younger siblings and/or undertook household chores. In doing so, it alleviated some of the pressures and difficulties of maintaining a balanced home life while parents were studying.

Mother and daughter, Veronica and Catherine, provide a good example of the way in which reciprocal family support helped the family during Veronica's time studying a social work degree. Despite Catherine feeling frustrated by the burden of responsibility she nevertheless helped her mother overcome several difficulties, for example, she ferried her mother to social work placements, did household chores, and looked after her younger brother. Likewise, Debbie often relied on daughter, Heather, to keep up to date with changing technologies. As Field (2013, p. 113) points out the "classical view of intergenerational socialisation" is currently in the process of giving way to the information technology age. Even when children of a very young age were exposed to parental

learning activities, there were some surprising reactions. Hope, a mother of two sons aged under five, was torn between trying to study during the day or to leave studying until after the children had gone to bed. When I asked Hope whether she thought her sons were aware of her learning, she replied:

I think he [older son] knows because when he's in umm nursery, and he's doing colouring and stuff. Literally when he's writing he's concentrating so much, so when he sees me concentrating he knows that I'm doing something so he don't disturb me that much... I think he knows. I don't think he understands the importance of it, but he knows when I'm doing something otherwise he wouldn't be like, 'Shh, a minute [name of younger brother], mummy's doing something.' (Hope, mother of two)

In this scenario, Hope's son responds to his mother's need for peace and quiet. This is seen in his attempts to pacify his younger brother, allowing Hope time to briefly focus on her studies. This exchange is an important aspect of the parent-child relationship. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, in Veronica's account, with reference to giving her pupils peace and quiet in the classroom.

7.5 The influence of ACL participation on parent-child relationships

As the interview progressed I wanted to turn my attention to exploring children's thoughts about parental learning and, more importantly, whether they felt ACL had influenced them in any way. As outlined in Chapter 5, participation in ACL encouraged parents to want to become good role models for their children (Reay et al. 2002), and this is one of the themes that emerged out of the child interview data.

7.5.1 Parent role modelling

In Chapter 5 we learned that in the space of just over a decade, Debbie, Veronica and David had all managed to transform their lives through learning. As a result, former factory workers, Debbie and Veronica, changed jobs: Debbie is now a teaching assistant and Veronica a qualified social worker, while David, a former car mechanic is now a local authority family support officer. Despite challenges along the way all three parents expressed satisfaction in their new career role. For example, during the interview David reflected on his former school days, noting the absence of the vital *push* from his parents to do well at school. He questioned whether education would have been at the forefront of his mind had he decided against a change of career. As he explained:

[I]f I'm ill I will say I'm going to work, I'm going to see how I am and I will stay in work. My daughter does exactly the same thing; her attendance is excellent. I always say at home that I may not be the cleverest in the office, but I'll work hard, so I'll beat them all. And it's quite a standing joke that I rush to try and beat them, you know, to finish my qualifications first, and my daughter works hard, and she will put in the hours. She sees that from both myself and my wife, and she really does put an effort in, she's focused on her education. You know we *talk* a lot about it and it's at the forefront of her mind to do well. (David, father of one)

Here we see the influence of the powerful family role model transmitted through everyday experiences and discussions that focuses on education and work. Despite feeling ill David goes to work; this shows dedication and commitment to a job that he loves doing. Moreover, the couple's diligence towards learning encourages their daughter, Rachel, to focus on her education. David explained:

[I]t's quite often that I do work at home after hours: it's quite often that the wife will do work at home. So, it's nothing for the three of us to be sitting there doing work and my daughter doing her homework. So, it becomes natural and normal.

Again, the subtle influence of exposure to seeing both parents working away helps Rachel focus on her schoolwork. Similarly, Lyonette et al. (2015) argue that when parents studied the same time as their children, it helped 'normalise the situation' at home. Here Rachel is subsumed into a culture of learning; learning that spills over into school life. During David's interview, it came as no surprise to hear that Rachel had been selected as junior school head girl, that she had passed her GCSEs with flying colours, and that she was now studying A levels in sixth form. It is poignant therefore, considering David's failure to reach his potential at school, that he is now able to help Rachel achieve her potential. Since participating in learning David's self-efficacy and confidence levels have risen considerably (see Appendix 14). As David proudly stated:

She's going to be the first one to go to university straight from school, you know, from A levels. So, she is breaking the cycle. I think we've broken the cycle a bit by learning later on in life.

Although David is keenly aware of missed opportunities in childhood, he nonetheless has been able to alter the course of his trajectory with help and support from others around him (Lave 1991; Nohl 2015). Also, participating in ACL alongside volunteering gave David a mini-learning boost. Without it, the ability to change career would have been far tougher. Shared interests also created stronger bonds between parents and children; this was especially evident in learning routines at home.

7.5.2 Parental learning routines

Despite parent and children's learning being distinct in nature, that is, parents and children studied different subjects at different levels, there was evidence in the narratives where parents and children worked together on learning tasks. Each household had different arrangements for completing homework, projects or assignments. Not all children enjoyed doing their homework in isolation; some preferred a parent to be around while they completed homework while others were comfortable about working on their own. Likewise, most parents, depending on the age of children, often studied when the children had gone to bed. As Marandet and Wainwright (2010) point out in their study of student mothers at university, mothers often made sacrifices to meet deadlines, sometimes by sleeping less or by foregoing social activities.

However, being situated in the context of the home, some children naturally became involved in home study routines (Lave and Wenger 1991). Take for example, the case of Debbie and 11-year-old daughter Heather. Debbie is a full-time teaching assistant currently studying a part-time degree at her local university. Although mother and daughter have distinctly separate learning goals their activities at home are very much shared. Here the opportunity to sit down together at the same table helps Heather concentrate on her homework. She commented:

[S]ometimes when my brother goes with his dad and mum's doing her uni work, I do my homework 'cause it's like easier 'cause then there's no real noise or there's no talking. You can just like do your homework and get on with it... (Heather, 11-year-old)

Furthermore, the activity of parent and child sitting down together encourages mutual discussion and collaboration. As Heather explained:

We split the table, she'll have a load of her work and I'll have a load of mine, and I'll have like a pile of my homework... Then if I got stuck I'd like go over and ask her what this was, and then she'd come over and explain everything.

By creating the right study conditions for herself, namely a quiet space with no interruptions, Debbie automatically provides her daughter with the motivational push to complete her homework. Indeed, later in the interview, Heather admitted that, 'If she [Debbie] wasn't doing it and she was sat down it would make me not want to do mine, and [I would] sit down and watch the TV as well.' This situation is characterised by simple everyday tasks that unintentionally become a normal and routine part of life: a routine based on mutual interests, discussion and collaboration.

In contrast, some children preferred doing homework in their own time and space. Sharon's daughter Leah, for example, approached her homework tasks quite differently to Heather. At time of interview Sharon was in the middle of completing a six-week confidence-building course. However, during the interview Sharon stated she had no plans to commit to a prolonged course of study, citing full-time work and family responsibilities as reasons for not learning. When I asked Sharon a question about helping her children with homework, she talked about her eldest daughter, Leah, a secondary school pupil.

She tends to do a lot of it herself... she just wants to get it done out of the way. So, she'll do maybe a bit of a project on the iPad they give her, may be a bit of maths homework. She is very clever, however she's a rusher. She just wants to get it done out of the way. (Sharon, mother of three)

Subsequently, when I later asked Leah a question regarding what she would do if she were stuck on a homework problem, she replied:

Usually when I'm stuck I'm a bit stubborn and I try to work it out myself, and I don't usually ask for help but then I'm stubborn with like being smart because I like to be smart and know things more than anyone else. 'Cause I like animals so much that if I ever get like homework on things like animals, I will always, you know, try to do it all myself. I will not ask for help. (Leah, 11-year-old)

Although Leah revelled in the thought of being 'smart', unlike Heather her stubbornness in not asking for help could well prove to be a problem further down the line. When I asked Leah whether she knew if her mother had studied any courses, she was unsure. Indeed, since Leah's birth Sharon has not participated in any prolonged episodes of ACL activity other than undertaking CPD at work therefore it is unlikely that Leah would have been directly exposed to ACL activities in the home. While it is impossible to predict how well Leah will progress in secondary school, her stubbornness in not asking for help suggests that she could potentially miss out on important discussions. Similarly, non-ACL participation reduces the opportunity for parents to expose children to adult learning experiences in the home context. While it could be argued that exposure to ACL in the home has little influence on children's study routines, exposure over a prolonged and sustained period did appear to have a positive influence on David's daughter. For example, during interview David highlighted the impact of his wife's home study routine on their daughter, Rachel. He explained:

One thing that stands out, when my wife did her Masters degree, 'cause she was doing her 20,000-word dissertation, she went up into the attic for peace and quiet

because we have a room up in the attic. When my daughter was studying for her GCSEs, she said, 'I'm going to start my revising now', and she'd gone and next thing I know she was up in the attic. So, without even saying, it was normal for her to go up the attic to study. So, what she'd seen, she was a kind of product of her environment. What she'd seen with my wife doing, she did herself like. (David, father of one)

When parents study, it not only exposes children to routines they might otherwise not be privy to, but it also exposes them to situated contexts revolved around learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). Therefore, by imitating her mother's study routine, Rachel was assured peace and quiet to concentrate on her revision tasks. It would have been interesting to hear Rachel's side of the story however she declined the opportunity of an interview. Nevertheless, living with supportive parents like David and his wife had its benefits. As David explained:

[If] she's studying say five hours in the evening, we sort of pamper her needs a bit and take her food up to her and, you know, look after her and encourage her, go up there and help her revise. You know she spends a lot of time up there on her own, but we do go up and she says, 'Can you come and test me?' So, we do support her.

Here we see how a positive learning environment encourages Rachel to learn. Further, what is interesting here are the words that David uses to describe the scenario, for example, 'pamper', 'food', 'look after her', 'help', and 'support'; key words that not only characterise a positive learning environment, but also words that *boost* learning.

7.5.3 Planning and setting goals

While some parents offered their children help and assistance in schoolwork there was also evidence in the narrative of parents pushing their children to complete schoolwork on time; actively encouraging them to plan and set goals, see for example Yvonne's step-by-step account in Chapter 6 of how she helped her daughter plan a geography project. All children and young people interviewed were either attending school or college at time of interview. However, since recruiting children and young people to the study had been difficult I decided to take up Veronica's offer to interview her 24-year-old daughter, Catherine. At time of interview Catherine was not living with her parents however similar to Mezirow's experience (1978) of watching his wife's transformation, so too had Catherine seen her parents transform their lives through learning since both had transitioned from factory workers to social workers. During the teenage years, Catherine, had been exposed to a variety of learning approaches and methods, for

example, Catherine was accustomed to seeing her parents submit coursework. When I questioned Catherine about her observations at the time, she had carefully noted the difference in the way each parent worked. Unlike her mother, who always completed her coursework well before the deadline, her father was not so organised. She commented:

[H]e would just be locked away then until 3 am some mornings 'cause my dad didn't prepare. So, he would just do his essays like the night or day before or something. Whereas my mum when she was doing it, my mum would do it in the living room. So, I would just remember coming home and books all over the living room, and her laptop, on doing her work there. (Catherine, 24-year-old)

Here Catherine had the opportunity to observe how each parent responded to course deadlines; her father locking himself away until the small hours of the morning (due to work commitments he had less time) highlights the urgency and pressure of learning while her mother takes a more relaxed approach although, as a foster carer, she naturally spent more time at home. Nevertheless, the fact that she had been exposed to these different ways of working helped Catherine understand her capabilities as a learner, and what worked best for her. Knowing that rushing to do an assignment might cause her to submit an inferior piece of work she opted for a more planned approach, by preparing well ahead and taking her time. During the interview, Catherine explained how she managed this process:

[W]hen I had essays in university, say they'd tell you you've got an essay due 2nd March and it's 1st February, I would probably do it that weekend or start it that weekend, and then I'd want it finished two weeks before. Always. I'd want it always finished for about a week or two weeks before.

When I asked Catherine why she handed her work in so early she replied:

I get really anxious, really, really, really, really anxious. So, I'd be stressing and panicking, and working myself up. I get really anxious. So, if I left it, if I had to do it in a week, I'd be so worked up I wouldn't sleep, and I'd be a little bit of a wreck. So, I knew if I did it really soon then I'd know that I wouldn't be anxious 'cause I would have got it all down before my anxiety caught up with it, and then I'd hand it in and then once I'd handed in I would forget about it and I wouldn't panic.

Furthermore, she explained how her mother's strategy had influenced her thinking:

I think my mother's influence of saying, 'Take your time and do it,' probably had more impact than my father had to rush and do his. I think just hearing my mother saying, 'Take your time and do it.' I'd rather take my time than rush it all and it just be mumbo jumbo, but my dad could rush it and it'd be a good piece of work, whereas if I rushed it out, it would be garbage.

Being exposed to observing how each parent worked at home helped Catherine to work out which style of approach suited her best. Knowing the ramifications and outcome of rushing a piece of work, Catherine realised there were benefits to be gained by working on assignments well before the due date of submission. This was one of the practical ways in which parents helped children become more aware of academic study requirements.

7.5.4 Sharing learning resources

Exposure to parental learning practices also benefitted children in the shape of accessing extra resources in the home. Veronica, for example, had accumulated a considerable bank of learning resources over a 10-year period. When, some years later daughter, Catherine, undertakes a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to pursue a career in secondary school teaching, the support mechanism once more comes into play. During the interview, Catherine noted that:

When I was doing my PGCE it was very useful 'cause she knew lots of stuff about safeguarding and things like that. So, she passed all the books and documents on to me. (Catherine, 24-year-old teacher)

In another example, Yvonne (currently studying to become a nurse) explained how she shared her learning resources with 17-year-old son, Stewart, who is studying a Level 3 Diploma in Sports Coaching. Since both courses cover the subject of anatomy, there is a crossover in subject specific content and this creates a platform for mother and son to share information and resources. Moreover, as Yvonne is learning at a higher level she can pass her specialist knowledge of anatomy on to her son. Although Stewart declined to be interviewed, we can see the impact of ACL participation on the mother son relationship through Yvonne's account. Having subject specific resources to hand not only offered Yvonne the chance to help her son but it also created a closer connection (Wainwright and Marandet 2010). During interview, Yvonne talked with pride about the fact that she now had something in common with her son.

[N]ow he's doing like anatomy and stuff; I feel like I can help him a bit with that. So that's quite nice and he's like, 'Oh mam come and help me by here with this,' and it is nice because like I've bought books and stuff for uni and he looks at them. So, we've got that. It's nice me and him doing... 'cause [my husband] done a gym instructors course and it's always like them two have had that little thing between them about sport and stuff, and now he's asking 'cause it's a bit, it's a bit more in depth now, he's asking me. So, it's nice we've got that little bit of, you know, something we can share sort of thing. (Yvonne, mother of three)

Even though her husband and son are closely involved in sports coaching it is Yvonne who now plays a larger role in her son's progress at college since she possesses the knowledge and skills that he can tap into. In addition, the ability to share resources with her son gives Yvonne a great sense of joy, which effectively creates a closer bond between mother and son through shared knowledge, resources and academic interests.

7.5.5 Learning tips

In Chapter 6 we learned how ACL participation equipped parents with the knowledge and skills they later utilised in the home. Therefore, in this section of the interview, I was keen to learn whether children had picked up any learning tips from their parents. Debbie, for example, gathered ideas from course colleagues at university to devise mathematics exercises for pupils at school. When this strategy was successful in the classroom Debbie took the mathematics exercises home for daughter, Heather, to work on. The strategy paid off handsomely: during one parents' evening Debbie was informed by her daughter's teacher that she had 'run out of things to give her.' Heather was so advanced in mathematics that Debbie was advised by the teacher to hire an extended mathematics tutor, much to Debbie's chagrin since she did not possess the financial capital (Bourdieu 1986) to hire the services of a private tutor.

Considering this information, I was interested to hear Heather's views. During the interview, Heather mentioned that she loved learning mathematics and science subjects at school. When I asked Heather whether she had picked up any learning tips from her mother she commented:

Sometimes she does show me different ways 'cause my teacher does it like some confusing ways, and mum will teach me the easier ways, and then I can do it that way [and] sometimes she'd like go on a piece of paper, and she'd draw on there and explain it to me, what she'd done on there, and then it would be that little bit easier for me. So, she'd do it, and then she'd explain it to me, and then I'd copy it down because then I'd know what I'm doing. It's, I find it easier. (Heather, 11-year-old)

While parents may want to help their children with maths homework, one major challenge in providing support is the difference in teaching methods between school and home. As pointed out in Chapter 3, most parents referred to the way they were taught mathematics at school, as opposed to the way mathematics is now taught in schools. This situation can lead to anguish and tension in the household (Russell 2002; Hughes and Greenhough 2007). In many ways, Debbie is perfectly situated to help her daughter at

home since her job involves supporting children in numeracy at school. However, in this scenario, ACL participation boosts Debbie knowledge and skills base, which she then passes on at home. Further, it appeared that Heather had picked up tips while working alongside her mother on homework tasks. She explained how she drew inspiration from observing her mother by saying:

May be if she done like a rough draft, I'd do the same thing as well. Sometimes she might do rough on a piece of paper and I might do the same and ask her to read it and see if it's okay. Like I did that with my geography homework once. I had to write a story and I done a draft and she marked it for me, and then I typed it up.

In collaborating with her mother, Heather learns how to write, proofread and edit her work. But there is one other element apparent in this process; the mechanisms not only prevent Heather from slipping behind, but also boost her further ahead in her school work. Similarly, there is evidence of this process happening in another household. When I asked Robyn's son, George, to comment on whether he had learned anything from his mother, he said:

Probably one of the largest tips is proof reading your work. The more you proof read your work and editing... the better you are going to get at it because editing is... I remember she said, 'It's a skill really.' If you've just done a large assignment, having to take pieces out of it, I think maybe it might raise your levels of school because maybe you might have unneeded bits in it. I think that's one of the biggest tips, is proofread and edit. (George, aged 13)

After leaving school with five GCSEs, Robyn, a higher-level learner, has since participated in sustained episodes of ACL over the years; and had recently studied a full-time English literature degree. Now in her 40s, Robyn described how she utilised her university experience to support her children.

I'm encouraging them now. Also, internet usage, don't even think of looking at Wikipedia, that's my advice. If you've got to look at Wikipedia, it's lazy. Get into the habit now of doing proper research. If you want some help or some guidance I will [help]. (Robyn, mother of four)

Once again, there are three features in this narrative that hold significance. First, Robyn talks about encouraging her children; second, she guides the children as in 'don't even think of looking at Wikipedia'; and third, her offer of *immediate* help communicates the idea that Robyn is ready to support them wherever, and whenever. Moreover, when parents were concerned about their children, ACL participation enabled parents to take preventative measures to boost children's learning. Take for example, Isobel's concern

for her younger daughter. At the beginning of the extract, here we see a parallel with Isobel's former learner identity.

I just want them to be more relaxed and Emily is, but Marie is very much like me. I can see it. I can see me in her then. You know, when she's not got the confidence. She's not oozing the confidence and I know she can do things, and I'm like, 'Right, okay let's sit down and work it out.' I just... It's the confidence, isn't it? At that age, as well, they haven't got confidence, have they? (Isobel, mother of two)

To find a way around the problem, Isobel utilises her current student position to demonstrate the practicalities of learning. Whilst waiting in the car for her daughters to finish after school activities, she explained how she went to great effort to expose them to revision practices. She said:

You know, umm, I just think for the exam, when they were watching me, I'd make a big thing of saying that I was revising. So, when we like, for example... I'd say, Right, okay, you go off and do what you've got to do but I'm going to sit in the car, and I had my files out and I know it's a strange place to revise but it was lovely. It's in the middle of nowhere. You've got no other sounds around. It's great you just sit in the car and just read, *and then I made a big thing of it to them that I was revising* [emphasis added].

As both daughters are due to sit their GCSEs in a few years' time, this example illustrates how Isobel demonstrates what the nature of revision looks like in practice i.e. reading course materials, quiet space, setting aside time to study, and so on. Exposure to her daughters seeing this process at first hand helps them understand the extent to which effective planning and preparation can instil confidence before the event. We see the outcome of Isobel's efforts in their response to my question on learning tips. Indeed, observing their mother prepare for examinations helped both daughters understand the requirements of planning and preparing for examinations in advance. Marie, for example, understood the importance of 'getting everything ready before, so it's not like a rush at the end', while Emily noted that:

You make sure you're confident before you go into the exam or something because when she went in there, if you're not confident before, then you'll not be like confident there. (Emily, 13-year-old)

Parents that shared their knowledge and skills with children often gained a great deal of satisfaction from doing this. These informal exchanges were a reminder to children that effort, application, good planning and preparation were essential features that improved the chance of success. Moreover, over the past two years Isobel has been learning sign

language at her local further education college. For the end of term practical examinations, Isobel recruited her daughters to help with exam preparation as she needed to practise her sign technique, as well as receive help with the timing of her answers. Here Marie comments on the process of giving feedback, and how it influenced her thinking. She said:

[B]efore I didn't really want anyone to help me because I would take offensively whatever they said, and I wouldn't like people helping me...[but] it's good having some criticism 'cause you can learn from it then, and you can make your work better by other people's views. (Marie, 14-year-old)

As Cutting and Dunn (2002) point out in their study that looked at young children's individual differences in sensitivity to teacher criticism, criticism has both "a cognitive intentional component and an emotional component" (p.3). Thus, in this context we see how, prior to the task of giving her mother feedback, Marie was not comfortable about receiving feedback – we see this in the words 'took offensively' - and would not accept help from others. However, after observing her mother's reaction to feedback, and her subsequent improvement in performance, Marie saw the value in constructive criticism. 'It's good' and 'you can make your work better' signals a change in thought pattern. This process highlights the powerful ways in which exposure to ACL activity can benefit children.

7.5.6 Benefit of parents and children learning the same subject specific content

As noted in the last section ACL participation provoked changes in children's feelings and thoughts towards learning and provided ideas for possible career goals. Moreover, when ACL was of a similar nature and aligned with children's learning, the link appeared to be useful for *both* parents and children, as demonstrated in the next example. Over the past three years 42-year-old Mary, a single parent, has participated in multiple episodes of ACL. At time of interview, Mary was studying a Level 3 teaching qualification at her local community centre while her son Stephen, a 17-year-old college student, was studying a Level 3 Diploma in Sports Coaching. During the interview, Stephen talked about the benefit of studying a similar subject-related course within the same timeframe as his mother.

I think we can relate as well because we're both studying at the moment, and now my mother's studying we can relate to each other. Like we can all help each other because we're all at different stages I feel. Well my mother has just passed her level 3 now. I'm currently doing my level 3 and [sister's name] hopefully will go on to a level 3 course so I think with us all being at different stages now, it's

experience. My mother can pass it on to me, I can pass it on to... my sister... and with my experience from coaching as well I think I can pass that on to my mother as well, with her teaching and not having a lot of experience with teaching as it stands anyway, and I think it will help my coaching experience. Well it will help her because I can tell her little things to do: what to do and what not to do. I think it's just all about experience and helping each other out. (Stephen, 17-year-old)

In this case, a shared interest in the same subject encourages the family to pool their knowledge and resources: a learning habitus that is inextricably linked through everyday conversations, interests and offers of reciprocal support that take place in the home context (Lave and Wenger 1991). Stephen was eager to talk about sharing his experience of learning with the family.

We've had a few discussions, me and my mother, 'cause she's had to do a teaching plan and I think that again it's the coaching, I do the coaching plans as well, and how they can like interact with each other doing different things. So, we always have discussions about it, and I'm like, 'Oh you could do this a better way,' and she's like, 'Oh well you could do this a better way,' and it just, it works well to be honest with you. I think we help each other out with her doing the session plans and me doing the coaching plans, I think the link there is helpful.

This links to evidence in the transactional model of two-way influence in the parent-child relationship (Demick 2012). Likewise, when I interviewed Mary, she talked about her experience of studying GCSE English, and how the family had discussed parts of the course at home. For example, Mary and the children had studied the novel, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Here, studying the same subject specific content had been especially helpful as everyone in the household knew the storyline. As Mary explained:

[W]e had discussions about it... in the house and that was good. Why did you think he done this [son's name]? Who do you think done that? Why did this happen? We had discussions about that. My son likes politics as well. So, he likes to have a good debate and a good discussion. So, we had a discussion about that, yeah, so that was good. It's interesting because when you're learning about the same things, it's nice for all of you then, isn't it? *You can all talk about the same things* [emphasis added]. (Mary, mother of two)

Here again, the narrative is distinctly positive, the words 'good', 'likes', 'interesting', and 'nice', coupled with 'talk' and 'discussion' all point towards positive action in learning. Indeed, when I asked Mary what discussions in the household might have been like had she not taken the course, she replied, 'I would've been like, 'I don't know what you're on about. What's *Pride and Prejudice*? I would never have known.' It is interesting to note the negative words in this statement. Nevertheless, learning the same subject specific

content within a similar timeframe had benefitted the family in several ways. First, the distinct nature of the learning naturally brought mother, son and daughter together, stimulating discussions about learning in the household (Lave and Wenger 1991). Second, Mary reported that she had shared her course notes with her daughter. Third, and most importantly, Mary's statement, 'it's nice for all of you', demonstrates how learning within the same timeframe brings a sense of joy and connection. While these moments may pass without notice they are powerful reminders of the influence of learning. As Stephen noted earlier, mutual interests and discussions at home were important to him as they linked directly to his learning. This dimension is highlighted in a paper by Hammond and Gough (2000, p. 1), who state that:

If a family shares goals and fosters a team spirit, individuals' motivations to learn become replaced by family-based motivations. This can create a "learning buzz", which is immensely effective in motivating learning amongst all individuals in the family.

In contrast, when parents struggled to understand what their children were learning, they were often limited by the type of support they could offer children. As we learned in Chapter 6 some parents relied heavily on family members to help with homework; others looked towards teachers to provide extra support at school; a few relied on private tutors, while others appeared mystified as to know what steps they should take to help their children, for example, see Karen's predicament in Chapter 6. In the next section, we see how parents drew upon learning in day-to-day educational practices at home.

7.5.7 Nature and timing of ACL participation

In the last section I briefly looked at the nature and timing of parental learning in relation to children's learning. Where parental learning overlapped and interlinked with children's learning the parent-child relationship appeared stronger and better connected. ACL also encouraged conversations and discussions in the home, for example, when I asked Lizzie and George, to talk about their mother's learning journey it was clear that Lizzie had been influenced by her mother's ACL activities since she wanted to follow in her footsteps to study the same English Literature degree. When I asked Lizzie to give a reason why she wanted to study the same degree, she replied, 'It sounds really interesting and I just thought I wanted to do it.' In contrast, when I questioned Lizzie about what she knew about her father's studies at university, she commented:

I don't really know what dad did as a degree, I don't really know much about it. So, I suppose because he did it earlier we don't really speak about it that much. But with mam, because she did it so recently, it's more of a, like we remember her doing it...

Since Lizzie's father had gained a degree some years before Lizzie was born she had not been exposed to his learning journey, therefore it did not figure highly in family discussions. On the other hand, Robyn's recent experience of studying full-time at university had influenced the family since the children were aware that Robyn had assignments to complete, they accompanied her to the university library, they shared in her learning success, and so on. In a similar way to situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) as an onlooker Lizzie had been directly exposed to watching her mother learn. Also, it is worth noting that the timing of ACL is important since exposure to ACL participation, in this instance, creates a platform for family discussion that gives Lizzie cues and clues for future learning. We know there are discussions revolved around Robyn's learning at university because Lizzie wants to study the same degree as her mother. To all intents and purposes then, the home is an important context as here Lizzie is exposed to learning that might otherwise be alien to her. ACL activity attracts children's attention: in Lizzie's case, it helped cultivate her interest in English literature. From this position, she has the space to think about her future learning goals.

However, when I juxtapose Lizzie's experience to Catherine's experience it is possible to understand how the nature and timing of ACL participation plays an influential role in parent-child relationships. Exposure to parental learning in the teenage years gives both young women the opportunity to observe and learn from their parents. On the one hand, Lizzie develops an interest in English literature, to the extent that she wants to study the same degree as her mother. In contrast, Catherine was less sure about following her parents into social work. At this point it is worth noting that Catherine's father discouraged her from taking this route⁵⁹. In terms of learning, then, Catherine had little in common with her parents, subject-wise. She explained:

[T]hey didn't go and do a degree in physics, or mathematics, or English which was relatable to what I was doing for my A levels or my GCSEs. They did social work and, really, I didn't do health studies or anything like that. So, I didn't really have a link but when I did... my degree I think it was more so about the standard of writing I'd have to produce. So, they understood that, and they understood what like a 12,000-word essay would involve. They were useful for that but for my PGCE it was more beneficial because there's overlap with social work and

⁵⁹ Her father repeatedly advised her not to take this path as he felt she would be unable to cope with the job.

teaching. So, it was useful for that; and they knew about people and they'd say, read Blogs" work or things like that. So, that was beneficial.

While it appears that ACL participation has no relevance or usefulness to Catherine as a teenager, when she attends university some year later several support mechanisms fall into place. Here, parental learning is relevant and meaningful since both parents were in a position to offer Catherine advice and support. Indeed, when Catherine later trains to become a teacher she is again able to draw upon her parents' knowledge and experience of social work. She draws upon the subject of fostering and adoption, and assimilates the information gained from her parents into her work context. She explained:

[T]here are a few children who are fostered in my school and many teachers don't really, I don't think they understand the issues. They say, 'What's the problem?' and I'm a little bit more sympathetic 'cause I understand the difficulty in what they've experienced. Even though I think some teachers do understand I think I've got an upper hand because I'm... well my brother's background but also from my dad being Child Protection, and if a child comes in and their shirts are like looking a different colour and they've got a bit of odour about them, I automatically think, oh something needs to be done by here. And then I think I'm an absolute pain to the Child Protection officer in that school, 'cause I'm constantly, constantly there saying stuff but I'd say for the better. (Catherine, 24-year-old)

Exposure to her parents' learning and social work background has given Catherine an understanding of Child Protection to the extent that she now feels she has the 'upper hand' on Child Protection matters related to her teaching job. While it is true that Catherine could have gathered this knowledge and experience from other sources, situated learning in the home context (Lave and Wenger 1991) demonstrates the powerful influence of ACL. Here, the experience of learning in the home context helps prepare Catherine to cope with situations at work that directly relate to the health and well-being of her school pupils.

7.5.8 Exposure to new contexts

Despite parents often having to rely on babysitters to attend courses there were times when parents had little choice other than to take their children along with them. These activities introduced children to new social contexts. In Chapter 5, we learned that Amy's teenage years were very isolating. Due to bullying issues at school she found it extremely difficult to leave home, which limited her friendship network. However, after the birth of her children she took advice from her local health visitor to sign up to fitness sessions. As Amy had no family support network, the only way she could take part in the fitness sessions was to take her children along with her. Participating in activities

helps the family integrate into the community, helping Amy and her children to socialise and forge friendships; aspects that Amy found difficult to manage as a teenager.

In contrast, Robyn's experience of studying at university had other unintended influences on the family. Robyn's children, for example, would often have to tag along with their mother during visits to the university library. Daughter, Lizzie, recalled the experience of entering this new, unfamiliar place.

I've always thought of university as quite like a, 'Oh no, more school,' but because we came down here with her when we were quite young, and everyone was so nice around... I don't know, it just made us, I think it made us respect it more, and may be want to go to university more than, or study on more than we would if we hadn't have come down. So, I'm glad that she did it when she did even though we didn't see her much. I think it opened our eyes more. (Lizzie, 16-year-old)

Experiencing this new social context changed Lizzie's perception of university life; it opened her eyes to possibilities for the future; this is seen in the words 'nice' and 'respect'. Thus, exposing children to socially situated contexts involving ACL can help children see the wider picture. ACL participation also stimulated discussions in the household. When Amy enrolled at her local further education college to study a BTEC Level 3 course in Fitness, 14-year-old son Craig pointed out, 'Basically what she learnt, we learnt with her 'cause she would come back after and teach us what she learnt.' Amy's daughter, Louise, had also benefitted from the course. She explained:

[We learnt] new stuff but not like holding heavy things like the weights and stuff. We couldn't do that but the exercises that she done, she like didn't do the hard stuff with us, she done like the easy stuff and we like put music on but not like really loud and learnt the new things, and she was like teaching us new things. And I think she's, in one way, I think she's helped me to get to gymnastics 'cause she done the classes in where I do gymnastics now. (Louise, 10-year-old)

Here we see the impact of Amy's learning on her children; learning that has pulled the family out of the home environment and into the community. Moreover, ACL participation not only gives both children the opportunity to learn more about fitness, but it also creates opportunities for all the family to enjoy: since participating in fitness helps the family to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Although Amy had no immediate family to call upon to help her, she nonetheless made the best of her situation. When attending fitness classes, the children also engaged in activities at the centre. As Louise explained:

[M]e and Craig would go swimming with our friends, so we would have fun in the pool, while mammy does classes, and we would meet in the Reception bit 'cause we're only next door to each other, 'cause the hall's there and like the swimming

pool's here so we're right next to each other. So, we're keeping fit by going in the pool, and she's keeping fit by going in the classes. (Louise, 10-year-old)

Later when I asked Craig and Louise what they thought about their mother studying, Craig, for example, commented that he had observed his mother doing coursework, noting that, 'It looked difficult; so many words and such little time.' Louise, on the other hand, had been inspired by her mother. She explained:

['C]ause she done fitness and I want to be a dance teacher, I think when she done the stretches I think she helped me learn about what stretches I have to do before I do dancing and stuff like that. If I teach I got to learn different stretches to teach the other people that are there what to do because if like, she said, 'If we strain a muscle... it might like stop you dancing for a couple of weeks,' and you don't want that to happen. So, we learnt different stretches. So, I could do that if I'm a dance teacher. (Louise, 10-year-old)

By observing Amy in class, Louise is naturally able to assimilate the experience into her world of learning: a world of learning that fires her enthusiasm to become a dance teacher. Here we see how ordinary, everyday experiences weave into the fabric of family life almost without notice; what Back (2015) describes as the 'seemingly unimportant' (p.21). This activity not only adds value and depth to Louise's knowledge and understanding of the world around her but also promotes ideas about future identity. Certainly, when children expressed an interest in parents' learning, it presented the opportunity for parents to extend their children's knowledge and skills.

7.5.9 Children and young people's observation of change in parental attitude and behaviour

When I asked children if they had noticed a change in their parents' behaviour since learning, as expected some children found this question difficult to answer, possibly because some parents had been involved in so much learning it would have been difficult to pinpoint the changes. However, as Catherine was much older than the rest of the children, she could reflect on the experience of observing both parents transform their lives from factory workers to social workers. This process involved a substantial amount of learning, on and off the job, over a period of 10 to 11 years. When I asked Catherine to explain how her parents had changed, she said:

[M]y mum is a lot more, I don't mean this rude but a lot more opinionated 'cause she knows about stuff now a lot more. So, she had a lot more things to say and add to the conversations about stuff of that nature. So, I'd say that's improved and she's a lot more confident and fierce, you know, that type of thing. She's a lot more strong-willed from doing her degree and my dad's pretty chilled out but

he's, I'd say, he's risen quite high, he's done quite well for himself. So, I think having a career is much more, well as a profession opposed to just a job now, so he's got a different attitude towards it and he is committed to it. (Catherine, 24-year-old)

Catherine also noted that since leaving their factory jobs her parents were now associated with different social networks (Bourdieu 1986). She commented:

[It's] given them a social life as well, like outside of their friendship groups. So, it's a different friendship group with like with my mum. [She] was bothering quite a bit with the people on the social work course and that was quite nice 'cause she was bothering with people with similar interests to her.

Here we see how new friendships are perceived in a positive light i.e. 'quite nice', and through 'similar interests' that bind the group together. When I asked Catherine to talk about what was good about her parents' studying, she replied:

[T]hey were challenging themselves academically to try something new... 'cause they could have just gone and tried to get a job in another factory up here or my mother could have stayed being an LSA⁶⁰ 'cause the hours were good.

In addition, Catherine noted how her mother's learning had helped her see the bigger picture, especially in terms of the competencies required to stay ahead in today's job market.

I think my mum has changed quite a bit. In a good way but it's nice to see her like, I'm just trying to think of an example, she understands a lot more about the world out there, and all the jobs out there and what's expected of you in a job.

Indeed, throughout her time at university and later during her teaching career Catherine explained that she had often referred to her mother for advice and guidance. Evidence of this aspect arose during my interview with Veronica. Here she talks about giving her daughter advice about work and careers.

If you want to leave your school, don't leave your school to come into school in Wales, leave your school to go to a school in Australia, Canada. See the world, progress with your career but look what is out there. You can do anything, the sky's the limit and today now she texted me, 'I think I'll apply for a promotion in school' and I texted her back this morning saying, 'Don't forget, big yourself up: I can, I will, I can, I did, I, I, I.' That's what I texted her. (Veronica)

⁶⁰ Learning support assistant

Veronica's sense of futurity encourages Catherine to think big. Her advice to 'look what's out there', and further tips on how to behave at job interviews, for example, 'I can, I will, I can, I did', gives Catherine the much needed 'push' as well as the 'boost' to help prepare Catherine for her next career move (Reay et al. 2011).

Polly, mother of two, took a similar approach. As discussed in Chapter 5, after leaving school at 16 with no qualifications⁶¹, Polly's education and work trajectory over the past 28 years has been one of continuous learning. At time of interview Polly was participating in short courses while working, volunteering and bringing up her two children. Her son Aled, a sixth form student, had set his sights on a career in physics. During interview, he commented on his mother's skills and abilities by saying:

My mother's a very outgoing person. She has confidence in talking with people, anyone, anywhere... [and] she isn't afraid of bringing up a problem, which might be kind of touchy with people, to get it sorted out to be honest with you. (Aled, 17-year-old)

Certainly, Aled has a lot to be grateful for. Polly has fought tirelessly through the courts to gain the right for Aled and his sister (who are both disabled) to attend mainstream school instead of attending the local specialised school some miles away from home. Indeed, Aled's views on his mother's confidence to get through this 'harsh world' is shown in the way he acknowledges her strength and fortitude to battle the school system. On passing his GCSEs with flying colours, Aled described himself as being 'pretty laid back' about the whole experience. However, studying at AS level requires more effort and commitment. Here Aled explains how his parents helped him understand what was needed to succeed.

[T]he extra step up to A level, like I needed pulling back in line I guess and [stepdad's name] and mum definitely made me see the bigger picture I guess. They made me work harder... if I didn't have that nagging so to say, push, marks or whatever, yeah, I definitely wouldn't have got the grades that I have.

In many ways, this scenario is much like Catherine's experience of being pushed by her parents to do better academically and Caroline's experience of being nagged by the job advisor to join a literacy class. In the same way, Polly's support and understanding of what needs to be done to get her son back on track is not much different to that of the job advisor.

⁶¹ The specialist school that Polly attended did not offer a GCSE curriculum.

7.6 Summary of chapter

To conclude, this chapter continued to explore parent-child relationships, while considering children's views and perspectives. Interviewing children offered me an opportunity to triangulate some of the evidence presented in parent interviews (Silverman 2010). Listening to children's unique accounts gave me a broader understanding of parent-child relationships. Sometimes children saw ACL participation in negative ways; indeed, watching parents become stressed or having to forego spending quality family time together was a source of frustration for some. This led some children to think about following the traditional education pathway instead of following the ACL pathway. Yet, on a positive note, ACL participation helped parents and children gain a sense of connection, which benefitted both parties enormously. Also, there is evidence that children and young people were drawn into their parents' studies in unexpected ways; they took note of adult learning routines, and observed how parents planned, prepared and executed their work. ACL participation also exposed children and young people to different learning contexts; they picked up learning tips; had access to parents' learning resources and saw parents as good family role models. Likewise, seeing parents achieve, inspired some children and young people to want to follow in parent's footsteps, as in Lizzie wanting to study the same degree as her mother. Parental achievement also gave children and young people clues and cues about future identity. Children, especially teenagers, also provided support for parents, via discussions at home on subjects of interest. When subjects studied were of a similar nature and level, there is evidence to suggest there was not only bi-directional support but interactional support between parents and children. Finally, the nature and timing of learning was critical. The closer the subject specific content studied and the closer the interest, the more parents and children became involved in each other's learning.

CHAPTER 8 – UNDERSTANDING FAMILY LEARNING LIVES

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I presented my empirical findings. Here we learned about parents' learning lives, their experiences of schooling children, and then later how the process was viewed from a child and young person's perspective. In keeping with the broader study questions this led me to further consider (1) what part did ACL participation play in the process and (2) what were the underlying mechanisms of change and transition? Initially, I created a 'snapshot classification framework' to use as a guide, then later devised the NAP procedure to aid in the identification of underlying mechanisms. In doing so, this enabled me to form the very basis and structure of the arguments presented throughout the study, from which I was then able to provide answers to the main study questions.

8.1 Understanding adult learning lives

Exploring and unravelling learning lives is central to understanding how parents school their children. In considering the 24 adult trajectories, it was possible to see how some parents had managed to successfully navigate through the ACL pathway while others, despite trying their best, had been unable to overcome the significant obstacles and barriers placed in their way. Not surprisingly, as we learned in Chapter 5, the concatenations of life: the various twists and turns, blockages, stumbling blocks, chances and opportunities, in many ways orchestrated parents' learning lives. However, by paying attention to the cognitive and emotional aspects in the narratives, I realised that vital support mechanisms needed to be put in place to enable individuals to successfully navigate the life pathway. Further, I could appreciate how some parents had managed to progress through to the higher levels of learning, while others had progressed no further forward since leaving school. Indeed, it had taken over 10 years or more for individuals like Veronica and David to transition from Level 2 learner to degree level learner while others, like John and Owen, were still no further forward qualification wise some twenty years later. Moreover, I could appreciate how ACL participation influenced the ways in which parents educated their children: a point I shall return to later in the chapter.

However, before I proceed, I need to explain the first part of the conundrum, namely why some parents were motivated to participate in ACL while others were not so keen to do

so. First, I sensed that some parents, especially those who possessed lower level qualifications, were afraid to participate in formal learning. Certainly, throughout the interviews, Tom, Owen, and John had consistently stressed their preference for learning in practical or 'hands on' terms. Negative school experiences, coupled with low level outcomes tend to undermine confidence that in turn influences attitudes towards learning (Bandura 2001). Further, in one example we can see how this process plays out when, some years later, Owen must face an imposed learning situation at work. Here, Owen's failure to pass the sports instructor examination later re-confirmed his doubts about learning in the academic sense through the statement, 'anything with the pen scares me'. Thus, to shield himself emotionally Owen returns to manual work; a work context he felt comfortable with and knew best. Owen also focused more on the 'fun' side of learning with his children, and less on the academic side because this form of learning was something he could cope with: it resided within his comfort zone. In this situation, the task of providing academic support for his children was delegated to his wife Yvonne; the higher-level learner in the household.

Likewise, John, having nothing to show for all his years of schooling, believed it would be difficult to achieve any qualifications in later life. By demonstrating a commitment and dedication to work, John deflected attention away from his worries about learning by focusing on the role of 'earner' and 'protector' in the family. In doing so, John could guarantee that his children would not grow up in poverty much like John had experienced in his childhood. However, as we learned through Caroline's example, an element of persuasion and constant 'nagging' signalled a turning point in her life. Since returning to learn, Caroline has never looked back. However, 'taking the plunge' to return to learn often involves a certain level of risk; the fear of ridicule, embarrassment, or looking small in front of others, an ever-present forethought carried over from school day nightmares.

This leads me to a second consideration: our proclivity or appetite for learning, in the academic sense. For whatever reason, if one is not willing or open to learn, or if one does not respond to encouragement or feedback from others (Nohl 2015) then this can prove problematic. However, all is not lost: intervention-based learning offers a helping hand for adults prepared to take the risk, and certainly for those who require that extra measure of support and encouragement. As we learned in Chapter 5, interventions not only offered a beacon of hope for these parents, but also helped parents get their lives back on track.

Third, many parents when reflecting on their childhood reported that they lacked the vital support or 'push' needed to achieve at school. Suffice to say, most of the time it was factors outside of their control that dealt the killer blow to block their path. Family separation and divorce, illness, poor teaching, and lack of support in and outside of school, were just some of the blockers to learning. Effectively these situations barred many from achieving their potential during the teenage years. Thus, the 'critical window of opportunity' was lost. Nevertheless, parents' reaction to unfulfilled goals and regrets about failure to achieve their potential was one of the reasons that drove some of the parents to re-engage in ACL (Reay et al. 2011). Fuelled by new goals, aspirations and interests, these parents were keen to redress the balance of earlier losses through sheer determination, a resolve to do better or, as in Debbie's words, 'to be somebody' (Ecclestone et al. 2010).

Fourth, once the decision to learn has been made, there is the question of what it takes to become a successful learner. At the very least, one must be willing to focus, concentrate, and apply oneself in the learning context. Furthermore, good quality, timely support, increases the chance of success since, in the absence of appropriate support, the learning pathway will be far more taxing and challenging. Indeed, as we learned, many of the higher-level learners garnered help and support from a range of sources, for example, from family members, teachers, tutors, friends and colleagues, and fellow learners. When learners stumbled, or failed to achieve their goal, it was not so much for the want of trying, but more to do with the lack of support at that critical point in time. On the one hand, Owen's failure to declare his literacy problem was risky to say the least. It therefore came as no surprise to learn of failure to pass the sports instructor exam. On the other hand, institutional failure to recognise Robyn's needs as a parent student, and the lack of support thereafter, contributed to her decision to drop out of the degree programme.

As explained in Chapter 5, although parental accounts of initial education were fraught with difficulties and obstacles, for some parents this provided the motivation to improve their lives through learning. Parents engaged in ACL because they:

- Regretted not reaching their potential at school, which set in motion a process of self-directed learning;
- Wanted to learn and were open to trying new experiences. This helped to filter out areas of potential interest;

- Identified opportunities that fostered their interest in learning;
- Put in place a plan of action, which helped parents focus on the goals they wanted to fulfil; while
- Some parents (but not all) participated because they had the funds to do so, in the absence of funding from other sources.

This list is not exhaustive: there were many other reasons why parents participated in ACL, for example, parents talked about wanting to improve their knowledge and skills to get a job or to change job, and to improve their mental health and well-being (Aldridge 2015).

8.2 Identifying underlying mechanisms in learning

As the study progressed I came to understand the nature of the learning trajectories and could identify the points at which some parents had begun the process of changing their lives through learning. However, it appeared far more difficult to pinpoint changes in parents' styles and practices. After completing the interviews and analysing the data, this led me to question over a significant period of time, what were the underlying mechanisms that helped parents and children learn, and likewise, what were the underlying mechanisms that prevented parents and children from learning? As outlined in Chapter 4, unravelling and revealing the mechanisms was a major challenge. However, after devising the NAP procedure, I discovered two groups of mechanisms that figured highly in the narratives. They were (1) the 'facilitator' and 'booster' mechanisms (positive), and (2) the 'blocker' and 'checker' mechanisms (negative).

8.2.1 'Facilitator' and 'booster' mechanisms

In analysing adult life trajectories, several patterns emerged out of the data, from which I could attribute ACL participation to situations that facilitated or boosted learning. An essential feature throughout the narratives was that learners thrived on receiving feedback from tutors, friends, work colleagues, fellow learners and others. As exemplified in Caroline's case, the literacy tutor invested a significant amount of time and effort into the tutor student relationship (Salisbury 2016). Consequently, the level of one-to-one support proffered at the very beginning of Caroline's learning journey helped her to develop a coping strategy that worked best for her, and one which enabled her to continue learning as well as progress onto other courses.

Receiving informal advice and guidance also offered potential learners like David ideas and clues about identity, and the possible pathway he might take. For example, when David was informed by his wife's social work colleagues that he worked well with children, it stimulated his interest in working with children, which eventually triggered his decision to change career. From this point onwards, David set out an action plan to achieve his goals. Support and encouragement, especially at critical points in the trajectory, from close family members, friends, and peers was also important as it provided learners with the encouragement to continue learning. Likewise, these patterns emerged in the trajectories of the higher-level learners, notably Veronica, Debbie, and Yvonne. For example, after one episode of illness Yvonne temporarily lost confidence in her skills and abilities but on receiving reassurance from her husband that she was up to the job, she returned to the hospital placement. Familiarity in this situated learning context helps Yvonne settle back in her job, whereupon after spending only an hour on the hospital ward her confidence levels begin to rise. We can see this in her words, 'I'm back now; I'm back with a vengeance.'

Situated learning contexts also provided many opportunities for learners to observe what was going on around them (Lave and Wenger 1991). Here learners took note by observing others in the classroom, and in the workplace (including volunteering). For example, when parents undertook voluntary placements in primary schools they gained an insight into teaching methods and practices. Similarly, children did the same in the home learning environment. Being exposed to parental learning routines allowed children to observe and mimic their parents. From this situated learning context, children took inspiration from the cues and clues on offer. Moreover, exposure to situated learning contexts outside the home stimulated children's interest, hopes and aspirations, which in turn offered children ideas about future identity, as seen in Louise's aspiration to become a dance teacher after taking part in her mother's fitness video, and in Robyn's children discovering what the university environment was really like (Wertsch et al. 1995).

Likewise, parents drew upon the skills acquired through ACL to demonstrate different aspects of learning. On the one hand, children learned how to plan and prepare for homework tasks. This is seen through Yvonne giving her daughter step-by-step instructions on how to complete a school project, while Robyn offered her children advice on how to write and edit essays. Also, parents with higher-level qualifications generally had a good understanding of academic study requirements. For example, Robyn

demonstrated how to research information on the internet, while guiding her children away from inappropriate websites like Wikipedia, while Veronica could advise her daughter about which books to read for her teacher training course.

On the other hand, children learned through observation and discussion, for example, offering feedback on her mother's performance helped Marie realise the value of constructive criticism, while Joshua picked up on the fact that sometimes it took his mother a long time to find answers to his questions. Observing parents juggle learning around family and work responsibilities also encouraged older children to seriously consider following the traditional pathway, rather than follow the ACL pathway. When children were exposed to this dimension, they realised that negotiating the ACL pathway was sometimes more stressful and time-consuming. This was expressed in Stephen's reaction to wanting to study sooner rather than later in the life course, and in Lizzie's words, 'I want to do it in a nice way.'

The availability and proximity of learning opportunities offered parents access to learning they might otherwise have not considered. Attending courses in the community engendered a more accessible type of learning. Nanette, Whitney, and Zoe, for example, felt comfortable learning in their local community. It also saved time and money on travel and childcare costs.

Exposure to multiple episodes of learning, coupled with regular feedback and encouragement from others, also helped learners overcome their fears and doubts about learning; this process was vital to helping learners develop a sense of agency and identity. Moreover, the experience of success motivated learners, and mastery encouraged confidence to engage in further learning. Some parents drew on the power of the knowledge gleaned and used it to challenge professionals: for example, when Yvonne challenged the primary school teacher to record her son's work properly, and in Polly fighting the courts to gain the right for her children to be treated equally in the school system.

Sharing success with parents exposed children to the payoff and rewards accrued from learning. When parents achieved their goals, children were happy and looked up to parents as good role models (Brassett-Grundy 2004a). Also, when parents received reward and recognition, it instilled confidence in their skills and abilities, which fuelled hopes and aspirations for all the family.

An element of competition also inspired some learners, for example, both David and his daughter enjoyed the competitive aspect of learning, as did Veronica's course colleague. These individuals thrived on the element of being first or the 'one to beat'. This aspect was not apparent in all trajectories. Veronica, for example, was not particularly interested in competing against others however there were situations in the classroom setting that spurred some children to want to perform better at school, for example, Bernard reported his daughter rising to the challenge of wanting to do well when sat next to another pupil with similar literacy problems. Introducing an element of competition in the home learning environment therefore could yield similar results especially if learners respond positively to an element of competition.

Parents always appreciated help and support from others, especially when learning opportunities were supported by the institution through CPD, for example, David's employer agreed to fund his part-time degree, and in recognition of the support David worked hard to thank his employer, which made him even more determined to succeed. However, when support was not forthcoming, this spurred people like Veronica to want to do better despite the odds stacked against them, for example, when her employer refused to give her time off to study, Veronica resigned from the job and with the help and support of her husband signed up for the course regardless.

Moreover, there was significant evidence of role modelling. While parents looked up to their tutors, and valued their support and guidance, children and young people looked up to their parents as role models (Brassett-Grundy 2004a). More importantly, when parents participated in ACL, learning was naturally assimilated into home routines and practices. Children and young people benefitted from observing their parents' routines, for example, Rachel (David's daughter) took the opportunity to work on homework tasks while her parents focused on their professional work tasks at home; even to the extent of Rachel copying her mother's examination preparation routine by disappearing to the attic to revise for her examinations. Similarly, Heather took advantage of quiet time at home to do her homework, while her mother studied. This meant she had access to immediate help and support at home; a home learning environment where Heather had the opportunity to ask her mother questions on the spot. There is also evidence to suggest that Heather copied what her mother did, for example, by directly observing her mother working on university assignments Heather knew how to plan, produce and edit her homework. These situated learning contexts were not only a normal part of family

routine but also, and of more importance, these contexts were naturally assimilated into children and young people's lives (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Parents also passed on learning resources to their children, for example, Mary shared her GCSE English course notes with her daughter, and Yvonne shared her books on anatomy with her son. In effect, these forms of support boosted children's learning in the home. Studying subject-specific content also stimulated conversations in the household, for example, since Mary's GCSE course directly linked with her children's GCSE course it offered opportunities for the family to discuss the subject of English literature. Having read the novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, both Mary and her children had many informal discussions about the storyline at home. Thus, what is significant here is the timing and nature of learning, for example, had Mary not read the novel *Pride and Prejudice* as part of her course, she would not have understood the nature of the subject being studied. Thus, it is unlikely the family would have had discussions about the book at home because, as Mary clearly stated, 'I would never have known.' Moreover, later when Mary was studying a teaching qualification at the same time as her son Stephen, mother and son had lively discussions about teaching and training in the home. Here, not only is there evidence of bi-directional support, but also there is evidence of interactional support, where mother and son have discussions about ways to improve their work.

Even when parents studied at the higher levels, if children were not interested in the subject matter studied, there is little evidence to suggest that discussions took place in the home. As we learned in Chapter 7, Catherine's GCSE studies were not linked in any way to her parents' social work course. May be this is the reason why Catherine felt so frustrated at having to give up her 'me' time to look after her younger brother. As Catherine pointed out, she could see no reason why her mother should want to study to become a social worker when she had no intention of finding a job after the course. However, a few years later, when Catherine studies at university, and later trains to become a teacher, the support mechanism kicks in, and the benefit of ACL is plain to see. Later in the interview, Catherine reported that she had benefitted from her parents' learning since both parents understood 'what a 12,000-word essay would involve', and often recommended which books she should read. Indeed, Catherine reported that she had borrowed her mother's learning resources while studying at university. Further, since both parents were qualified social workers, Catherine drew upon their social work experiences to inform her work practices. She believed that having a practical knowledge

of Child Protection scenarios gave her the upper hand at work since many of her teaching colleagues had appeared none the wiser about Child Protection issues.

In pinpointing the booster mechanisms, it is possible to demonstrate at different points throughout childhood how ACL influenced the parent-child relationship. Take for example, the process of learning to focus and concentrate. This is exemplified through the following situated learning contexts, in:

- Hope's four-year-old son's efforts to keep his younger brother occupied while his mother studies;
- Veronica giving her 'naughty' 12-year-old pupils some quiet time in the classroom;
- Debbie and 11-year-old daughter, Heather, sitting together quietly at the table to work on their respective assignment/homework tasks;
- Isobel exposing her teenage daughters to quiet time studying in the car, and
- David's teenage daughter, Rachel, working quietly with her parents, and disappearing to the attic to revise.

Every one of these situated learning contexts highlights one dimension: that peace and quiet, with no interruptions helps the learner to focus and concentrate on the task at hand. In summing up, the mechanisms identified which facilitated and boosted learning were:

- Support and encouragement, especially at critical points in the trajectory, from close family members, friends, fellow learners, and significant others;
- Tutor/teacher feedback, support and encouragement;
- Role modelling, for example, parents looked up to their tutors, while children looked up to their parents as learners;
- The opportunity to learn in different situated contexts; this was achieved by learners directly observing what others were doing, and copying their behaviours as exemplified in the earlier extracts of children learning to focus and concentrate;
- Availability, proximity, and continued exposure to learning opportunities;
- Experience of success, and sharing success with parents, and significant others;
- Reward and recognition; and
- An element of competition (but only in some cases).

Moreover, when individuals were exposed to these mechanisms multiple times, not only were they more experienced at finding ways to manage their support needs but also, they became more adept at identifying and managing others' support needs. For example, Polly appeared to be very enthusiastic about passing on what she had learnt, especially when she recognised that others had support needs too. She explained:

[W]hen I have volunteers if I think, well actually, they would really benefit from doing that course and the other. I'm always encouraging people to do courses and develop their learning.

Here Polly is putting in place a facilitator mechanism, suggesting that volunteers attend courses to boost their learning. In effect, this open invitation encourages volunteers to expand their knowledge and skills base. In contrast, a lack of support at key points in the trajectory appeared to block or check the learning pathway. Here, it depended on an individual's reaction or response to a situation or circumstance, and whether the individual had the means, the will and the fortitude to overcome the obstacles placed in his or her way.

8.2.2 'Checker' and 'blocker' mechanisms

As discussed earlier, learning involves a certain level of motivation, effort and commitment, but equally, learners need the vital support and resources to achieve their goals. In Chapter 5, we learned that some parents were reluctant to learn. Perhaps the fear of ridicule or embarrassment, stemming from emotions felt in the school classroom many years ago, was what stood in their way. Owen, Tom, Eleanor and John, had always struggled with reading and writing and, as a result, had resigned themselves to thinking they were more practical than academic type learners. It is ironic then that had they received the right kind of support at the right time, it is likely they could have improved their literacy skills. However, not acknowledging the problem or not knowing how to overcome the problem was a major obstacle for all four parents. For example, when I asked Owen whether he had considered joining an adult education class to improve his reading and writing he replied that it would cost too much, and that family and work commitments took up too much of his time. Thus, until Owen decides to seek help to overcome this issue, there is slim chance of him moving forward.

Furthermore, on analysing parent interviews there was a noticeable absence of support mechanisms in many narrative accounts. In effect, this enabled the 'blocker' or 'checker' mechanisms to remain in place until, of course, a solution or way around the problem

could be found. Mainly, when participants encountered problems it was often due to the limited educational resources they had at their disposal (Sime and Sheridan 2014), as well as a perceived lack of support from family, the school, their employer, or learning provider. For example, had Amy received appropriate help and support from the school and her mother to overcome the bullying situation, she may well have stayed in school to complete her education. Likewise, had Robyn been allowed to move from full-time to part-time study, this may have led to a decision to complete the degree programme. Finally, had Bernard secured financial backing to train as an NVQ assessor, or if he possessed the personal funds to finance his learning, the training could well have led to a career change. Instead, his path was blocked and, in this scenario, both potential employers and Bernard lost out. Indeed, at time of interview Bernard was long-term unemployed, and still looking for work. In contrast, some parents did negotiate their way around the blockages, for example, when Veronica's employer refused to fund or release her to study, the checker mechanism came into play. However, undeterred, and with the help and support of her husband, Veronica left the job and went back to college, whereby she eventually gained a degree in social work.

Lack of communication and co-ordination within institutions also deterred some learners from studying, and even caused enthusiastic learners like Polly to drop out. Even though Polly had declared a need for support, lack of communication within the institution resulted in the failure to put in place appropriate mechanisms of support (for a more detailed description, see Polly's account, Appendix 15). In addition, aside from barriers placed by the family, institution or employers, some parents were constrained by personal barriers, such as:

- Believing they were 'dull' or 'thick';
- Believing others were better than them, essentially putting others on a pedestal;
- Fears about learning;
- Low levels of confidence and self-efficacy;
- A reluctance to acknowledge a problem or issue with respect to learning;
- A reluctance to seek out help and support;
- Not declaring a need for support;
- Not knowing where or how to obtain support;
- Lack of financial capital to study; and,
- Lack of resources at home, for example, no internet and few books.

These factors placed significant obstacles in their way, which caused some parents to give up on learning. However, as outlined in Chapter 5, with the right kind of professional support a few parents were able to overcome the blocking mechanisms, as exemplified in the intervention-based learner stories. This, effectively, assisted parents to resume the learning pathway that instilled a sense of hope, confidence and pride from which they were able to develop a positive attitude towards learning.

Likewise, there was evidence in children and young people's accounts of slipping or lagging behind at school. This situation was further compounded when:

- Children were unaware they were lagging behind their peers at school;
- Children failed to ask teachers or parents for support;
- Some children concealed or failed to show parents their learning log (as reported by parents); while in some instances,
- Schools delayed telling parents that children were lagging behind: this was more likely to happen at secondary school level.

If parents are unaware that children require help with homework, then it is unlikely support will be forthcoming. This effectively places children at real risk of slippage, in the educational sense. Even when support needs were identified, there was no guarantee that support would arrive immediately. Therefore, a delay in support can put children at serious risk of slipping further behind at school.

8.2.3 Support: a nuanced, complex mechanism

Before I move on to the next section, I want to take a moment to reflect on my position as a PhD student researcher. During my journey, there have been points where I have needed help and support. When this happened, I was lucky enough to have at my disposal a solid support network. I must acknowledge that without the help and support of my PhD supervisors, family and friends, it would have been far more difficult to negotiate the obstacles placed in my way. To demonstrate my point, just recently my home computer crashed eight weeks before submitting this thesis. The whole process was very stressful and after struggling to get the computer fixed, I decided to buy a new computer. However, this caused me to question, what would I have done if there were no systems of support in place? On reflection, I realised that seven close family members had supported me through this tough period, plus six others outside my family circle. I received technical support, financial support (to buy a new computer), ideas on where to

obtain help, and a considerable amount of emotional support and encouragement. But not only that, what I realised most was that in my hour of need, people in my support network *immediately* came to my aid. Had there been no support, or if support had arrived some weeks later, I question whether I could have submitted my thesis, let alone submitted it on time.

To return to the study, I realise that while it may be relatively safe to assume that support is integral to the learning process, in this study the nature and level of support for parents, children and young people appeared nuanced and complex. It is not just a question of 'support'. First, the need for support must be identified and brought to light; either by the learner or by, for example, a teacher, tutor, parent, or significant other. Second, once the need for support has been identified, a mechanism or combination of mechanisms must be put in place to support the learner. Third, support must be appropriate, timely, and effective. In the absence of one or more of these dimensions there is a real risk of slippage, in the education sense. Moreover, as Sharon and David's examples clearly demonstrate in Chapter 5 (section 5.7) continuously slipping at school leads to the tumbling effect.

8.3 The importance of support in parent-child relationships

I now turn to discuss the findings by considering the relevance and importance of support in parent-child relationships. But before I move on, and as a precursor, I refer to Chapter 5, where I explained how Veronica adeptly managed to win over her group of 'naughty boys'. Here, a positive staff-pupil relationship was underpinned by several underlying mechanisms, namely: one to one support; peace and quiet; encouragement, and an element of competition. More importantly, Veronica's role as learner in the classroom exposed her pupils to a different situated context, whereby the pupils had the opportunity to directly observe the world of the adult learner (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wertsch et al. 1995; Rogoff et al. 2015). In this case, some of the mechanisms above can be linked back to the 'facilitator' and 'booster' mechanisms identified in adult learning trajectories, for example, see Caroline and David's experience (Appendix 12 and Appendix 14). Thus, bearing in mind this information, in this section I offer some answers as to why parents who had been exposed to multiple episodes of ACL were more adept at supporting their children than parents who had been exposed to far fewer episodes of ACL.

During the parent interviews, I got a sense that some parents were unaware of the extent to which ACL participation had changed their lives, still less to understanding how learning had influenced the way they schooled their children. However, parents like David were sure that ACL participation had helped the family in several ways. Learning had not only helped David change career but had also helped, in his words, to 'break the cycle of disadvantage' since daughter, Rachel, was poised to become the first in the family to go to university from sixth form. In addition, following the ACL pathway had inspired many parents to pass on their experiences to others, as demonstrated in Polly's efforts to encourage volunteers back into learning at her place of work. What is certain however was that when parents took the ACL pathway, children were directly exposed to adult learning experiences. As Lizzie recalled, the family never had discussions at home about their father's degree course, mainly because he had followed the traditional pathway many years prior to starting a family.

8.3.1 Schooling and parental support

Regarding children's education, in Chapter 6 we learned that parents had the opportunity to become very involved at pre-school and primary school stage, and as Russell and Granville's (2005) template of activities shows many parents were formally and informally involved in several aspects of school life. However parental involvement at secondary school level appeared to be far more difficult for parents to manage, mainly because of children's growing independence, and the nature of trying to deal with a far bigger institution. Parents were often hampered at this stage because of the tenuous relationship with the school. Consequently, parents mainly relied on the school to track and monitor their children's learning, putting hope and trust in their children to do the work. In addition, there appeared to be difficulty in identifying children's support needs, which may explain, in part, why some children were at risk of slipping behind at school. However, even when support needs were identified, reactions differed according to the type and level of support parents could offer children.

It became clear that parents with lower-level qualifications and limited experience of ACL, struggled to support their children. When children required support, these parents either deferred to other family members, the school, the internet or, as in some cases, gave up on their quest to find support. Others were determined to provide support even though they lacked the personal skills to help, for example, after experiencing the 'tumbling' effect in childhood Amy knew all too well that support was crucial. Failure to

address her son's struggles with maths would have resulted in Craig slipping further behind at school. However, as Amy had no maths' experience to draw upon from her school days, as well as having no experience of learning maths along the ACL pathway, she had no choice but to turn to the school for help. Fortunately, at this point, the school provided extra maths sessions, which halted the slipping process. However, it does beg the question what would have happened, had the school not come to Amy's rescue. Liam also faced the same problem when his son was struggling with GCSE English. Unable to help his son, Liam and his wife decided to hire a private tutor. However, here again if Liam had not possessed the financial capital to do so (Bourdieu 1986), what other support mechanisms could he have referred to, especially considering that Liam could not rely on other family members to provide support. There is another possible dimension: sometimes parents are too proud, and do not want to admit that they need help to support their children academically.

There is evidence to suggest that some parents intentionally, and in some cases unintentionally, boosted their children's learning by participating in ACL. Isobel, Robyn, David, Polly, Veronica, Mary, Yvonne and Debbie all drew upon and utilised their ACL studies to boost their children's learning. This effectively kept the checker and blocker mechanisms at bay. Even when blocker mechanisms were identified these parents responded quickly to prevent their children from falling behind, by putting in place a combination of support mechanisms. Liam, Amy and Frances took a similar approach however support here was sometimes delayed: these parents relied heavily on the internet, the school, and in Liam's case, a private tutor to provide support.

In contrast, parents with higher-level qualifications were not only more adept at supporting their children, but they also understood the need to put in place mechanisms of support as quickly as possible. When parents discovered their children were falling behind in schoolwork, not only did they implement a system of support immediately but also, they tended to put in place a combination of support mechanisms to help children catch up. For example, when Robyn discovered her son George had slipped behind in science, she immediately set about monitoring his homework diary. This action was further supplemented by not one but two home revision sessions per week. In effect this gave George a real opportunity to catch up in science, which prevented him from slipping behind in the subject. Further, organising revision sessions at home encouraged Robyn's younger son to join in. In effect, this strategy worked well for the family. On the one hand, George was catching up on his school work while, on the other, his younger

brother had the opportunity to boost his learning. Also, exposure to parental ACL routines in the home environment helped prevent children from slipping at school, and in some cases, boosted children's performance at school. For example, Rachel was subsumed into a learning culture at home that spilled over into school life, while social networking at university spurred Debbie to bring home ideas that boosted Heather's knowledge and skill in maths. This process was so effective Debbie commented that her daughter was teaching her peers in the classroom because her class teacher had run out of exercises to give her.

8.4 Summary of chapter

In summary, this chapter considered adult learning lives, and the distance travelled along the ACL pathway. Three further aspects were considered: the individual's' willingness to learn; the vital support needed to reach the learning goal, and what it takes to become a successful learner. Next, I identified the underlying mechanisms in learning, namely the: facilitator, booster, blocker and checker mechanisms. Here again, good systems of support are vital and integral to successful learning. Without support, there is the risk of slippage which, if not halted, leads to the tumbling effect.

CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter 8, we learned that when parents put in place mechanisms of support, or a combination of support mechanisms, they prevented children from slipping behind at school. Indeed, in many cases there was evidence of parents boosting their children's learning. In contrast, when support at home or school was lacking or non-existent it led to children falling behind at school, and in some cases, continuously slipping led to the tumbling effect. Thus, in this chapter, I draw my main conclusions from my findings against the research literature. Next, I put forward recommendations to implement a strategy to boost learning in the home environment. This is followed by consideration of the strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for further research. Finally, I end my thesis with a quotation from Louise, one of the child participants. At time of interview her words struck a chord with me however I did not realise the full significance of the power in the words until I reached the latter stages of my PhD journey.

9.1 Main conclusions

As referred to in Chapter 2, understanding parent learning lives, and the pathways they navigate is highly complex. Mezirow's (1978) perceptive transformation theory, and Nohl's (Nohl 2015) five stage process of transformation provided a basis from which to understand the notion of transformation. However, on identifying the mechanism of change in adult learning trajectories Nohl's typology (2015) that explains five phases in the learning journey resonated more closely to my empirical findings, for example, the nature of both David and Veronica's learning transition began incidentally. On the one hand, receiving feedback from friends that he worked well with children set David off on a different career trajectory. Veronica, on the other hand, after volunteering for some months at her daughter's primary school by chance saw an advert in the paper advertising jobs working in learning support, and from there her learning journey began. Here, volunteering provided the basis from which Veronica progressed into employment (Plant 2014). Although both typologies describe specific stages in the process of change, what is missing in these accounts is the element of timely, effective, and ongoing support. In effect, without this mechanism, change and transition will be far more difficult to achieve.

In consideration of the studies outlined in Chapter 3 that identified the processes and mechanisms of learning within parent-child relationships, I largely agree with the

findings. The mechanisms identified are similar to the ones identified in this study, for example, much like Brassett-Grundy (2004a) and Attewell and Lavin (2007) there is evidence of role modelling, bi-directional help and support, parent-child shared interests, and discussions at home. While Attewell and Lavin (2007) noted the significance of 'church going' and 'residential moves' as features in the process these two aspects were not apparent in this study; although Debbie did acknowledge the caring nature and support provided by her daughter's Catholic primary school. Aspects of which were prominent in school choice.

Regarding the question - does parental ACL participation influence and shape parents' perspectives and practices towards the education of children? The answers to this question are more nuanced. Certainly, ACL assisted some parents to change their styles and practices; and this is seen in cases where learners utilised ACL learning experiences to expose children to learning practices in the home context. Although evidence suggests that parents felt guilty about losing out on spending quality time with the family (Morgan 2016) and although parents sometimes felt stressed about learning, overall the benefits of parental ACL participation far outweighed the disadvantages. Therefore, we should not underestimate the significant power of ACL participation. One of the most important aspects that emerged from the findings was the idea that ACL brought a 'culture of learning' back into the home environment (Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff et al. 2015). This aspect orientated children towards learning by stimulating their interest in learning and, in some cases, through providing an element of competition. Thus, families had the opportunity to discuss learning in day to day home activities, outside of the normal homework routine. Learning, therefore, was assimilated into parent-child relationships in a less pressured, more congruent and less conflictual way.

Parents that had travelled furthest in education terms, and those who had participated in multiple episodes of learning, were best positioned to help their children. Although these parents referred to the internet and, from time to time, other close family members or private tutors, they also drew upon the skills gained via the ACL pathway to educate their children. While there is little doubt that most parents wanted the best for their children (parental goal) there is evidence to suggest that, for some parents, ACL participation did change their parenting practices. This is seen in many accounts, for example from: David believing he was 'thick' to utilising the skills acquired through ACL study to help daughter, Rachel, with her homework; Debbie bringing home ideas and information passed on from peers on her degree course to boost her daughter's skills in maths; Veronica and Yvonne

sharing course books and resources with their children; and through Mary and Stephen's narrative exchanges in the home to improve each other's teaching and training plans. These activities not only boosted children's knowledge and skills base but, in some cases, boosted parents' learning. These aspects are outlined in Rogoff's research (2015).

Further, when parents put in place multiple mechanisms of support it not only prevented children from slipping behind at school but also enabled children to catch up with their peers. However, not all parents could utilise their ACL experiences to the full. Although Amy was a passionate and devoted mother who wanted the best for her children, when son Craig needed support with maths' homework, Amy had no other option but to request help from the school. She did so in the knowledge that failure to provide support at that critical point would result in him slipping behind at school, and Amy knew all too well about the effect of 'slipping' and 'tumbling' in childhood.

In contrast, parents with few or no qualifications, and those who had participated in few episodes of learning since leaving school, struggled the most. Here, parents relied heavily on the school, family and friends, the internet and, where finances allowed, private tutors. When support was not forthcoming, delayed or difficult to obtain, parents could do little to help. This put children at serious risk of slippage, in the educational sense. The only parent that bucked the trend was Frances. As a mother and passionate learner, Frances overcame the problem of 'not knowing' through informal learning; by referring constantly to the internet, and through volunteering at her children's primary school. This strategy was effective, and one that Frances exploited to the fullest. In many ways, Frances was no different to the ACL learners. She observed, she asked questions and received feedback: features of which are integral to a sociocultural learning process (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wertsch et al. 1995). However, it remains to be seen how well Frances will cope with supporting her children at secondary school stage, and what methods she will employ to obtain information from teaching staff since home-school links at this stage are far more tenuous (Crozier 1999). In this situation, it might be difficult for Frances to gain access to observe teaching strategies and methods at this level, especially since this is a time when children want to gain independence and autonomy.

Finally, in considering the findings the nature of the learning culture at home was an important facet. Here ACL participation stimulated family discussions, fostered critical thinking, stretching parents' as well as children's' intellectual skills (Ochs et al. 1992). .

This bouncing around of ideas in collaborative contexts was especially noticeable when parents and children had shared interests and references; features of which are identified in research by Rogoff et al. (2015). In addition, research by OECD (2011) highlights the importance of family discussions as an essential feature in boosting children's learning in the home environment.

Despite the positive outlook, implications for policy and practice are never straightforward and ideally caution must be exercised since, according to some commentators, "any efforts to improve the HLEs⁶² of disadvantaged families to encourage educational success 'against the odds' may seem unduly optimistic (or even naive)" (Siraj-Blatchford 2010, p. 477). However, this is a rather negative view; a view I fundamentally disagree with. The narrative that constructs notions of parent lack or deficit is well known and accepted. Yet, in this study most parents were very involved in their children's learning and wanted their children to do well at school. In fact, all parents wanted their children to reach their potential, and in light of parental school outcomes hoped their children would achieve. However, despite trying their best some parents struggled to support their children. This left them at odds with the school system. Unsure about what to do when children needed help, some parents deferred to the school through family learning programmes or school support sessions, to family members or the internet, but only if they had access to broadband and a computer. Finally, it is important to point out that although parental ACL participation benefitted many parents and their children in this study, what is central to its success is the timing of ACL participation.

9.2 ACL participation: a question of timing?

As explained in Chapter 8, when adult learning coincided with children's learning, and when the nature and level of learning was the same or similar in nature, content, and level, parents and children connected well in the home environment. Here, parent-child relationships were strengthened through shared interests, mutual discussions, and collaborative engagement through offers of reciprocal support. Indeed, these are similar dimensions to those identified in research by Rogoff et al. (2015). This leads me to conclude that there would be benefit in linking some areas of ACL provision to children's

⁶² HLEs represents home learning environments.

learning at Levels 1 and 2 at secondary school stage, especially in communities where parents' and children's educational outcomes are low.

9.3 Implications for policy and practice: a synchronised learning approach

In terms of implications for policy and practice, I argue that the following strategy could provide an opportunity to enhance learning in the home environment. Indeed, in a recently published document entitled *Adult Learning in Wales* (2017a), the Welsh Government has set out its vision for adult learning from 2016-2021. One of the priorities for adult learning providers links to the Government's 'Education begins at home' strategy that aims to equip parents with the necessary skills to help support their children through school. However, there is a strong emphasis on parents supporting younger children through engagement activities and 'hook' courses. There is little mention of strategies to engage parents to help older children and young people. Perhaps the 'hook' that might encourage parents to get involved in young people's learning is to offer level 1 and 2 adult courses that complements parts of the school curriculum.

As explained earlier, if ACL participation encourages enthusiasm, better connection, support and reciprocity within parent-child relationships, then there is merit in aligning and synchronising adult learning with children and young people's learning. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, this model is already evident at the pre-school and primary education stages, through parenting and family learning interventions. However, as indicated in Chapter 3, there is a noticeable absence of initiatives at secondary school stage (Ofsted 2009). Research by Haggart and Spacey (2006) suggests a possible way forward; by allowing adults to learn alongside pupils at school. They argue that when this happens, adults have a strong, positive influence on children. However, considering historic child abuse scandals and current issues around Child Protection, a strategy that allows adults to study alongside pupils in the school classroom is unlikely to be welcomed, at least for the time being.

However, there is a way to circumvent this issue. Currently there are few working links between ACL providers and secondary schools, other than the obvious school college transitional links, and the collaborative work undertaken between schools and colleges on the 14-19 curriculum. Further, generally secondary schools and ACL providers operate in separate silos: schools deliver learning to children while ACL providers deliver

learning to adults. This highlights the tenuous links between school, ACL and home – see current framework presented in Figure 9.1.

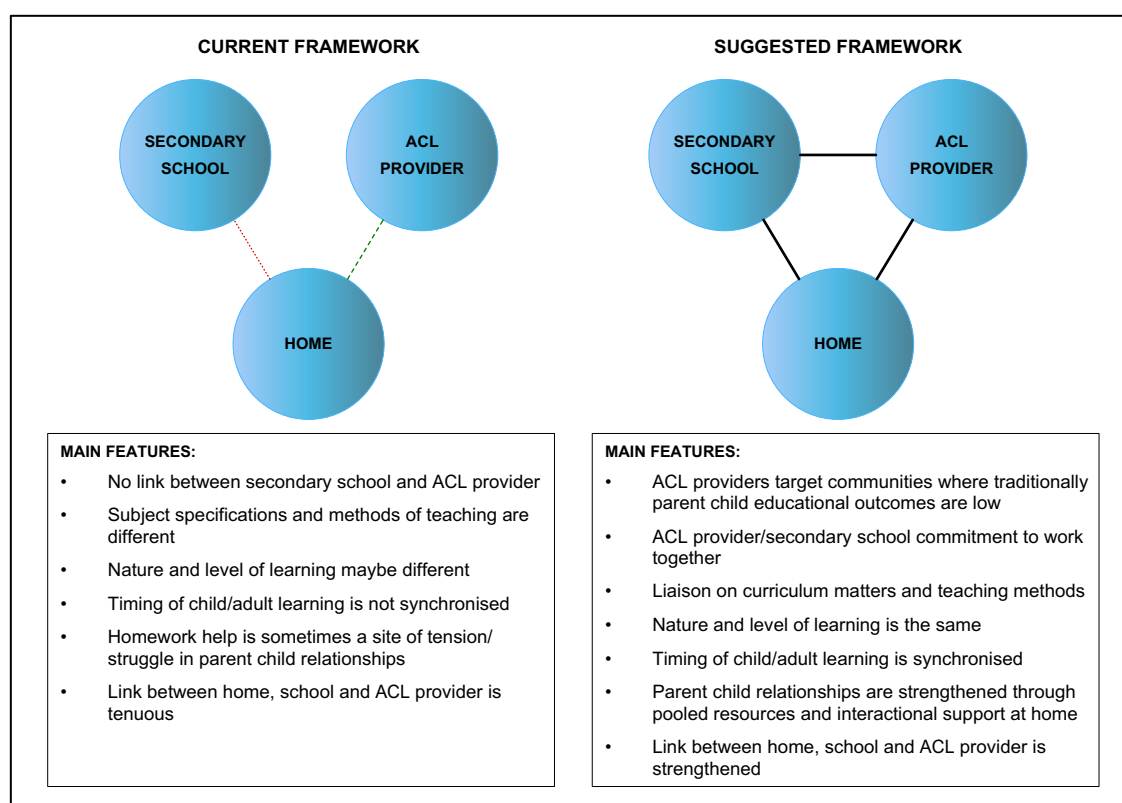


Figure 9.1 Current and suggested framework: schools, ACL providers, and home

Even so, the only difference between education delivered in schools and education delivered through ACL, is the timing of learning and the methods taught. In many respects, the nature and level of learning is the same: for example, both schools and ACL providers offer Level 1 and Level 2 learning in subjects like literacy, numeracy, IT, and so on. If part of the adult curriculum were synchronised to the school curriculum, the school-ACL-home link would be strengthened – see suggested framework in Figure 9.1. Here each stakeholder has an opportunity to operate on the same page, as it were. In doing so, ACL providers would automatically provide the opportunity to “incorporate the centrality of kin” (Vaccaro and Lovell 2010, p. 173) into their course offer. Moreover, by creating this link, learning is brought back into the home environment at a time when children require support the most, and arguably at a time when parents require support. Consequently, it would release parents’ and children’s untapped potential, while creating a mutual mechanism of support in the home environment. Of course, this would be dependent only on parents’ and children’s willingness to work together to pool their resources. Yet, what I want to stress here is that by ACL providers synchronising the course offer i.e. timing, content, level as well as using similar teaching strategies and

methods, it is possible to deliver learning without parents having to set foot inside the secondary school classroom.

Adopting a synchronised learning approach may well be too late for some children, especially those that have already ‘tumbled’ in the educational sense. However, it could be a useful and timely strategy to prevent and even halt teenage children from ‘slipping’ behind in school work, especially at a critical stage in their learning, thereby closing the gap in attainment – see Blanden et al. (2015). Moreover, participation in synchronised learning studies crucially would provide a *duplex causa*; in other words, a dual reason for learning. Firstly, it would allow parents the opportunity to reclaim their earlier educational losses, while introducing a reciprocal mechanism of support in the home, through the harnessing and pooling of both parent and child’s academic knowledge, skills and resources. As Skaliotis (2010) suggests, one of the ways to maintain levels of parental involvement at secondary school stage is to provide support for mothers who want to improve their educational qualifications. Secondly, as this study attests, there is every possibility that teenage children would rise to the challenge; this might awaken children’s sense of responsibility to pitch in to support their parents (Rogoff et al. 2015), especially if parents are responsive to the support on offer (De Mol and Buysse 2008). After all, teenage children are already in ‘learning mode’, and in many ways are best positioned to offer help and support, much like Brassett-Grundy (2004a) highlighted in her study. Furthermore, offering synchronised courses to parents at a similar level and within a similar timeframe to their children would give both parent and child the opportunity to ‘observe’ what each other does with respect to learning in the home environment, thereby opening up opportunities for both parties to help one another. Essentially this strategy would engender a ‘same world’ learning environment based upon the idea that both parent and child would be working towards a common goal (Rogoff et al. 2015), for example, a parent and child studying a GCSE course within the same timeframe.

9.3.1 Presenting the case for a synchronised learning strategy

A predominant theme that cropped up during interviews was the subject of parents ‘not knowing’ what their children were learning at school. Although parents knew what subjects their children were studying most, if not all, had little idea of the subject content, or indeed the methods and approaches employed by teachers. Some parents reported

they were able to find a way around this difficulty by offering to volunteer for the school. This gave them an opportunity to observe at close hand teaching activities in the school. However, none of the parents reported volunteering at secondary school stage. A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research NFER (2012) found that although 64% of schools in England and Wales reported working with parent volunteers, this was mainly work with parent governors or, in some cases, via specialised teaching arrangements that encouraged volunteer mentoring or coaching. Also, a point worth noting here is that parent volunteer numbers dropped in schools that had a higher incidence of free school meals (FSM), which means that schools operating in highly disadvantaged areas had access to less parental support. Also there is an added dimension to consider: this is the point at which children are trying to establish independence from their parents (Campbell 2011) . However, if parents are not privy to teaching content, methods and practices at secondary school level, they have little choice but to rely on guesswork. To highlight the point, during interviews parents reported that the only way they knew the content of what their children were studying was via:

- Conversations with their child's teacher (usually at parents' evenings), although even here parents reported there was limited time to speak to teachers;
- Conversations with their child, however in some cases parents reported gaining very little information by using this approach, especially at secondary school stage;
- Homework task books or schoolbooks; or by
- Working as a volunteer for the school however not all parents were situated in the classroom. Some parents were involved only in school fund-raising activities. Further, none of the parents interviewed were school governors, although one parent indicated she was in the process of applying to become a school governor.

9.3.2 Benefits

Having presented the case for implementing a synchronised learning strategy, I next discuss the benefits. As mentioned earlier, it would not be without its difficulties however adopting this type of approach could benefit all stakeholders. Indeed, for synchronised learning initiatives to work effectively there would have to be a common understanding and commitment between schools and ACL providers; without this, the initiative could fail at the first hurdle. However, once agreement is reached on a way forward each

stakeholder could gain considerably from the partnership. Thus, synchronised learning has the potential to help:

Parents

- Offer parents the opportunity to re-engage with learning. This is crucial since during the interviews most parents reported that they only realised the impact of 'missed learning opportunities' some years after leaving school;
- Offer parents the choice to study discrete units (pick and mix) specific to theirs and their children's learning needs, with an option to sit GCSE examinations if they so wish;
- Help parents feel less guilty or less anxious about spending time away from children, since studying synchronised learning courses would be relevant and instrumental to theirs and their child's learning needs;
- Help parents gain qualifications for work, and to progress onto other courses;
- Help parents understand the content and nature of the subjects their children study at school, which would avoid the humiliation of parents not getting things right in front of their children;
- Help parents to connect with their children at home through shared interests, discussion, and through the sharing of knowledge, skills and resources;
- Give parents a valid and added reason to learn since they would not only be educating themselves but would also have the opportunity to educate their children; particularly women that face issues at home, for example, when struggling to overcome negative or gendered attitudes towards learning in the family.

Children and young people

- Children and young people would have the opportunity to tap into parents' knowledge, skills and resources in the home environment,
- Potentially children and young people would not only have the opportunity to directly observe parents learning in the home e.g. working on assignments, studying for examinations, but also it would allow them the opportunity to 'pitch in' to help parents through their studies (Rogoff et al. 2015).
- Assuming that parents and children are willing to work together at home, potentially both parents and children would receive in time support. This could facilitate or boost parents' learning, as well as possibly preventing children from slipping behind at school.

The school

- Teachers could identify areas of learning that children need to improve upon, and recommend to parents the most appropriate synchronised units to study;
- The initiative would give additional (albeit indirect) support to schoolteachers delivering the school curriculum;
- Potentially it would break down barriers between schools and parents, since parents would have knowledge of subject specifications, methods and approaches related to what their children are studying at school;
- Synchronised learning would promote dialogue between schoolteachers and ACL tutors. Up to this point there has been no reason for the two professions to work closely together on curriculum matters. This could result in the stimulation of new ideas, new approaches and new ways of delivering learning in schools.
- Schools often do not have the time or staff resources to 'reach out' into communities in a systematic way. However, ACL providers already have good links with organisations, businesses, groups and individuals in the community; albeit thinner on the ground than before. Therefore, working with ACL staff could help schools better connect with parents that have traditionally had little contact with the school.

ACL providers

- Aside from the main curriculum offer, synchronised learning could offer ACL providers with a fresh focus and a new purpose.
- As mentioned in the previous section, working with school professionals would encourage new dialogue, approaches and teaching methods.
- Synchronised studies could change the look of the ACL curriculum offer: for example, advertisements could feature more meaningful titles. Instead of advertising a *Help your child with maths* course programmes could be clearly advertised in Plain English (2016) jargon free terms, for example *Algebra in Ten Easy Steps** (the asterisk denoting that the course is synchronised to [name of school] GCSE maths course). Advertising the programme in this way informs potential learners what will be taught i.e. algebra, and the way in which it will be taught i.e. ten easy steps. Alternatively, courses could be advertised in neat, bite size chunks, for example - *Learn how to do a quadratic equation in 30 minutes*.

- If synchronised learning is successful, the initiative has the potential to attract additional government funding and support.

The community

- Social networks in the community are often closely bound and intertwined. The introduction of synchronised learning studies could create a domino effect, as once parents engage with programmes it might encourage interest from other parents.
- Funding and resources would be channelled towards communities and schools that require assistance the most.
- Since learning opportunities would be tailored to meet specific school programmes and subjects, the study offer would only be relevant to parents living within the school catchment area targeted.

9.3.3 Issues in delivering a programme of synchronised learning

Of course, in theory, introducing a synchronised learning approach would not be without its difficulties. Firstly, both schools and adult education providers would have to commit to work together to offer a synchronised programme of learning. Secondly, agreement would be required regarding where to deliver the synchronised learning programme; preferably not on school premises but located in the community. Thirdly, there is the question of funding the programme. Currently, there are vast differences in ACL course fees, for example, studying a GCSE qualification can be as little as £25 per course or as much as £300 per course, depending on which local authority area the course is offered. If course fees are high, it will automatically preclude parents who do not have the financial resources to study, especially those living in areas of deprivation and poverty. However, for ACL providers that are able to keep course fees to a minimum, there is scope to offer adult synchronised programmes. After all, in Mary's case this did actually happen; part of her GCSE English course specification was exactly the same as her children's secondary school GCSE English specification.

Moreover, within the current climate of austerity sufficient funding would be needed to roll out a programme of activity, although ACL providers could choose to re-direct some funding to synchronised programmes of learning. Also, parents from more affluent areas or those that already possess the skills to support their children might wish to enrol on programmes, effectively 'crowding out' the very parents that need to take part. Thus, care would have to be taken to ensure that ACL providers give priority to parents who

do not possess qualifications, and those that live in the school catchment areas targeted. This would ensure exclusivity.

9.3.4 Recommendation

At first glance, synchronised learning may appear to be just another form of family learning. However, what I want to stress here is the idea that the strategy is designed to help predominantly parents, and not necessarily their children. However, working together in partnership there is the opportunity for all stakeholders to benefit. Therefore, in proposing a programme of synchronised learning I recommend in the first instance that ACL providers:

- Target communities and secondary schools where education outcomes have been, and still remain, traditionally low;
- Liaise with secondary school staff to identify the subject areas where pupils are struggling most;
- Agree on a mutual way forward to primarily meet the needs of parents, with a focus on synchronising some adult programmes to children's learning at secondary school stage.

9.4 Strengths and limitations of study

In choosing a qualitative approach, I want to point out the strengths and limitations of this study. Firstly, the sample is small; thus, no claim can be made to the generalisability of the findings in relation to the wider population. Secondly, the study could have been strengthened by interviewing parents and children more than once. Had there been more time to conduct second interviews it would have afforded me the opportunity to delve deeper and learn more. In doing so, other facets, features and stories would have come to the fore, which might have changed the nature and significance of the data presented. However, as time was limited, conducting more interviews would have meant less time spent on analysis. Thirdly, findings would have been strengthened if children of parents with lower level qualifications or no qualifications, or parents who had engaged in fewer episodes of ACL had come forward to be interviewed. Had there been this balance, the research might have uncovered other issues or points of interest. With the benefit of hindsight, the decision to interview children should have been made sooner rather than later in the study. Finally, the data might have been different had I employed the BNIM approach to interviewing instead of conducting semi-structured interviews. However, in my defence I was unaware of this approach until 75 percent of interviews

had been completed, by which time it was too late to change. Nevertheless, one major strength of the study was the development of the NAP procedure since it helped me systematically reveal some of the processes and mechanisms of influence across the life course, as well as influences in parent-child relationships.

9.5 Implications for further research

It is beyond the scope of this study to measure impact however, if a programme of synchronised learning were to be introduced, implications for further research could include:

- Research to explore whether synchronised learning raises the level of attainment for disadvantaged parents and children;
- Research that compares outcomes for parents and children participating in synchronised learning courses, against those who do not participate;
- Research exploring the optimum time to engage in learning i.e. asynchronously, one or two years prior to children studying qualifications (for example, this could help prepare parents to support their children during their GCSE years), or alternatively, synchronously i.e. parents studying within the exact time frame as their children.

9.6 Summary of chapter

This chapter set out to explain to what extent parental ACL participation influences parents' perceptions and practices with respect to the education of their children. In certain cases, ACL participation did change parents' perceptions and practices. Further, some parents drew upon and utilised their experience of ACL to support their children educationally. In addition, it became clear that timely and effective educational support was integral to preventing children from slipping behind at school while in some cases, there is evidence to suggest that parental ACL participation boosted children's learning. This led me to conclude that there would be merit in aligning part of the adult learning curriculum with children's learning in communities where educational outcomes are low. To bring into alignment support for parents and consequently their children, I introduced the concept of synchronised learning as a strategy to enhance parent and child relationships in the home learning environment. In doing so, I presented the case for implementing such a strategy, and discussed the benefits for all stakeholders while pointing out potential issues and problems associated with the roll out of such a strategy.

Next, I put forward recommendations for ACL providers. This was followed by a discussion on the strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for further research.

Finally, in tribute to the parents, children and young people that participated in this study, I end my thesis with a quote from Amy's daughter (Louise) who, as a 10-year-old, displayed remarkable thought and insight during her interview. Here she highlights the importance of exposure to ACL, parent role-modelling, and timely support. Indeed, while commenting on her mother's learning journey Louise was able to capture perfectly the essence of this research study in one sentence:

We've seen her reach her goal, so we should try our best to reach our goals, and she said she'll help us reach our goal in life.
(Louise)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Risk Assessment
Research to be carried out between February 2014 and December 2014

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Steps taken to reduce risk	What further action is necessary?	Action by whom?	By When?
Robbery, violence and threatening behaviour outside the office, when visiting or carrying out interviews at public institutions.	Researcher may suffer stress and/or injury from assaults, threats and abuse from members of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher has undertaken training in personal safety. • Researcher to carry mobile phone and panic alarm during visits. • Researcher to inform buddy of date, time and place of interview. 		Researcher	By January 2014
Robbery, violence and threatening behaviour outside the office, when carrying out interviews in a participant's home.	Researcher may suffer stress and/or injury from assaults, threats and abuse from members of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher has undertaken training in personal safety. • Researcher to carry mobile phone and panic alarm during visits. • Researcher to inform buddy of date, time and place of interview. • Researcher to advise buddy on arrival at the site that the interview will go ahead as planned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher to conduct own risk assessment at doorstep before entering the home. • Researcher to give thought to exit strategies if feel uncomfortable or threatened. • Researcher to make a note of how door opens and closes so that a quick exit can be made, if necessary. 	Researcher	By January 2014

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	Steps taken to reduce risk	What further action is necessary?	Action by whom?	By When?
Issues or concerns, and/ or stress arising from interview e.g. psychological/emotional issues.	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If required, researcher to seek help from supervisor and/or university counselling service. 		Researcher	After interview takes places
Issues, concerns, and/ or stress arising from interview e.g. psychological/emotional issues.	Adult participants - parent, professional worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher to give details to participant of how to contact researcher and their supervisor. Researcher to advise 	If appropriate, contact participant later to check if ok.	Researcher	At interview

Issues or concerns, and/or stress arising from interview e.g. psychological/emotional issues.	Child participants During interview child may make disclosure of abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher has undertaken training in Child Protection and is aware of the duty to report abuse. • Encourage child to speak to parent, other family member or teacher. 	Report concerns to appropriate authorities.	Researcher	As soon as possible after interview
	Child may get upset about an issue or concern that may not require reporting to the authorities.		Ask permission from child if issue or concern can be discussed with parent(s) or another person.	Researcher	At interview

8 Non-ACL participants*

16 Learners

<p><i>4 participants indicating a ‘reluctance’ to engage in ACL</i></p> <p>Parent age range: 32-43 years Current qualification range: No qualifications to NVQ level 2 Number of children and young people in group: 10**</p>	<p><i>4 learners participating in agency or government intervention-based programmes</i></p> <p>Parent age range: 24-35 years Current qualification range: No qualifications to GCSE Number of children and young people in group: 11</p>
<p><i>4 participants ‘willing’ to engage in ACL but not currently learning</i></p> <p>Parent age range: 31-48 years Qualification range: GCSE to HNC Number of children and young people in group: 7</p>	<p><i>4 self-directed learners (studying Level 1-3 courses)</i></p> <p>Parent age range: 23-45years Current qualification range: GCSE to degree Number of children and young people in group: 9</p>
	<p><i>8 self-directed learners (studying Level 4+ courses)</i></p> <p>Parent age range: 24-51years Qualification range: GCSE or O level to degree Number of children and young people in group: 16**</p>

*Indicates participants not engaged in any form of ACL at time of interview

**Owen and Yvonne are a couple; therefore, their three children are included in both groups.

Appendix 3 – Parent Interview Schedule 1

Date of interview:

Time:

Name of interviewee:

Issue/topic	Possible questions	Possible follow up questions/probes
Introduction Social background	<p>The point of this interview is to find out about your life story as you tell it. I'm interested to know how people learn as they go through life and how they help their children learn. I've been through quite a lot myself, so I know what it's like to return to learning in later life.</p> <p>I want to start with some general questions about your childhood. I'd like to take you back to that time. Can you tell me about your life back then?</p>	<p>Where were you raised? Who did you live with? Any brothers, sisters? How old were you at that point? What did your parents do for a living? Did they achieve any qualifications at school/college?</p>
Life History Background info/ history Primary/secondary education	<p>I want to take you back to your school days. Can you tell me about your school days? What was life like at primary school? What was life like at comprehensive school? What were your parent's hopes for you as a teenager? And education wise, what were their hopes for you? What were your hopes as a teenager? What were your educational hopes as a teenager?</p>	<p>Did you enjoy school? What was your favourite subject?</p> <p>Were you ever bullied in or out of school?</p> <p>Did you pass any exams? Why didn't you continue to 6th form or college? Can you give any examples? Can you tell me any more about them? Go on...</p>
Post 16 Life since leaving school at 15/16 years e.g. education and training, voluntary work, family etc.	<p>What did you do after leaving school?</p> <p>What jobs have you done? What job(s) are you doing now?</p>	<p>Have you done any volunteering?</p> <p>At what age did you start your family?</p>

Post 19 Education and Training	<p>Have you done any learning or courses since you left school? If so, what have you studied? If no, ask why? What is your highest qualification? Is there anything that you wish you had done?</p>	<p>Why did you decide to take a course of study? Were you employed during this time? When was the last time you took a course of study? Did you ever start studying for a qualification but leave before completing it? What was it, and when was this? Have you ever taken private courses or lessons in anything? Leisure based etc.</p>
NOTES		

Schedule template taken from Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do your research project*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Appendix 4 – Parent Interview Schedule 2

Date of interview:

Time:

Name of interviewee:

Currently learning: YES /NO

Issue/topic	Possible questions	Possible follow up questions/Probes
Role/responsibility for educating child- levels of awareness	I want to know about your child's education and how you think you fit into it.	
Perceptions/expectations Attitude Knowledge	Looking back at the time your child first started school, what did you know about the school and what were your expectations of the school? Do you think it's your responsibility to educate your child, the school's or a bit of both? As far as your responsibilities are concerned what do you think they are?	Mm. e.g. picking up child/making sure child goes to school, reporting absences to school, help with homework, ensure child completes homework, supporting child when playing sport, keeping track of child's education performance
School involvement –	I'd like to talk about your involvement with your child's school	Possible follow up questions/ probes
Behaviours: Challenges in connecting with child's school: lack of time due to job or childcare arrangements Attitudes: it's not my job, it's the school or my partner, resistance to PTA group (do not fit in)	How important do you think it is to get involved with the school? What types of things are you involved in at your child's school? How would you describe your relationship with your child's school? How would you describe your relationship with your child's teacher(s)?	Do you ring your child's school if they are ill? How often do you speak to your child's teacher? Looking at last term, roughly how many times were you in touch with your child's teacher? Every day/once a week/once a month? Do you think there's anything from

		stopping you from getting (more) involved with your child's school?
Parental support at home	In this section I want to look at the types of things you do at home with your child after school.	Possible follow up questions/Probes
<p>Behaviours</p> <p>Attitudes</p> <p>Behaviours</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Challenges</p>	<p>What activities do you do with your child after school? i.e. help with reading/homework, play games, trips to park or leisure centre</p> <p>Do you help your children with their homework?</p> <p>How important do you think it is for your child to do their homework?</p> <p>In your household who is responsible for monitoring and making sure your children do their homework?</p> <p>How important do you think it is for your child to do their homework?</p> <p>How much do you know about what your child(ren) is/are studying at school?</p> <p>Is there anything in particular that you have found challenging with your child's learning?</p>	<p>Do you make sure they do their homework?</p> <p>On average how many hours a week do you spend helping your child with their homework?</p> <p>Do you have any difficulty helping your child with their homework?</p> <p>If you have any difficulty, do you or your child ask anyone for help?</p> <p>Do you take your child to swimming lessons or any other kind of sport?</p> <p>Brownies/scouts or private tuition?</p>
Child's progress/ school report	In this section I want to talk about how you keep track of your child's progress at school	Possible follow up questions/Probes

<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Behaviours</p> <p>Attitudes</p>	<p>How do you find out about your child's progress at school?</p> <p>How do you find the process of getting feedback from the school?</p> <p>When you receive your child's school report what do you do with the report?</p> <p>Where do you keep your child's report at home?</p> <p>Can you put your hand to it?</p> <p>How useful do you find your child's school report?</p> <p>How important is the report to you?</p>	<p>Do you know when your child's school report is due out?</p> <p>Did you read the report?</p> <p>Was the report easy to read/ understand?</p> <p>Did you talk to your child's teacher about the report?</p> <p>Do you find it easy to get to parents' evenings?</p> <p>When you're there, how do you find parents' evenings?</p>
Adult learning influences	This question is about looking at your own learning, and in what ways has your experience of (formal) learning helped you.	Possible follow up questions/Probes
<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Social capital</p> <p>Behaviours</p> <p>Attitudes</p> <p>Behaviours</p>	<p>Have there been any benefits to learning since you've been studying?</p> <p>Any drawbacks?</p> <p>Are there any advantages to learning in terms of the family?</p> <p>Any disadvantages?</p> <p>Since you've been learning, have you made more friends?</p> <p>Since you've been learning have you bought more books for yourself/ your children? Why? What books?</p>	<p>Have you picked up any useful learning tips, which you have then been able to use with your children?</p> <p>Have you experienced any learning on your course that you have been able to directly draw upon to help your child(ren) through school?</p> <p>Is there something you think you could have learnt over the course of your life</p>

	<p>Has participating in learning helped you to support your children in any aspect of their learning?</p> <p>Since learning, do you feel more confident dealing with your child's school?</p> <p>How has learning helped you in terms of you supporting your child(ren) to learn?</p> <p>Have your views on education changed since you've been learning?</p> <p>Considering the amount of learning you have covered, have you noticed any difference in the role you play in your children's learning?</p> <p>Do you see a change in the way you do things? Especially things you do with your children?</p>	<p>that would have benefitted you or your child(ren)?</p> <p>Do your children know you are learning?</p> <p>What do/did your children think about you going back to learn?</p> <p>Have you noticed any changes in the relationship with your children since you've been learning?</p> <p>Can you explain further?</p> <p>If yes, can you explain?</p>
Hopes/aspirations for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your hopes for your child(ren) for the future? 	
Checklist of things to do before close of interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pie chart exercise <p>Check!!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent form signed • Interviewee contact details filled out 	

Schedule template taken from Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do your research project*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Appendix 5 – Project Information Sheet



Project Information Sheet



Hello, I am Suzanne Samuel, a research student at Cardiff University and I am looking for parents or carers who left school at 16 years of age or earlier, to take part in my study. The study involves exploring people's personal experiences of school, learning and work, and later, involvement in their children's education and schooling.

Who is being invited to take part in the study?

Initially I am inviting parents and carers to take part, although at a later stage I may want to interview others, for example, family members, teachers, adult education tutors.

What does taking part involve?

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. It involves meeting me up to two times for 1 to 1.5 hours each time. With your consent the interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder.

What if I am interested in taking part in the study?

If you are interested, please contact me by phone or email. At this point I will tell you a little more about what is involved and will answer any questions you may have about the study. If you are happy to go ahead we will set a convenient date, time and place to meet up.

What will happen at the FIRST interview?

We will spend a short time discussing the project. You will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand the information about the research and that you agree to take part. Next, we will talk about your experiences of learning at school and what you have done since leaving school, for example, if you have been working, volunteering and/or bringing up children. Finally, we will arrange a convenient date, time and place to meet up for the second interview.

What will happen at the SECOND interview?

We will talk about your child's education and learning, for example, the school they attend and the activities they do after school.

What will happen AFTER the interviews?

I may contact you again to check that I have understood the things you have talked about in the right way. Please note it will take a few weeks to write up the interviews. If you wish to receive a written record of the interviews to check that you are happy with what I have written, please let me know, I will post or give you a copy. At this point you have the chance to ask me to change or take out anything you are not happy with.

What will happen to the results?

The results of the study will be written into a report that I will submit to Cardiff University School of Social Sciences, as part of the requirement of my PhD study. A version of the report may be presented at different events, such as conferences or to

inform policymakers and interested parties and may be published in an academic journal or book. The information will not be used for other purposes and all participants will be anonymous.

Will you keep what I say confidential?

The answer is **YES**. Whatever you say will be treated in the **strictest confidence**. I am bound by ethical and legal practices to keep all information about participants confidential. **ALL** your information, including recorded conversations and personal details will be stored on computer. I will change some details (such as names) to protect your anonymity. This will ensure that you cannot be identified. Any information that identifies you, such as the consent form and the printed records of my interviews with you, will be kept privately and securely (in a locked cabinet). Following the completion of the project all information will be kept for a minimum period of five years or at least two years' post-publication.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Taking part in the study will give you an opportunity to provide information to services, which may find your experiences helpful when planning the delivery of education and learning across Wales. If you wish to receive a summary of the report once the study has been completed, please let me know.

Will I be paid if I take part?

Unfortunately, it is not possible to offer payment of any kind to people who take part in the study.

Will I be at any risk if I take part?

Sometimes taking part in a study that asks people to talk about their personal experiences can bring up thoughts and feelings they may find difficult. If this happens during the interview we can talk about this together. It is important that you feel comfortable and it is fine if you want to stop for a moment. Alternatively, it is fine if you do not want to answer further questions and/or you want to finish the interview. If you need support following the interview you can contact me to discuss ways to access appropriate support. Please note I do have a professional duty to pass on information if I consider that you or someone else is at risk or in danger in some way.

Who is funding and organising the research study?

The research study is funded by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) and is organised by me, Suzanne Samuel. I am a research student at Cardiff University supervised by Professor Gareth Rees (The Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods) and Professor David James (ESRC Wales Doctoral Training Centre).

What if I have an issue or concern about the study?

If I cannot resolve your issue or concern, you can contact:

Professor David James Tel: 02920 870930 Email: JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk or

Professor Gareth Rees Tel: 02920 875101 Email: reesg1@cardiff.ac.uk

My Contact Information

If you require further information about the study or if you have any issues/concerns about the study in the first instance, please contact me at:

Cardiff School of Social Sciences, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD.

Tel: 07907654311 Email: SamuelSM2@cardiff.ac.uk Thank you for your interest!

Contact Details

Name	
Date of birth	
Contact address	<p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Post Code.....</p>
Contact Tel No.	<p>Home:.....</p> <p>Mobile:.....</p>
Email	
Marital Status	
Children's Age and gender	

Appendix 7 – Consent Form (for Adults and Young People)

**CONSENT FORM: for research conducted by
Suzanne Samuel, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.**

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to consider the information provided about the study, to ask questions and received satisfactory answers about the study.

I understand that I will remain anonymous, any individuals named will remain anonymous, and any details that would allow people to be identified in the study to be taken out or changed.

I understand that the interview will be recorded onto an audio digital recorder. Do you agree to the interview being recorded? **YES / NO** (please circle)

I understand that during the interview I have the right to refuse to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer.

I understand that I can withdraw from the interview/ study at any time, without giving a reason and require that all data, including recordings, be destroyed.

I understand that the information I give will be used as part of a PhD thesis, of which the findings: will be stored at Cardiff University library; may be published in academic journals/ other publications; and information in written form used for presentations.

I understand that the interview is likely to last from 1 to 1.5 hours.

I understand that although I will not be paid for my interview time, my contribution is important as the information I provide might be useful to the planning and delivery of education services.

I understand that part of the audio recording of my interview might be used for presentations to other researchers, or to people who work in education. Please circle **YES** (if you agree) **or NO** (if you wish to opt out)

Please sign below to confirm you understand the statements/questions above, and that you wish to take part in the study.

Name of participant:.....(PRINT)

Signature of participant:..... Date:.....

Name of interviewer:.....(PRINT)

Signature of interviewer:..... Date:.....

Agreement for My Child to Take Part in a
Research Study
Parent/Carer Consent Form

Child's Name(s)..... (please print)

I give permission for my child to be interviewed for the purposes of a research study conducted by Suzanne Samuel, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

Please read the statements below.

- I agree that the interview can be recorded.
- I understand that the interview will be confidential.
- I understand that my child can stop the interview at any time.
- I understand that if my child wishes to withdraw from the study
all information about my child will be destroyed.

If you agree with the above information, please sign below.

Please print your name.....

Signed.....Parent/Carer

Date.....



PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Would you like to take part in some research?

My name is Suzanne Samuel and I am a researcher at Cardiff University. I would like to invite you to take part in my study, which involves learning, school and the things you do at home as a family. Also, I am interested in whether your parent or carer has been studying and/or joined an **adult education** class.

What is adult education?

Adult education is when adults decide to join a day or night class at a school, college, university or local community centre to learn something new. Some adults want to improve themselves to get a new or better job, others may want to learn just for fun or may simply want to get out of the house to make new friends.

Why am I doing this research?

The reason I am doing this research is because very few studies have looked closely at whether studying adult education courses makes a difference to the lives of families, parents/carers and children, and if it does, in what ways does it make a difference?

Who is being invited to take part in the study?

Parents/carers, children and young people will be invited to take part in the study. Community workers, teachers or adult education tutors may be invited to take part too.

What will it involve?

As long as your parent/carer is happy for you to take part, it will involve sitting down with me to answer some questions. To begin with, I will ask you questions related to your learning at school and/or college e.g. what courses you have done, what is your favourite subject at school? Then later I will ask you questions about your parent(s) and their learning e.g. if you have seen your parent/carer studying or learning new things, does it motivate you to do your homework or assignments? These are just some of the questions I am interested in asking.

If I am interested in taking part in the study, what will happen next?

If you are interested, I will arrange a day, time and place for you to come along with your parent/carer to meet me. First, I will talk to you and your parent/carer so that you can ask me any questions about the study. Then if you want to go ahead, I will ask you to sign a form to say you are happy to speak to me. At this point your parent/carer will leave the meeting. Depending on your age, your parent can stay in the next room while we have a chat, or you can arrange to meet up with your parent afterwards.

What will happen during our talk?

I will ask you questions about learning and homework, in school and at home. Our talk will last no longer than 45 minutes and will be recorded (with your permission) using an audio digital recorder. During this time, you are free to end the talk at any point. If you change your mind and want to take no further part in the study, then you are free to do so; you do not have to give a reason why. Any information I have (your signed form, audio recording of our talk etc.) will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

What if I don't want to take part in the study?

Even if your parent/carer decides to take part in the study, you do not have to take part if you don't want to.

Will you keep what I say private?

When I write up what you say, your name will be changed and the names of all other people you mention will be changed so that you cannot be identified. All your information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and on computer for at least 5 years after the end of the study. Once I have collected all the information I need, I may have the opportunity to publish my findings in journals or books, and I may be asked to talk about my findings at the university, at conferences or meetings.

Please note, if you tell me you are at risk or in some sort of danger, I will have to report this to my university supervisors and to others.

What will happen after our talk?

I will go away and type up what we talked about onto my computer. I may need to check that I have understood the things you have talked about in the right way. If this happens I will contact your parent/carer to ask for their permission to speak to you over the phone. If you want to know what I have written, I will tell **only you** what I have written. At this point you will have the chance to change or take out anything you are not happy with.

What if I have a query or concern to do with the study?

If I cannot solve your query or concern, you can contact:

Professor David James Tel: 02920 870930 Email: JamesDR2@cardiff.ac.uk or

Professor Gareth Rees Tel: 02920 875101 Email: reesg1@cardiff.ac.uk

My Contact Information

If you want to know more about the research or want to have a chat with me, along with your parent/carer, before you decide whether you want to take part, you can contact me at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, 1-3 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BD.

Tel: 07907654311 or email me at: SamuelSM2@cardiff.ac.uk

Thank you, Suzanne Samuel ☺

Appendix 10 – Young Child Project Consent Form

My name is Suzanne



I am a student studying at Cardiff University

I am doing some research and would like to talk to you about learning, school and the things you do at home as a family



Our talk will be private. I will not tell your family, friends or teachers what you say.



Our talk will take no longer than 45 minutes. You can ask to stop at any time.



You do not have to take part in the research project but if you want to, please turn over the page.



Please read below if you would like to take part in this project

I understand our talk will be recorded.



I understand our talk will be private. My name will be changed so that no one will know it is me who is talking.



I understand that I can stop our talk at any time.



I understand the information above and would like to talk to Suzanne about her project.

Do you agree to take part in the project? Please circle **Yes** or **No**.



YES



NO

Please print your name here.....

Please sign your name here.....Date.....

Appendix 11 – Child/Young Person Interview Schedule

Date of interview:

Time:

Name of interviewee(s):

Topic	Possible questions	Possible follow up questions
Introduction info	I am doing a course at university and if it's ok with you I want to ask you a few questions about your school and what you do at home to study.	
School	Which school/college do you go to? Can you tell me a bit about your school/ college? Do you have any homework? If you have a problem with homework whom would you normally ask for help? Which parent normally helps you with your homework?	Do you like school? What is your favourite subject? Do you like learning? Ask reason why they may go to one parent instead of the other for help. Do get help for different subjects from one or another parent?
Home	What do you do when you come home from school/college? What do you like doing at home? What do you want to be when you grow up? What kind of work would you like to do? Do you want to go to college/ university?	Do you read stories to your mum or dad? (Younger children) Do you think you'll move away to study when you are older? (Older children) If yes – Have you told your parent(s)? Do you know what your parent(s) think?
Parental Learning	Do you know if your mum/dad studies? Have they done any learning or exams? What types of things has he/she done? Have you seen or do you see your parent doing their homework/ assignments? What do you think when you see them doing their studying or homework? Does it help motivate you to learn? If yes, in what ways? What do you think of your mum/dad going back to school or college? What's good about them learning?	How much do you know about what your mum/dad is studying? Does it make you happy to see your parent studying? Are you proud of them studying? Does your parent ask you for help with their studying/homework? <u>Prompt</u>

	<p>What's not so good about them learning?</p> <p>Has (s)he ever discussed/ mentioned anything about their learning to you?</p> <p>If yes, what were the discussions about?</p> <p>If you have conversations about your learning with your parent, what do you discuss?</p> <p>Has (s)he referred to anything they've learnt on their course to help you with your learning?</p> <p>Since your parent has been learning have you seen any changes in them?</p>	<p>Any learning tips for example?</p> <p><u>Prompt</u></p> <p>Are they more confident, do they challenge people?</p>
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Appendix 12 – Caroline's return to learn

Caroline: I would have been about. I had her at 19 so I was 20, 21. So I started going back there but I didn't know there were courses out there until my advisor, she was there, and she said, "Oh you do realise there's classes and courses that you can do." I said, "But I'm not ready for it." She said, "But you have to get back into it or you're never going to get back into it." I said, "But I'm not ready." I said, "I want to stay with my little one," I said, "I want to be with my little one." And she said, "Right, look here is a piece of paper just in case if you want to have a nose." I said, "But I don't want it." She said, "Look, just have it and take it and see what you think about it." And I said, "Oh okay I'll take it", just to shut her up, because that's all she did was nagged, nagged and nagged!

Suzanne: So, when you say about your advisor, who is the advisor?

C: She's not my advisor any more. She's not with me anymore, she's left; her name was [advisor's name].

S: Advisor? Who did [advisor's name] work for?

C: Umm she used to work for these... lifelong learning. She worked with [project name] who helps for single parents back into life. She was all right but she just nagged, and nagged and nagged. Weeks later she said, "Have you thought about it?" I said, "No I haven't," and I think she was trying to encourage me to go back into learning. I didn't feel ready enough. I thought no my little one. I feel guilty leaving my daughter if you know what I mean, I just felt... but she said, "No you won't, just think about it please," and I rang her up one day. I said, "Right I've decided," and she said, "It's a yes isn't it." I said, "No it's not. I've decided that I'll come and have a look at the classes but I don't know if I'm going to come." So, I brought my daughter with me because wherever I went she went with me so I brought my daughter. Fair play she was a quiet little baby she was sleeping in the pram. So, I brought her with me and I went to the classes again. That was the first time I met my tutor in English. I went there and I sat there in the class and she said, "Oh, you thinking of joining then?" Her name was [tutor's name] at the time. I said, "I don't know yet." I said, "At the moment, I want to stay at home. I want to be with my little one like," I said. She said, "Here's the book I'm reading to the pupils in the class." She said, "Just have a look. You don't have to say anything but if you have got any questions, just don't put your hand up." She said, "It's not like class. Just say [tutor's name] I want to speak to you." I said, "Okay." So, she gave me like this um, I think it was like um this book that she was reading. I can't remember the book so I had a look at the book. Oh, a bit boring but not my kind of taste. So, I gave it back to her, I said, "Na, I don't like the book sorry." She said, "That's fine, go to the cupboard and see if there's another book." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "You don't have to have a look at this book. There's a bookshelf here that you can have a look, read it. If you can read it, good, but if you can't understand it write the words down, and I'll talk to you later after the class." "But," I said, "I'm not joining the class." She said, "Okay but still just in case you do want to join." I said, "Okay." It was only like a few, a couple of words on the paper that I didn't understand the book and I gave it back to her and I put my name on it and my contact details. I said, "Right, I'll have to go. The little one's getting hungry." I said, "I've only brought two bottles and she's gone through two bottles." She said okay, she said maybe I see you again. I said, "Maybe." I said, "I don't know," and fair play about a month, about two

Commented [SS1]: Here Caroline is introduced to the thought of improving her skills.

Commented [SS2]: In this sequence, Caroline puts forward a strong case for **not learning**. She feels guilty for leaving her child BUT the advisor nags. As a professional, the job advisor knows that Caroline needs to improve her literacy skills to get a job.

Commented [SS3]: This project was closed due to funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) coming to an end.

Commented [SS4]: The guilt feeling, opposition to learning. Here she further develops an argument for not learning, showing her resistance to learning at that point.

Commented [SS5]: Here's the turning point, agrees to go but makes no commitment to staying only to see what's going on.

Commented [SS6]: Here the literacy tutor tells Caroline that this class is *not like school*. A vital and important piece of information that introduces Caroline to the world of adult learning.

Commented [SS7]: Indicates her surprise at being allowed to choose the books she wants to read.

Commented [SS8]: Still showing resistance to learn.

Commented [SS9]: Tutor is persuasive and encouraging.

Commented [SS10]: An open invitation to join but with no pressure.

Commented [SS11]: A 'maybe' indicates she will return.

weeks, yeah about two weeks after that I went back to the class and I started learning English.

S: So, at that point, what made you?

C: Click?

S: Yeah, why did you want to go? What was it about that class that you wanted?

C: I knew that my punctuation, my grammar and reading and writing weren't up to standard. I knew for a fact my daughter was coming to that age that she was going to the little infants and start bringing home pieces of paper, and letters, and information, and I'll just look at them and won't understand them. So, I knew I had to do something out of it. My reading weren't that good so I knew deep down, I knew I had to go but I didn't want to go. I weren't ready enough. I felt embarrassed about it that I go out but I thought I have to go. I have to for my sake and my daughter. If she comes home, "Mam what's this mean? Mam, what's this word?" So, I knew deep down I have to so it just clicked. I think my little one was in nursery. She was up to two years old, she was either coming up to two. Yeah just about turned two she was in about a month so because yeah, I joined in December, my daughter was two in January. Yes, so I joined in December. I started doing the class because I was late in the year in the couple of months. She said, "Right we're not going to get you started on any projects or nothing like that coz you started coming late." I said, "Okay that's fair enough." She said, "Look I'll give you a few tests to see what level you're at and all that." I said, "No." She said, "No don't need to be scared about it." She said, "Look if you don't understand put a cross by it, and we'll come back to it yourself, just me and you." I said, "No I still don't feel right." She said, "Look I'll sit by you when you are doing the tests but I can't give you any of the answers but if you're stuck on any words give me a tap and I'll read the letters for you," and I said, "Are you sure?" She said, "Yes." So, I did that. I think I did like three or four tests before I could start into... so she could work out the level that I was on. She said, "You're on the lowest level you are on." I said, "No offence I could have told you that coz I didn't come out with a gooder level when I was in school." And she said, "Don't worry, we'll work up to it now and you can get into that level that you want to be in, that you feel happy." And I said, "Can I do it?" She said, "If put your mind to it and you're happy, we'll get there." So, I had three tests. I think I failed one. I got a little bit of the answers right on the second one and then coming onto the third one, I think I got like, it was like a booklet and I think I got like half way of it, I got that right. So, she gave like, every so month, she give me three different tests but she wanted to work between them times, for the first test because I didn't get any right. She said right, I know where I've got to get you started so she give me. I felt it was easy and a bit babyish but she said, "Might be babyish to you, and might be a little bit easy but I know where you are. If you can't spell the words or can't read the words I know I got to start to..." I could spell them a little bit. I got a little like two little letters mixed up but I got there and couldn't say most of the words but fair play she helped me out on that level. I was on the lowest level and I sat with someone next to me and she was at the same level as me so we helped each other out. It weren't too bad and after being in there about a year I started getting up a grade and I was so happy and, but [tutor name] didn't tell me how well I did or if I done bad, or anything like that, or she didn't give me a sheet of paper. She give me a sheet of paper but there was no grades on it or nothing like that, or wasn't a level or anything like that. So, she just gives me the piece of paper. She says, "Here we are, there's your homework next" or "Here we are here's a piece of paper I would like you to do." And umm the next day I said, "I've done it," and there was a grade on there and a higher level and she said, "Caroline, I think I

Commented [SS12]: She realizes that failure to act on her difficulties with reading and writing will result in further problems and challenges in the future.

Commented [SS13]: Knowing deep down, refers to her emotional state. She didn't want to go because she was embarrassed. However, the mechanism that pushes her to go is the thought and embarrassment (emotion) of not being able to help her daughter read.

Commented [SS14]: Immediately the thought of a test puts her off. She cannot cope emotionally with this process.

Commented [SS15]: Offers to help her, 'just me and you', indicates that no-one else will be looking on, therefore less chance of her being embarrassed.

Commented [SS16]: 'Still don't feel right' indicates that she feels very uneasy about the prospect of being tested.

Commented [SS17]: Offer of support from the tutor changes the fear aspect of the test.

Commented [SS18]: Indicates the substantial amount of tutor support given before the tutor is able to work out her literacy level.

Commented [SS19]: Here the tutor tells her not to worry, that she will help her get to a level that makes her feel happy. Note the change in emotion from negative to positive.

Commented [SS20]: Beginning to get used to learning with the help and support of another learner on the same level as her.

Commented [SS21]: Application and perseverance pays dividends, she is happy!

Commented [SS22]: Tutor doesn't tell Caroline how well or badly she's done for the moment. Why? Because knowing (especially if she has done badly) will set her back emotionally. Far better to be told nothing for the time being.

might have to move you into the afternoon class." I said, "Why? Have I done something wrong?" And she said, "No." I said, "Why then?" She said, "You've gone higher as possible I can give you." "What do you mean?" She said, "Haven't you noticed the work has gone harder or easier?" and I said, "No. Why? Was I supposed to notice?" And she said, "Yeah technically you are." So, I had a look at it and said, "What! I'm on higher grade?" And she said, "Yes you need to go on to the afternoon class," and I was over the moon. She didn't tell me what was the level or the grade I was on coz every

Commented [SS23]: Afraid she is going to be castigated for doing something wrong.

time she told me I felt down, if you know what mean, they'd put me myself down and I still have it now in class with my second tutor. She doesn't tell me any grades, she don't tell me any levels, coz I don't feels confident enough that I am doing as well as would like. She don't tell me nothing so I'm happy like that. I'd rather not know until I finish my course and then she says Caroline you've gone a higher grade that you're supposed to. So, I'm happy about that, that they don't say. Coz I don't know I put myself down, I'm not good enough like. I'm not going to be that higher grade and I'm not qualified enough to do what I'm doing. Fair play the English class has helped me a lot and I didn't know that that was out there until my advisor told me, and it's worked well.

Commented [SS24]: A much-needed boost to her confidence and self-efficacy. Her reading has improved and she is moved to a higher class.

S: So, the two things that happened really... correct me if I'm wrong. Your advisor pushed you, umm, and deep down you were concerned about some of the stuff that would be sent... you knew that there was going to be some stuff sent home from school, information and you knew you might struggle with it?

C: Yeah.

S: So, you returned to learning because you wanted to be able to do that, to help your child?

C: Yes, that's correct. Yes.

Mechanisms identified in Caroline's trajectory

Professional intervention – job advisor spots a problem with reading and writing. Information, help and support given; then 'nagging'.

Caroline caves in to 'nagging' and visits class to find out information (no commitment at this stage).

Welcomed by tutor, feels at ease in class. Tutor gives Caroline an element of control in learning (choices). Friendly, open invitation to join the class.

Caroline CLICKS (awareness) – realises she must take the plunge for her own, and her child's sake.

Tutor support, reassurance - no need to be afraid, I will sit with you.

Further help/support from a fellow learner.

Caroline insists on not knowing her grades (good or bad), anticipating that by the end of the course she will have improved (coping mechanism). Emotionally this makes her feel happy therefore more likely to stay the course.

Distance travelled in cognitive terms: beginning of the narrative sequence, from saying she is 'not ready' and 'don't want it', to the end of the sequence, saying that 'English class has helped me' and it's worked well'.

Distance travelled in educational terms: from being unable to read to moving up a grade.

Commented [SS25]: Criticism of any kind evokes too strong a negative emotion in Caroline's mind. To cope with this, she tells her tutor not to feedback on how well or badly she is doing. This is her coping mechanism. By the end of the course she hopes the tutor will tell her some good news i.e. that she has improved or done better than expected. As she gains more confidence, she may well revise her thinking but for now she is content with not knowing, as not knowing shields her emotionally. Putting this mechanism in place helps her to continue to learn. Knowing if she has done badly will dent her pride and confidence, she would feel undermined; this could place her at risk of dropping out of the course. However, as time goes on and she learns more there may well come a point where she can deal with immediate feedback, without experiencing negative emotion. This links into Isobel's daughter, Marie where she talks about being upset when criticised. However, after exposure to observing her mother receive feedback on practising signing techniques, it releases that worry. In this instance, Marie learns how to react positively to constructive criticism.

Commented [SS26]: This last line sums up the beginning and end of the sequence where we see how far Caroline has travelled since initially speaking to the job advisor. Here she acknowledges the help and support received in class. Also, the words 'worked well' suggest the extent to which the process has been a positive and productive one.

Commented [SS27]: Checking my understanding. I have interrupted a lot less in this sequence.

Appendix 13 – Whitney's tumble

Suzanne: So, you moved from primary to comprehensive school, so can you tell me a little bit about the comprehensive school?

Whitney: I can't really remember much. I know I was **very** anxious. I know I done well in SATs leaving primary, and I got into comp in one of the top sets. There was the top set and I was the one below it. **Still done really well** and **achieved really well**, right through year 7, year 8, **had amazing SAT results** again in Year 9. **No problems at all up there with bullying**, nothing. No, it was good, I **enjoyed** the first three or four years of comp.

Commented [SS28]: Maybe Whitney was anxious about moving from primary to secondary school or because of a fear of being bullied.

S: So, what were your favourite subjects?

W: Oh, I don't know. I was a bit of a, like I said I was a swot, so I was an all-rounder. Everything I'd kind of put my hand to. You know I think I used to like writing. I knew I had a way with words: very good with words. So, I'd write and do my literacy and that was probably what I liked the best, was my English.

S: So, you say up until about 15 years of age you were fine, no problems.

W: No, not major.

S: You were working well in school.

W: Yeah.

S: So, could you then, I know this may be a bit difficult for you but if you could just describe then, that last year in school.

W: Yeah. Well I don't know, to us our parents were the model parents. They were always the ones that were walking down the street holding hands. They were always the parents that never argued in front of us. We never heard of an argument in the whole time that we'd been born. Never heard of a disagreement, very, **very happy** family, normal routine but then like one day, I would like, hear my mother and father arguing in the bathroom and it wasn't just one day it was something that was going on for night and nights, and nights and then. Well it turned out my dad said to me, he was bringing me home from somewhere, I think I'd been out with friends and he come to pick me up and he said, "Oh I've got something to tell you." And I said, "What?" And I'm not one of these that I can wait, I need to know there and then if you want to tell me something, and he said, "Come inside." I said, "You've got another child," and he said, "Yeah." And I had an older sister. At this point I was about 15/16 and my sister would have been about 21/22. Umm and then he did say, he said, **"Look I am going to leave, I've really had enough."** And **I'd had a really close relationship with my father**, which I've still got now, I'm still really, really close and I'd been then like, you know, I just carried on as normal, not normal but I was a bit of a... I was a bit of a girl; I used to go out with the boys. I wouldn't go out with girls and **I'd started then drinking**. I'm not going to show; **smoking, drugs, being, fighting everything in sight**. The amount of people that would knock my parent's door about me. **I was an absolute nightmare** and everybody will tell you now, if you spoke to anybody that knew me in childhood, I was,

Commented [SS29]: Father leaving is a shock especially as she had a very close relationship with him. He is the main carer in the family, stay at home dad. From this point onwards, you see the tumbling effect.

oh so bad. My brother was fine; he didn't let none of it affect him. He just carried on as **normal**.

S: Was he younger or older?

W: Older. He had just gone into college.

S: Did he go to college?

W: Yeah, he went to college; studied media studies, business studies. You know he's done really well for himself. He's a manager now.

S: Did he go to university at all?

W: No, he just went to college but like he was working at a young age and he still works for the same company so he's kind of bumped himself up now to get the manager's position.

S: What is that in? Retail?

W: Yeah retail in a [omitted] store, he manages in [place name].

S: So, things at that point, so did you say that you didn't go to school then?

W: No. Come the last six, seven months of the school year, no **didn't bother**; I'd stay at home. I'd get up in the morning; I'd put my uniform on 'cause my mum and dad used to go to work. So, **I'd pretend** that I was there and I'd be going to school but as soon as everybody left the house I'd take my uniform back off, I'd phone the school, pretend I was my mother, tell them I was bad and just kind of go back to bed, and **nobody ever knew none of this** because my brother was in college all day, and my mother and father was in work. Or if I did go to school, it got to the point that I hadn't been there so much, I'd normally get my registration mark in the morning then **go on the mitch**.

S: So, I mean because you didn't go to school then, obviously, you didn't do the coursework attached to your GCSEs?

W: No. I got thrown out of a lot of classes and a lot of GCSEs I wasn't allowed to sit because of the way I would **argue** with the teachers. I would **disrupt, disrupt** the whole class. **I was just a nightmare.**

S: And the reason for you being that way, you think?

W: **It was because of the divorce.**

Slipping over the space of two years – from achieving 'really well' in Year 9 to not bothering in Year 11, being a nightmare. Noticeable lack of concentration in the narrative, no evidence of support. **Coping mechanism:** the backlash – Whitney pretends to go to school. No-one in the family is aware that Whitney is not in school

Commented [SS30]: Possibly the brother was not affected as much because the relationship with his father was not as close as the one that Whitney had with her father, or that the relationship with his mother might have been closer, or that he developed a coping mechanism to deal with family separation. On separation, the mother stayed in the family home.

Commented [SS31]: Pretence mechanism: this is very like Owen's way to get out of going to school - rubbing his school clothes in the mud so that he didn't have clean clothes to go to school. Also, Amy pretending to feel ill to avoid going to school. Sharon pretending to be ill at school to go home early. This is a theme that emerged from the narratives.

therefore no opportunity to put in place vital support mechanisms to halt educational slippage.

Mechanism that triggered the tumbling effect: At home, Whitney had a very close relationship with her father. When her father (the stay-at-home dad and the main carer in the family) leaves home Whitney's source of support, and a major one at that, is lost. This situation is further compounded by the shock of learning there is a half-sister, plus parent's separation and divorce. Mother cannot support her as there is evidence that the mother takes a tumble on learning her husband has another child.

Appendix 14 – David's career transition

Suzanne: And have you done any volunteering?

David: Yes.

S: Oh, tell me about that.

D: Yes. I was 20 years I worked in the garages from 16 to 36 and I'd had enough. So, my wife worked in [name of social services department]. She was an admin officer working in [name of section], and I got to hear and find out about children's homes and things like that, and every time I went to a barbeque I'd be out the back playing with the kids and people would say, 'Oh you should get a job working with kids.' So, I thought the only job that pays enough would be working in the children's homes. So, I looked at the job description and decided to volunteer for a year. So, I went to work in a youth club in [name of area], quite a rough area, for a year for two evenings a week. So, while working full-time in the garage, I went to work for the youth service for two evenings a week and that's kind of when I started my training courses as well then. They send you on Child Protection training courses and start thinking of education then. So, although I'd already planned to change careers, it was still very early days, still quite nervous. I guess your confidence gets built up yeah, through going on training courses and realising you can do things, and umm you're not as thick as you think you are.

S: Just briefly I just want to go back to school. How did you think the teachers treated you in school? Did they have their favourites and...?

D: They always gave me time.

S: They did?

D: Yeah but it was never a priority for me. I had no interest in school so teachers, you know, they tried to encourage me to work and learn but um...

S: So, it wasn't that the school was doing anything wrong in particular, that they were giving you as much encouragement as...

D: As everybody else.

S: As everybody else. Oh, that's fine.

D: It was more about us as a family, me as a person. No guidance and you know learning from my environment basically.

S: Okay, so you've done the volunteering for a year and completed that. What then?

D: I went for a job in the children's home and it was a two-day interview and I was offered a minimal hours post of eight hours a week. So, I took that job and I started off working weekends for about a month and I thought, this can't go on any more 'cause I'm working in the garage. I was still working in the youth club and I was working the

Commented [SS32]: Signals he wants to change career. No longer satisfied working in the garage.

Commented [SS33]: Facilitator mechanism - Feedback from friends that he is good with children. This gives David clues and cues about a possible change in identity. Initial ideas and interest stimulates David to actively seeking out opportunities that involve working with children.

Commented [SS34]: Through volunteering David can access training.

Commented [SS35]: Here David describes his thoughts and feelings at the beginning of his learning journey (using negative words like 'thick' and 'nervous'). Attending training courses builds his confidence, which helps him realise he 'can do' things.

Commented [SS36]: Interrupted David's flow. Enthusiasm getting the better of me again!

Commented [SS37]: Again, reflecting negatively on school life. 'No interest' stems from home. The learning environment at home is not stimulating (refer to a previous section in the narrative for evidence). Blocker mechanisms.

Commented [SS38]: Portrays home life in negative terms i.e. no guidance. This fits in with his comments in previous sections of the narrative e.g. never talked to his mother about learning.

odd shift here and there in the children's home. So, I took the plunge, I spoke to the children's home, there seemed to be enough hours there and I took the plunge and packed in the garage, and it worked out. Yeah, I was eventually offered a full-time post, things quickly changed for me then and yeah that was when I started my first qualification then, NVQ level III in Health and Social Care. So that took me about a year I think.

S: And where did you do that?

D: It was in the children's home, in work placement.

S: NVQ? Yeah.

D: So, it was, we had somebody working there. She was an NVQ assessor and she used to talk us through it and support us with what we needed to do. So yeah that was kind of my first proper qualification then and I stayed at the children's home for four and a half years and I learnt a lot in those 4 ½ years. You're kind of on the front line working in the children's home. You see a lot, you learn a lot; you get a lot of training courses. You know, I think we had to do 30 hours a year of training. So, I experienced a lot, and it changed my life a lot as well.

S: How did it change your life?

D: Well I guess I went from what I thought was a stupid, garage worker, manual labour to somebody who was all of a sudden looking into psychology and things like this. Umm yeah so, my aspirations as a person changed. It was around about the same time that my wife was doing a Master's degree as well. So, you're thinking right, if she can do it, I can do it.

S: Did you think that that had an impact on you?

D: Yes, yeah definitely, everything together really to be honest with you. Everything I was experiencing in work, the training courses, the qualifications I was doing, the positive feedback I was getting, all of a sudden you start thinking no, I can do this.

Mechanisms identified in David's transition:

- Decision wants to change career – 'had enough' (goal setting)
- Feedback from others 'good with children' (Nohl, 2015: non-determining start)
- Volunteer job - opens opportunities for training (institutional action scheme)
- Initial self-directed learning (action scheme)
- Exposure to significant episodes of learning (institutional action scheme)
- Experiencing success – mastery encourages further learning (Bandura, 2001)
- Tutor support
- Wife - support, encouragement and an element of competition at home

Distance travelled in cognitive terms: beginning of the narrative sequence, from believing he is 'thick', to the end of the sequence, believing that 'I can do this'.

Distance travelled in educational terms: from Level 2 car mechanic to studying a degree.

Reflection on my performance at interview highlighted in turquoise.

Commented [SS39]: Turning point 'takes the plunge'

Commented [SS40]: Indicates a new work life, new challenges, new learning opportunities, and success in learning!

Commented [SS41]: Checking again that it was an NVQ, didn't quite hear the first time.

Commented [SS42]: Facilitator mechanism, support from tutor.

Commented [SS43]: Significant episodes of learning and work practice. Booster mechanism: Exposure to learning and working practices.

Commented [SS44]: Another negative comparison. What he was like before participating in learning.

Commented [SS45]: Learning helps raise his aspirations. Mechanism: wife learning at the same time provides encouragement, support and an element of COMPETITION!

Commented [SS46]: It would have been better to ask an open question at this point. However, David provided more information despite the closed question.

Commented [SS47]: At the beginning of the sequence David refers to his former self in negative terms i.e. as thick. The end of the sequence signals a change from negative thought to positive thought. Change in identity. Also receives positive feedback from others that raises his confidence 'I can do this' = transition complete.

Appendix 15 – Polly's example of boosters and blockers to learning

Polly: There was an advert that come through saying there was this course for engendering change, and this is what the course did. It would improve your confidence and do this, that and the other, and I thought, oh okay I'm going to have a go of them, and me and five other women from the organisation that I was running at the time went, and it was just one of those courses. It was all for women, and it just had such an impact on me. I was just like, 'Wow!' 'Cause I thought, I mean I've always felt I was quite a confident person but we did this course and you know at the beginning you have to say what your levels are of this, that and the other, and then at the end you have to re-measure your levels of how you were at the end of the course. And I realised how much I thought I knew, which I didn't really know, and how much I needed to learn. One of the girls that was on the course, like come from the same organisation as me, they... I think again you had to say what your name is, and where you were from and she was literally nearly in tears at the idea of having to say, 'My name is...' and she couldn't do it. She was like her voice had all gone all dried up and everything. And then at the end of the course, it was only six or eight weeks, whatever it was, and she actually could say her name, what her interest was, where she lived, without getting into tears and for me that was like, just amazing you know, and it was the first course I'd ever been on where I'd seen such a change around in people. I mean I felt that when I taught [sport] and stuff that I'd seen changes in people as they went through their learning but it was just that, that impact and I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing'. And from there then, I went on to doing other stuff with them and then I've done other adult education classes and I think that, I think that's why education is important because it just gives you that continuous learning and development, and confidence for you to be able to make choices about what you want to do. I would never have ever dreamed. I mean when I was on that governor's committee first of all and I was a bit like, ooh totally out of my depth here. All these people are cleverer than me, that are all sort up on that pedestal but after doing the Women into Public Life and all the other training courses I've done, I'd begun to realise well, no they're not really, they're just like I was when I... They would have been like me when I first started. So yeah, you know, I was just, in my work that I do, if there's courses that I can... when I have volunteers if I think, well actually, they would really benefit from doing that course and the other. I'm always encouraging people to do courses and develop their learning, whatever way it might take.

Suzanne: So, you know the [name of initiative], how many years have been part of?

P: Eight years.

S: Eight years.

P: Yeah, since I was on maternity leave with [name of child].

S: Oh gosh, right okay.

P: And in that time, you know, I've done various things with them... I've sat on their steering group since pretty much from the beginning because they didn't have anybody with a disability really, looking at the disability side of it. Umm and a lot, for whatever the reasons are, a lot of my visually impaired volunteers, you know, they won't go and do courses like that. They won't go and do adult education courses because the provision isn't generally there for them, and they just find it a challenge to go off and do courses. And I think unless you have the confidence to say, well actually this is what I

Commented [SS48]: Advert triggers an interest.

Commented [SS49]: Learning has an impact. 'Wow'

Commented [SS50]: Blocker to learning, cannot say name signals student is low in confidence at start of course.

Commented [SS51]: The booster mechanism that triggers the change i.e. boosts confidence, is the course itself.

Commented [SS52]: The course boosts the learner's confidence level. Big change.

Commented [SS53]: Amazing signals achievement.

Commented [SS54]: Belief that learning stimulates, increases confidence, coupled with lots of support, and continuous learning.

Commented [SS55]: Reflection - how she was totally out of her depth, perceived others to be cleverer than her, put them on a pedestal.

Commented [SS56]: The course helps her reflect on her learning identity as well as others' learning identities; they must start somewhere.

Commented [SS57]: Gives back to others what she herself has learnt (reciprocity) Encouraging others to learn. This is an extremely important point because she knows what support looks like in practice so enthusiastically encourages others to learn.

Commented [SS58]: Blocking mechanism – no support, even though by law there should be support in place.

need in order to do this course, or this is how you need to adapt your course to suit me, I think it can be really difficult for some people. But over the years I've just...

Commented [SS59]: A way to overcome the blocking mechanism.

S: There should be provision now for them, especially in further education colleges?

Commented [SS60]: Challenging the system but difficult to overcome the blocking mechanisms.

P: Yeah, there should be and if you ask for it but because depending on where you go and because it can be down to the lecturer when you turn up. I mean the number of courses I've been on, you won't believe the number of courses I've been on and the lecturer hasn't been told that I have a visual impairment.

Commented [SS61]: Blocking mechanism- lack of communication in institution.

S: Oh right. No. I used to work for a further education college and anybody that applied and... mind you, you've got to say that you've got a need. If you don't say that because I used to umm arrange support for whatever really, and put that in place before the class started. So, the provision is there, albeit the provision may have been cut now due to funding.

Commented [SS62]: Here I am staging a defence on behalf of the institution stating that support mechanisms are in place, subject to the learner declaring the need for support. Although this only confirms the commonly-held assumption in policy terms that support is readily available when, obviously, the support is not available here.

P: By law, under the Equality Act, they would still have to provide that provision. The barrier is where you fill the form in. That goes to wherever it goes to and that information doesn't always get down to the actual lecturer of the course, and it depends on the type of course you do. Because if you're only doing say umm... the best experience I've had is on the PTLLS course. They actually provided me with a one to one support.

Commented [SS63]: Another blocking mechanism. Lack of co-ordination and communication on the institution's part.

S: Who was that with?

Commented [SS64]: Booster mechanism – one to one support.

P: That's with [ACL provider 1].

S: Right.

P: When I've done adult education courses in [name of town], which have been run by the adult education authority in [name of town], I'm assuming. You know they do like adult learning. They advertise different adult courses.

S: Yeah it might be by [name of town] County Council or the further education college, I'm not too sure.

P: Like I did one with [name of ACL provider 2] that was, it was an auditors course, you know, like British Standards. You know, where you can do, you get the British Standard Mark.

S: Oh, right yeah.

P: So, you become an auditor with the British Standards so you can go and quality control. So, I did one of those with them, and the lecturer didn't know I had a visual impairment even though the college knew that I had a visual impairment and they were supposed to... They said they would give me provision umm to put in. Nothing ever happened. They kept oh yeah, yeah, we'll sort something out with the... Now they've got a resource team in [name of ACL provider 2] that deals with people with visual impairment and they provide IT courses and stuff like that. Now if you actually go into the resource base and you're doing a course with them, it's okay. But if you're doing a course in the college like this quality course I was doing, the communication between the two, it just doesn't seem to happen. So that is actually one course I didn't complete. When I think about it, when you asked me earlier, I didn't actually complete that course.

Commented [SS65]: Blocking mechanism – lack of communication in the institution. Results in Polly not completing the course.

Booster mechanisms:

The Confidence building course itself

Successful learning stimulates further learning

Asking for help and support

Receiving one to one support

Result: Effective support = achievement, successful outcomes demonstrated in positive words like: 'impact', 'wow', 'best experience', 'encouraging', 'provided'.

Blocker mechanisms:

Looking on and seeing the other student in tears, low in confidence.

Perception that others are cleverer

Not requesting support (the challenge and difficulty of asking for help)

Lack of institutional communication and co-ordination

Result: Lack of support results in non-completion demonstrated in negative words like 'difficulty', 'challenge', tears, 'couldn't', 'won't', 'nothing ever happened'.

Turquoise **highlight** denotes my influence/performance in the interview.

Appendix 16 – Frances' example of homework help

Suzanne: Oh, okay. So umm other than the card games, and the vegetable patch and things like that, do you help your children with their homework?

Frances: Oh. Yes, yes. I've actually received a letter from the school stating that I'm helping them a little bit too much (both laugh). And I was like, right, I'm sorry! They get their homework in... and you know, you read their homework sheet and I'm one of these that will, you know, yeah I know this is your homework but now that you've given me your idea of... "What can we do to make it better?" And I'm one of them, and I get them thinking. You know, oh right we could do this, and we can do that but the problem is that even though they are doing their homework themselves the idea is so amazing to say because you come from this and we're up here now because where we've evolved through our questioning and trying to get to it, that the teachers are believing that I'm doing the homework because it's so up there and I'm saying, "Well no! We are having discussions about it and they are coming up with their own ideas", but that's what I'm like. It's just always what I... you take a problem; how can you make it better? You know, you don't go... my son always says, "I want to be an accountant mam." "No, you don't! You want to manage all the money in the country. You don't aim by there you aim by there! And if you only get to be an accountant well, well done! But if you get up there, amazing." And that's what we do. I always say... always push it that little bit further. See what extra you can get, and that's the way I raise them.

Suzanne: Yeah. So, I was going to ask the question how important... do you think it's important for your children to do their homework? (Laughs).

Frances: Very. I think, you know, I often say to them, "Yeah you've got homework where you've got to sit down for an hour." Do you know sometimes, "Oh I don't want to do my homework mam; can we do it later? Can we do it tomorrow?" And I always say to them, "This little bit of homework you've got now" in with my son, you know, 6/8 years. "You are going to be coming home with stacks like this that you've got to get through in the night, so if you get used to doing this little bit of homework, then this isn't going to be a problem!" And... but I feel homework is so important because they need to know that life doesn't stop when you enter your home, it still carries on. You know, I say to them I don't stop cleaning just because you're home from school, and you can't stop learning because you are home from school. You know.

Mechanisms identified in the parent-child relationship:

- Frances encourages her children to think for themselves, to come up with their own ideas, to improve and make things better (positive parenting practice)
- Conveys goals and aims – 'think big'
- Pushes her children to see what 'extra' she can get out of them
- Encourages and persuades her children to continue (and not put off) learning.
- Most importantly, Frances points out that learning doesn't stop when they finish school, it continues in the home environment too.

Commented [SS66]: Her practice is to get her children to think about their learning.

Commented [SS67]: Booster mechanism. Exposing her children to the process of thinking and questioning.

Commented [SS68]: This is a crucial element of Frances' home regime. The family are having discussions about learning and the children are coming up with their own ideas because of the discussions. But the teachers don't believe this is happening, hence the letter from school.

Commented [SS69]: Getting her children to aim high through pushing them to 'think big'. Connection here to Veronica telling her daughter the same.

Commented [SS70]: Laughing in the sense that I knew what Frances was about to say.

Commented [SS71]: Children showing a reluctance to learn – request to delay learning until the next day. Much like Caroline's remonstrations and refusal to learn with the job advisor. But Frances counterbalances their negativity with encouragement.

Commented [SS72]: Explanation to justify continuation of learning in the home environment. Frances uses explanation and persuasion, to bring her children around to the idea of doing their homework. A similar technique to the one used by professionals e.g. job advisor persuading Caroline to go to literacy classes.

Commented [SS73]: Good role model i.e. 'I don't stop cleaning': Frances tells her children that learning doesn't end outside of school-time, it continues in the home (parenting style).

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