controlling
the
imagination

How do teachers and managers of adult language, literacy and numeracy define, achieve and maintain quality?

'....professional imagination will enable professionals to gauge their own efficacy within contemporary settings without resorting to either an over-individualistic or an over-determined position.'

(Power 2008a:144)

Controlling the Imagination is an exploration of the tensions embedded in the notion of quality when it is used in relation to the teaching and managing of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy, with specific relation to 'Skills for Life' – New Labour's policy attempt, instigated in 1999, to improve the basic skills of adults living in England. The thesis offers an analysis that charts the development of discourses around quality from the vague and attractive transcendental quality of the 18th C artisan to its object like textualisation in the Common Inspection Framework. Through critical discourse analysis and interview data with teachers and managers in further and adult education colleges graded as good or outstanding in their most recent ALI / OfSTED inspection, the text traces the contours along which practitioners experience the tension between quality-as-professional-aspiration in contrast to quality-as-demanded by policy. This axis, wrenched apart in several directions, is further complicated by the tension between quality-as-abstract and quality as embodied in day-to-day experience. I argue that practitioners talk about quality in ways that journey through these competing and contrasting meanings. In considering the implications of these ideas about quality, the thesis explores the research, policy and practice nexus. Research can inform policy and practice, but it can also lead to uncomfortable and unsettling conclusions that to some extent also unframe professional practice.

Key concepts: *quality, adult literacy, professionalism, policy, Skills for Life, basic skills, research and practice, further education,*

figures

Appendices

Acronyms

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
ALLN	Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CIF	Common Inspection Framework
DIUS	Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills
ESOL	English for Sepeakers of Other Languages
FfE	Framework for Excellence
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSN	Learning and Skills Network
NALC	National Adult Literacy Core Curriculum
NANC	National Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
QIA	Quality Improvement Agency
SAR	Self Assessment Report
SLDD	Students with Learning Disabilities and Difficulties

intro: the puzzle

In this study I elaborate upon the tensions embedded in the term 'quality' when it is used by researchers, practitioners and policy makers in reference to teaching and managing Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy (ALLN).

The policy surrounding this curricular area, *Skills for Life*, emerged from a report written by a team of researchers led by the eminent statistician, Sir (now Lord) Claus Moser. *Skills for Life* connects current poor levels of language, literacy and numeracy achievement among adults living in England to the absence of a 'coherent and consistent set of national standards to guarantee the quality of what is taught [to adults attending basic skills classes] how it is taught and the qualifications [...] awarded to learners' (Moser 1999). The proposed 'Fresh Start' for basic skills, re-branded the area as '*Skills for Life*' and was framed by 21 recommendations, four of which were headlined as to do with the quality of provision: effective teachers, effective teaching, the use of ICT and a reformed inspection regime.

I examine this notion of 'quality' through a detailed exploration of the relationship between 'Quality' as codified through the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and 'quality' as lived experience. My primary focus for this study is literacy provision in England. *Skills for Life* policy initiatives incorporate the three curricular areas of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), literacy and numeracy and it is my intention to draw upon discussions that have taken place within all three areas. I am driven by an interest in literacy, a professional closeness to numeracy and an overlapping connection of language. Intended as a study into the tensions involved in achieving quality, part of what compels this research is my desire to come to an understanding of how post-16 providers of *Skills for Life* have been able to convince Adult Learning

Inspectorate (ALI) and / or Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) to evaluate their provision in a positive light – despite the policy flux that has surrounded the area since the publication of the Moser Report in 1999 and the continuing wave of successive ALI and OfSTED inspection reports expressing considerable reservations about the overall quality of provision (OfSTED 2003, 2005).

I enter a quality terrain in which theorising is largely encompassed by two broad referential frames (Ratcliff, 2005). These frames are compelled by radically different gravitational centres. The first suggests that to understand quality we need to analyse systems, structures and frameworks. Quality is codified as objective, explicit and coherent. The second frame locates quality as something experienced by practitioners. Quality is an emergent property of a series of complex interactive social processes and practices. I think this difference in conceptualisation is more than an almost imperceptible contrast in focus or referential frame. It is a deep-seated polarity. A 'solitude'. Comparable to the experience of the inhabitants of a city, who share a contained geographic space and common identity but speak different languages. Fink (2001) offers this metaphor to portray the relationship between policy maker and policy implementer who – in attempting to communicate are able only to achieve what he calls a 'dialogue of the deaf'.

I draw on Fink's (2001) metaphor to explore the somewhat uneasy relationship between ALI and / or OfSTED and organisations subject to the inspection process. While the encounter cannot be cast as one between policy maker and policy implementer without careful justification, is it possible that the initial wave of critical inspections for college departments responsible for *Skills for Life* may, in part, be connected to the extent to which inspector and practitioner are caught up in their own 'solitude'? They occupy a similar professional terrain, yet seem to inhabit distinct normative universes with contrasting views and values about what quality means.

This 'dialogue of the deaf' is neatly captured in an exchange between inspector and practitioner published in *Reflect* the house journal of the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC 2005).

In October 2005, Neena Julka outlines some of the lessons to be learnt from the wave of critical inspection reports into the delivery of *Skills for Life* in colleges. In the article she offers a portrait of a grade one lesson in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Her descriptive analysis adopts a template that lists planning, structure, teaching methods, assessment, learners' achievement, purpose and tutor evaluation. The article is intended to identify the defining characteristics of what inspectors regard as a grade one lesson. It is offered as advice for tutors who aspire to excellence.

The article was met with a scathing response in the following issue of the journal. Simpson *et al* (2005) seem to adopt a position which doubts the basis upon which Julka – and by logical extension OfSTED and / or ALI inspectors - make their judgements. They point initially to the logical inconsistency of the portrait Julka offers of a grade one lesson. Is it possible for a lesson in which students are 'in control' to follow a tutor's 'detailed and thought through lesson plan'(Simpson *et al* 2005:16)? Although they explicitly frame their critique of Julka's contribution in terms of freedom and control, Simpson *et al* (2005) seem to reject an approach to identifying quality (which they codify as excellence) through a series of predefined criteria. They suggest that quality can exist beyond the narrow bullet-point brevity deployed by Julka. They exemplify their response by reference to the role of ICT in ESOL teaching. Simpson *et al* (2005) seem to hint that quality is most appropriately considered as a property located in persons rather than situations. The exchange echoes the headlining of quality contained within the Moser Report (1999). The report writers posit a distinction between effective teaching and effective teachers. This is not a pre-given decoupling. Is it possible that Julka's analysis is led by a notion of 'effective teaching' which is slightly at odds with an analysis led by a notion of 'effective teachers'? Simpson *et al* (2005) offer a vision of quality which may – with close analysis - reveal its own framework, albeit one that centres around a tutor's ability to respond creatively to the exegesis of a particular situation.

This debate crystallises the puzzle I want to elaborate upon in this research. Julka's notion of quality is derived from the CIF. She bases her analysis on recent OfSTED and ALI reports. Simpson *et al* (2005) are also enmeshed within the CIF but seem to adopt a position more sympathetic to practitioners – tutors. In this study I want to explore the role played by quality and its textual representation – the CIF – in the professional lives of *Skills for Life* practitioners.

This elaboration demands I move on quite quickly from an overly simplistic polarisation. The 'dialogue of the deaf' is not neatly attributable to the differing experiences of inspector and practitioner. The CIF is, theoretically at least, all encompassing. But it is also textually mediated (Ratcliff 2005). It is an idea about quality that is written in one domain for implementation in another. It is then presented to both practitioner and inspector as document which, once object, takes on a particular form. There are spiral-bound copies of the framework itself and derivative texts, including its contextualising translations, that explain what it means, what it looks like in localised settings. There are back copies of former inspection reports and comprehensive guidance notes. Participants in the quality process are compelled to interpret, to make sense of these documents. This negotiation of meaning occurs through a series of micro-social encounters. People talk to each other. And it is this talking – this communicative dynamic – which means that quality has to be understood as a relational dialectic (Ratcliff 2005). Something that exists within an embodied exchange. The outcome of human relationships.

What is perplexing about the dialogue between Julka (2005) and Simpson *et al* (2005) is that both parties are *Skills for Life* insiders. That is they are both central players in the infrastructure that has surrounded *Skills for Life* since the publication of the Moser Report announced a fresh start for literacy, numeracy (and much later ESOL). Why do they seemingly have such different – and to some extent emotionally entangled – notions of quality?

My intention is that through an extended exploration of the role quality plays in the day-to-day delivery of *Skills for Life* - I will come to a resolution, a fuller understanding of how to reconcile Quality as objective coherent unambiguous framework and quality as the outcome of a series of complex interactions and practices. Somewhere in this curious mix is a compulsion, an anchoring desire to develop my own professional practice. But more than this I want, like so many others attracted to this area of work, to contribute not to the achievement of government policy as such, but through government policy to the achievement of goals connected to social justice, to working to redress the impact of inequality, to making a positive and substantial difference to the lives of those who have benefited least from the education system.

one: from education to skills

"A field that is emerging has no fixed name or form. It is an imaginary space." (Hamilton and Hillier 2006:15)

It is possible to trace the history and development of ALLN[1] by reference to how the curricular area is named.

In 1946, the *Times Educational Supplement* published an article entitled *'The Problem of Adult Literacy'*. Calling for the establishment of county colleges offering adult literacy classes, educational psychologist, Fred Schonell (Jones and Marriott 1995: 340), believed that a reduction in the problem of adult literacy would lead to 'less unhappiness, less delinquency, less crime, and less neurosis;' and that improved '[...] personal and social efficiency would be a major gain to the nation.' His contribution was part of a slow process through which Adult Literacy was eventually constructed as a problem. When Schonell's article was published, ALLN had no distinguishable institutional presence. And without a defined curricular space, it had no name. There was some activity, activation around adult literacy, but – driven by individual philanthropy, it was slow, largely invisible, local and uncoordinated (Jones and Marriott 1995). By 1972, a precursor to the Russell Report (1973) concluded that little over half of all local authorities in England and Wales offered some sort of adult literacy provision (Clyne 1972). A more extensive survey, one year later found that in the 20 years between 1950 and 1970, 200 adult literacy instruction programmes had been developed. That provision was an inchoate

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[1] I use the term Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy (ALLN) to enclose my area of study. I use the term *Skills for Life* to refer to a specific policy.

dispersal is evidenced in how it was named: variously, Remedial English, Compensatory Classes or General Education or Return to Study (Hamilton and Hillier 2006).

Everything has its beginnings in what has gone before. It ought to be possible to identify a more than arbitrary reference point, a specific event, time or location that led directly to the current wave of policy interest surrounding ALLN. If there is a single moment where we can say with authority: it all began here, it is 1974 when the government released £1 million to establish a National Adult Literacy Resource Agency (NALRA) and increase the number of classes being offered by local authorities. In Jones and Marriott's (1995) comprehensive examination of why the literacy campaign took so long to build momentum, they point to two noteworthy features of this development. The first is that it took so many years for politicians to realise that adult literacy was not a temporary problem, something that emerged post-war to be eradicated by such and such a date once the full effect of compulsory schooling had taken hold. The second is the enthusiasm with which the issue was taken up once the hidden reality of what was initially seen as 'adult illiteracy' was exposed to public and policy attention. The sheer scale of the response is astonishing. In 1973 there were 5, 000 adults attending reading and writing classes. Ten years later this number had increased to 110, 000 (Jones and Marriott 1995). Seen in 1973 as something that would and could be solved by high profile campaigning, the Problem of Adult Literacy by 1980 was recognised as something that required a permanent service and national agency.

By the 1980s adult literacy was an enclosed curriculum area within adult education. It had been broadened twice, first to include numeracy and again later to include ESOL. Without central strategic direction, provision was driven by volunteerism and the political will of local authorities in response to lobbying pressure groups. It was also a moment of experimentation, supported by what became the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). In the same decade rising unemployment, a neo-liberal conservative government and accelerating economic downturn sharpened the policy focus on what had become established as adult basic education.

With establishment came institutionalisation. What happens in Further and Adult Education happens to ALLN. Incorporation and a changed more rigidly defined funding regime saw the area enclosed and designated as Programme Area 10. This period also saw the emergence of adult / basic skills. Funding and inspection arrangements led to demarcation, fragmentation and dispersal. Adult /basic skills was known simultaneously as 'core' (later to become 'key') skills. Provision which offered language, literacy and numeracy as discrete subjects retained the name basic. Provision which offered language, literacy and numeracy to learners enrolled on other college courses was named core - later key - skills. The distinction implied by these variations was most often connected to institutional positioning and the associated pedagogic traditions. It was a matter of what particular cohort of learners were being taught and where rather than what or how they were learning. Adults in community and discrete settings attended what was described as 'basic skills' classes. Young learners in further education colleges attended what was described as 'key' skills classes. The abiding and distinguishing metaphor was between basic skills as 'building a foundation' as a basis for further study, employment or personal development or key skills as 'offering a supporting structure', a simultaneous scaffolding that opened up the possibility of further study.

With the publication of the Moser Report in 1999, ALLN achieved a pivotal place in government policy. The Report called for step-change in adult basic skills. And recommended an entirely new infrastructure. From the Report came a new name: *Skills for Life*. The discursive shift from adult basic skills to *Skills for Life* is noticeable and deliberate. When the Moser report was published the most often used sobriquet was 'basic skills'. When the post-Moser strategy emerged, the name 'basic skills' disappeared from use in policy documents. The curricular area – Language, Literacy and Numeracy - was quite clearly signposted, but its name – adult basic skills – was not once mentioned. The shift was exaggerated by an almost ceremonial renaming. What started life as the Basic Skills Strategy Unit, the Whitehall based office charged with implementing the Moser Report and consequent strategy paper, some few years later changed its name to become the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit. With *Skills for Life* New Labour established its legacy leaving credentials. The name change signals a clear punctuation point between the 'basic skills' of the past and the *'Skills for Life'* of the modernising present.

The name change also established a distance between policy makers and ALLN managers, teachers and learners. Documented references to *Skills for Life* is primarily a reference to a specific policy. It is unlike 'adult / basic skills' which was a more grounded reference to continuously re-defined competences and behaviours. Adult / basic skills signals something of what practitioners do. It was often an uncomfortable and stigmatised name, but it was also one that seemed to emerge from the field. The naming '*Skills for Life*' when applied to college departments, organisational roles, strategy papers and documents positions teachers and managers as modernising implementers of government policy. Through using a specific name associated with a time, a person and policy it suggests a political and subjective alignment. *Skills for Life* also signals curricular separation. ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy became subject specialisms in their own right. Each became a discipline, a clear and distinct independent and commodified body of knowledge ready for acquisition. There are policy parallels between 1974 and 1999 but there is also policy mutation.

The £1 million awarded as a surprise initiative in 1974 was in 1999 transformed to £1.5 billion. In 1974 money was unexpectedly made available and re-directed towards this new and previously unfunded area of work (Withnall 1994). By 1999 money was made available because an urgent need requiring policy attention was identified. In the post-Moser policy wave a Strategy Unit was established within Whitehall. This was quite unlike the 'at arms length' development of what became the Basic Skills Agency. It is difficult to overestimate the impact that *Skills for Life* has had on the area. Everything changed. The title of Moser's Report: A Fresh Start – signals its seismic intent. It may be little more than rhetorical flourish, but 'A Fresh Start' indicates a degree of dissatisfaction with what has gone before. It is an indictment. 'A Fresh Start' offers no acknowledgment that what was there was good – even if only for the time. It doesn't 'build on'. It rather suggests an impatient desire to tear things up and start again.

from campaign to strategy

The discursive shift from adult basic skills to *Skills for Life* is entangled with several other narratives. I place 1974: the establishment of the National Adult Literacy Resource Agency and increased funding for local authority classes alongside 1999: the establishment of the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit and a commitment to raise the skills of 3.5 million adults by 2010, and view both as moments from which we can say: it all began here.

1974 and 1999 are moments when ALLN became recognised as a problem requiring policy attention. This reconfiguration has little connection to changed levels of adult literacy need. There is robust data indicating that levels of adult literacy have remained the same, at something like 20% of the population, since the 1940's (Brooks 1995, Bathmaker 2007). It would be extremely difficult to present a convincing argument suggesting that the amounts of adult literacy distributed throughout the population was suddenly and dramatically lessoned at these two key moments. There is little evidence to support the idea that suddenly and dramatically, almost overnight in 1974 and 1999, came the realisation that the ways in which people were required to use existing skills had radically altered. This notion of literacy standards falling, or literacy demands rising rests on a troubling idea of literacy as measurable. In actuality the meaning of figures relating to levels of ALLN is hotly contested (Hamilton 2001, Hamilton and Barton 1999, Sticht 2001). Painstakingly detailed analysis of statistics relating to literacy have drawn attention to the inherent difficulties of constructing literacy as something that can be unitised, distributed and measured. Counting ALLN is a notoriously complex task. Measurements do not easily translate from nation to nation or decade to decade. Comparisons across time and space are virtually meaningless. Even if ALLN was quantifiable in the way the tables and tabulations imply, the presentation of levels of need in public discourse compels us to conclude that it is not literacy itself - what people do, think and feel in social interactions involving text – that is problematic. Despite these quite legitimate misgivings, the figures that emerge from various international studies are presented in graphic form telling an alarming and somewhat self-evident story of UK's failing and falling economic prowess.

In 1997 reported figures for adult illiteracy ranged from 2 million in July (Guardian 2000), which is considerably less than the 5 million reported as in need of literacy classes in 1987 (Guardian 2000), but not as much as the 8 million illiterates quoted in the same newspaper in 1997 (Guardian 2000). Though the 8 million illiterates identified in September 1997 (Guardian 2000) represents a significant reduction from the 50% of the population counted by the Guardian as illiterate in January, some eight months earlier (Barton 2000).

An argument that identifies gradually decreasing / plummeting amounts of literacy unevenly distributed amongst the population as providing generative momentum behind policy change in 1974 and 1999 has to be placed to one side and discarded as too tenuous. And yet some sort of explanation is required. In the two to three decades between 1946 and 1974, between 1974 and 1999 The Problem of Adult Literacy broadened, deepened, took institutional form, invited compensation and remedy, only to become deeply embedded in policy 'at the heart of government' as something requiring urgent resolution.

At this point the constructed parallel between 1974 and 1999 dissolves. The unfolding organisation of adult basic education that characterised post-1974 was largely driven by the promise that schooling would achieve universal literacy. It was articulated around the crusading energy of ALLN teachers, managers and learners. It was primarily a campaign. By 1999 Sir Claus Moser envisioned the eradication of The Problem of Adult Literacy. A Fresh Start aimed to have 2.25 million adults improving their basic skills in 10 years. There was some talk of targets in 1974, but the unfolding implementation of the Moser Report was frenetically driven by a policy insistence on improved skills and achieved targets. In 1999 activity around ALLN was most conclusively galvanised by government and centralised control. It was policy driven and strategic.

It is the disjuncture between ALLN as constructed in 1974 and 1999 that is most significant. It provides a basis for understanding the purpose and scope of this research. Entwined within the name change from adult basic education to *Skills for Life* is a

discursive change – one that connects to changes taking place in domains not immediately or strictly associated with ALLN policy or curriculum.

skill: the key to economic success

Skills have acquired a totemic status amongst policy makers. The belief that 'Economic success, social cohesion and active citizenship' are all dependent on the skills and abilities of the population (Labour Party 1996: 2) provides cohesion to New Labour's social policy and economic strategy, designed to secure the UK's position in a global market place. Several interweaving strands of argumentation define the technical, cultural, political and economic changes that characterise globalisation. The internationalisation of production, restructuring the labour market, the hyper-fluidity of capital and an increase in the number of flexible workers are some of the pick and mix features that define the internationalisation of risk (Morley 2003, Burbles and Torres 2000, Green 1997, Esland 1996). In this environment, education and training have become direct objects of, rather than adjuncts to economic policy. What a globalised economy creates – according to some theorists - is a reduction in state power and an enhancement in the market. Policy attention shifted towards education in the 1980s onwards largely because with power residing in international corporations, it has nowhere else to go (Hodgson and Spours 1999).

The increased focus on skills amounts to an increased focus on creating conditions that make the UK an attractive investment proposition for international corporations. The new economy requires flexi-workers: workers with desirable behaviours and attitudes. This line of argument is strongly supported by Payne (2000) who demonstrates that while skills have for a long time been valued by policy makers as 'the back bone of industry' (Carr Report 1958), its invested meanings have expanded exponentially. What

contemporary discourse means by 'skill' is barely distinguishable from what is meant by personal characteristics, dispositional attributes and attitudes.

Embedded within this emphasis is the myopic and deeply flawed belief that simply boosting the supply of educated and skilled employees will transform national economic competitiveness and realise the vision of a high-skills, high value-added capitalism. In *Skills for Life* ALLN is endowed with super-hero like qualities. It is imagined as the silver bullet that pierces the petrifying heart of economic decline. While policy makers talk of skill, the labour market reduces the scope of activities required from the contemporary workforce. For example, a shop-worker previously may have been required to enter digits into a cash register and manually calculate change. With the introduction of technology, an 'up-skilling' to include the use of IT, the task is reduced to scanning a barcode. With skills-talk we are caught up in an Orwellian double-speak where we move inexorably towards a post-Fordist nirvana while, in reality, remain firmly entrapped within the low-skills, neo-Fordist cage (Payne 2000).

The abiding interest in skills emerged most strongly during the 1980s. This is the decade during which adult basic education became adult basic skills. It was also a period of spiralling economic decline, high unemployment and a growth in Mc Jobs (Green 1997). Embedded within the emphasis placed in education and skills is the assumption that the state – through further education – is responsible for the preparation of competent workers with universal and transferable skills. These pre-packaged skills are required to be demonstrable regardless of the wider organisational context and assumed to bear no connection to a particular situation. This notion of skill reduces the complexity of human capability to its most mechanistic atomised unit. Yet skill, for example the skill of problem solving, relies on expertise and specialist bodies of knowledge. The demonstration of skill is bound up with particular routines, procedures and 'ways of doing things'. It can only be generic at its simplest. The imperative for further education colleges to prepare people for working life has come at a time when previously existing forms of skill acquisition and structured socialisation into the workforce – apprenticeships and graduate training programmes – have been cut back to save costs (Payne 2004). Payne is critical of what he views as a belief amongst policy makers and industry that colleges can and should provide 'oven-ready' workers who hit the ground running on entry into the workforce. This expectation achieves a metonymic

of blame. It is a view that would suggest that responsibility for unemployment should be located not within economic policy or the management of industry but rather within the unemployed themselves for failing to acquire the necessary skill and disposition to render themselves employable. Or within further education colleges for failing to achieve what Payne (2004) refers to as a 'mission impossible': the supply of pre-specialised workers ready for entry into the workplace equipped with generic, transferable skills.

quality: development of a discourse

My argument has so far focused on the extent to which further education is implicated in the 'low skills equilibrium' (Coffield 2004, Finegold and Soskice 1988) the production of skilled workers, flexi-workers with the right dispositional competences or, to use Cooper's term (2002a), the production of 'docile bodies'. I have largely ignored the extent to which colleges of further education are also workplaces. If the unemployed are held responsible for the effects of government policy within globalised hyper-capitalism, teachers and managers in further education are also subject to the same misplacement of blame.

Discourses around quality are closely aligned to the skills agenda. The more stringently education policy centralises skills, that is the more government centralises a particular version of further education, the more sharply focused policy becomes on quality and standards . This is not quite the same as saying quality is only ever relevant as a discourse when associated with skills. There are several possible domains within which it is possible to narrate the development of discourses around quality, ALLN and further education. A summary outlining of these in provided in Table 1- *Quality: the development of discourse*. The template provides an overview of the discourses woven throughout this study. It represents various shades of meaning to emerge from texts surrounding education and quality. At first glance they may appear to follow a timeline, but there is

Quality – the development of a discourse.

concept	perception	associated with
abstract	Quality as a vague, attractive and desirable state not amenable to explicit bullet-point definition.	The 19th C artisan produced artefacts carefully crafted from hand selected materials paying close attention to both form and function.
Industrial i & ii	Quality as control over processes of mass production. Components need to be interchangeable, hence emphasis on precise specification.	Migratory terminology of neo-liberal managerialist discourse resulting in uncomfortable semiotic couplings e.g. zero-defect and between customer / learner.
enlightenment	Quality as continuous improvement. It is a never ending journey rather than a definable point of arrival.	The miracle of the post-War Japanese car industry. Maximising output means limiting resource input and the insistence on zero-defect.
campaigning	Quality as the tacit grammar of professional practice. Creativity of practitioners working in marginalised institutional spaces offering gift-time to define an occupational territory.	Hallmark of barefoot-professionalism and pre-Skills for Life practice: student-centred learning. Professionalism was based on developing creative ways of working with adults who had benefited least from formal education.
demanded	Quality as policy, specifically named 'Skills for Life', attempts to ensure ALLN provision is equipped to meet the needs of the economy.	New infrastructure that followed Moser Report and ceremonial redefinition of professional territory. Aligns ALLN to wider changes in education and policy most notably audit culture and rage for accountability.
textualised	Quality as object, achieved by practitioners' adhering to standardised mimetic templates. Akin to a Weberian 'ideal type'. Embodied experience is obliged to confirm to a fictionalisation.	The new Skills for Life infrastructure is textually mediated. It is an extensive series of exemplifying, (re)modelling, contextualising - documents with which practitioners have to engage. It requires a specific set of literacy practices, translations and betrayals.

fig i

considerable overlap as ideas appear to co-exist in different places at the same time, or strains of thought are entangled within a single framing. The table attempts to separate discourses around quality not for the purpose of implying this is how they are naturally found, but for the analytical value of making what might otherwise be taken-for-granted visible.

abstract: pre-industrial artisan

There is a romantic reframing of quality located within discourses surrounding the pre-industrial artisan of the 18th C who took pride in the quality of his or her work (Hart 1997). In this strain of thought quality has a vaguely defined, abstract meaning that establishes a connection between process and product. Hart (1997) evokes the sense of pride artisans invested within handmade artefacts individually crafted from selected materials carefully fitted together. Quality as associated with the craftsperson refers to a abstract, transcendental belief in the inherent worthwhileness of doing something well. It is not strictly determined by criteria or rules, nor can the belief in its worthwhileness be strictly located in concrete experience. This notion, exemplified by the construction of the pre 18th C artisan, is driven by the desire to create beauty in form and function. The production process offered holistic involvement and connected commitment to an entire process. With industrialisation this approach to production, constituent parts of a complex object built to form a finished article, became quickly outdated. The abstract, transcendental quality of the skilled 18th C artisan has no relevance in an era of mass production.

i) industrial: maximising output

The second domain for the emergence of discourses around quality, one that has the most highly pronounced contemporary resonance, locates it as emergent from the Japanese car industry in the 1940s and 1950s. Picking up a narrative thread that began with the 18th C artisan, quality becomes an issue when the connections between person, process and product are broken. Sallis (1994) reminds us that the artisan worked without quality control supervisors. The shift from hand made individually crafted items to mass produced goods offers valuable insight into the genealogy of quality. Quality controls ensure that the component parts of mass-produced items are made according to strict specification. It is only when components are tightly controlled that the atomisation of production is possible, and goods can be assembled without the need for an expert craftsperson. The quality discourse of industrialisation is most strongly associated with the elimination of waste – time, money and materials (Morley 2000). Its other associates - fitness for purpose, the measurement of outcomes in relation to product specifications, effectiveness in achieving institutional goals and success in meeting customers' stated or implied needs (Green 1997) became re-inscribed within the term during the 1980s. An approach to management that led to the spectacular recovery of Japan's post-war economy - was applied to the management of public services in the UK. There are varying terms in circulation here – quality assurance, total quality management, quality control, quality improvement. In industry quality demands 'zero defect' and error reduction / prevention. The same principles were applied to public services.

Arguably this technicist approach to quality has opened the 'secret garden' (Ranson 2003) of the professional. Through explicitly defined quality demands teachers lose their status as an autonomous expert community – shielded by specialised knowledge from public scrutiny. The bullet-point brevity of the quality checklists condenses complex processes into easily identifiable competences. When service is broken down into defined entitlements, users have precise digestible information that clarifies legitimate expectations and provides a basis for evaluating what has been provided. Quality audits privilege users' voices. Customer satisfaction is counted and measured using whatever instruments are available.

With industrialisation, quality controls are instituted, in the absence of a connection between process and product, to ensure components are made according to tightly defined specification enabling interchangeability and the elimination of waste.

ii) industrial: zero defect

Appleby (2003) offers another strand of thought for the exposition of the discursive tensions surrounding quality.

There is something troubling, anomalous about the equation of further education and mass production. It fits, but it is an uncomfortable suturing. This jarring is exaggerated when 'mass' carries the association of decline, decay, falling standards and crisis. It is as if 'widening participation' broadening achievement to more and different learners inevitably leads to loss of value. The cultural value invested in learning requires it to be elite and excluding. In public discourses, the unstated thesis seems to be: the value of educational achievement drops, when the communities purchasing it changes (Morley 2003, Park 1992). This quite unsettling association takes a further twist in part because 'quality' is a migratory term. It is an industrial term. It refers in part to the materials required for the production process. Yet, when transported to further education, the insistence of 'zero defect' has potentially brought important aspects of the learner experience to light. During the 1980s and early 1990s high drop-out rates amongst students in FE was attributed to factors beyond the control of colleges. It was the inevitable outcome of poorly motivated students from poor backgrounds. While measures were in place to support learners, the emphasis focused attention on issues 'out there'. Poor student retention and achievement were viewed as something to do with the limitations of learners and therefore beyond institutional control. They could be helped but the problem was located outside the institution (Appleby 2003).

Changed policy conditions, namely a funding methodology that saw institutions rewarded for high rates of achievement and penalised for drop-out, provided a

stimulus and urgency for work on retention and achievement. Davies (2006), Davies and Webster (2005) has brought together a significant body of work into the causes of student non-retention and failure. Conducted over a decade it drew the conclusion that student drop-out was not the inevitable result of apathy or some other factor located within students and their circumstances but could be found within systems and structures controlled by institutions. The way data is collected and managed, the level of support offered to students, the nature and content of curriculum, teaching and learning relationships between staff and students, the extent to which staff feel adequately supported and managed with opportunities for professional development all influence students' decision to stay on or leave their course and are all within institutional control.

enlightenment: the economic miracle

With slight variation to a line of argument I have so far sketched with reference to Appleby's (2003) research report, I am suggesting that the operationalisation of a funding methodology driven by an industrialised notion of quality, zero defect, minimal waste, maximised output for minimised input led to an entrepreneurial interest in retention and achievement. The outcome of this was the severing of what had been a simplistic and troubling causal chain – poor quality raw material leads to a poor quality product. Once the link is broken, the quality of college provision – processes of production - came under closer scrutiny. And – over a considerable number of years – what emerges are changed perceptions, more favourable - less pathologised perceptions, of learners. With 'quality' public services become more publicly accountable.

There are versions of the 'quality' narrative that have the distinct feel of an enlightenment story. The history of quality is one of exposure, light and improvement. Morley (2003) suggests that the hankering for quality has quasi-religious overtones. It is a desire for redemption brought about by an awareness of lack, deficit, failing. The

achievement of quality is a rising curve. It is presented as something new, introduced progressively into practices from which it had previously been absent. The implication is that quality became a problem because there was simply not enough of it in circulation.

With the holistic pride of the 19th C artisan, there was more quality than was required in the new era of industrialised mass production. The associations attached to quality, the developing skills agenda and the role policy makers have demanded of further education implies that quality may be associated with enlightenment. It is the demand for things to be done better: for standards to be raised, teaching to be improved. There is a simplistic and linear argument that underpins the urgency of the quality imperative. Improved learning and skills is argued as leading to a more competent, qualified employable population. With this, industry will have access to the workers it needs to create wealth, thus saving the economy from the ever present abyss of economic decline.

campaigning: a longstanding interest

In my third and final domain for the routes to / roots of quality in ALLN, teachers and managers have always been interested in quality. Hamilton and Hillier (2006) offer several retellings of the early days, pre-Moser and in some instances pre-1974 accounts of working in ALLN. Without a formalised infrastructure, teachers and managers created their own systems of support – to ensure that that what they were doing was good. Training was an integral part of practice. Although provision thrived on the gift-time contribution of volunteers barefoot-professionalism (Henning 2000) traning development was offered as standard. Teachers and managers developed and drew heavily upon networks of support. Regional development consortiums offered weekend training events to enable part-time staff to attend. In 1992, a BSA derived Quality Mark was introduced, only to be abolished when the CIF was introduced and the Moser Report published with its headline finding that after 30 years The Problem of Adult Literacy persisted. And part of this problem was connected to poor quality ALLN teaching and poor quality ALLN teachers.

These quality discourses meld into each other; overlapping and entangled, they represent gradual shifts in tone and meaning. In 1999 a radically self-referential and quite distinct discourse around quality emerged: *Skills for Life*, an explicitly defined, self-declarative re-framing.

Skills for Life: the strategic re-invention of ALLN

Quality is the centralising leitmotif around which my thesis turns. Several government reports into post-compulsory, further and adult education have emphasised the need to improve quality. For example in 1997 Helena Kennedy wrote about widening participation and commented:

'... the quality of teaching for new learners is not of a universally "good" quality' [...] and 'there has been a 'worsening of inspection grades on basic skills courses in the college sector.' (Kennedy 1997).

Kennedy's Report (1997) was one of a series of reports (DfEE 1988, DfEE 1999) all of which pointed to the poor quality of basic skills provision. The most significant of the Reports, The Moser Report and the emergent *Skills for Life* strategy is the policy terrain within which this thesis is located.

The *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE 2001) included,

    a) A government commitment to promoting greater participation in Language, Literacy and Numeracy provision, through a government-sponsored national promotional campaign;

b) The setting of nationally defined standards determining what an adult should be able to do, in what contexts and how – dividing these ways of engaging with text into hierarchical levels;

c) Standards as a basis of core-curricular documents, which for the first time explicitly define Adult Literacy, Adult Numeracy and English for Speakers of other Languages as subject specialisms in their own right;

d) Teaching and learning materials, to accompany the core-curricular documents, all published to exceptionally high production values, smooth thick glossy pages, high colour, paper based with integrated IT learning options;

e) Qualifications for teachers – making what had been an occupation derived from volunteerism and staffed by part-time workers into a desirable profession inviting graduate level qualifications;

f) Qualifications for learners which were, for the first time, pegged to a single coherent framework to be adopted by all providers;

g) National targets instituted and devolved through regional bureaucracies into colleges, departments and classroom. The aim was for 1.5 million adults to achieve a national qualification within 5 years of the strategy being published;

h) Funding ring-fenced for ALLN provision and a 40% uplift making it an attractive curricular proposition for colleges;

i) A completely new and formalised approach to ALLN, including screening, initial and diagnostic assessments accompanied by systems for recording the learners' journey through individual learning plans;

j) The establishment of an evidence base to inform ALLN practice through development of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy with the remit to improve skills and knowledge of ALLN teachers and managers.

The changes amount to the instigation of an entirely new infrastructure. The centralised control of pedagogy and textual requirements surrounding management radically altered. It is difficult to overestimate the impact these changes have had. In their textual presentation they appear neat and linear: a list of 10 clearly definable features. In the experiential life world of those working in ALLN, they may be described as something of a modern-day 'pelting' (Coffield 2007). Since policy amounts to so much more than a simple statement from policy makers declaring this is what and how we are going to do, this pervasive infrastructure implies a great deal of local activity. In the rolling out of these statements are levels and layers of implementation, of ambiguity accompanied by the densely opaque complexities of macro and micro political relationships that change implies.

With the unfolding of *Skills for Life* ALLN teachers and managers are enclosed by a set of circumstances and offered a pre-defined range of possible responses in deciding what to do and how to do it. They are invited to make decisions, while having their range of options severely curtailed. None the less, the invitation is to 'social action rather than robotic reactivity' (Ball 1993:12). That is, practitioners have to interpret not just policy itself, but its implementation in their local context against the back drop of their own professionalism, and through this make decisions about what to do. The implementation of policy is varied, at times neat, linear and rational, at times a messy push and pull of conflicting perspectives, at times a site of struggle for power and legitimacy, at other times deliberative. Policy implementation emerges through a complex network of unexpected and unpredictable connections. Policy makers – those with the capacity

to make public declarations and the resources to apply levers and sanctions across a sector – find their ideas are mediated by debate, distortion, (re)interpretation and interaction (Hamilton and Hillier 2006).

Skills for Life represents a dramatic turning point. A field that had been ad hoc, driven by volunteerism, resolute in its marginal status as 'Cinderella Service', became part of the establishment. The Institutional framing of ALLN - *Skills for Life* - became an example of what Block (2002) describes as a 'Weberian mini-bureaucracy'; an entity that functions in the same way for all people in all places at all times. With *Skills for Life* ALLN teaching and managing is characterised by five key tenets: efficiency, calculability, predictability, control and standardisation.

quality: contestation & compromise

With the textually driven centralisation of *Skills for Life*, quality has the feel of something that is clearly, unambiguously defined. The Learning and Skills Act of 2000 brought together planning and funding for post-compulsory education within a single framework and instituted the ALI with the explicit understanding that they would work closely with the OfSTED, who along with an inspectorate for Work Based Learning (WBL) would take responsibility for quality control within the sector. The purpose of the act was to establish a, 'coherent structure and common culture' (Hodgson *et al* 2007) that would transform post-compulsory provision. A CIF was published in 2001 to define the standards that providers should aspire to – irrespective of audience, constituency, context or setting. The standards – the examples of good practice - it described were generic. Providers were reassured that if they put learners at the heart of their provision, good inspection grades would follow.

The writers of the CIF and its contextualised version, *Success in Adult Literacy Numeracy and ESOL Provision: a guide to support the CIF*, construct themselves and their readers as sharing a common quest for continuous improvement. Quality may be constructed as unambiguous and objective, but its textual representation has had many slightly different editions (DfES 2002, DfES 2005, DIUS 2008).

With *Skills for Life* and the CIF there is a sense in which what counts as 'quality' ought to be instantly recognizable. Yet a cursory examination of the industry that has grown up around provision indicates that this is less than true. To begin with the parameters which defined quality changed, from a generic frame applicable to all areas, to one that (re) interpreted the framework and applied it to ALLN. This was followed up with later publications that further contextualised its applicability to specific environments – working with homeless adults, working with learners who have difficulties and disabilities. Although the CIF presents itself as a generic evaluative tool – the mere fact of its replication to suit varying situations establishes quality as something other than generic. The versions of the CIF suggest a view of quality more akin to one expressed by Armstrong (2000:5), when he suggests that what counts as quality is

'... invariably situated in a context, and a reflection of the interactions between a range of agencies, including the individual learner whose needs and expectations form part of the equation. The definitions are a cultural product and are underpinned by cultural values. In short, there is always an ideological as well as an ethical basis to definitions of quality.'

Explicitly the CIF declares quality as generic, singular and context free, but the existence of contextualised guides indicates that this is precisely not the case. It is possible that the difference is not one of definition, but one of operation. The contextualised guides do not redefine quality as such, they merely establish a link between definition and contextual operationalisation. This is a fine, but barely

sustainable distinction. It suggests that the meaning of a word exists as a thing in itself devoid of any connection to anything else.

Nonetheless, there is a fundamental difficulty surrounding how to understanding and implement quality, a difficulty that has given rise to the outpourings from the quality industry. This is not a straightforward matter that may be resolved by discussion regarding the meaning and use of words. The contestation that surrounds quality and *Skills for Life* requires some sort of compromise between the idea of quality as an abstract construct – something akin to Weber's 'Ideal type' (1968) – in contrast to the embodied-quality, whether campaigning or critical, of lived experience.

But, as I shall argue in this thesis, this is a compromise achieved at considerable cost. Through the textualisation of quality-as-demanded, the micro-world of the organisation is connected to the macro-world of public policy and politics. The pre- and post-Moser shift in the quality of provision was arguably a shift connected to control and compliance. The CIF in its *Skills for Life* contextualisations, makes explicit reflexive reference to itself as a range of documents. Embedded in the definition of quality and *Skills for Life* is a centring of the learner and learner experience and the invitation to adopt and adapt locally defined strategies that articulate and operationalise these. There are also continual references within the CIF to itself and to implementing the new infrastructure as part of a definitional framework. It is possible to read '*Skills for Life* in Colleges', as not only an evaluative report on quality but also as a reflexive report on the impact and success of a particular policy - the *Skills for Life* strategy.

The effectiveness of management is evaluated by the extent to which it supports the implementation of the new teaching and learning infrastructure set out in *Skills for Life*. In this policy-driven framing quality becomes a matter of compliance, a matter of acceding to policy prescriptions. It is no more than the implementation of a pre-defined structure. Arguably this amounts to the centring of a policy document rather than as the CIF explicitly states a centring of the needs of learners. (Even if the policy document around which practice revolves is one that requires practitioners to revolve around learners). The actual decentring of learner experience and teachers' and

managers' judgement is echoed in the OfSTED Report published four years into the *Skills for Life* strategy (OfSTED 2003, OfSTED 2005). While substantial reference is made to learner experience, judgements also consider the extent to which colleges are successful in implementing the strategy.

The Report is written from the perspective of policy makers and ALI inspectors, but contains the suggestion of a tension between perspectives on quality, with aspiration pulling against demand. This tension is resolved not through argumentation, but through an assertive and somewhat circular recourse to the strategy itself.

'However, in some colleges, there is too narrow an understanding of the *Skills for Life* strategy, resulting in a perceived tension between this national strategy as a methodology to improve students' literacy, numeracy and language and the focus on individuals' specific needs.' (OfSTED 2005:6)

There is the suggestion here of acknowledging practitioners' critique of the centralising tendency of a national strategy. While the report itself may not be the appropriate forum for argumentative resolution, the tension is recognised but then categorically dismissed. There is instead an assertive defence of the strategy and a dismissal of critique as based on lack of understanding.

Teachers and managers in *Skills for Life* have a whole new vocabulary to contend with in attempting to develop a broad understanding of the CIF. There are websites, quality portals, pathfinder reports, good practice guides, research and development agencies, Beacon Colleges, Centres of Vocational Excellence, newsletters, knowledge bases, e-updates, facilitators – paid for by the LSC and private consultants all of whom offer (re) interpretations of quality.

Jackson (2006) suggests that this is a deeply problematic situation. Meeting the demands of quality is only possible if teachers and managers suspend their professional

judgement and instead implement what varying commentators recommend. In this way the demands of quality have a distorting effect. Its imperatives produce 'awkward spaces', (Jackson 2006: 207) uncomfortable ambiguous compromises within which ALLN teachers and managers are required to act. The fabrication required here is one that obliges quality-as-embodied to confirm to quality-as-abstract. Experience is required to mimic a vague and attractive textualised fiction. This view is a dystopian one. In responding to externally derived conceptions of 'quality' ALLN teachers and managers adhere to frameworks, follow prescription and as a result flexible, innovative and dynamic teaching is destroyed. What remains is a pedagogy of confinement, robotic reactivity that reduces professional judgement to painting by numbers.

prescription / contingency

This precarious tension that surrounds practitioners as they define, achieve and maintain quality is what I focus on in this study. I explore how teachers and managers in ALLN operate within the pervasive *Skills for Life* framework to work in ways that achieve the personal and professional ends to which they aspire. In their study of educational leadership, Hoyle and Wallace (2005) offer irony as a generative heuristic for provoking a deeper understanding of large-scale educational change. They point out that social life is inherently complex and inescapably ambiguous. There are no easy or straightforward billiard-ball like identifiable cause equals predictable effect correlations. A situation may be framed and interpreted in several competing ways; laudable intentions may lead to adverse consequences. Pre-defined institutional recipes for achieving success through the copying of prescribed behavioural templates may lead to local arrangements which are unrecognisable. Outcomes seem to bear little resemblance to what teachers and managers were attempting to model. The meaning of policy, strategy and implementation may be un/intentionally obscured. Uncertainty may skew purpose. Policy may have derivative meanings that are to do with symbolism and ritual even as these parade themselves as instrumental rationality. What is textually encoded within the CIF as a transferable, pre-defined object may be experienced as an organism that takes shape in response to the contingencies of human interaction.

The distinction between quality-as-abstract and quality-as-embodied is perhaps connected to the distinction made by Cameron and Sine's (1999) borrowed terminology, "little q" quality as attribute-of-product and "big Q" quality as organisational-functioning. But this explanation is derived from an industrial commercial setting where the distinctions between process, product, service and customer are unproblematic. This is not the case in ALLN teaching and managing. What is the educational product? It may be a newly qualified learner. It may be a programme or course. It may be a qualification. Who precisely is the customer? Is it the purchaser, the mechanism that funds education – the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or the immediate beneficiary – learners? Is it all potential learners in a community or those who come into contact with newly qualified learners – community or employer? Is it the one who pays – government or tax payer or someone acting on their behalf? These are the tensions I explore, not the resolution of the tensions as such or the compromises made, but a fuller understanding of what these tensions are and how they shape ALLN teachers' and managers' definitions of quality.

My open and insistent questioning is 'how – in practical, prosaic, day-to-day terms does quality work?' (Buchanan, 2000).

professionalism / professionality

I explore the day-to-day realities of ALLN teachers and managers as they inhabit a shifting and precarious space in-between the 'ecology of practice': professionalism, the working self, contradictions and dilemmas, depositions and commitments and the 'economy of performance': professionality, the audit culture, the demands of quality, the external and alienating definitions imposed by policy (Stronach *et al* 2002). I explore the ways in which professionalism and professionality are mediated by processes,

systems and structures within local organisations. I intend to offer a reading of my data that side-steps the somewhat recursive argumentation of individual vs. society, agency vs. structure, ecology vs. economy. I explore instead the extent to which defining, achieving and maintaining quality is a perpetually renegotiated settlement between ongoing processes of professionalism – what is aspired to and professionality – what is demanded.

Quality-as-abstract and quality-as-demanded are not a ready-made recipes or natural phenomena. They are a policy response. Trust, authority and expertise have become disaggregated and the professional can no longer assume the public will invest them with privileges associated autonomy. Quality – abstract and demanded - is a state sponsored response designed to reassure and calm an anxious public as they look upon professionals.

I argue that the various tensions embedded in quality – abstract, embodied, aspirational and demanded - are deliberative. They are human-made constructs - imagined, pieced together, held-in-place and replicated (Law 2001). In examining quality and *Skills for Life*, I explore the possibilities of articulating these quality tensions as bolted together through antagonistic allegiances, an ambivalent suturing of impositions of policy, professional aspiration, beliefs about the good society, and judgements based on experience.

I explore the extent to which ALLN teachers and managers remain true to the principles of ALLN while working within a technicist frame, and the mechanisms that make this compromise possible.

two: quality & worthwhile professional knowledge

curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge.
(Bernstein 1975: 85)

.... quality defines what counts as the valid enactment of professional knowledge.

In chapter one I sketched a history of ALLN in England. I traced the development of what was initially a 'Right to Read' campaign to what became a high-profile strategy around which national economic success pivots. I have suggested that this shift – from ALLN as adult basic education to ALLN as *Skills for Life* is connected to a series of other changes that have impacted upon what it means to be a teacher and manager in this field. From a distinct anti-professional stance – characterised by the use of unpaid volunteers, the area has become redefined, incorporated and regulated from within an auditable framework. I trace alongside these changes in ALLN, developments that include the centralisation of discourses around quality. From being something that teachers and managers barely made reference to, 'quality, quality, quality' has become a public service mantra. It is impossible to escape quality; impossible to declare oneself against it. It is the fault line that separates work that is and work that is not worthwhile.

In this discussion, I established a central dilemma. Namely how do ALLN teachers and managers' work to reconcile apparently competing and contradictory tensions between quality as it is experienced in their day-to-day lives: contingent, locally defined and flexible, in contrast to quality as required by policy: objective, pre-defined at a distance and rigid. This may be rephrased as quality as 'demanded' in contrast to quality as 'embodied'. I have also suggested that some of these difficulties are connected to temporal changes in conceptions of quality. With its linguistic roots in the 1950s economic miracle of the Japanese Car Industry, quality retains echoes of meaning directly associated with this domain. These echoes of meaning, semiotic seepages, once mobilised in 1980s educational discourse create new meanings and redefine situations. There is no neat coherence for the constituent concepts attendant to quality as derived from industry, 'customer, product, zero-defect, fit for purpose, efficiency, input' when applied to the pedagogic encounter. Its key constituent concepts can all be understood in several ways. Quality when applied to education is a hotly contested term (Morely 2003, Ball 2008, Armstrong 2000, Cooper 2002b).

There are however further difficulties surrounding quality connected to the inherent ambiguity of implementing large-scale reform within a living public service environment. Implementing policy is not like a game of billiards. What happens, how it happens, maintaining order or harnessing the organic dynamism required to create a new order - cannot be understood from within a neat linear equation. There are few definable cause equals predictable effect relationships. And while ALLN teachers and managers are provided with a plethora of guidelines, frameworks, research reports, pathfinders – foolproof mimetic templates which they need only to implement - outcomes are obstinately diffuse, open to multiple interpretations and fraught with tension. I have argued in chapter one, that the fallout from quality creates anxiety for ALLN teachers and managers who are caught in a Goliathian struggle fought on the battle ground of the teachers' soul (Ball 1993) to meet the needs of learners which at times might mean finding creative ways of circumnavigating prescribed regulations to achieve what is only achievable if they retain professional autonomy, personal integrity and psychological well being.

In my first chapter I offered variations on how quality may be understood: abstract, enlightenment, industrial, campaigning, demanded: *Skills for Life* and textualised. Quality-as-abstract was associated with the professional pride of the pre-19th C skilled artisan who took time to individually craft functional works of art. Quality in its industrialised framing was arguably introduced to lower standards, that is to ensure that mass-produced components were made to strict low-cost, interchangeable specification. I outlined quality as an enlightenment story associated with the Japanese car industry and the economic miracle based on efficiency, continuous improvement and zero-defect. Parallel to these developments is the campaigning quality of the pre-*Skills for Life* ALLN practitioner. The barefoot professional (Hamilton 2006, Henning 2000) the unpaid literacy workers of the 'Right to Read' campaign who, once incorporated, wrapped quality around notions of learner entitlement. The notion of quality that forms a significant basis for this thesis is enshrined within *Skills for Life*, the re-invention of ALLN associated with the criteria based succinctness of the CIF.

In this chapter I extend and develop contemporary contestation around quality. In so doing I aim to achieve two purposes.

Firstly – in my outline of the nature and scope of contemporary contestation around quality I identify the discursive resources that practitioners draw upon to define their own personally and professionally held convictions about what it means to be a good teacher and a good manager. I am not suggesting that ALLN teachers and managers merely imbibe these discourses defining them as their own, but rather that they reference and interact with them as conceptual tools that plot the seascape within which they establish their own markers and navigational buoys. I draw on several sources to accomplish this: quality's widely distributed textual representation, that is the CIF, and the significant body of research into ALLN that feeds into, emerges from and sometimes stands resolutely outside the conceptions of quality enshrined within this framework.

Secondly, having scoped the nature of the contestation around quality, I work towards a theoretical resolution that enables my understanding of how quality-as-abstract and quality-as-embodied transcend an either/ or existence. I trace the ways in which ALLN teachers and managers avoid a descent into professional chaos or a loss of integrity. In the high-stakes professional culture created by quality, I elaborate upon the ways in which teachers and managers talk about themselves, their work and their different perceptions of quality. My understanding of this process is tangentially inspired by concepts of 'mediation' and 'translation' (Spours *et al* 2007, James and Biesta 2007). These researchers examine policy and its impact on the Learning and Skills Sector. They use the concept of mediation to describe the general processes by which a range of actors interact with policy. This notion enables me to appreciate general ways in which teachers and managers talk in broad terms about quality and about the CIF. They also use notions of translation – a more localised, specific interpretive act within a general mediation process. Translation is more useful in understanding the micro-interactive processes that form part of particular encounters. These concepts are never overly referenced or extended, but they do offer a valuable basis for my analysis.

Mediation and translation provide lenses through which I analyse the gathered words of ALLN teachers and managers. It is through translation that teachers and managers are able to speak simultaneously in two languages – conversing with learners and policy makers in a single utterance.

the common inspection framework

The CIF was introduced in 2001 to provide a consistent measure of performance against which all post-compulsory education would be judged. It was devised as the tool for deployment by the two bodies initially responsible for inspections – OfSTED, ALI and the inspection body for Work Based Learning (WBL). This responsibility emerged from the passing of the Learning and Skills Act in 2000 which set up a new organisation, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC - whose remit included further education,

community and adult learning, work-based training for young people, workforce development, information, advice or guidance and support for adults – was devised to bring together planning and funding all post-16 provision excluding Higher Education, into a coherent structure with a common culture that would provide a transformative platform for success and prosperity in the knowledge economy (DfEE 2000). This led to the development of a single and defining inspection framework for the whole of the Learning and Skills Sector.

The CIF is the template against which the 'effectiveness and efficiency' of all further education is judged. It is a particularly powerful document that governs and conditions the prevailing view of what constitutes quality in teaching, learning and managing education. The CIF has had several re-workings. Originally a booklet of 20 pages it has been adapted and contextualised to suit the very different contexts that fall within the broad sphere of activity currently funded through the LSC.

There is a specific version of the framework, 'Success in Adult Literacy Numeracy and ESOL Provision, A guide to support the CIF' published by the DfES in 2002, that offers practical advice to teachers and managers on how to improve the quality of provision, and as part of a self-assessment review, how to secure 'continuous improvement' and prepare for inspection. The guide reassures managers that if they put the learner at 'the heart of provision' and get the delivery right, good inspection grades will follow. Although the framework takes the form of seven key questions, each with attendant detailed criteria, we are advised that it is not a checklist and should not be used as such. In fact, the document looks exactly like a checklist. There is, with each section, a general heading followed by two broad columns. There is also quite detailed numbering with each broad point being broken down even further into smaller constituent points. Each point is a single sentence and makes a specific statement that invites readers to question themselves, and to question the extent to which the statement is true for their organisation. Readers are informed that the level of performance described in the document is that to which all should aspire.

Arguably the document is both generic and specific. Good practice is good practice regardless of audience, constituency, context or setting. Workplace learning, further education colleges, community settings; provision which is part of academic, recreational or vocational programmes, learning support or discrete courses – are all expected to work towards a singular generic framing of quality. Yet the guidelines are also specific in as much as they are themselves a re-interpretation of the CIF adapted to define 'good practice' in the teaching of ALLN. Further and more detailed contextual guides have been provided for practitioners working in adult and community learning, *learndirect*, work places, with students with learning difficulties and disabilities, in prisons and sixth-form colleges.

The Framework defines what underpins all provision, what all learners must have access to and what all providers must do regardless of their setting. When it was initially drafted, this was assessed through seven key questions, broadly arranged within three subheadings (DIUS 2008)

    i.   Achievement and standards

    ii. Quality of education and training

    iii. Leadership and management

The seven questions are

    1. How well do learners achieve?

    2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?

    3. How are achievement and learning affected by resources?

4. How effective are the assessment and monitoring of learners' progress?

5. How well do the programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of learners?

6. How well are learners guided and supported?

7. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

Each question is broken down into broad statements. Each statement is then broken down even further into sub-statements. The 2002 version of the framework (DfES 2002) contains 69 different statements that define quality, broken down further into 172 sub statements. There is no narration in this document, apart from the opening few pages – a foreword – signed by the Director of what was still known as the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and an introduction written – as is the entire document - by an unnamed author.

Within each section there are features that define how to judge the validity – evidence base – of the response to the overall question. This is elaborated with further criteria to evaluate when making a judgement and then additional features that providers of ALLN are required to demonstrate. The framework then offers densely detailed criteria. It lifts a broad statement from the original CIF and offers specific interpretation of what the criterion means when applied to ALLN. In a final section, it offers a detailed list of the documentary evidence that might be included to support claims about the quality of provision. In later versions the framework was revised down to five questions. Consideration of resources and the effectiveness of assessment, questions three and four, were subsumed within the other remaining questions one, two, five, six and seven. What was initially a descending five-point quality scale – with one graded as highest and five as inadequate - was reduced to a four-point scale, with grade three – satisfactory – as threshold.

With the revised framework, the central thrust 'How effective and efficient is provision in meeting the needs of learners and why?' remained.

By 2008 the text had become increasingly more complex. It is as if – in response to the 'deficiencies, inaccuracies and omissions' (DfES 2002:2) of earlier editions, the authors have become even more elaborate in their attempt to offer an all-encompassing definitive guide to achieving quality. The document has been published on–line with no immediate reference to a paper-based version. The on-line version (DIUS 2008) maintains the broad statement, sub-statement format. However, each key question is followed by three elaborative questions.

So for example, the first question of the CIF:

- 'How well do learners achieve?' is followed by, a statement and two further questions that invite an elaboration on this point:

    a) How to achieve success with learner achievement

    b) What is 'success' in learners achievement? *(emphasis in original text)*

    c) How is success in learner achievement recognised?

What started as seven questions, became five, but with the addition of the a) b) and c) statements and sub-questions the total is 15. The broad statements beneath each question in the 2005 on-line version were reduced from 69 to 66. But, by 2005 what had

been 172 sub-statements in earlier versions has grown to 275. This counting includes only those aspects of the text that the authors invite the reader to count by enumerating them. There are an almost equal number of bullet points with similarly definitive quality statements. If what is counted is added to what is merely bullet-pointed, there are in excess of 500 different questions, criteria and considerations to contend with.

The on-line CIF (DIUS 2008) has a much more contemporary feel. Its sub-statements are presented as a list and referred to as 'Checkpoints'. The CIF is only available in electronic format and requires an online readership. The text is full of hyper-links. A linear cover-to-cover reading is impossible. There is no front or back cover. The inter-textuality of the document is impossible to escape. Every section contains several hyper-links — sometimes to define vocabulary, sometimes to offer an example, or to reference the other contextual guides, to reference policy documents, and at other times to locate a dedicated *Skills for Life* stake holders' website.

There is more narrative to accompany the statements and sub-statements than was available in the earlier paper-based versions. The a) b) and c) sections contain bullet points but no enumeration and are intended to exemplify. The final section provides explicit help for providers in preparing for inspection.

quality: an essentially contested concept

Inspections are of vital importance for colleges. They alter behaviour. And while they may be variously experienced by those working in the field as either an enormous threat or as a source of team-building exhilaration and challenge, tremendous institutional resource is directed at quality improvements as defined by the CIF (Coffield

and Edward 2009, Lucas 2005). New Labour's '*Skills for Life*' policy exemplifies their approach to at-a- distance management of public services. Performance targets, standards, audit, quality assurance processes, funding and inspection are part of a process of reconfiguring the FE system around a single mission: to help people gain the skills and qualifications for employability (DfES 2006). With the capacity to intervene directly if organisations are deemed to be failing, the government, through local LSCs, is able to exert a great deal of control through its various policy levers to bring about the desired transformation of the sector (Spours *et al* 2007).

The trouble is that in providing colleges through the CIF with a definitive and authoritative account of what counts as good practice the government is not writing on a blank slate. In examining the impact of policy on practice in the LSS Coffield *et al* (2007) point out that policy does not emerge from or enter into nothingness. Prior to government intervention teachers and managers worked within frameworks that determined the conduct of their professional lives. Teachers have a long-term view of quality, driven by their motivations for entering and remaining in the profession. These versions of what the sector is for, its purpose are often quite distinct from the short-term view of the policy maker or LSC administrator who is committed to a large-scale political project. It is hardly surprising that there is dissimilarity between notions of quality that emerge from long-term professionalism and those specified and enumerated in bullet-point detail to support a short-term political project.

The ecology of ALLN teachers' and managers' everyday practice, their working environment and everything they bring to it, is an assemblage. What counts as quality is mediated by shifting localised ideologies around learner centeredness, beliefs about teaching, judgements about learners' needs, opinions about what counts as good practice, professional identities, actions, dispositions and interpretations of participants, institutional / departmental / curricular culture (Edward *et al* 2006), demands that emanate from myriad sources that include government policy. All are all part of the richly textured social mix to which policy levers connect.

The CIF as the defining account of quality – does not end contestation. It is an aspect of the continuing contestation. I am here drawn to Gallie's (1956) notion of seven features that qualify a term as an 'essentially contested concept'. These features usefully annotate aspects of the continuing discussion surrounding quality. Gallie argues that to achieve the status of an 'essentially contested concept' a concept must convey desirable connotations. It must be internally complex with desirability attributed to the whole. The weighting attached to its various components may be varied. The achievement of this contested state can remain constant, but is required to change in the light of unfolding experience. Different stakeholders must be prepared to assert their own version of the term as more truthful than other versions. To maintain its contested momentum, the desirable state requires an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all contestants. The original and authoritative exemplar must leave enough scope for other counter claims to persist with some degree of plausibility. It is the constant interplay of these multiple and competing claims that maintains the dynamism of a concept. An essentially contested concept defies absolute settlement. All reconciliations are temporary, until something changes to set the discussion back in perpetual motion.

My argument here is that the CIF provides what I am equating to a government sponsored original exemplar of what quality means. It is not original in the sense of being the first or most longstanding. It is original in the sense of origin. It was established as a referential starting. It is an externally authoritative definition. The expectation is that all variations of quality will be merely derivative, that is based upon it. It is one that carries coercive rather than persuasive authority. And yet its achievement is desirable. It has the resources of policy to bolster its claim to provide the definitive account of what quality means. It changes. The text itself is open to revisions as features become more closely specified and hyperlinked organisations merge, come to the end of their cycle or come into being. It is also multiple in the sense of being internally complex. It contains different and distinct parts, while quality would seem to refer to the whole. It allows strengths and weaknesses. With some strengths seemingly outweighing weaknesses. For example, poor teaching may be the only weakness but it is able to undermine other strengths e.g. a varied curriculum offer. Yet, the CIF is by no means the only resource practitioners draw on in defining quality. Contestation rises to the surface as several sources implicitly challenge its status.

I have so far offered two broad concepts – translation and mediation - which I shall rework in my attempt to make sense of what ALLN teachers and managers say when they talk about their professional lives, their views and their experiences of quality. I introduce the CIF as a centralising discourse around which all conceptions of quality must orientate themselves. That is, the CIF forms the basis of inspection – one of the five major policy levers the LSC uses to transform the post-16 education sector (Coffield *et al* 2007). It provides the template through which providers are required to assess the quality of their work. It is an all embracing text that may not define the everyday working decisions of teachers and managers, but is a perpetual backdrop that drives the annual quality cycle and institutional action plans.

The CIF is a powerful and all-embracing document, an externally derived authoritative text. It is a measure against which all ALLN teachers and managers are evaluated. It exerts power through demanding compliance. But it is not the only measure teachers and managers use to self-assess. It does not have exclusive dominion. There are also the barely referenced, fluid, changeable quality discourses, the 'internally persuasive' grammars of everyday professional practices. In the violently contested discursive milieu of the further education college, these strains and tensions are constantly re-negotiated.

In the sections that follow I critique the definitive account of quality offered by the CIF. I offer a detailed portrait of the document in which I notice its distinct textual features and analyse the impact they have on me as a reader. I suggest that the CIF represents an authoritative version of quality, one that achieves its status by virtue of the resource it has invested within it. It offers an authoritative but not definitive account of quality. ALLN teachers and managers retain and continue to enact their own discourses. I follow this line of argument through with an analysis of a specific artefact associated with the evidencing of student learning: the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP is a form teachers and learners complete to map learners' journey through a particular programme. Filling in the ILP means teachers and learners have to write down their

experience in ways that satisfy auditors. The ILP translates the experience of ALLN into a language auditors will recognise and value. What, superficially at least, is no more than a form-filling exercise becomes deeply implicated in an act of betrayal. Through the ILP the demands of quality subordinates the needs, aspirations and potentialities of learners and the professional judgements of practitioners.

the CIF & the ideal reader

In analysing the CIF I focus on three sections: the narrated aspects of the document – namely the introduction and concluding section entitled 'Help for providers preparing for self-assessment and inspection'. I also analyse question one, 'How well do learners achieve?'

My reading is a tense one. The CIF defines my professional life. It tells me what college life should look and be like if it is to be valued, counted as worthwhile. Fairclough (1989) references this internal tension when pointing out that mass-produced texts tend to address an 'ideal reader'. Not only do the writers of this text imagine and then address an ideal reader, in pulling together, interpreting and then presenting a notion of quality, they also construct ideal learners, ideal managers, ideal teachers and ideal college environments. The real embodied reader – the self who is engaging with the text - has to negotiate a series of relationships.   The tendency is to fall in line with the ideal reader constructed through the text. Yet at times the definitions thrown up through the text may challenge this positioning. So there is a process of negotiating between embodied self and self as ideal reader. This is further complicated by having also to recognise and then negotiate a stance in relation to the ideal learners, teachers, managers and college environment portrayed in the text and those the embodied reader - the self - actually encounters on a daily basis in sites of practice.

The ideal reader and embodied reader - the self - may experience further contradictions with this text. There is contradiction and tension between the several

different positionings I adopt as I read and critique the CIF. As a manager of ALLN – with direct responsibility for *Skills for Life*, I am a consumer of the text. I am the 'ideal reader' looking for the help of a knowledgeable guide. The text is directly addressed to me as someone who works in a site of practice, a practitioner. But I also move in academic networks, as researcher and analyst. The critique I engage in as an analyst has the potential to unframe my professional life. I am compelled to accept the possibility that 'quality' may disintegrate beneath the scepticism of my own glare. My critique may well call a key aspect of my professionalism into crisis (Barthes 1986). Indeed, this is the purpose of my deconstruction. As a consumer, I strive to maintain integrity and enact an ethics of professional survival. I work with the CIF on a regular basis and gain a certain degree of cultural capital based on my in-depth reading and referencing of the text. As a professional working in a high-stakes quality culture survival depends on my work being designated as worthwhile and acceptable.

Gallie's (1956) analysis of 'contested concepts' suggests that any use of a particular variation of what 'quality' might mean – including the version elaborated upon in the CIF – is both aggressive and defensive. It is a use asserted against other possible uses. In some instances these other possible uses might be other versions of the CIF. As policy around *Skills for Life* changes – so do variations of the CIF. The writers point out in an introduction that the document has been reworked to correct the 'deficiencies, inaccuracies and omissions' (DfES 2002) of earlier versions. The CIF is simultaneously a definitive and mutating text.

translating framework into practice: vague & attractive

The CIF declares itself as offering the definitive guide to quality – the criteria against which inspections are conducted. It can also be understood as a further element within (rather than the conclusion to) an ongoing contestation around what quality means (Gallie 1956). There are several other organisations and documents that overwhelm practitioners with 'help'. Agencies such as the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA), the Learning and Skills Network (LSN), the Standards Unit and The National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) as well as other Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills (DIUS) - are all electronically linked into the wealth of guidance on almost every aspect of quality. Documents that amplify the question 'how' to the answer 'what' insisted on by the CIF.

Örtenbald (2002) argues that this definitional ambiguity is not incidental or peripheral to our understanding of quality. Diffusion and popularity are intertwined. Certain ideas – like quality – are attractive precisely because they are vague. Using a two-dimensional model, he identifies five explanations for how certain ideas gain leverage within educational discourse. Two of the features he identifies include: their capacity to confer symbolic legitimacy on their users, and their capacity to seduce stakeholders. Other dimensions of his discussion include the degree of self-consciousness with which ideas are deployed and whether their use is indicative of actual practice or of how practice is talked about. The CIF is vague and attractive. It is also a 'seductive text' (Usher 1997). That is while what it says resonates as significant – what it signifies matters more. It is not the nature of the desire the text appeals to, but the fact that it works through an appeal to desire – through a disarming of the reader - that matters. The text makes reference to 'excellence' once during its introductory pages. Readers are informed that The Guide (this is how the writers refer to the CIF and the text they have

produced) is designed to help providers achieve excellence in their ALLN provision. It accepts the ambiguity of the generic CIF and offers this contextual guide to raising standards as an interpretation of the CIF and the adult basic skills curricular documents. The CIF sets out the characteristics of best practice. In referencing itself as a 'Guide' rather than an instruction manual, critical engagement with the version of quality implied is neatly sidestepped. Who can resist quality? Who would turn down excellence? Who wouldn't follow a well-meaning and knowledgeable Guide?

The invitation to quality that the CIF guides us towards, the excellence it allows us to glimpse, the opening up of 'best practice' are all examples of the use of what Gillie (2007) describes as 'condensation symbols'. 'Condensation symbols' are semiotic devices that allow disparate meanings to become woven into a single term. Powerful emotions such as pride, self-worth, patriotism, remembrances of past glories, aspirational fantasies, imagined futures and desired selves, feared selves, humiliations … are all imploded within the insignia 'quality'. My suggestion here is that the CIF offers a particular version of quality. One that can be interrogated and revised. It is part of an ongoing contestation that presents itself as a final and concluding text. To mask its status as polemical the writers deploy a series of devices that disarm the reader, that rhetorically draw us into the text in ways that mean readers willingly belie their own experience and comply.

Rather than presenting a detailed and objective portrait of quality, the CIF is a continuation of the aggressive and defensive use of the term: one that relies on ambiguity for its continued charm. As a promotional text, it is a mediating mechanism through which policy is translated into practice: a crucial element in producing change. The CIF is not a policy document in the direct sense of outlining the Government's *Skills for Life* policy, it is a central aspect of the implementation of *Skills for Life*. Inspection is a policy lever and the CIF amplifies the inspection process and changes institutional behaviour as teachers and managers prepare for the process.

It is, however, also slightly more than this. I here want to echo Ball (1993) and his invitation to view policy as both text and discourse. The CIF is a 'working document', part of the process of policy interpretation and implementation. It is an example of what is done and said in the name of policy (Lo Bianco and Wickart 2001). It is an aspect of the apparatus through which the requirements and regulations of policy are translated into practice. The CIF offers an example of how global forces and structures are instantiated within local contexts and interactions (Burgess 2008). This is not to deny that the CIF is also a locally produced document, emerging from its own ecology of practice and contextual negotiations. It is rather to acknowledge that as a 'global' policy-as-text the CIF has the capacity to take the form of an object and travel into many different contexts. Through a series of sophisticated rhetorical devices - discursive practices - teachers and managers are co-opted into macro-systems. Co-opted is apt in this context. Through the CIF what was a loosely defined field with informal measurement has been framed or 'enclosed' (Hamilton 2009). Boundaries around being a teacher, being a manager, being a learner and the designation of a learning site have been redrawn. Historically the enclosure of common land has been associated with the de-privileging of the right-to-access what had hitherto been public territory. Through the CIF policy becomes gate-keeper over the rights-of-access to what counts as worthwhile professional knowledge, the abstract, ideal-type, fictionalised demands of quality becomes the only legitimate embodiment of quality.

the heart of what we do

The CIF opens with a quotation from a DfES policy document. It reminds us that at 'the heart' of the *Skills for Life* strategy is the desire to raise the standard of provision. The use of 'the heart' as a metaphor appears again a few lines later when the reader is reminded that at 'the heart' of the skills strategy are foundational skills for sustainable employment. And that improved core or generic skills are at 'the heart' of 14 – 19 reform. In an earlier version of the same document – one that focussed on the cross-

contextual delivery of Skills for Life - providers are reassured that if they put learners at 'the heart' of provision, good inspection grades would follow. The referencing of 'the heart' has a direct emotive appeal that disarms the reader, inviting him or her to suspend scepticism and trust the sincerity of the text. It seems to suggest a concern for the heart as well as the mind of learners, a willingness to understand the affective dynamics of learning. This might at first glance signal a move away from the functionality which has in the past alienated teachers and learners (Finlay *et al* 2007). Placing learners at the heart of the *Skills for Life* strategy seems to echo a progressive 'student-centred' pedagogy. Yet the invitation itself contains a deception. The purpose for placing learners at the heart of provision is to gain good grades in inspection. The centring of provision on learners is not of inherent value, but is of value only because of the good inspection grades that teachers and managers are promised in return. There is further deception in this statement. The invitation to place learners at the heart of provision suggests a simplicity, and almost intuitive localised simplicity that is wrenched apart by the detailed prescription that follows. On a somewhat more fractious note, the writers in this sentence play a childish game with the reader. The invitation is to devote attentiveness to learners. Teachers and managers are asked to conduct their professional lives on the basis of attentiveness to the needs to learners, rather than adhering to the abstract-quality script provided by the CIF. We are reassured, if we do one thing - centre on the needs of learners – the other thing - adherence to the CIF – will naturally follow, as will good inspection grades. If this were a credible claim it would negate the need for the CIF. Not only does the promise lack credibility, it is also an impossibility. The repeated suggestion that we should not think about grades and inspection - by referencing itself, so frequently and with such punitive coercive endorsement - produces the exact opposite effect.

The 'heart' metaphor obfuscates the text's persistent and deeply-woven ideological policy linking between skills and 'sustainable' employment, the inherent contradiction of coupling social inclusion and raised economic competitiveness. It places diametric oppositions in a single unified place and pretends that repetition alone renders the political pursuance of both possible. In framing what counts as quality – the criteria against which we may judge the worthwhileness of provision - the CIF defines what falls within and what falls without the framing 'quality'. A worthwhile discussion of the role and purpose of education – or even an acknowledgement that there may be

discussion around these different purposes that may have some impact upon what and how providers design provision - gains no foothold within this framework. Differences in context may well open an exploration of differences in purpose. It is not self-evident that the purpose of ALLN provision for learners with difficulties and disabilities, for people in prisons or for rough sleepers can all be understood from within a single, albeit contradictory, framing of 'social inclusion and economic competitiveness'. The CIF admits no ambiguity to this assertion.

what we know about quality

The opening sentence of the document draws the ideal reader into a complicity with the text's authors. Readers are informed that 'Staff in colleges know' the importance of ALLN. 'We know' that the UK skills gap is wider than in other countries. 'We know' that learners with ALLN are unable to play active roles in their communities. We – the document's ideal readers - therefore understand government policy and appreciate its sizeable investment. We - the document's ideal readers - are praised in part for this knowledge and for our demonstrable capacity to deliver challenging national targets. The Guide is there to help us in this endeavour. The text then links *Skills for Life* policy, social inclusion, economic competitiveness, and adherence to the inspection framework within a single causal chain. To reject one is to reject all. Refusal of the CIF carries significant sanction. It is a high-stakes agenda: organisations are penalised financially if they are unable to deliver targets. Individuals are punished if they fail to comply with the required strictures. More than this, the refusal of quality implied by the CIF is cast as dangerously irresponsible. Quality-as-demanded is essential for the UK's economic survival. Without it ALLN will be unable to fulfil its policy obligations. The CIF is part of the process. This is implied. The framework itself is friendly and professional in tone. It is there to help … to Guide.

The 'we' referenced changes from a 'we' that includes the text's writers and ideal reader to a 'we' that separates. The writers are referenced as 'we' and as having a particular purpose for The Guide – to help 'you' providers and practitioners. They are telling … showing …practitioners what success looks like. They offer the example of how do we know when a learner has made an important new step? It is ambiguous which 'we' - inclusive or separating - is referenced here. Teachers and managers of ALLN might reasonably feel somewhat bemused at needing a guide to tell them when a learner has learnt something, or indeed a guide that introduces them to 'real learners in real situations'. But the writers position teachers and managers as in need of help. And as if to drive the message home, the spectre of ALI and OfSTED are raised in the concluding paragraph of the section. We don't need to know what success looks like with real learners in any abstract sense, but only in the sense deployed by Inspectors. The Guide helps us to 'gain an insight' into how they evaluate.

The earlier invitation to place 'learners at the heart of provision' is here neatly sidestepped. The assurance was that if we focused on learners needs and aspirations, then all else would follow. By invoking inspection and offering us a chance to gain an insight into what ALI and OfSTED are looking for, the needs and aspirations of learners are quite clearly de-centred. It is a focus on learners' needs and aspirations as seen not by teachers and managers working with learners as embodied occupants of space and time on a day-to-day basis, but learners as seen through the CIF - the 'real learners' constructed within the texts that surround the delivery of *Skills for Life*.

It is towards the end of the introduction that teachers and managers, having been flattered with what they know, helped and guided in the delivery of quality, introduced to learners whom they meet and talk to in their own workplaces, are then reminded of their status as lacking. The text includes bullet points that remind us what success looks like. There are further bullet points that inform us what colleges are so far still not doing. There is no gently ambiguous 'we' in these sections. They – the writers of the text, The Guides are telling us – teachers and managers – what we need to do. And it is more than to place learners at the heart of provision. They remind us that 'we' are more likely to be graded as 'unsatisfactory' than other areas of work. That teaching in the area is less likely to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. Inspectors are referenced as 'they' the only

moment that they – with its slight distancing, its derogatory 'as oppose to us' echoes – is used in the text. In the final section of the introduction 'we' returns.

'We' have every opportunity to improve. Here the writers shift position again and seem to align themselves with their ideal readers: the teachers and managers in need of improvement. 'We have every opportunity' hints of haranguing. It is an unfinished sentence … given that we have every opportunity to improve our 'unsatisfactory' status, failure to do so can only be understood as wilful or worst incapability. It is a refusal to accept the opportunities offered. This slightly out-of-focus derided 'other' is not an aspect of the argument I want to pursue. But this pointing to 'opportunity to improve' is part of the process through which The Guide is sold to its readers. If the writers align themselves with readers, they also invite their readers to align themselves with the text, with them as writers. In using 'we' the writers draw their audience into collegial parity. 'We' can all learn from successful colleges. The subjectivity of the (ideal and real) reader is brought in line with the subjectivity of the writers. Reader and writers are positioned as sharing a common set of understandings and ensuing enterprise. 'We' implies empathy. Hence inspectors have to be 'they'. Yet the writers of this text are also an authoritative 'we' who have quite recently chastised teachers and managers for not being able – perhaps even willing - to deliver quality. They are also authoritative because they have definitional power. Having been chastised, we – teachers and managers - are finally offered help and support. Having been introduced to the 'real' disembodied learners, who simultaneously inhabit multiple spaces and times across different policy texts, learners who are the only inhabitants in policy texts who speak directly in the localised singular first person 'I' – we are reminded that these learners need and deserve the best we can provide. Who can resist this invitation?

Through the CIF, government policy on post-compulsory education, including as it does a strong link to economic competitiveness, becomes something that is neatly packaged and contained, easily and simultaneously transportable into multiple places in the form of a physical and virtual object. Through it policy is able to gain leverage (Spours *et al* 2007) in organisations. The CIF is part of a complex process through which policy becomes practice. It changes practice. It is not a neutral technical communicative tool that conveys a series of incontestable facts. It is an affective

document, rhetorical, something that expresses, appeals to and shapes the feelings and aspirations of teachers, managers and policy makers. In reading the CIF, readers and managers suspend sceptical disbelief and allow themselves to be disarmed. Quality is presented as abstract and definitive – it has transcendental characteristics, a textualisation reminiscent of a romanticised image of the pre-19th C artisan. It evokes the essential worthwhileness of professional being. I have here suggested that it is also deeply implicated in the furtherance of particular and contestable values.

translating practice into framework

To equate quality as elaborated upon in the CIF with the implementation of policy is to equate it with something that must be interrogated, rather than something purely worthwhile and beyond critique. Quality and its textual representation are attractive because they appeal to the sensibilities of ALLN professionals. The invitation to place learners at the centre of provision resonates with the progressive pedagogic leanings of barefoot-professionals who have over a long period of time - prior to the introduction of *Skills for Life* - developed ALLN practice.

Through the CIF, policy is translated into practice. It becomes part of college life. It is an agentic text (Fairhurst 2004, Hardy 2004). The CIF discursively structures how professionals talk about work. It regularises procedures. Its checklists establish records of action and form the basis of other college documents and processes: lesson observation, course evaluations and programme reviews. It obliges teachers to think about and plan their teaching in terms of objectives and outcomes. The CIF is the mechanism through which information is collated and later fed into course and team reviews. The annual self-assessment reports (SARs) it generates form the basis of inspection. It regulates and oversees. It is an at-a-distance device that exerts control

and influence over the work of professionals. It ensures public accountabilities. What is done, how it is done, its justifications and the value placed upon it are couched in terms of the CIF.

But it is not all-encompassing. The definitions of quality written into the CIF interact with teachers' and managers' own perceptions of quality or more broadly teachers' and managers' own perceptions of what is true and important in professional situations and how they should accordingly behave. The implementation of policy requires intricate, complex and unpredictable processes involving far more than the straightforward execution of prescription (Kelchermans 2007). The CIF is only one part of a local eco-system that is otherwise made up of teachers and managers, learners, organisational and departmental cultures, as well as external parties such as examining boards, funding bodies and local employers. Particular aspects of quality are unevenly mediated by the established culture and history of an organisation as they interact with existing patterns of influence and control. Policy initiatives trigger dynamics that cause policy to mutate (Steer *et al* 2007). Practitioners read texts. Or ignore them and accept pre-packaged interpretations. They struggle to make sense of them. They disagree with recommendations. Or, even if they agree, they realise that implementation compromises their professional interests. They do not simply read policy documents, understand them and respond appropriately. Prescriptions are taken up by organisations, interpreted and woven into existing fabrics to create idiosyncratic formations.

This discussion traces policy – the CIF – as it is filtered down into practice. It is possible to analyse the connections between policy and practice from another angle. My argument has been that understanding the discourses surrounding the CIF enables us to understand something of the resources that teachers and managers draw upon to define quality. I now skew this position slightly. Instead of a focus on how policy is translated into practice, I want here to ask the question – how is practice translated by policy.

the actuality of learners' achievement?

I base this section around a discussion of the first question asked by the CIF – 'How well do learners achieve?' The CIF defines quality as learners' success in achieving challenging targets, including qualifications and personal learning goals. Literacy through the CIF is rendered as having object-like qualities. It is something that can be acquired by an individual. It can become a personal attribute (a skill). It is autonomous and can be deployed at will in multiple situations. It is transmittable from institution to learner. As a thing, literacy can be counted and measured, associated with, compared to and manipulated to affect other objects – employment, social security, economic competitiveness, crime and public participation (Darville 2002). This notion makes literacy manageable and manipulable by policy makers. To achieve overall goals, policy makers require a device that translates literacy into an object that can be counted, measured, compared. This in part is what the CIF does.

This is a significant argument for shaping my understanding of quality. If the CIF shapes practice, it changes what teachers and managers do – in part – to conform to what they are required to do - at least - it provides a lexis within which their actions become describable within the accountabilities, mandates and discourses that organise policy. Policy is wrapped around an overall aim of governing society: responding to the need to retain competitiveness within a globalised economy with the risks of social disintegration that this implies. The teaching and management of literacy – the worthwhile and fundable teaching and management of literacy is – through the CIF – fitted to the dictates of this policy. The actuality of literacy work is textually fitted to the accountability practices through which it is regulated. This is achieved by the working practices of those teachers and managers who are part of the regime.

The trouble is 'the actuality of literacy exceeds its form of ruling'. Literacy as a policy construction clashes with literacy as an actuality. There is always an 'excess of literacy'

that falls outside of its categorical renderings (Darville 2002). That is the categorical renderings do not adequately capture or control teachers', managers' or learners' experiences of textual engagement.

The translation of literacy into administrative categories that render it governable involves an act of betrayal: 'to translate is to betray' (Latour, 1993). Re-describing literacy using the reductive lexical categories recognised by the CIF negates the idiosyncratic complexity that determines the multiple ways in which communities interact with text. A social practice is remade into something formulaic. Hamilton (2009) describes the compromises teachers and managers make when fitting learners' literacy achievements into the categories recognised by the CIF. Based on the example of the ILP, her discussion exemplifies what happens when literacy development is subjugated to a policy regime which does not take hold of its actuality.

individual learning plans

The first question of the CIF, 'How well do learners achieve?' understands ALLN from within an enclosure tightly bounded by targets, goals, qualifications, temporal and comparative measurement, as related to employability, the economy, citizenship and standards. The evidential answer to the first question centres strongly around a single document: the ILP. The ILP is described as the main tool for driving learner progress. It pulls together information gathered about learners through formative assessment and charts their 'distance travelled' through the course of study. The framework defines what the ILP does, and what it must contain if it is to be fit for the purpose of mapping and demonstrating learner achievement. It is not enough that the ILP maps and demonstrates learners' achievement, it must do so in a precise language that, although derivative from industry (SMART targets), must simultaneously satisfy policy makers, cohere with the core-curriculum documents and remain 'meaningful' to learners. I

extend my critique of the CIF with a discussion of ILPs. Teachers and managers have a lot to say about them. Completing one should amount to no more than filling in a form, yet another example of distracting administrative activity, 'tedious paperwork' (Hodgson *et al* 2007) that stands apart from the real work of teaching and learning. But because the ILP enjoys such a privileged status at the heart of provision filling one in has acquired deeper significance. They are a source of considerable anxiety. Practitioners frequently speak about them in emotional terms. They describe them as frightening and confusing (Hamilton 2008). During interviews the subject of ILPs comes up with or without a direct question being asked about them (Darville 2002).

The CIF places learners at the heart of provision: the centrifugal force around which all teaching and learning must revolve. This seems to resonate with student-centred practices highly valued by teachers and learners - a hallmark of the profession (Hillier 1998). Embedded in one-to-one tutorial discussions and group work, the ILP is integral to an individualised pedagogy. They have a long-standing history in ALLN and, prior to *Skills for Life*, were mechanisms through which teachers were able to discover the interests, aspirations and concerns of students and plan teaching accordingly. As a democratising influence, they were consistent with Freireian pedagogy and part of an informal contract between learner and teacher (Hamilton and Hillier 2006).

Within *Skills for Life* they have become the locus for highly-charged debate fraught with ambiguity. In 2005 two editions of *Reflect*, the NRDC's in-house journal, featured lengthy and detailed discussion from teachers, managers, trainers, researchers and inspectors examining the role of ILPs from the perspective of different stakeholders. The ILP seems to have acquired an almost mythical status as a tricky object that refuses to be grasped. The discussion included quite fundamental questions about the role and status of ILPs: are they a quality requirement or not (Heath 2005)? Are they a long-standing aspect of good practice in ALLN or not (Grief 2005)? Do they have a distorting or appropriately individualising impact of teaching and learning? The journal also featured practical advice from an ALI inspector about how best to maintain them effectively (Julka 2005) and further suggestions for how teacher training might be improved to ensure lecturers are appropriately skilled in their use (Schellekens 2005).

The introduction to the CIF notes that in too many organisations ILPs are a source of weakness often identified during ALI and OfSTED inspections. Given the depth and breadth of ambiguity that surrounds them it is hardly surprising that organisations are not entirely sure how to present them to the satisfaction of inspectors. This ambiguity is not resolved by the CIF. In question one 'How well do learners achieve?' there are several and continued references to ILPs. The question outlines in detail the role they play in demonstrating progress, recording targets and driving performance. A whole section is devoted to describing how they should be completed – the types of targets they may reasonably feature and how they chart progress through and within organisations.

The centrality of the ILP, its privileged place at 'the heart' of provision, means that they do not merely record but are able to exert direct influence over the pedagogic process (Burgess 2008, Julka 2005). In this accomplishment their form and structure is significant. As material objects they link longer-term processes with shorter-term events, conjoining these to other material and semiotic functions. The professionalism of teachers is radically redefined through ILPs. In conjunction with other texts, such as lesson plans and schemes of work, the tempo and time of ALLN learning is streamlined. It assumes a direction consistent with the content of the core-curricular documents. As a material artefact, the ILP traces student progress over the course of a lesson – or a segment of a lesson – and through a complex layered network links this to development over an academic year and to events at a wider timescale in the form of college strategic plans, inspection cycles and policy implementation (Burgess 2008). As an instrument of performance measurement they are of interest to a number of different college constituencies. Each stakeholder makes a slightly different investment and exerts a particular influence over the ILP's design and use. Managers use them for quality assurance and staff appraisal. Administrators use them to claim funding for courses (Grief 2005). They may be presented to inspection teams as evidence that required standards are being met. They play a central role in systems of performance management and accountability. As a key text they achieve the translation of ALLN learning into policy sanctioned categories. Teachers use them with learners as a form of formative and summative assessment. But they are only accepted as valid evidence

that this purpose has been achieved if they are amenable to the demands placed upon them at other levels within the system. They are considered 'fit for purpose' only when they serve these other quite distinct purposes that stand outside of the pedagogic encounter. A discussion of the ILP is important in a discussion of quality. They are a central mediating artefact through which quality - learners' achievement - is defined, measured and evidenced.

To complete the ILP teachers and managers must use the lexicon of goals, targets, qualifications, distance travelled, standards, skills acquired. The pedagogic encounter between teachers and learner must be recorded in terms of core-curricular references checked and government policy dictates satisfied. Through the ILP a one-to-one encounter is brought in line with policy purposes. In this sense the ILP instantiates the extent to which local and global are entwined rather than polarised. It is a further example of how the macro-world of policy becomes directly involved in the micro-world of teachers and learners. What this would seem to demonstrate is that while everything is local, some local systems have globalising effects. ILPs translate the experience of ALLN learning into a 'fit for purpose' policy object. In a culture of performance management, where only 'measurable outcomes' count, teachers regulate their practice to meet systems of accountability requirements. The ILP shapes teachers' and learners' relationship, binding both into purposes and discourses that resonate beyond the immediacy of their encounter (Hamilton 2006). They mould experience to fit the representations available through a specific form which has been determined by policy. Transmogrified into an object, experience congeals to assume a certain sort of 'thingness', a reification (Wenger 1999) that reorganises meaning. The pedagogic encounter between teacher and learners is thus reconstituted and recontextualised. Teachers and learners reify what 'counts' as ALLN learning according to the requirements of systems of accountability rather than their own experience.

Teachers and learners 'write up' their experiences for institutional purposes and 'write down' their experiences for their own ends. However, ILPs re-shape rather than re-capture ALLN teaching and learning. The formulaic recording process effectively

decentres teachers' and learners' own accounts of progress (Weir 2005). In translating their experiences into the required format, the ILP is implicated in an act of betrayal. It does not represent the diversity of learner experience. Nor does it offer a broad enough view of what counts as learning. The ILP assumes learning as individual and cognitive rather than social and interactive. Sunderland and Wilkins (2005) in a discussion published by the NRDC, write about the experiences of teachers as they attempt to implement ILPs with ESOL learners. The individualised focus of the ILP implies that tutors change the format of their lessons to include group work followed by individualised workshop supported with a classroom assistant or volunteer. This makes it technically possible to offer individualised learning in the context of group. But this individualised learning undermines learners' purposes for being part of a group. Learners value classroom interaction. They want to work with other learners. Talking to other students is part of the work in an ESOL class. The individualised focus implied by the delivery of individual learning goals led to classroom approaches and activities that negated the point of being part of a class.

ILPs are also time-consuming and absorb energy that could be devoted to developing literacy. In completing ILPs teachers are compelled to adopt a position between system and student. Through the ILP learners' aspirations and system demands are translated into a performative requirement. There is some manoeuvrability in how this is achieved. The exact format, the actual words, the time, place and duration of the form-filling process is open to negotiation. But it is a highly constrained manoeuvrability that confines itself to the limited range of steps drawn up by experts external to practice. The outcome is discomfort. Teachers give managers the paper work they want. In a high-stakes quality culture there is little choice about it. Professional worth is measured by the extent to which practitioners adhere to performative requirements. This is the compromise. If teachers provide managers with the required paperwork, it enables them to continue working with learners who can then experience the learning they need (Edwards *et al* 2007).

My argument is that once the ILP is as much about performance measurement and management as it is about a faithfulness to a highly valued pedagogic encounter it is implicated in an act of betrayal. Holistic functional and task-driven approaches that

take everyday demands as their starting point are not approaches to ALLN learning favoured by policy and, as such, are not legitimately represented in the ILP. ALLN as small, measurable chunks that progress linearly is a favoured policy construction that belies the apprentice-like iterative process of actual ALLN development.

translation and betrayal

The competences of the adult core curriculum documents are devised for administrative purposes. They are at odds with what research tells us about the development of ALLN (Lightbown and Spada 1999). They are unable to accommodate the everyday practices, aspirations and diverse experiences of adult learners. Audit, inspection and professional training promote a singular view of what needs to be taught. Hamilton (2009) points out that more experienced ALLN specialists are more adept at moulding the restrictions of the CIF around the needs of learners. This requires a more pedestrian, direct form of translation. By this I am suggesting that although the language of the three main core-curricular documents is sterile and opaque, it is not impossible to take the language literacy learners use and connect it to the institutionalised version of literacy preferred by the *National Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* (NALC). It is plausible to suggest that the two forms of articulation refer to a similar external reality, using different words to convey a singular truth. However, this translation – the exchange of one set of words for another set of words - very quickly becomes a transmogrification. The process denies the inherent validity of learners defining their own experience using their own language and accepts that their statements regarding what and how they want to learn are only acceptable when couched in words that suit the needs of auditor, inspector, administrator and manager. The ILP demands that learners conform in their learning to an evenness of level and that progress represents an upwards spiral from Entry Level One to Level Two. The unevenness that characterises learners' in actuality development may skew this singular

progression and is therefore evened out of existence, or recognised as a 'spiky profile', an anomaly that has to be explained.

ALLN may develop horizontally in organic tuber-like directions as well as vertically. The difficulties implied in a task is related to more than some abstract technical measure. What the core-curriculum describes as 'straightforward' is not always easier than what is described as 'complex'. A 'complex text' that relates to a learner's passion and area of practical expertise may be less difficult than a 'straightforward text' that is irrelevant and holds no appeal. Applying existing knowledge to new areas, new contexts – a possibility both recognised and denied by policy – suggests that horizontal ALLN learning is of value. The Core-curricular documents imply ALLN is a generic skill applicable to several and competing contexts. A policy commitment to embedding ALLN into subject areas – teaching ALLN in the context of a learner's specific interest and chosen vocational subject - would seem to acknowledge that this is far from the case. There is a CIF document that relates to embedding ALLN.

This fitting of learners' ALLN needs to suit policy is consolidated by the outcomes that may be entered on the ILP. Only those outcomes which reference Core-curricular documents – whether directly or indirectly – are acceptable. Outcomes which trace the actual development of ALLN as if it fully cohered with the policy definitions of ALLN are acknowledged as 'real and valued' ALLN learning. Swain *et al* (2005) and Hodgson *et al* (2006) investigated learners' motivations for attending adult numeracy classes. They found that motivation was only rarely related to the kinds of motivation assumed by policy - employment or everyday life. Often motivations were wrapped around learners' desire to prove that they had the ability to succeed in a subject that they see as a signifier of their intelligence. They wanted to improve maths to help children, or for abstract understanding, engagement and enjoyment. In part this means that the 'everyday' maths favoured by the *National Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum* (NANC), a policy document that determines what adults need to know and should be taught - did not meet learners' motivations or needs. What they seemed to prefer was abstract mathematical concepts. What counts as acceptable and legitimate numeracy is connected to culture and ideology as well as to mundane things such as content and context. The policy assumption that numeracy must be functional – straightforward,

familiar, everyday and practical – clearly distinguishable from esoteric higher-status maths negates what fascinates learners who, for a range of reasons, might well prefer to learn about abstractions like the multiplication of fractions (Oughton 2007) in preference to working out the correct cost from their weekly trip to the supermarket.

Once broken down into the chunks and categories recognised by the core-curricular documents, learners' goals become something qualitatively different. A goal to 'feel more confident when reading the bible at church' becomes 'trace and understand the main events of chronological texts'. This may appear on paper in the form of learning objectives for a lesson plan as 'read a story in class'. Through the core-curricular documents, learners' and teachers' pedagogic negotiations are 'written up' to communicate with managers that teachers and learners are engaged in policy sanctioned literacy activity. They are also 'written down' for learners and teachers to record and guide their encounter. The point I am making is that this translation represents and sanctions a substantially different goal to the one expressed by the learner. The translation of one set of words into another set of words amounts to a distancing betrayal that does not have the same instantly recognisable immediacy and appeal.

A process that metaphorically places learners at its centre – the keeping of ILPs – in actuality achieves a wide range of other functions. Learners are made passive through the assessment process. Their skills are classified within a uni-dimensional structure that echoes the learning of a child. The process of completing the ILP form is time-consuming and interrupts a highly valued space between teachers and learners that both may feel would have a more beneficial effect on learning if used in other ways. The language of the ILP, written up as SMART targets derived from industry, is not sophisticated enough to acknowledge the diverse multiplicity of individual learning experiences. This is the compromise demanded by quality. Teachers complete the ILP with learners. They draw up, question, review and translate ALLN learning. They produce documents that mould literacy into a template that represents achievement in a highly specified language. They prompt and question, they rephrase and translate. They do this knowing that only those desires that can be counted are allowed textual existence. Quality is achieved because teachers are able to translate learners' legitimate goals.

They write them down in ways meaningful to learners and write them up in the lexical categories required by managers and auditors. What quality demands is a translation. I would argue that what it achieves is compromise and betrayal.

three: interrogating quality: approaches, preparation and gathering

Why do research if you cannot say anything about what is out there and all research is self-reflexive? Why do research for which you must deny responsibility for what you have 'found'? (Steier 1991:10)

In chapter two I offered an extended critical review of the CIF. Part of the critique included a textual analysis through which I fore-grounded the discursive strategies the CIF writers use to disarm their readers. I argued that through a series of rhetorical devices teachers and managers are lulled into adopting the stance of an 'ideal' reader, even if this means taking up positions at odds with their experience. The text makes references to the heart and to highly-valued student-centred pedagogy. The writers refer to themselves and their readers using the first person plural 'we' sometimes inclusively (meaning writers and readers as one) and at other times exclusively (meaning only the writers) – creating a shifting sensation of warmth and distance. The tone is collegial. Yet the writers seem to speak from the implied position of transcendent wisdom: they present themselves as 'a guide'. Readers are variously praised, flattered and chastised. The text requires teachers and managers to accept the writer's faceless un-named authority in contrast to the readers' general condition as deficient, an object in need of improvement.

The CIF is argued as vague and attractive, a generic text that presents itself as definitive but admits revisions and redrafting to acknowledge the significance of context. I may seem in this discussion as if I am hedging towards taking up a position against quality. But this is an impossible and undesirable stance. Indeed, a college's view of inspection will often depend on where they are on the scale from inadequate to outstanding (Skinner 2008). Perhaps I am disarmed by the hopes and aspirations I have condensed within the quality insignia– aspirations embedded within a professional biography of feared pasts and desired futures. My argument in chapter two extended, exemplified and, through the CIF, contextualised what I earlier presented – in chapter one - as a central dilemma for ALLN teachers and managers. I remain driven in this study by my desire to understand how it is possible to reconcile the quality-as-embodied: contingent, locally defined and flexible in contrast to quality as demanded by policy: objective, pre-defined at a distance and rigid. I want to understand how ALLN teachers and managers achieve this reconciliation and how they define, achieve and maintain quality.

It is this ongoing dilemma - the embodied reconciliation between the economy of performance and the ecology of practice - that I have explored with research participants through a series of conversations held over a two-year period from August 2006 to July 2008.

In offering an explicit and reflexive account of my methodology I trace six brief narrations. Separating research into finite categories is a valuable heuristic that has the effect of marshalling the actuality of research. Aspects and elements of each phase occur simultaneously in a to-ing and fro-ing motion. Based in part on Denzin and Lincoln (1998), the six phases I detail provide a semantic framework for a constructed narration rather than a mirroring of my research experience.

i) identifying self and others

I draw in this study on my own experiences of being an ALLN manager who has worked in and out of the field for some years. I returned to work in the UK and a career in post-compulsory education at the start of the *Skills for Life* agenda and since 1999 I have worked in further, adult and community education. I approach this study as a professional who, exhilarated and exhausted by policy, has developed an interest in academic research with all the ambiguities this self-naming implies.   The scale and nature of *Skills for Life*, the change it has brought to this area of work is both welcome and bewildering. Like many practitioners – including my research participants, I started working in ALLN motivated by a strong commitment to political and social justice. I have always believed that cognitive ability is only remotely connected to educational achievement, and that educational inequality is a function of social inequality. Government sponsorship of ALLN has brought in policy principles that place education as key to national economic survival. These economic leanings may well have lingered through other strains of policy, but New Labour's stakeholder government is arguably more *political* than other governments. Continual shifts and turns in policy have had an enormous impact on the day-to-day life of teachers and managers in colleges. The two contradictory educational agendas – inclusion and economic competitiveness - do not easily coexist. And the tension between a personal notion of an education system that exists to contribute towards the achievement of social justice and a policy determined notion of education for economic prosperity is not resolved through Third Way rhetoric. It is, instead, brought into sharp relief through and around quality. Quality adopts the language of radical student-centred pedagogy and wraps it in a managerialist ideology.

This research study represents a personal and professional turning point, a curiosity-driven homage to the embodiment of contradictory reconciliations.

ii) guiding theory, paradigms and perspectives

In casting this research as qualitative I am asserting a series of beliefs about the nature of social life and how social theorists are able to know it. Drawing on Flick (2002), I outline these as firstly, social reality is the outcome of meanings created through a complex labyrinthine series of interactions in which the meaning of everything is up for grabs. In social life there are few absolutes or givens. Instead, meanings are constructed and under constant negotiation. Through modification they interact with and are changed by other meanings. Secondly, if the social world and its attendant meanings are constructed through modified and framed interaction, it has to be understood in its fluidity as a process. It is reflexive and recursive, having only the temporary appearance of order and obduracy. Thirdly, apparently objective life situations are always and already both material and symbolic in their consequences. The connotations of race, gender and class are held in place rather than fixed. Materiality and symbolism form part of a constantly shape-shifting synthesised totality. The life world, the experience of an individual is an incomplete and transitory fusion of concrete circumstances, subjectivity, collectively negotiated interpretations and individual biography. Finally, social reality from this framing is understood as entirely communicative, as something that is negotiated through social interaction, meaningful when taken up by other individuals and conveyed through interpretations.

My approach to research is entirely interpretive and while there are concrete facts that form a significant and decisive part of teaching and managing ALLN, these are all open to individual and collective interpretation. My talking to practitioners represents an attempt to understand these interpretations and the worlds they create. As far as possible I aim to draw attention to and therefore interrupt their taken-for-granted obduracy.

iii) entering the field

Consistent with the worldview I have articulated above, I view the teachers and managers I have interviewed as research participants. In writing this study I aim for the reconstruction of a joint narrative. My intention is that each participant will be able to recognise this thesis as familiar even if they do not subscribe wholly to all the ideas I sketch.

When making initial contact with research participants, I introduced myself as a 'research student' wanting their help with a project. I made direct reference to my employment as a manager of *Skills for Life* in a further education college with a 'good' reputation. Participants were informed that the study was about quality and included organisations who had achieved grade two in a recent inspection. In some instances my introduction to the study was detailed as an analysis of professional and personal conflict. I used the OfSTED website and personal knowledge of London Colleges to identify organisations and in some instance snowballed for other participants by asking for a recommendation.

While the philosophical underpinnings of knowledge-generating enterprise offers enormous scope for nomadic exploration, I am captured by Seal's (2006) suggestion that research may also be viewed in prosaic terms as a craft-like activity. It does not have to be a deeply-laden theoretical endeavour aimed at the realisation of some essential scheme. Research should be informed but not over-determined by social theories. Becoming an educational researcher implies participation in a community of practice. It involves learning and honing practical capabilities through apprenticeship. This is a creative accomplishment achieved partly through engagement with methodological debate and partly through witnessing the work of more experienced practitioners. This research undertaking then is part of an ongoing process of professional learning driven by my curiosity about literacy, policy, quality and professionalism. It is also part autobiography. In writing this research I am writing about

what, how and why I know about quality. With each draft, revision and ongoing exploration, I integrate professional creativity and imagination to develop a distinct research style.

iv) defining the field

Most of my data collection was completed between June and September 2007 through 16 informal semi-structured interviews. A few were conducted months before and some almost a year after these times. The interviews lasted for one hour to ninety minutes and, once transcribed, were analysed as text. All participants were invited to review and comment upon their transcription.

Making comparisons in role and responsibility across organisations is complicated by different organisational structures. And *Skills for Life* may be conceived of and located in contrasting ways.

In one college the *Skills for Life* manager is responsible for cross-college learning support and embedded provision. Her focus is on the literacy and numeracy needs of learners enrolled on vocational courses. She has a minimal team of co-ordinators and is line managed by a college vice principal. Her department is viewed as a student support service alongside advice and guidance, the learning centre and student welfare services. In another college cross-college learning support and discrete literacy and numeracy are placed in different areas, and have different managers. One is based in cross-college support. The other is in a curricular department. There is a team of lecturers and co-ordinators responsible for aspects of implementing *Skills for Life* who are directly managed in different vocational areas. This was seen by many colleges as a

more innovative way of achieving policy objectives. There is a direct relationship between institutional framing and quality in *Skills for Life* which I elaborate upon in chapter four. I argue that quality has enabled subjectivities to become realigned along hierarchical rather than horizontal lines, influenced in part by the local experience of implementing *Skills for Life*.

All participants were employed in post-compulsory education, in further or adult education colleges. All the colleges were in or around London. The majority of research participants – 13 - were based in general further education while the other three were located in adult education provision. This locates where colleagues were at the time of the interview. All but one participant had worked in education and ALLN for at least ten years and could narrate a pre- and post-Moser experience. Some had spent all their professional lives in FE. The participants between them had varied professional pasts. The scope of post-compulsory experience they quoted was extremely varied and included community and voluntary education, an academic background in language teaching and research, creative industries, teaching in private language schools, travelling and teaching overseas and secondary school teaching. Some had become involved in ALLN after moving from an entirely different background – e.g. fine art - while others had assumed management responsibility after years of working in a related field e.g. students with learning disabilities and difficulties (SLDD).

Six participants had a role that focussed exclusively on ESOL. Of the other 10 participants, two had a role that focused exclusively on Literacy and Numeracy. The others combined all three areas. The cohort includes teachers, programme managers – whose role may or may not include a significant amount of teaching - and college managers who have a more senior role of which *Skills for Life* is either their exclusive focus or part of a portfolio. Participants work for nine different London-based organisations. In five organisations I have been able to interview two different participants. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis.

Each research participant has been given an individual reference. The coding indicates the individual, the interview site, whether they were the first, second or third person interviewed at a particular site and a reference indicating the individual interview. All participants were promised anonymity, my coding and approach to writing up and analyses makes every attempt to ensure this is possible. Some of the participants are colleagues with whom I have a working relationship of shifting degrees of closeness / distance.

At the time of conducting the interviews all participants were working for organisations that had achieved grade two in their most recent OfSTED inspection. It is important that the research draws on the experience of those who have been successful in policy terms. Only successful organisations can expose the professional compromises involved in the achievement of quality. That is, the experience I want to capture for this project is the compromise involved in the successful achievement of policy-defined quality. However, in instances where I have interviewed more than one person from the same organisation, the second participant was responsible for a department that may have been given a grade three. One participant was managing a department which had been graded as a three on its most recent OfSTED inspection. All research participants spoke openly of their professional past. Four recounted the experience of previous involvement with *Skills for Life* and colleges that had been given a grade four during inspection. They narrated quite different circumstances. One participant had changed her job and was now working for a different college. In another instance, the participant was working as a more senior manager within the same organisation. Two other participants talked about the history of *Skills for Life* in their college. At least two other colleges had been given a failing OfSTED grade prior to achieving the grade two. I have focussed on success as pertaining to the organisation with its obvious reverberations on the individual. In conducting this research my focus does not imply a desire to maintain disdainful distance from the experiences of ALLN teachers and managers associated with other less celebrated OfSTED grades.

The colleges, all grade two colleges based in and around London, are vast and varied. To gain an initial feel for my territory, I conducted an on-line search of the OfSTED website to read and review the inspection reports of relevant colleges. At the time of drafting the review, six reports were available. Each suggest a very different profile. The

reports are laid out customarily in a specific format. The opening section lists bullet point strengths and weaknesses (sometimes called areas for development) followed by a more extensive narration that describes the department in judgemental terms. The narration may feature strengths and areas for development not featured in the bullet point summary. Grade two-ness is not a singular or even similar state. The defining features of each college and how the grade two was achieved is remarkably different. In interviews one participant attributed the OfSTED grade two to her extensive programme of embedded provision, insisting that a college that does not have this curriculum can-not be give a good grade. The manager of another college, also grade two, declared embedding as not a significant aspect of his organisational agenda. His insistence was that the achievement of grade two related to them doing what they did (discrete centre- and community-based provision) extremely well.

If the summary strengths and weakness listed for each organisation have anything in common, that is if they have a common grade-two-ness, it is that while each have a varied combination of four to six strengths in contrast to two to three weaknesses, the strengths all make reference to data – something along the lines of high success rates, good progression, good achievement and standards feature in every organisation. The weaknesses analysed coalesce around a perceived lack of focus on individual students. This is often expressed in terms of target-setting and planning for individual learning, inconsistent completion of ILPs, inconsistent identification of individual needs, poor sharing of good practice to meet the needs of individual students. In the reports analysed, only strengths are exemplified by reference to data. None of the strengths makes reference to 'individual students'. Though the strengths mention students and learners, none make use of the word individual. This is in contrast to the weaknesses that more frequently, in three out of the six reports analysed, use the word individual. This initial textual analysis of the OfSTED reports suggests scope for further exploration. The achievement of quality involves reconciliation between managing performance indicators, the macro-economies of measurement and large data-sets that narrate a version of the organisation and the micro-ecology of experience and individual learners that may narrate a contrasting version.

v) professional conversations

The interview questions that I have used for the study changed. It became apparent after one or two interviews that some questions did not generate the responses I had imagined when drafting them. Initially my focus placed much greater emphasis on the CIF as a document used by participants. I hoped to explore the various thoughts and feelings people had about this text. I imagined specific conversations about how they used it on a fairly regular or perhaps even day-to-day basis. Initial interviews established that although this was for most participants a reference document they could probably locate physically if they had to, it was not one that they made use of on a regular basis, nor was it one that they were able to voice opinions about. Quite unintentionally the question had the feel of a challenge of some sort. The question itself seemed to imply that managers ought to know the framework by heart, without recourse to text. Few could narrate the questions it asked about provision and it was openly described as something they referred to only out of necessity in preparation for inspection. The contents and approaches to quality it mobilises are referenced in how participants talk of quality, but the document itself is not often referred to directly. One participant went as far as to suggest it had been superseded by the 'Framework for Excellence' (FfE) and was therefore no longer relevant. My approach to interviews therefore changed to focus less on the framework itself and more on the substance of ideas contained within it: policy and professional perceptions of quality.

All the interviews covered similar ground. I had a list of questions that I aimed to ask. I probed and questioned in response to what participants said and, at times, offered aspects of my own professional biography. The interview (for me) had the feel of a professional conversation. As I talked with managers and teachers about aspects of work that we have in common I had to make a conscious effort not to be drawn into a practical work-a-day conversation about, for example, individual learning plans or the practical arrangement for conducting initial assessment.

I have offered a detailed policy framing for *Skills for Life* in chapter one. A more immediate and local framing is also relevant. In 2006, the government announced

changed approaches to the funding of ESOL. The summer during which the interviews were conducted saw a major union-led campaign that many research participants were involved in (Salisbury 2007). The changes in funding had the impact of causing some colleges to reduce the scope and scale of ESOL classes. In one instance, a college had recruited a third of its usual cohort of students and the manager I spoke with was extremely worried about what it would mean for the future of provision. In another college the impact had been less severely felt. All talked about their discomfort with having to charge learners for language provision. In some instances reactions to policy were unexpectedly emotional. At least four research participants traced a biographical involvement with ALLN that referenced the Inner London Education Authority. Two research participants with long-standing involvement in the area explicitly suggested I interview more recently qualified professionals to gain a less 'jaded' view of the impact of policy.

vi) understanding data

The 16 interviews and six OfSTED reports generated substantial data. In later transcriptions I have analysed my own conversational contributions and questioning as this influenced how I understood what my participants had said and why. How I framed a question seemed to achieve an echo in the linguistic formation of participants' responses. Without my transcribed contribution the jointly constructed nature of the exchange slipped out of focus. Grounded theory (Glaser and Straus 1967) is closest to what approximates my analysis – I have moved between data and theory throughout, picking up and modifying codes and references in all 16 transcriptions. I have read, analysed, re-read and then identified notable aspects of transcriptions.

Leading my analysis is the question of how participants define quality. Few actually utter a sentence that begins: 'Quality is'. There are moments when something that approximates this sentence construction is used. I used the software package *atlas-ti* to

enable the analysis of several interviews. I have created codes and established relationships between them. The 16 answers to one question, 'Does your job include a quality-driven responsibility' were compared. In other instances I have lifted out references to learners, to learning, to documents, to specific events or activities, to moments where participants express judgement about an aspect of their work, policy or their environment being worthwhile or the opposite. The initial analysis offered several different criss-crossing construction of quality.

The retelling of the data I offer here is one that presents a single narrative albeit with several strands. This is not to suggest that participants share a common perception of quality, or when they do, I do not suggest that this perception emerges from or leads to a similar set of experiences. I view the analysis as offering a starting point from which perceptions diverge and fragment into individual and idiosyncratic leanings.

My data analysis is triangulated by reference to the academic literature that surrounds quality, policy, literacy, management and good practice.

four… an ongoing conversation over time

"We push our lives through a thicket in which the stern trunks of determinism are entangled in the twisting vines of chance." (Hacking 2004:282)

I think our principal is quite pragmatic. And s/he doesn't do vocational stuff because it's resource heavy and also didn't perform too well. So s/he knows that s/he can keep things afloat much better if s/he does the things that are top of the agenda. I think that's fair enough really. I mean colleges are run like businesses now, aren't they? And – what this college does – it does very, very well.

<div align="right">GC/1 – 02, programme manager</div>

It's also to do with delivering for your clients, for your punters, for your students, for your learners – the best provision that you certainly can

<div align="right">HW/1– 03, college manager</div>

In my analysis of quality – an extended and argumentative portrait – I have suggested that an answer to the question: how do managers and teachers working in ALLN define, achieve and maintain quality is far from straightforwardly self-evident. Even after a detailed reading of the required policy documents and continued conversations, a conclusion remains obscure.

In chapter four, I offer a somewhat nomadic-exploration in which I review the lines of thought that threaded through chapters one, two and three. I weave into this re-narration the words of research participants to provide contextualising depth to the exploration so far established. From this basis I analyse the words I have gathered to provide direct answers to the question of quality.

In organising my data analysis, I first of all establish quality as desirable, an attribute pertaining to both process and product to which teachers and managers aspire. That quality is desirable and confers meaning on professional selves is something all practitioners agreed. Not only is quality desirable, but the 'furniture of accountability' associated with the demands-of-quality makes our work important. Aspects of ALLN teaching and managing that fall outside the quality gaze are diminished, reduced in status. Practitioners harness the momentum and energy provided by the demands-of-quality to achieve aspired-to-quality.

However, demands-of-quality require specific embodiments from teachers and managers. The tension between what is aspired to and what is demanded creates both uncomfortable compromise and opportunity. Quality-as-demanded has the capacity to draw attention to its own embodiments. It enhances the status of an activity. Teachers and managers draw upon this energy to bring about institutional and individual change. Practitioners willingly offer their soul for something in which they believe. Something which they describe as meaningful. There is an extent to which quality-as-aspiration may take an embodied form, but it may also remain as an abstraction. Vague and attractive, abstract-quality is desirable but never wholly defined. It possesses a consistency that despite perpetual shifts in policy retains a secret and enduring attribute. The abstract-aspirations-of-quality to some extent seem to momentarily becoming a campaigning-quality that re-writes hierarchical divisions. 'Them' and 'us' is recreated as those sympathetic to *Skills for Life* learners and those not. Groupings may include teacher, manager, senior manager and policy maker in opposition to vocational teams.

But this alignment of hierarchical identities is short-lived and changes considerably when reference is made to the detailed precipitous substance of quality. When practitioners make reference to the embodied-demands of quality, they become quite critical. Everything changes the moment quality becomes something other than an abstraction. The moment it becomes less a thing to be defined and more a thing, a required state that is embodied, it is noticeably a series of documents that practitioners have to read, write and calculate. When practitioners talk about quality as an auditable activity requiring paperwork, the embodied-demands of quality it becomes something they describe as meaningless. It is aspired-to quality, its transcendent ambiguities and embodiments, that practitioners value in direct opposition to the demands-of-quality with its bullet point textualisations. And yet, the bullet-point brevity of textualised-quality is compelled by quality-as-abstraction. Quality remains an essentially contested concept (Gallie1956). Continual waves of precise re-definition serves only to deepen ambiguity.

It is difficult to critique quality. Attempts to do so may be dismissed as the rearguard defence of ineffective and outdated professional self-interest against legitimate accountability. Quality is the insistent public policy protection of learners' interests. This positions critique as standing outside of a logic that names, classifies and confers value. It locates critique as emerging from the incompetent, the nonsensical or the inflexible. So strong are the emotional investments concentrated in the insignia quality, so threatening is the impending crisis of economic decline, which only quality improvement in education can halt, that to name quality as undesirable is to name a self as undesirable (Morley 2003).

Yet teachers and managers of ALLN are deeply sceptical of quality-as-demanded. At times the colleagues I spoke to seemed to suggest that quality conspires against their attempts to do a good job. That is, to do the job, to achieve the quality to which they aspire. Reframed in this way, my reading of data suggests four possible notions of quality. In *fig ii* and *fig iii*, I present these as tensions, notions of quality – a singularity – compelled by competing gravitational centres. The 'quality' insignia seems to exist within two distinct axes.

It is quality-as-demanded that is textually mediated and elaborately referenced. The scepticism that surrounds quality is directed towards its textual representations. That is the embodied-demands-of-quality establish a critical space from which teachers and managers analyse the abstract-demands-of-quality. Scepticism is mostly directed towards the abstract-demands of quality, its increasingly complex textualisations. It is this rage for accountability through measurement and quantifications, the mathmatisation of social life, that prohibits the achievement of the quality to which practitioners aspire. There is implied here a challenge to practitioners to generate and vivify their own understandings of quality which may usefully contribute towards a more considered connection between the four tensions of abstract, demand, embodied and aspiration. The invitation is to establish a language that makes dialogue between these four solitudes possible.

Firstly, quality-as-aspiration pulls against quality-as-demanded.

Quality-as-aspiration: romantic, vague and attractive. Referenced as conferring meaning on professional selves.

Quality-as-demanded professional life is reduced to painting by numbers, delivering the LSC's required agenda

fig ii

Secondly, quality-as-embodied competes with quality-as-abstract.

Quality-as-embodied: teachers
and managers campaign to make their
'imagined' future real.

Quality-as-abstract: Although specified in detail,
quality remains an essentially contested
'ideal type' fictionalised abstraction.

fig iii

manufacturing educational quality

In part the ambiguity that surrounds quality is related to its linguistic derivation within manufacturing. The semiotic seepage that accompanies this migration of language from industry to education creates unsettling echoes of meaning. Discursive shards associated with one domain – commerce - are transferred to another domain - education. Educational practitioners begin to experience their domain in different ways. The language of commerce, once applied to education, generates an idea of education as enterprise which takes hold, in preference to education as public service. Along with language comes the particular mindsets associated with activities of measurement and evaluation. Ways of (inter)acting, ways of representing and ways of

being – are all transferred to the new domain (Taylor 2004). The collective subconscious of ALLN teachers and managers is, through this process, transformed.

Participants offered various re-tellings of their professional biography and the history of ALLN. Most accepted that the quality of pre-Moser provision was problematic. Retellings were at times strewn with anachronistic acceptances and rejections. In the text below a senior manager talks about her early professional experience working for a rural voluntary literacy scheme,

> *I remember thinking this is charming. It is a very pleasurable way of spending time with very disadvantaged people who put their hopes in a programme of study but are not actually getting any real skill development in their two hours a week, not really working towards any meaningful certification. And their tutors are good people, with some good ideas and strong capabilities but actually do not have a great deal of professional infrastructure or any real rigour around what they are doing.*

> *PL/2 – 14, senior manager*

In critiquing pre-Moser *Skills for Life*, practitioners made reference to the absence of the infrastructure introduced by policy. What is noticeable about this narration is that it is predictive: it makes reference to evaluative criteria that were not a contemporary part of public quality discourse. This participant identifies the weakness in provision as a policy weakness. There was no supportive infrastructure.

Practitioners pointed to a shift in sensibilities that paralleled the introduction of evaluative criteria previously considered irrelevant. The manager below discusses the introduction of *Skills for Life* – equating it to the introduction of rigour – a rigour closely

associated with a concept that, prior to 1999, would have been considered an irrelevance: measurement.

> *Certainly – certainly in my first few years being in – I've always worked in community education – but in my first few years – no way would you – have measured [...] The inspection was much less rigorous – or at least it was a different sort of thing that was looked at. It was much more to do with how the place was run really. You certainly would not have expected to go into an adult education institution and measure achievement in any shape or form – whether that was accredited or not.*

> *HW/1– 03, college manager*

With quality comes the idea that education is a product that can be measured and evaluated. Yet this industrialised quality framing of *Skills for Life* is a problematic reframing. Accompanying concepts of customer, fit for purpose, SMART target, efficiency, input, output, product and zero-defect create uncomfortable couplings when applied to the pedagogic encounter. This discomfort has the potential to unsettle professional identities. The entrepreneurial professional may preserve his or her altruistic commitments to service, but with manufactured educational quality what is the product? The learner manufactured by the college for the consumption of industry or education neatly packaged into manageable chunks to be consumed by the learner? Who precisely is the customer? In workplace learning the customer may be the employing organisation wanting to see improvements in their workforce, the supervising officer who directly manages staff participating in classes, the learner who participates in the course or the body that funds provision. If we adopt a broader, more expansive notion of workplace learning as learning which derives its purposes from the context of employment (Sutherland 1998) Workplace learning may be constructed as learning which is in, through or for the workplace (Evans et al 2006). It may take a variety of different forms, encompass differing degrees of formality, and involve vastly divergent forms of social interaction and participation. A rigid construct that insists on pre-set relationships - customer, product, entrepreneur - offers limited scope for grappling with the purposeful social interaction, which may not be easily

measured and which maps onto existing workplace practices and conditions of employment in a complex process of belonging, becoming, experiencing and doing (Wenger 1999).

If we accept the guidance of the CIF and place the student at the centre of provision, ambiguity still surrounds who the service is for: client, customer, student or learner. These four constructions are quite distinct. Accepting the most contemporary sobriquet 'learner' does not resolve the ambiguity. The relationship between learner and teacher is quite unlike the direct transactional exchange between retailer and customer. Offering a learner the status of a customer would seem a diminution of what they might legitimately want from a college. Learnership involves an extended relationship built up over a period of time. It is a reciprocal exchange based on mutuality, trust and attentiveness. What counts as good service for a 'customer' is quite different to what counts as good service for a learner (Clarke and Newman 2007). It is possible that a business ethic may be drawn upon to justify principles of public service, but this does not negate the confusion created by discourse-driven social change (Fairclough 2001). With quality ALLN professionals have had to construct new ways of understanding themselves in relation to who and what their work is for.

The research participants below discussed and extended the particularity of a public service ethic and the requisite student status:

I think it is very much a difference, because a lot of what we're doing ... I mean if we taught to meet our students expectations or indeed desires, then a lot of what we do would be done very differently.

CC/2 – 01, programme manager

... it depends on what they're here for. I mean we always – on our class visit form – we do have ... we grade according to whether it's an enjoyable experience for the student. But I'm not – actually - not entirely sure that 'enjoyable' is quite what it needs to be. On certain types of courses – for example, professional development courses, they might actually be

From within a business ethic – profitability may legitimately determine curriculum. A point remarked upon by the programme manager who opens this chapter. That entrepreneurialship may drive a college principal's behaviour is enshrined in policy. Financial inducements are used as a direct steer for colleges with provision funded at different rates and cash incentives attached to hitting qualification targets and delivering priority provision (Hodgson *et al* 2007). A college's decision to offer *Skills for Life* may in part be based on the lucrative funding this provision is able to attract. The avoidance of other resource-heavy vocational subjects may also be justified in monetary terms, as well as convenience. If education is a business, this approach to curriculum makes sound economic sense. It makes less sense when interrogated from the perspective of a lifelong learning sector funded on the basis of meeting other needs.

What the commercialisation of public service generates is a notion of quality as having a self-referencing value. Quality is allowed to become an object to be pursued as a thing in and of itself. This is a pursuance that emphasises in minutely specified detail what, to the neglect of how and why, creating a space for mismatch between means and ends. Morley's (2003) assertion that the development of quality follows educational reform is pertinent here. The suggestion is that although justified on the basis of concern over standards, the impetus for change predates these concerns and is most often driven not by a need to respond to serious quality problems, but by the desire to have a regulatory device for the process of production. In other words, the discourse of quality justifies policy intervention in professional practice to ensure it is brought in line with whatever policy outcomes are stipulated. Hence the obsessive detailed demands that accompany the call for quality improvement.

Through quality the micro-practices of ALLN practitioners become subject to scrutinies of performance, production and customer satisfaction while the purpose of ALLN

provision remains blurred. There is instead a continuous invocation to achieve a high quality education product, but, less often discussed and never in precise detail, is the purpose of that product and precisely how it achieves the ends attributed to it. Anomalous and irreconcilable policy goals - social inclusion and economic competitiveness – are allowed to stand. With quality ends become subservient to means.

Persistently changing, contradictory policy- driven definitions of what quality is intended to achieve means that what can be demanded of practitioners remains open to whimsical redefinition. A point experienced by these managers:

I think what I'm constantly aware of […] in terms of classroom practice is that the agenda is constantly changing, and what was the new big thing, very quickly, is the norm and then there is another new big thing. I mean seven or eight years ago it was differentiation. You had to do differentiation. That was the new thing to talk about. The following inspection, that was the norm. So we had to be thinking about being more student-centred. Now being student-centred is the norm. The next thing is we have to be encouraging our students to be independent; we have to be ... incorporating work which will give students the skills to go into the workplace. So I think it's the changing agenda, and the speed of change ... it is much faster, than the context I was working in before.

CC/2 – 01, programme manager

I think ... [this college] has always got this thing about, being the first to do. So if anything does come up ... in terms of national policy trials, or strategy, it would tend to be, try to be, one of the first to actually take it on. So, personalisation. Personalisation has been bandied around for a couple of years. What does it mean? What does it look like? [This college] says 'Ok, yeah, we will define it.' So ... and all those sort of things ... employer engagement, personalisation, numeracy strategy ...

TL/1 – 13, college manager

Within a quality framing pursued in industrial terms – discussion of what and why we do is displaced by frantic attention to doing it well.

total quality transformation of ALLN

In chapter two I analysed publicly available discourses around quality – centring much of my discussion on the CIF. The CIF offers what purports to be a definitive account of quality - to guide managers. I have argued that it is rather an authoritative contribution to an ongoing conversation about what quality means. Another document within a 10-year outpouring of documents aiming to demonstrate what quality looks like. An enticing metaphor for the capacity of professionals to narrate a desirable professional identity, quality is also a condensation symbol (Gillies 2007) within which teachers and managers invest a great deal of hope. In this high-stakes make-or-break professional culture, quality is both attractive and repulsive. Attractive because quality is attractive. It emerges from a logical framework that confers value. It is hard not to respond with enthusiasm to the invitation to be involved in what is presented as a national concerted effort to improve the lives of students who have so far benefited least from the education system. *Skills for Life* presented itself as an invitation to teachers and managers to continue doing work they had for a long time been committed to doing, but this time with government backing.

But it is also repulsive. The quality checklists that accompany *Skills for Life* hint at practitioners being asked to operate within an alienating technical frame. This has the feel of being an artist but required to paint by numbers. This is an emotive description that quite possibly negates the experience of practitioners involved in *Skills for Life*. Practitioners talk about their work with enormous strength of feeling, enthusiasm and energised gusto.

> *Over the years ... there's been an acknowledgement of the strength of those areas of work (ALLN). And – with the new ... well .. even before the new principal I think .. the college*

itself then recognised that … we aren't going to improve our college success rates …
overall … unless … we can get improvements in literacy and numeracy and language levels
across the college.

<div align="right">*GH/1 – 12, college manager*</div>

What [pre-Moser ALLN] didn't have was enough resource behind it, have enough structure
under it, and have high enough expectations of it to drive to the centre of what the provision
is about.

<div align="right">*PL/2 – 14, senior manager*</div>

Some participants commented on what has the feeling of calm after the *Skills for Life* storm,

We've actually had eight years without Skills for Life being touched. It has been pretty
amazing, […]. You can make so much progress when there's enough funding around.

<div align="right">*HW/1– 03, college manager*</div>

This is more than willing compliance or the successful colonisation of a professional soul. There is something wilful and agentic about these deliberative engagements with policy. Policies do not normally tell people what to do. They rather create circumstances within which the range of options for deciding what to do are narrowed or changed (Ball 1993). Responses to policy are an untidy suturing, creative social action rather than painting by numbers. In suggesting that ALLN practitioners responses to *Skills for Life* are deliberative, I am also suggesting an approach to understanding the implementation of policy that acknowledges the significance of 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980). There is a strong sense here of practitioners being a decisive constituency in defining policy. Quite possibly *Skills for Life* might be cast as the second outcome of persistent agitations. After years of marginalisation, with *Skills for Life* the Problem of Adult Literacy became recognised as something more than a temporary problem to be eradicated. It is no longer viewed in policy terms as a temporary measure to be dismantled once agreed targets have been hit. It is instead a

mainstream entitlement. In 2008 local authorities' responsibility to offer 'proper ALLN provision' became enshrined in law (Boyd 2008).

Research participants most often reference morality as their motivations for becoming and remaining involved in ALLN.

Sometimes this morality emerges from participants' own recollections of being a further education student. A manager talks about his desire to make sure the students in his college do not repeat his experience of poor provision.

> *ESOL [...] is a mission. I told you that when I came here as a boy of 17 years old, I think I wasted a great deal of time. I had brought [qualifications] from [my country]. If I had not been wrongly advised, I would not have had to repeat my GCEs and A Levels, these [the qualifications I had] would have been the equivalent. So all I had to do is to go on a fast track English course. I would have got to university a lot quicker, rather than the six or seven years it had taken me.*

> *So there was a sort of personal interest that motivated me, continuously saying to me that, 'If you go to further education college, you really should be properly advised and guided. You should really be properly supported so you can achieve your full potential.'*

> *And what I did see happening in ESOL was a lot of students very happy with their tutors but doing the rounds, one level to another. There were bizarre situations where students were one year entry level two and then the next year were judged to be entry level one at another institution.*

> *KE/1 - 04, programme manager*

Others reference an inherent, Aristotelian, inside-out morality. Their motivations are woven through with traces of romanticism and desire to contribute towards the good society.

I thought it was a worthy-type thing to do to be honest. I was interested in working with refugees and longer term immigrants and I was attracted by education really.

<div align="right">

GC/1 - 02, programme manager

</div>

That's really easy. It was almost as soon as I left university, I wanted to be involved in community development work. I wanted to be involved in learning and be involved in work I felt that addressed issues of disadvantage, poverty, and under achievement for the adult population. Almost pretty much the first thing I did on leaving university was to start as a literacy volunteer [...], and loved it and thought, 'This is great!'

<div align="right">

PL/2 – 14, senior manager

</div>

I was motivated by making a difference in people's lives. Helping people to acquire English language skills, people who'd come here from another country ... helping them to make a new life in this country.

<div align="right">

SH/2 – 15, programme manager

</div>

Yes ... I've been in education for over 30 years. And coming from an AEI background. Adult Education Institute background. [...] I took a lot of that work out into the community. I did mainstream work and community work. The working in the community was extremely challenging and was terribly exciting because it was different. It changed. Every time you went out there something had changed. And it, I think it brought me into contact with an awful lot of people who would now be described as being underrepresented in education, but also disadvantaged in basic skills.

<div align="right">

GH/1 - 12, senior *manager*

</div>

In making 'education, education, education', more particularly in making *Skills for Life* a major policy initiative, New Labour lived up to their election promises. Successive waves

of policy have transformed the broad rhetorical commitment to a learning society into something concrete even if not entirely cohesive.

Lavender (2006) offers the feathered toes of the snow-walking alpine ptarmigan as a visual metaphor for the tension between policy intention and policy effect. The alpine ptarmigan has webbed feet that enable it to walk quickly across snow, a biological necessity for the artic conditions in which it lives. Yet this same design also makes it extremely vulnerable to traps set by predators. Its feet are very easily snared. Measures appropriately devised to have a desirable impact in one way may lead to wholly undesirable, unintended and unpredictable consequences in some other way. This metaphor enables a critique of quality from a framework of logic that refuses to cast its advocates as undesirable. The newly defined infrastructure surrounding *Skills for Life* is part of an extensive and ongoing transformation of further education. As I have argued in my first chapter, government sponsorship could quite easily be viewed as the successful outcome to years of lobbying by committed activists. Government sponsorship brought with it a whole new infrastructure and the redefinition of what it meant to be a good ALLN teacher and a good ALLN manager.

struggling ... becoming rooted at the centre

In what follows I explore the ways in which teachers and managers working within London Further and Adult Education Colleges talk about quality and its impact on their professional lives. My intention is to place their articulations in conversation with the writers I have so far referenced. My analysis is reflexive to the extent that I acknowledge the interviews as an exchange and my emergent analysis as a deliberate construction. At times I analyse my own transcribed and anonymised contributions to this ongoing conversation as data offered by an ALLN manager alongside those I have interviewed.

While the definition of quality implies a somewhat static, abstract conceptualisation that can be directly asked and answered: what does quality mean? The achievement of quality and its maintenance can only be understood when participants begin to talk about the actuality of their work. Here my approach is to understand maintaining and achieving quality as something that happens over a period of time, involving a dynamic interplay and revealed through rituals, stories and symbols – the overall paradigm within which research participants talk about themselves and their work (Johnson and Scholes 1989).

I draw on Stronach *et al's* (2002) metaphor of professionals struggling to maintain a coherent biographical narrative as 'walking a tightrope'. The image evokes precariousness, spectacle, astonishing expertise, public exposure and a queasiness that holds nausea at bay only when it resolutely refuses the distractions of what has gone before. A second's glance away from the target is a life-threatening indulgence. Stronach *et al* use this 'walking the tightrope' to indicate the carefulness with which professionals navigate between the 'economy of performance' and the 'ecology of practice'. I explore the differing ways in which research participants talk about quality – the extent to which their role has a quality remit – in an attempt to trace the contours of this tightrope. Do research participants' articulations of themselves in relation to quality suggest the depth of struggle implied by 'walking a tightrope'? And if so along what lines of axis, between which polarities does the struggle seem to take place?

I displace the notion of willing compliance – the construction of ALLN professionals as being duped into passive acceptance of a perverse quality culture – in recognition of the fact that once adult basic skills is redefined as *Skills for Life* it offers professionals the opportunity to bring about institutional changes to which they are fully committed. This I suggest is a un-colonised commitment. With government sponsorship of *Skills for Life*, traces of the pre-Moser campaigning barefoot-professionalism have remained. The emergent *Skills for Life* strategy has provided infrastructure and sponsorship. Policy may have colonised professional sensibilities, but professionals have also hijacked policy to serve ends to which they have always been committed.

A senior manager describes the process of implementing *Skills for Life* in her organisation.

> *It's been a struggle. It's been a struggle in the college. To get us to where we are. And I think that now we're very firmly rooted at the centre of what the college does. I think the very fact that we have a new principal who started in January and the very fact that that new principal is promoting [the Head of Skills for Life] to assistant principal is placing Skills for Life at a very high level of the organisation.*

> *GH/1 – 12*, senior *manager*

In the process the status of ALLN and the status of those associated with ALLN has changed.

In the discourse of the practitioner, notions of quality are more grounded, more closely linked to purpose. This is other than a generalised compliant commitment to government policy. It is a commitment to social justice, inscribed into the notion of commitment to *Skills for Life* learners,

> *In the teams themselves, there's a real commitment to Skills for Life. And not just to Skills for Life, there's a real commitment, I think it's correct to say, to the learners within the Skills for Life area. The Skills for Life thing is incidental. It's the commitment to the learners.*

> *Many, many of our learners, older learners have never been to school. They ... we've got masses of learners who have never read, learned to read and write. Big numeracy deficits all over the place. And a lot of young people, 14 - 16, 16 – 18 coming into the college who did very badly at school, didn't come out with any basic skills, any levels of basic skills that were credible. So, we've had to work hard to raise those levels of Literacy, Numeracy and Language for our learners. And we've now got some very good success rates. And it's all down to the commitment, motivation and enthusiasm of the team.*

> *GH/1 - 12*, senior *manager*

The abiding themes associated with the critique of quality and the associated discourse of managerialism – erosion, loss, deprofessionalisation – seem not to take hold in *Skills for Life* (Gleeson and Knights 2006, Briggs 2004). A cursory exploration of the professional biography of ALLN practitioners indicates that *Skills for Life* has enhanced considerably the status of what had been a marginalised and misunderstood activity.

> *for many years literacy, numeracy and ESOL was always the poor relation. And didn't get the funding, didn't get the priority in colleges, didn't get the support, didn't get the staffing. We had to make do with part-timers. All that stuff that went on years ago.*

GH/1 - 12, senior *manager*

Skills for Life has changed that. With government policy sponsorship, ALLN teachers and managers have become 'rooted at the centre of the organisation'. There is a strident discursive strand emerging from this research that links a commitment of ALLN provision to a commitment to social justice. There is compromise implied in the interplay between economy and ecology. There is tightrope, but the potential for identifying and maintaining a coherent professional biographical narrative is more optimistic than this metaphor and its dystopian associations might suggest.

> *There's a group of mums who I worked with who had [...] had children very young, single mums bringing up children by themselves. They had been out of the educational system for a long time and they just needed to brush up on things and also confidence to move forward and apply for jobs. They didn't have any confidence in their own ability. I was able to see one woman go from a few hours literacy all the way through to now – she's doing a teaching course. So in four years she's done a basic IT with literacy included a numeracy course, initial teacher training teaching assistant course [...] That's my motivation – you're able to help people on their journey through life, to have a better quality of life, that reflects in their children and their community, so it's good for everyone basically.*

BH/1 – 07, programme manager

These strands of commitment are very clearly expressed by research participants and the commitment to *Skills for Life* is consistent with a commitment to wanting to pursue these ends. The ends described by policy are less often and less clearly articulated in specific coherent detail. For practitioners the purpose of ALLN is quite closely linked to wanting to improve learners' lives. When teachers and managers describe quality they do so by drawing on references that most closely link quality to quality of life – approaches that enable students to define and achieve life goals – even if these are vaguely defined and without direct economic pay-off.

'Quality? Well it's ... it's everything.'

Without quality work is meaningless. Not only is quality of deep significance, it is all-pervasive, impacting on every aspect of participants' role and sense of professional self. When asked whether their role has a quality-driven responsibility, participants answered unanimously in robust unequivocal terms.

> *[It's] .. everything from developing courses, curriculum development, programme planning. None of it would mean anything [without quality].*

> *HW/1- 03, college manager*

> *We all assume an air if integrity about what we're doing because I think it's important [...]*

> *GC/1 - 02, programme manager*

There were no detractors from this. All saw quality as highly prized. When the consequential threat of poor quality is surfaced,

Inspections will ferret you out if you're not actually delivering the programme and I guess [...] there's already talk of colleges not being funded. There's a direct link between funding and quality.

<div align="right">HM/1- 03, college manager</div>

quality still retains its inherent value.

well obviously ... it's not purely to do with funding. [...] It's about doing the best you can. You know – I would say that quality impacts on everything that you do – for me anyway.

<div align="right">HW/1- 03, college manager</div>

There is a sense of quality as having an abiding form, unchanged by time and policy – even though the resource attached to policy may obscure or hasten its emergence. In this frame, notions of what quality means, what a good teacher and good manager does, has not changed from pre- to post-*Skills for Life*. What has changed is the environment that practitioners operate within, a policy environment that has increased the range, scope and possible impact of provision. This idea emerged through the sometimes idiosyncratic ways in which participants reconstructed their professional biographies – mindful perhaps that the secure maintenance of their current status as a 'good ALLN teacher or manager' required a complicated compromise. On the one hand, a good teacher and manager acknowledges that quality in ALLN has improved significantly since 1999, on the other hand, if that same teacher and manager was a practitioner pre-1999, there is a resistance to being too closely identified with the derision of their own pre-1999 practice.

In one discussion a senior manager evaluated her experiences as a pre-*Skills for Life* volunteer

> *Oh yes, it was a good programme. It was a programme that was well run. It had recruited*
> *successfully. The tutors were well supported. The resource bases were of a good standard.*
> *The training I received as a volunteer was of enormous help to me and I think it added up to*
> *a programme that was effective in the context it was operating in.*
>
> *What it didn't do is have enough resource behind it, have enough structure under it, and*
> *have high enough expectations of it to drive to the centre of what the provision is about.*
>
> *We needed more acknowledgement, better management was often in place, so meaningful*
> *accreditation that had the respect of employers and others was very important. Investment*
> *was important. A structure was also important,*
>
> *PL/2 – 14, senior manager*

The suggestion is that the programme was good. That is the properties located within the motivations and worthwhileness of the individuals managing the programme this manager worked on, were of good quality. But this is a limited notion of quality. One that would persist only for a specific time. What was not good was the environment in which it operated. It was an unsupportive one which inevitably limited the capacity of the programme to bring about substantial change of the type contemporary policy-makers require from post-compulsory education: the production of appropriately skilled and certificated workers. In this discourse, quality becomes an abiding, abstract, transcendental object that persists pre- and post-*Skills for Life*.

> *The fundamental principles [of quality] were there. That you needed be able to secure the*
> *attainment of the people you were teaching. I always remember being invited to structure*
> *my learning plans, my lesson plans based on what the learner would have learned to do at*
> *the end of the session. I always carried that with me as a good test of a teacher's plan of*
> *attainment in the classroom, because that is your professional responsibility.*

I have always felt it was fine to be held to account for that. Some people didn't particularly agree with that philosophy, but I do. I did then and I still do. So maybe it hasn't changed that much. The language has changed. The furniture has changed, but in fact the principles are relatively enduring.

PL/2 – 14. senior manager

quality – turns nothing into something

Not only is quality important and its importance connected to professional and personal status, being thought of as part of a quality process has the capacity to confer importance on what practitioners do. In a discussion between the philosophy of accounting and Locanian psychoanalysis, Power (2008b) talks about audit as the primary act of making something visible. It has the capacity to turn nothing into something. Through audit 'nothing' becomes 'something' that can be recorded and therefore recognised. With audit, the Zen-like transcendental mist of the abstraction quality becomes something tangible that can be grasped and grappled with, compared to and classified. It takes on a form that enables the institution to see it, to name it and value – assess the worth - of its existence. There is in this process a 'capture'. With quality aspects of organisational life become recognised. Those aspects of organisational life which are not included in the quality gaze lose status. They remain as nothing.

An ESOL manager and teacher talks about quality as being constituted by two distinct elements

I think there are two elements of it. In terms of what the college demands as the quality programme. There's my role within that. And there's also my role providing what I consider to be good quality service to the students.

There is a strong suggestion of difference here. What the college demands as part of a quality programme is held in contrast to what this manager considers as a good quality service to student. However, this is contrast rather than conflict, as personally-held perceptions of quality are only contrasted with institutionally-recognised notions of quality in as much as one is and the other is not recorded. One is something and the other is nothing.

I only separated them in my explanation to you because the sort of thing, the sort of customer service element is not ... I don't think ... is not always recorded. I mean it might be implicit in some of the key question elements [of the CIF], but it's not always explicit.

It is the recording that makes the difference, that enables something to become recognised.

Quality then is something practitioners are committed to and offer to organisations whether it is demanded of them or not. They draw on their own resources and offer these up to the organisation to deliver what they consider to be a good quality service.

What is referred to as 'quality' may also be understood as a series of textualisations, a broad pulling together of a selection of instruments of governance designed to regulate institutional behaviour. These instruments of governance have intensified and

extended into an all-pervasive audit culture with associated techniques and vocabularies (Power 1997, 2008b), paralleled by a significant proliferation of surveillance technologies made possible through development in concepts and techniques that focus upon specifically human attributes of working subjects. Together, they constitute forms of governance that mobilise active (rather than passive or complicit) human subjects. Through quality the micro-world of the organisation – of the practitioner – is linked to the public world of policy and politics (Morely 2003).

Quality enables the ordering of social practices (Edwards 2003). This ordering normalises the desirability of quality, its purpose and value. As a process it is rarely held up to direct scrutiny. Instead the organisational culture, the commitments, performativities and knowledge it generates are thoroughly embedded in the assumptions and practices of governing. The subjectivity of teachers and managers – their passions – becomes a resource to be optimised through the choices they make.

A senior manager, discussing the quality aspects of her role, established the close relationship between the demands of policy and notions of quality.

> *When we look at quality, we are looking at the funders' agenda, so we are looking at the LSC, the LSC are wanting success rates. That's the be all and end all.*

> *EC/3 – 08, college manager*

Funding, targets, inspection and policy initiatives (Spours *et al* 2007) are the mechanisms through which the LSC achieves its policy purposes of creating a post-16 sector that meets the needs of employers, individuals and community. These policy levers may be collectively grouped under the heading: quality. And it is through these levers that the LSC achieves an 'at a distance' steering of institutions. This approach to organisational governance is part of a wider process consistent with the changing role of the state from provider to enabler. A contracted out, modernised state is less involved in direct provision and more responsible for the overseeing of services through regulation, setting

standards and guaranteeing quality (Newman, 2001). Performance targets, standards, audit, inspection, self-assessment and powers of intervention all equal quality. These arms' length mechanisms provide policy makers with a way into organisations to achieve prescribed purposes.

Critical debate has long established the extent to which through quality the subjectivity of teachers and managers becomes appropriated by the corporation (Ball 2003). Managerialism and its New Labour manifestation – modernisation – undermines the interests of workers by the capture of their soul, their inner selves, leaving little room for resistance. Practitioners willingly offer up their soul, their inner selves, believing the interests of the enabling state to be aligned to their own. While I acknowledge this critique of quality, I am suggesting that practitioners are also caught up in the process in more deliberative and decisive ways then this dystopian reading allows. ALLN professionals hijack policy to serve their own long-term passions that pre-date *Skills for Life* and will survive the inevitable policy waning.

Through quality organisational structures and relationships are re-written. Practitioners are able in some instances to harness the energy and momentum of policy to revise hierarchical subjectivities. 'Them' and 'Us' take on new and dispersed meanings as those empathetic to the needs of ALLN learners, passionate about the implementation of policy and those resistant to recognising their role in perpetuating or interrupting social inequality.

> *I mean it has been something that my manager and particularly myself had been passionate about. It's taken a long time I think for people to jump on board and to understand the importance of it. The Principal's jumped on board and of course once you get senior management movement then things really change. And the attitude has changed – especially in areas like construction, engineering.*

> *We are kind of getting there but sometimes you feel like you are banging your head against a brick wall, but if one person changes their attitude and talks to another tutor and then it continues on. 'What is this basic skills thing?' 'Oh my student is doing really well on his*

exam on his construction course. He's been going to that special session once a week for maths and English.' Once you get this talk amongst people things start to happen.

BH/1 – 07, programme manager

And that whole thing about 'them' and 'us', between a central team and the schools [has changed]. At least now I feel I'm in a position where I can at least go into a school and say this needs to happen, can you do it, get the backing from the Head of School to drive it through.

TL/1 – 13, college manager

So, the obviousness of quality as desirable is in part connected to contemporary forms of governance that mobilise the inner self for the deployment of policy purposes. There is possibly another reason why the obvious desirability of quality enjoys its taken-for-granted status.

All participants explicitly state that quality is central to their role. And in so doing my suggestion is that they are engaging in what Goffman (1956) refers to as 'front stage presentation'. That is offering me, the interviewer, a specific and deliberately crafted persona. This is not to suggest that participants have offered something other than complete frank openness. I am rather making a theoretical point about story-telling. Stories often recount how the story-teller would like it to have been, rather than how it was. The aim of a story teller is to tell a good story. The parameters of a good story are linguistic and aesthetic. Truth, as detailed adherence to facts, is not the point. The 'facts of the matter' are incidental to a good story. And a good story legitimately plays fast and loose with 'the truth'. Ricoeur (1981) makes this point. Narratives of personal experience create a chronology in reverse, by reading the end into the beginning, the beginning into the end. Time motions forwards and backwards. Events and sensations may be mismatched, altered, marginalised, misremembered and invented. What is important for the story-teller is the coherence between single events and overall plot. The story of our past is selectively narrated from the perspective of an ever-shifting present. We continually (re)create who we are in the present through dialectically

drawing on the fragments of our past. This was most striking in the ways in which participants evaluated their experiences of managing ALLN. They spoke with confidence about the compromises that achieved a grade two. The end was embedded in the beginning. They spoke with tentative precariousness about current negotiations yet to be evaluated.

Asked about quality directly, practitioners insist that it matters and signal a complete willingness to accept whatever is required of them. They sometimes offer anachronistic and idiosyncratic retellings of their own biographies in order to maintain this impression. It is only when we begin to talk about what one participant referred to as the 'furniture' associated with contemporary accountability that dissent emerges.

As a moral and ethical imperative, quality is highly regarded. It is something which teachers and managers aspire to achieve. As a specific set of measures, the 'furniture' designed to regulate conduct through self-governance, its status is more tenuous. There is then a tension between quality as a series of vaguely defined commitments in contrast to quality as a series of demands that often sit uncomfortably with existing ways of working and professional identities.

quality ... you mean paperwork?

Interviewer:	*Does your role include responsibility for quality?*
Participant:	*Are you talking in terms of paperwork?*

VC/2 – 06, teacher

When teachers and managers talk about quality, they also talk about its textualisations: paperwork. Talk about quality improvement makes direct reference to documentation.

[To improve quality] I put some very initial changes into the system. I insisted on lesson plans, provided staff with a file in which everything that they should have as a professional should be in there to enable them to teach better.

And the quality and standards unit - they lead on the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and the observation process, the questionnaires, the focus groups, the quality cycle, quality manual and all the documentation comes from that. And I ... everybody understands that questionnaires are important and that they have to be done, [...] they are very, very, lengthy documents.

Planning learning and recording achievement ... [...] ... it's a very useful document. But when you first look at it you think, crikey, where am I going to find this? And sometimes, all you need is the flow chart. And you don't need all the rest of the bumf to show you where you, where you're expected to be going. But sometimes you can't see the wood through the trees ... [...] ... sometimes there's too much. You've got to really dig down and find what you want.

Much of what I have described as the new infrastructure for *Skills for Life* is textually-mediated. It is a series of mundane transactions involving documents: lesson plans, schemes of work, initial and diagnostic assessment, a CIF, lesson observations, DfES-published teaching and learning materials, a plethora of websites and guides offering examples of 'good practice', core-curricular documents, individual learning plans, statistical representations of students' experiences in terms of retention, achievement and success rates, satisfaction surveys, quality assurance visits followed up by

monitoring forms, self-assessments, course reviews, quality action plans and inspection reports.

Research participants commented on the differences between pre- and post-Moser ALLN.

> *You're now expected to do an awful lot more of evidencing, documentation … which is a pain. […] we're in the sorry state where teaching gets in the way of admin. And not the other way round.*

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PB/1 – 05, programme manager

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'Paperwork' references a number of different texts and types of text requiring distinct forms of engagement with varied degrees of impact. Some aspects of paperwork are benign or even seen as helpful e.g. learning materials. Practitioners spoke of wanting to make a complementary contribution to DfES-published teaching materials by offering a more tailored localised interpretation. Some offer scope for creative interpretation and invention in their design. Others direct work and energy within a given cycle – with everything flowing from and back into a form.

There is depth and significance attached to paperwork. It is an important aspect of what teachers and managers do. It has the capacity to re-write who and what we are by virtue of determining not only how we spend professional time, but how we talk and write about what we do. Definitions – ways of knowing - are caught up in practices – ways of doing - which in turn produce particular emotional investments, ways of feeling, that combine in shifting constellations of being and identity (Edwards and Usher 1996).

Morley describes the quality regime as involving a damaging process of ventriloquism and impersonation (Morley 2003). Teachers and managers are compelled to represent themselves – and their processes - using a language that auditors will understand and value. Self-assessment reports require an optimistic and promotional self-description.

Observation reports demand consistently evaluative statements. Individual learning plans unambiguously define linear cause - effect learning relationships. These textualisations imply self-subversion as those charged with producing documentation for the consumption of auditors are compelled to adopt an authorial self and discursive self at odds with the autobiographical self (Clarke and Ivanič 1997). The language of authority makes practitioners active and participative in the creation of quality normalisations. They not only consume 'hyped' - rather than hedged or tentatively exploratory - quality texts, but contribute towards their production. The authority of the quality regime speaks about ALLN, but also induces ALLN teachers and managers to speak about themselves in ways that create alienating distance and non-recognition.

To understand practitioners' definitions of quality is to understanding their definitions of the documentation that attends it. In this sense the demands of quality and paperwork seem to co-exist as a singularity. In the discourse of teachers and managers there is a blurred boundary between them. Paperwork may be a time-wasting and tedious distraction from the real, the more important purposes of teaching and managing. But it is also a central and defining feature of the quality regime. This is a point of significant tension. When quality is discussed as an idea, as an aspiration, it is valued by practitioners. If it is discussed as an activity, as an embodied experience, something to be operationalised, its status is more tenuous. People talk and feel differently.

The textualisations involved in quality determines professional identity and create conditions that draw individuals into a new world of lived experience, a world that has the potential to detach them from their own critical consciousness, ideology and value commitments (Dominelli and Hoopgvelt 1996). The identity of teachers and managers becomes engulfed by organisational priorities.

In chapter two I analysed the CIF, examining how a text drawn from public discourses around the problem of quality and ALLN was implicated in the project of social ordering (Law 1994). In the section that follows I pick up another way in which text contributes to the same project, one that extends the discussion already started that implicates ALLN teachers and managers as producers rather than consumers of text. The distinction between official and unofficial knowledge is preserved, between quality

as demanded and quality as aspired to, but here my focus shifts slightly to understanding how official perceptions of quality are experienced in practice. The embeddedness of these relations of ruling becomes a mechanism for grasping the connections between experience, situated activities and extended social relations (Grahame and Grahame 2001). The material and symbolic effects of texts become something of a bridge between what is mundane about local actualities and multiple sites connected into a single institutional complex. In the production of texts, what is done – what can and can not be done - is shaped not only by teachers' and managers' knowledge, but also by the managerial conditions and institutional arrangements within which they find themselves.

In my final section I want to analyse what participants say about paperwork to understand something of how they conceptualise quality.

meaningful vs. meaningless paperwork

Towards the end of a discussion, I talked with a colleague about 'right-touch' inspection. This research participant imagines what the shift towards self regulation should mean (Coffield / LSN 2008).

> *It's about paperwork but meaningful paperwork, rather than just looking at things for the sake of it. It's about actually making links.*

> *HW/1- 03, programme manager*

Teachers value and enjoy teaching and see it as being the main purpose of their role. Yet in a recent study of teachers working in FE , Bolton (2007) found that fewer than half

her respondents rated it as their main task. Administration, the least enjoyable aspect of the role was described as taking up more than three quarters of their time. Some paperwork is accepted as a necessary aspect of the role, it is nonetheless extremely time-consuming and a source of considerable stress. In part this stress may be related to teachers and managers having to undertake tasks that are inconsistent with their versions of themselves. Spending time doing paperwork would seem to challenge teachers' sense of who they are and undermine their motivations for becoming teachers (Ball 2008:51).

There is also stress associated with surveillance and getting it right.

It just seems to get more difficult [...] I've been through so many inspections and I'm just a bit ... sick of it. I don't see the inspectors – they seem to be there more for the validation of quality [sic], I think the teachers should really focus on teaching without freaking out about course files, the paperwork, perfectly presented ILPs. That's what I think.

VC/3 – 06, teacher

I mean what is a perfect ILP? No inspection report ...[has managed to find or describe one]... They give grade one but they still criticise the ILP so ... so we do ILPs now. I mean that's ... it does force tutorials. The pastoral care is obviously better. Everyone does their schemes of work, lesson plans. And it is put on Blackboard or whatever system you've got for your internet.

HM/1 – 03, programme manager

You are set up to fail. There is no perfect ILP – you don't know – you're always fumbling in the dark. Never knowing if its right. I think that's how I always felt as a tutor and I still feel, people feel that – although we've revamped our ILP, we've got our own, we've looked at other models, I still feel, you know – you never know if you're doing the right thing. I always feel the monitoring is very hard because you're setting individual targets and it's quite hard to keep

track of everyone. It's easier if you do group targets in a way. Because then you can – you know – but people don't feel confident in doing that.

HM/1 – 03, programme manager

Participants made several distinctions when they made reference to paperwork, each of which may fit into an overarching frame of meaningful and meaningless. This did not amount to a direct and unqualified rejection of text associated with quality, but if the abstract notion of quality was not at all criticised, the 'furniture' associated it with it was largely rejected as detrimental to good teaching, good learning and good managing.

The trouble with our system here is that we've always tried to make it meaningful. And we've always tried to make it light on paper. And so as a result what you get is something that is perhaps not as substantial as it would look if it had lots of forms that students filled out – and everybody had an ILP and what have you, what have you. We've tried to not go down that road at all. And I think … I don't know really … we've got a form that we're going to change and that might do the trick – I don't know. I think it may be unavoidable – having more paper.

HW/1 – 09, programme manager

The distinction here is between paperwork that complies with quality requirements, but is extensive and meaningless, or paperwork that is light, minimal but does not cover what quality demands. Practioners are offered permissive guidance by SfL. They are drawn into processes of designing quality templates for their own use within course teams. There is a degree of freedom here, but it is a severely restricted freedom with the unavoidable possibility of bulkier documentation that everyone has to use as an imminent threat.

The meaningful and meaningless distinction emerges again as these managers talk about lesson observations.

> *I think very much so — I think the course manager's role — in many ways you're the first amongst equals with tutors — I think they expect the person who's responsible for their work to know about teaching and to be good at it. So, I do try and support teachers as much as possible in doing that. We do lots of lesson observations. And I do take them quite seriously rather than any box-ticking exercise.*

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GC/1   02, programme manager

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The distinction between taking observations seriously rather than seeing them as box-ticking would seem to imply that the institutional quality requirements would be met by box-ticking, but not the real activity of observing teaching and offering good feedback. Another manager, in talking about lesson observation, makes a similar point.

> *[The observation I undertake as opposed to the ones undertaken by the quality team] tend to be more informal. I might just drop in. and I wouldn't produce huge reams of paperwork afterwards. I might just say, 'Look, yeah, that was a good lesson. Why don't you try this next time?' Or, something may come up at an appraisal and someone might say ... 'I'm not very confident in doing grammar' ... Then ... 'Well, tell me when your next grammar lesson is and I'll pop in and see how you're getting on.' You know that's ... it's more like that, from my side of things.*

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PB/1- 05, programme manager

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The lesson observation process is treated here as an interactive process between teacher and observer. The manager in the above quotation contrasts his approach with the official approach taken by the college's quality unit.

'I wouldn't produce huge reams of paperwork afterwards.'

PB/1- 05, programme manager

I have suggested that quality is mediated by a series of documents that label, group and categorise, creating a virtual organisational reality offered to inspectors and auditors (Castleton 2000). This virtual organisational reality is constituted by the textual representations practitioners produce for the explicit consumption of auditors. These hyped up and ventriloquised communications offer a self-assessed reflexivity that is designed to ensure success through the inspection process. ILPs present ALLN development as if it took the form of neatly linear incremental progressive steps. Lesson plans treat learning as if it were a series of cause-effect predictable relationships. Good retention and success rates through reductive equations are the result of good teaching and good management instead of the effective manipulation of information. Data only ever tells an upbeat and congratulatory story instead of following learners' experience that would enable the statistical capture of the iterative 'dipping-in and dipping-out' persistence of adult learning (QIA 2008).

Part of the grouping and categorising they achieve is to distinguish teacher from manager. The notion of manager as 'first amongst equals' is compromised through a quality culture, as staff occupy very different positions in relation to paperwork. The degree of involvement and understanding of what physically happens with text makes a significant difference to how meaningful or meaningless that text may feel.

> *When I came into this role I was very cynical about it. When I was a programme area leader I was very cynical about it. I thought you know ... we're producing all these documents and nobody takes a blind bit of notice. But I think now I'm ... now I'm in the management side of it all ... more in the management side of it, I can see that it's very, very important that we get these things right. Ahm.... and I can see more now that the need for this and it does help.*

Part of my ethos is trying to get our teachers to realise how important this is because ...
when I was doing SARs for my programme area leader nobody told me how we would use
this information and that's when the cynicism set in. But . . what I'm trying to do is to tell .
to get our lecturers to realise that this is important. This informs the way we move forward
over the next academic year. It informs OfSTED as well. This is how ... this is what
OfSTED .... this is OfSTED's starting point. When they look at this, it's really important. So
that's it. The SAR [...] everything feeds into the SAR doesn't it? [...] Stage 1 reviews, stage
2 reviews, [...] the induction process, your teaching and learning process and your students
do their questionnaires ... so ... all that feeds into it. Your mid-year review feeds into it, and
course meetings feed into it.

I think we're getting there now. That ... staff are actually doing it ... not so much because
they've been told to do it, but because actually it's pretty useful and you can look back and
say, 'Yeah! We have done that. We have moved forward on that and it has been useful or it
hasn't. We can learn from that for next time.

PB/1 – 05, programme manager

This manager's changed role has altered his perception of the significance of completing certain documentation, leading to attempts to dissuade his course team from adopting a familiar but feared cynicism.

Indeed, he expresses a desire to dissuade his team from the adopting an analysis of the place and significance of paperwork similar to one he has at different points in our conversation expressed, namely that time spent on paperwork is time taken away from the teacher's main role – teaching. His response also echoes points made earlier about governance – it is the inner world of practitioners that has become the battleground. The preference is for course teams to comply with paperwork not as a requirement, but because they share his changed view of it being useful. He is inviting a shift in disposition away from compliance to one of conviction.

The culture produced by quality paperwork opens a space between teacher and manager. As such it impacts upon mutual credibility. A manager's desire to assume the position of 'first amongst equals' is compromised within a regime that requires her/him to struggle for the heart-and-soul commitment to meaningless paperwork. Thus paperwork determines professional priorities (Castleton 2000) creating a chasm between manager and teacher. Teachers remain in direct contact with and primarily concerned about learners, quality as embodied and aspired to. Managers share these commitments, but are also taken up with the demands of quality. They are more caught up, and less able to resist the demands of quality.

quality ... is somewhere else

So there's definitely the theory over here. There's the philosophy over here and then there's the reality, which is way over there somewhere else, around quality.

HW/1– 03, college manager

Well .. I think it's different what you as a tutor think is quality and what you're being asked for. And I think what you're being asked for is paperwork. That's all. That you've got to show that you're achieving quality. Whereas from my perspective, it's what the student is getting from the teaching. And the paper work doesn't provide it ... in my opinion. It might help, but it's not the be all and end all. Whereas I think you feel a lot of pressure at the places you work to produce paperwork to prove quality. And I don't think paperwork proves the quality.

MM/2– 10, teacher

But for me quality, no, none of it is paperwork

VC/3 – 06, teacher

From my perspective ... [quality] is what the student is getting from the teaching [...] well, for some people it may just be that they can gain confidence and they can participate in a discussion in the classroom without feeling really shy or embarrassed. And I think it takes quite a while for some people. Well, it can be over a class, but I think it's more noticeable over a term. Because some days people can be changeable, better at doing something one day and not having such a good day the next day.

[but with the demands of quality] You've got to, you've got to show that you've had achievement in your class ... and, in some ways, with an ILP you can show small, you can show small achievements, because really, I think that what your manager wants is that everybody's ... you've got a high level of achievement on your ILP. So in some ways that makes you decrease ... the ... down into small achievements for people who can't maybe progress into the next level.

MM/2– 10, teacher

This sense of learning as of value only when it is incrementally acquisitive has implications for the extent to which learners' progress over a longer term is understand. It also creates difficulty for learners whose learning typically does not follow an incrementally ascending pattern. Participants make reference to learners who seem to plateau at a certain point. Within *Skills for Life* there is no scope for developing pedagogies that would enable practitioners to begin the theorise about this learning. And while often this was more typically the case with learners who had learning difficulties and disabilities, it was also an issue of consideration for ESOL learners unfamiliar with formal education.

The tick-box mentality of quality and curriculum had further compromises for teachers. Several colleagues have commented on the potential source of tension between the

standardised core-curricular documents and student-centred teaching. Newly qualified teachers particularly find it difficult to reconcile these two apparent contradictions between being student-led while adhering to a curriculum that is predefined. However, there are further dilemmas involved here. The accreditation attached to *Skills for Life* may cover any aspect of ALLN at the appropriate level. If teachers are required to reach targets, if they are to ensure that enough learners in their classes gain qualification, they have to cover the whole curriculum at a specified level whether or not the learner requires it. If there is ambiguity here it may rest around the notion of 'whether the learner needs it or not'. A deficit notion of the ALLN stipulates what an adult needs to know at a particular level, and concludes that any adult who does not have the policy defined knowledge is in deficit and needs to be filled.

> *The curriculum [...] gave so much importance, not to methodology, but to the syllabus. This is what you have to cover, and yes, you are a professional, and just like a teacher of Business Studies, or whatever, this is your body.*
>
> *That detracted a little bit from beginning with the learner, analysing the learner, the needs of the learner, which we'd always begun from. Instead it began with what is the level of the learner? Right they are an E2. This is the syllabus for E2.*
>
> *The boards have to base the exams on the whole curriculum. It means that you are teaching to the whole of the curriculum, which might not be 100% relevant to each learner.*

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EC/3 – 08, college manager

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A learner-centred notion implies that a particular learner may only need selected aspects of the curriculum. What drives teaching and learning is not a pre-defined body of knowledge, but the specific knowledge a learner may need. The core-curricular documents have a specific construct of learners and their lives, defining what it is necessary for them to know. There is then a mismatch between student-centred teaching and target-driven accreditation that results in learners being taught what they do not need to know to meet the requirements of the accreditation rather than their

learning needs. This is a distinction between different views of language. As one research participant explained, it depends on whether we consider language as a means to an end or an end in itself. Experienced teacher may reconcile contradiction with greater ease, inexperienced teachers may be less jaded about what's required from them. In either case a compromise is involved.

defining the territory

In this concluding section I draw on and extend the discourses above to more explicitly outline practitioners' definitions of quality.

Practitioners' perceptions of quality seem most closely aligned to everyday rather than to expert definitions. That is, quality is given the status of a mist-like abstract and aspired to object, that defies explicit capture. It is treated as having an inherent value. This is the notion of quality about which practitioners are most passionate. They offer abstract and aspired to quality uncontrolled, heart-and-soul commitment. My suggestion is that the audit culture in connecting the work of the organisation to the inner world of the individual has indeed brought this emotional dimension into a professional arena. But practitioners do not always do with their inner self what policy dictates. And so the commitment to quality as a valuable abstraction is in many ways an assertive non-compliance, a form of resistance, in-as-much as a reference to this notion of quality places practitioners' perceptions outside the strictly prescribed confines of the quality culture.

The status given to quality in practitioners' discourse is an aspect of how the inflected meanings invested in language are a site of contestation and struggle. Quality as demanded is accepted by research participants as part of the 'furniture of

accountability'. There is no sense of professionals wanting to preserve their secret garden of privileged esoteric knowledge. Indeed, it is doubtful that ALLN can ever identify a time of being able to claim exclusive ownership over a specialised occupational knowledge terrain. The *Skills for Life* agenda has enhanced the status of teaching and managing ALLN. The anti-professional stance that characterised aspects of pre-1999 ALLN has become something else. It has given way to a newly defined policy-driven professionalism the full meaning of which is still unfolding (Dennis 2002). In the discourse of the practitioner, notions of quality were more immediately grounded in learner experience. There was an aspect of the demands of quality that all participants echoed agreement with - the emphasis on student learning. The notion that observation was focussed not on teacher as performer, but on the learners' experience was welcomed. Student-centeredness - appropriated by the quality discourses - has a long-standing tradition in ALLN and is something to which teachers and managers make reference. The student-centeredness of the practitioner connects to liberal and radical values that ALLN practitioners have traditionally sought to embed in practice. There were no direct references to but there were some distant echoes of community and radicalism. And the implicit purposes of ALLN was equated with improved quality of life.

The vocabularies and sensibilities associated with quality enable the mobilisation of passion and commitment for purposes not initially intended. They do not inevitably generate greater commitment to New Labour's *Skills for Life* project. Practitioners' capacity to retain a critical stance is maintained. There is compromise and there is cost attached to this compromise. It was difficult at times to disengage emotionally from how practitioners spoke about themselves and their work.

Managerial vocabularies have created the possibility for the re-alignment of organisational identities in contradictory ways that both challenge and calcify existing hierarchies. The goals of the institutions, the life chances and aspirations of the individual are closely entwined. In a high-stakes quality culture, one that research participants sometimes referred to as a blame culture, the fate of an individual is indeed altered by the outcome of quality. Quality is the mechanism through which this alignment of fate (and not only or always identity) is justified. There is also a sense of quality and *Skills for Life* having provided government sponsorship for commitments that

led to, rather than emerged from, government policy. Practitioners have hijacked the institutional space opened up by *Skills for Life* to fuel their own commitments. There is a sense of practitioners as sponsored rather than colonised.

ALLN teachers and managers welcome quality when it is a vague abstraction that roughly equates to 'doing things well and with integrity'. They have 'jumped on board' the delivery of *Skills for Life* policy as this seems to offer opportunity to achieve the kind of quality to which they aspire. It is when quality becomes something embodied that perceptions shift dramatically. There is mismatch. The desirability of quality, the aspirations embedded in quality open up to reveal a series of professional tensions and compromises. It is as if quality becomes an entirely different entity, one that generated different commitments. Practitioners accepted in principle the accountabilities associated with quality. They appreciated the opening up of the occupational terrain through specification of learner entitlements. The experience of responding to the demands of quality was rejected as a distortion. There is the insistence of a disconnection between what is recorded and what is experienced. In practitioners' perception the quality of ALLN resides in the pedagogic encounter and not the textualised virtual organisational reality that surrounds it. It is possible to satisfy quality demands through compliance with paperwork while the key relationships that determine quality remain unchecked. The quality that teachers and managers aspire to is at odds with the quality they experience, even if this seems to satisfy the quality demands that are being made of them. This may be taken in two directions: the demands of quality at times conspired against the capacity of practitioners to do a good job. Or: the quality regime – satisfied with superficial production of good paperwork – is seeking to locate quality in the wrong places.

five: an unsettling, dangerous knowing

'all meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship.' (Macmurray, 1957:15).)

ALLN teachers and managers value quality. They have found a decade of riding the crest of the *Skills for Life* policy wave (Hodgson *et al* 2007) exhilarating and have offered a heart and soul commitment to working in partnership with New Labour to achieve policy objectives. Practitioners have been deliberative in this process, hijacking the momentum and resource attached to *Skills for Life* to achieve not short-term policy but long-term purposes to which they aspire.

But the quality valued by ALLN practitioners does not extend to an acceptance of the rage for accountability which often conspires against their capacity to offer aspired to quality. Something of this sentiment is echoed in the statement 'meeting the target but missing the point' (Hodgson *et al* 2007). The statement suggests that it is possible to meet the external requirements placed upon organisations by the quality regime, while the actual needs, desires and possibilities of learners remain unmet. The demands of quality may be satisfied but the quality to which practitioners aspire would seem to require something more or different. Equally, developing practice that creatively institutionalises the aspirations and needs of real learners would be to the detriment of an organisation's quality profile. There were several instances where research participants exemplified this view, neatly separating the limitations of quality as

demanded from the embodied quality they experience which may be distinguished from the quality to which they aspired. It is possible to offer a figurative illustration of the tensions the define quality. What practitioners aspire to pulls against what is demanded of practitioners by policy. What is textualised through self-representation or in policy documents stands in stark contrast to what is actually experienced. *Fig iv* offers an illustration of the tensions that emerge from a careful reading of the data generated throughout this study. At no point do participants reference tension surrounding quality in direct ways. They rather discuss their aspirations and frustrations, fears and successes, actions, biographies and ideas. Through analysis contradictions emerge that may be placed in relation to each other.

At its most benign participants describe the inconsequential nature of the demands of quality: 'learning would have taken place without it' *(GC/1 – 02)*. But this changes subtlety to become more critical: 'learning has taken place in spite of it' *(GC/1 02*. Practitioners understand, accept and are prepared to accommodate the legitimate accountabilities of quality. This is part of a negotiated compromise. Practitioners provide the quality regime with the paperwork and the achievement targets it needs in order to create sufficient space for themselves to provide learners with the provision they need (Hodgson *et el* 2007).

At other times the demands of quality felt less benign, more problematic. Practitioners offered several examples of the quality regime as detrimental to the achievement of the quality to which they aspire. The translatory to-ing and fro-ing between policy and practice is a time-consuming distraction. Practitioners are caught up in enormous energy spent understanding quality, then working out what it means in their situation and how they can comply with its demands while retaining professional integrity. The textualisations of quality demands that practitioners re-create ALLN, pedagogy and organisational life as objects that can be contained, recorded, measured and compared across time and space. The mechanisms and processes through which this is achieved require compromise and lead to distortion and betrayal.

quality: four tensions

aspirational

romantic

It's everything. None of it would mean anything without it.

campaigning

A commitment to Skills for Life is a commitment to Skills for Life learners

abstract

textual

Q: Does your job include a quality driven responsibility
A: Do you mean paperwork?

embodied

critical

When we look at quality we are looking at the funders' agenda and the LSC want success rates

demanded

fig iv

quality: four tensions

i) quality as aspiration - *romantic*

Quality is something that is defined by what it is not (e.g. paperwork). It does not take a fixed form, but is referenced as 'meaningful' and something practitioners feel passionate about. It is echoed in commitments to student-centeredness. The only consistent feature of quality in this romantic dimension is that it is desirable. In this quartile 'quality' is an uncontrolled, self-referenced individualised imaginary ALLN space. The tension surrounding quality – its demands and its embodiment are imploded to create ways of working that practitioners feel represent their professional purposes. Students gaining confidence recognised in indistinct ways and observed over an unspecified period of time, informal unrecorded discussions about teaching and meaningful paperwork are articulations of the connection between the quality to which practitioners aspire as an assertive or negotiated non-compliance with the demands of policy and the abstract transcendental notion quality as 'worthwhile' work.

ii) quality as abstract - *textual*

The textualisations of quality as a policy construct present organisational life as adhering to a standardised linearity. Implementation is understood as following billiard-ball like cause equals effect correlations free from professional sensibility or disposition. The textualisations of quality – those produced by government sponsored and practitioner led sources – add to rather then diffuse ambiguity. This quartile 'textual' represents the connection between the demands of quality which although presented with unambiguous bullet-point brevity, full understanding of how to deliver what the regime requires remains at a tantalising distance. This is a Kafkaesque nightmare as practitioners can see with clarity, and might well for a fleeting moment reach, but can never fully grasp quality. Quality in this quartile - its understanding or embodiment - is

never achieved with finality. Organisations are graded as good, but there is ambiguity regarding precisely what that 'goodness' pertains to and an insecure 'precariousness' saturates how it might be maintained.

iii) quality as demanded by policy – *critical*

The demands of quality are a time-consuming distraction that translate organisational life into administratively convenient categories. The needs of learners are displaced and the professional judgement of practitioners subordinated. Practitioners treat the demands of quality e.g. paperwork, statistical analysis, adherence to mimetic templates as a trade-off. They provide organisational structures with the information it requires to protect a semi-autonomous space that offers learners the provision they need. This quartile 'critical' represents how practitioners experience the demands of quality when these are clearly at odds with that to which they aspire. This is an over-determinsitic quality quartile. There is little scope for exploration in this space as practitioners simply give the LSC what they want: success rates, SARs, observation reports, good retention figures, lesson plans, ILPs and so forth. These documents, quality proxies, are viewed with cynicism. None of them actually prove quality. They are plentiful, satisfy auditors but are also meaningless. The real life of an organisation happen outside and beyond these documentation proxies.

iv) quality as embodied - *campaigning*

Practitioners hijack the momentum and resource attached to policy to achieve purposes to which they aspire. The commitment is not to Skills for Life policy but to Skills for Life learners. There are glimmering shards here of the barefoot-professionalism that pre-dates Skills for Life. Policy merely creates a particular environment and resources

that in some instances practitioners are able to mobilise to meet what they see as the needs and entitlements of their learners. This quartile 'campaigning' represents how practitioners embody - make real - their quality aspirations. It connects the actual practices teachers and managers engage in – the play-offs and strategic negotiations - to precipitate the quality to which they aspire. It is narrated in practitioners' ALLN biographies as they reminisce about they have struggled to become 'rooted at the centre' of organisations. This is a desirable space for the controlled imagination. In this space professionals trace careful and expert steps between individualism and determinism.

quality – a discourse explored and exemplified

In chapter one, I asked 'How do practitioners define, achieve and maintain quality?' I have elaborated upon this question by suggesting that quality implied walking a tightrope (Stronach 2002) between policy demand and professional aspiration. I traced the beginnings of *Skills for Life* from imagined space (Hamilton and Hillier 2007) to a rigidly defined curricular area pivotal to the nation's economic success. Several competing temporal discourses around quality established its current manifestation in the CIF as an externally authoritative rather than a definitive version. The more recent quality reformulation of the FfE, changes the specific content but not overall approach to quality. My detailed reading of the CIF identified a policy effect which although intended to guide practitioners in how to place learners at the heart of provision had the consequence of displacing learners' needs, aspirations and potentialities. The demands of quality and its textualisations also had the effect of subordinating the professional judgement of ALLN practitioners. With this theoretical backdrop I approached research participants with critique in mind. Conversations offered varying positions in relation to quality, echoing and adding to the multiple discourses identified in chapter one. What has been most surprising is the enthusiasm with which practitioners have jumped on board the *Skills for Life* policy wave. What emerges is the localised groundedness of their notions of quality.

quality – a discourse explored and exemplified

concept	definition	associated with	example from data	commentary
abstract	Quality as a vague, attractive and desirable state not amenable to explicit bullet-point definition.	the 19th C artisan produced artefacts carefully crafted from hand selected materials paying close attention to both form and function.	'The furniture of accountability changes but the abiding principles of quality have remained the same.'	The insignia quality is a powerful condensation symbol, around which practitioners wrap their sense of what it means to develop and maintain a desirable professional self.
enlightenment	Quality as improvement. It is a never ending journey, an attitude, rather than a definable point of arrival.	The miracle of the post-War Japanese car Industry. Maximising output means limiting resource input and the insistence on zero-defect.	'What quality means changes persistently as what was the new big thing very quickly becomes a norm. Then the next big thing comes along.'	Quality requires practitioners remain open to the whimsical redefinition of policy requirements. The why and how of education is subservient to constant invocation to do it better.
industrial	Quality as control over processes of mass production. Components need to be interchangeable, hence emphasis on precise specification.	Migratory terminology of neo-liberal managerialist discourse resulting in uncomfortable semiotic couplings e.g. between customer / learner	'I mean if we taught to meet our students expectations or indeed desires, then a lot of what we do would be done very differently.'	Quality opens the 'secret garden' of professionalism. The pedagogic process is demystified and learner entitlements made explicit. Students as customers have their experience taken more seriously. The role of the teacher is downgraded that that of technician.
campaigning	Quality as the tacit grammar of professional practice. Unstated creativity of practitioners working in marginalised institutional spaces.	Hallmark of pre-Skills for Life practice: student-centred learning. Professionalism was based on developing creative ways of working with 'un-teachable' learners.	'A commitment to skills for life is a commitment to learners rather than policy.'	Practitioners hijack the momentum and resource attached to Skills for Life to achieve purposes to which they aspire and have long-standing commitments.
demanded	Quality as policy: 'Skills for Life' attempts to ensure ALLN provision is equipped to meet the needs of the economy.	New infrastructure that followed Moser Report and ceremonial renaming of professional territory.	'When we look at quality, we are looking at the funders' agenda and the LSC want success rates. That's the be all and end all.'	Practitioners accept legitimate accountabilities. They are exhilarated and exhausted by Skills for Life. But the time-consuming distractions of quality threaten their attempts to offer worthwhile provision that meets learners needs.
textualised	Quality as object, achieved by practitioners' adhering to standardised mimetic templates. Akin to a Weberian 'ideal type'. Embodied experience is obliged to confirm to a fictionalisation.	The new Skills for Life infrastructure is textually mediated. It is an extensive series of - exemplifying, (re)modelling, contextualising - documents with which practitioners have to engage.	'[To improve quality] I put some very initial changes into the system. I insisted on lesson plans, provided staff with a file in which everything that they should have as a professional should be in there to enable them to teach better.'	Through the CIF, quality mathmatizes organisational life. It is re-written as if it adheres to billiard-ball like cause-and-effect correlations unhampered by professional sensibilities.

fig v

They see *Skills for Life* as affording the continuation of long-term commitments that pre-date this current policy phase, commitments that will quite possibly remain firmly in place once *Skills for Life* policy has changed beyond recognition. A summary of the discourses around quality discussed in this research and mapped to participants' own perceptions is outlined in *fig v*.

The research is couched within work undertaken by colleagues into the impact of policy on the Learning and Skills Sector. From this work I have assumed – with little direct referencing - processes of mediation, translation and policy levers (Coffield *et al* 2007, Steer *et al* 2006, Finlay *et al* 2007, Spours *et al* 2007, Hodgson *et al* 2006). My focus has been exclusively on quality as a pulling together of a series of policy levers. The impact of which is diffused by the specifics of particular organisations and professional sensibilities. I develop an understanding of quality as a policy attempt to achieve particular changes in how organisations are managed. Quality has also provided practitioners with sponsorship. Practitioners are aware of the absurdities and compromises that policy implies. They seemingly reconcile these in exchange for achievements afforded elsewhere. The pursuance of *Skills for Life* has been exhausting and exhilarating.

In this final chapter I draw conclusions about quality based on my data analysis and open a series of possible explorations for practitioners, policy-makers and researchers. As a practitioner these ideas are at times unsettling. An inevitable consequence. Engaged study invites critique; to critique is to bring into crisis (Barthes 1986: 319).

control and imagination

In her ethnographic study of literacy education in post-Apartheid South Africa, Kell (2003) offers an analysis of on the one hand, schooled formal literacy which exists as a uni-dimensional autonomous phenomenon invested with considerable power to

change people, communities and national economies and, on the other hand, the literacy practices embedded in peoples' lives, where powerful distributive networks operate to counteract literacy hurdles enabling people to achieve a full and functional life. With the former described as vertical literacy and the latter defined as horizontal, Kell theorises what happens in literacy education programmes when the two versions come into contact with each other. She achieves this by reference to Wilson (1999) and Bhabha (1994) who develop 'third-space theory'. Here the argument is that once the informal horizontal literacy of learners' life world comes into contact with the vertical literacy of formal institutions what emerges is a third-space literacy – a unique composite of the vernacular and the institutional, with its own defining features. This third-space lies in between the two constructs, or perhaps overlaps both and allows teachers and learners to appropriate from each domain. This third-space is a creative space which denaturalises both constructs. It offers the potential for the emergence of critical literacy, meta-learning or reflective literacy in which practitioners and learners carefully and consciously move between the two, exploring boundaries and defining features of each space.

With reference to South African literacy education, Kell introduces another dimension that re-theorises the relationship between domain one – vertical literacy - and domain two – horizontal literacy. She refers to a phenomenon of Literacy as sign (simulacrum) that interposes between the two domains, creating a barrier to the emergence of a third-space. This she suggests might be equated to a 'virtual' literacy. This virtual literacy space is a generic socially-empty literacy simulacrum that negates the possibility of critical thought.

Kell's theorisation is of interest here because it seems to capture something of the relationship between the polarities that thread through aspects of quality and the effect that they have on practice. Before considering the implications of this research for policy, practice and knowledge generation I want to sketch some of the ways in which quality and its institutionalised definitions interact with the embodiment of quality to create a virtual or ritualised quality space that prohibits the emergence of aspired-to quality practice.

teaching and learning

ALLN Learning in *Skills for Life* policy is conceived of in uni-dimensional incremental terms. Learners' progress is understood as a vertical laddering destined for pure functionality. 'Pure functionality' is the core-curricular referenced, distilled literacy in which being literate is conceived of as a fixed singularly defined point of arrival, a threshold unrelated to the sociality of an individual's life or circumstances. The policy aspiration for the ALLN learner is the capacity to 'function'. There is limited opportunity here for a literacy that connects to individual lives, communities or cultures with the hope of being able to do something more or something other than fit into an allotted position within a pre-existing social order. There is an implication that the socially reciprocal relationships generated by vernacular literacies (Barton and Hamilton 2002) are non-functioning or dysfunctional. Perhaps they may be viewed as such because they lull communities into believing that the inability to engage with text independently and in policy-sanctioned ways does not place them, their community and the economy at an enormous disadvantage. Is it possible that micro-level literacy brokerages ensure the full meaning of low levels of literacy is never fully understood by the individual. The interconnectedness of ALLN and the economy is never directly experienced. It is only perceptible on a macro-level as part of an intricate weaving through of other indicators. Literacy brokerages enable those who do not develop desirable communicative attributes to manage otherwise unmanageable lives. Perhaps non-functioning, or dysfunctional vernacular literacies also create potential for learners to do something other than fit into the pre-allotted spaces that functional literacy would determine for them. I am suggesting here that the ALLN of *Skills for Life* does not only sanction technical approaches to encoding and decoding text, but seeks to develop distinct communicative practices that ensure learners assume preferred identities, dispositions and contributions to the existing social and economic order.

The notion of a uni-dimensional vertical literacy is institutionalised through the core-curricular documents, through the centrality given to success and achievement rates,

through the ways learning is recorded in individual learning plans. Literacy learning may be understood as more tubor-like than ladder-like. I am here suggesting that literacy development, once positioned in the real lives of learners - outside an institutional frame - is informal, based on interest, curiosity, requirement and opportunity. Its development is context-driven and therefore randomised and eclectic.   It does not follow the pre-structured allowances of curriculum, but is in tune with the necessities of social circumstances. Reconciling ALLN learning as connected to cognition and capability, in contrast to ALLN learning as driven by culture and circumstance, is a formidable task. Research participants revealed that their learners seem to 'plateau' at a certain level. This was a consistently referred to metaphor by research participants. Learners seem to continue learning, but not in the acquisitive way policy determines. Sometimes ALLN learning seems more attuned to developing a student identity, developing the use of skills in different contexts, or sometimes maintaining skills. Practitioners spoke of their perceived need for provision that moves in multiple directions, connecting and disconnecting to different subjects, objects, motivations and institutional frames at will. This contrast between - the real students practitioners work with and the idealised student constructed in policy - causes considerable tension for practitioners. Tensions which are at times expressed in fundamental, moralistic 'as a human being' terms. The choice practitioners confront is quite clear: adapting provision to meet the particular requirements of real students would impact negatively on retention and achievement rates.

Practitioners offered several examples of skewing provision to meet the demands of quality even if this distorted their own professional judgement of what was required.

Auditors expect the aims and objectives of individual lessons to be clearly signalled at the start of each class and for lessons to follow formal structured delivery. Practitioners spoke of deductive approaches to language learning that encouraged learners to arrive at overall themes through guided practice, enabling learners to make the sideways shift from peripheral to full membership of a community of practice. Policy constructs motivations for numeracy learning as based on the needs of practical day-to-day activities. The core-curriculum centres on the notion that learners are driven by a

desire to manage everyday numbers with greater ease. Research into learner motivation suggests that they are rather driven by curiosity and challenge, a strong desire to prove wrong the idea of themselves as incapable. Understanding maths, 'being good with numbers', for many learners is a multi-layered semiotic process. It seems to symbolise the rediscovery a positive learner identity. The day-to-day practicalities of quantitative numeracy are of little significance. For many, the interest in maths is with often quite abstract and challenging concepts rather than with everyday calculations.

A quality culture that conceives of and is only able to recognise learning drawing on an acquisitive metaphor is at odds with the embodied transformative profiles of actual students and prohibits the development of practitioners' own theorisations about ALLN learning.

Teachers are seduced by the demands of quality into committing 'epistemological suicide' (Taylor-Webb 2007). Their professional knowledge, endemic and therefore event-structured, episodic and context-determined (Carter 1990, Elbaz 1983), is not immediately codifiable or generalisable. Accountability systems are only able to recognise what is visible or measurable. To comply with performance-based accountabilities teachers have to provide evidence of their knowing. They translate their experience into the codified knowledge categories demanded as evidence of quality. Through quality – what and how practitioners know is subordinated. Teachers and managers trust 'what they may not question' above that which they 'actually experience' (Cooper 2002b).

Arguably what this achieves is ALLN learning as simulacrum. A ritualised processional virtual ALLN that prohibits the development of appropriate pedagogic theorisation of the 'why' and 'how' of ALLN development. Literacy as monolith subsumes literacy as horizontal organic social practice. If learning is incremental, the plateau is an unusual occurrence that has something to do with the cognitive limitations of an individual

student. If learning is not understood in such uni-dimensional terms this creates a broader possibility of theory that enables teachers to understand the myriad ways in which learners learn and devise appropriate strategies to accommodate these. The slight tincture of literacy development as associated with intellectual capacity – a persistent undercurrent in adult provision (Sticht 2006) - cuts across a strong tradition within FE teaching – namely 'the capacity to take learners whom no one else wants to teach, who bring complicated, chaotic lives and damaged learner identities and through sheer hard work, through the creation of mutually respectful inclusive relationships restore them as human beings who see themselves as able to learn' (Coffield *et al* 2007:724). What the metaphor of ALLN learning as acquisitive, incremental, vertical and progressive does is to allow the notion that learners have an intellectual limit which they may reach at some point. It excludes and pathologises learners who do not develop in the vertical manner inscribed into the core-curricular documents. It also forestalls the development of theoretical understanding of what post-compulsory tutors have for some time known about how to work with and restore a more secure identity for learners designated as 'un-teachable'.

mimetic templates: standardisation vs. excellence

In part the marginalised obscurity of ALLN practice pre-*Skills for Life* may have nurtured a space of professional freedom and experimentation. In writing a history of ALLN Hamilton and Hillier (2006) analyse how a newly-emerging curricular area, an 'imagined space' established itself through defining its boundaries, specifying what it stood for, its methodologies and ways of working to achieve its aims. Guided by the challenge of finding pedagogies attuned to the needs of people who had not succeeded as children led to concepts and approaches based on student-centeredness, individualised learning, open learning, family learning, one-to-one provision, publishing student writing, individual learning plans. These hall-marks of pre-*Skills for Life* ALLN provision are not without their own tensions and contradictions. The area of work is now

and always has been contested. And yet aspects of these experimental pedagogies, for example student-centred learning, have been taken up by policy rhetoric, widely diffused and now envelope compulsory and post-compulsory education. Historically they are most closely associated with ALLN. Student-centredness, for example, is something practitioners talk about as a defining and abiding characteristic of their pedagogy. They claim ownership over it and express cynicism about its policy appropriations as mere lip service. James and Biesta *et al* (2007) trace the development of student-centred pedagogy in further education as emerging from work with a particular group of long-term unemployed learners by practitioners with a radical agenda. In their sketched genealogy of 'student-centred' as a concept they argue that a notion that was initially developed to apply to a particular context was taken up by the Manpower Services and denatured. The result was a pedagogy - student-centredness – which retained form, but not content.

A precise genealogy of student-centred pedagogy is a compelling study. But I must place this exploration aside as of incidental interest for now. The point I am pursuing here is that without the specific sponsorship of government policy, ALLN practitioners devised and developed pedagogic approaches in experimental and creative response to the situations in which they found themselves. My suggestion is that in part this pedagogic flourishing was made possible by virtue of their invisibility. Able to operate without the constantly evaluative glare of audit, practice develops based on the 'real' workings of institutions. The grammar of everyday professional ALLN practice, once beyond the tyrannical exposure of transparency, narrate their own revelatory truths, the detailed evidence of which survives in professional memory and forms the basis for the expansive quality which connects quality as aspiration to the vague and attractive transcended quality which drives practitioners in the desire to do a worthwhile job. I tentatively assert this possibility on the observation that the defining hall-marks of pre-*Skills for Life* practice, learner-centeredness, open learning, family learning, individual learning plans, despite having undergone several mutations - retain contemporary resonance. This is more than the straw-like construction of 'a stereotyped and demonised' policy present held in opposition to 'a visionary and idealised' unincorporated professional past (Clarke and Newman, 1997). After all, as several research participants advised me while proudly retelling their professional biography, we have always had inspections, and if they were not inspecting for

quality ... what were they looking for? And even if the dimensions drawn upon to justify a position are open to question, practitioners unanimously agreed that *Skills for Life* has broadened and deepened their capacity to deliver an agenda in which they have always believed. The point I am making is an inflected echoing of O'Neill's reminder that good practice is 'possible only if institutions are allowed some margin for self-governance ...' (O'Neill 2002).

In talking with teachers and managers, it is clear that a sharply-focused, high-visibility quality culture creates exhilarating opportunity, while resting on fear, anxiety and hesitation.

A manager may question whether he wants (while others refuse) promotion. Both teachers joked about feeling there was little choice regarding professional direction. There is a sense that 'blame' is never far away as any department is 'only as good as its next set of results' James *et al* (2007). Comments about quality are remarkably more critical when the tape-recorded interview becomes an informal conversation between colleagues. What one manager said when walking down a corridor was surprisingly different to what she said when seated formally in a room as we engage with the questions I have prepared. A manager with whom I have worked quite closely hinted at the possibility that she could not talk to me, with thinly disguised irony she wondered aloud whether I noticed her silences, her inability to speak. An experienced and successful manager listened insistently to my reassurances of confidentiality and emphasised that his views should not be interpreted as a comment on behalf of, or indeed as commentary about the organisation for which he work. Teachers and managers frequently expressed emotions of fear, anxiety and jaded frustration about getting things right and about the security of their current role.

There is a strong sense in which the wave that has engulfed the area since 1999 is on the wane (Hodgson *et al* 2007). Funding for discrete adult provision is being reduced and the sector is beginning to experience cuts. There is striking instability in the field with high staff turnover. Jameson and Hillier (2008) describe a sector with mainly part-time marginalized staff, where morale is low. Staff spend their time protecting the existing learning culture from external damage and habitually work 'underground'. They are routinely engaged in working well beyond their job descriptions. This is the embodiment of quality as it connects to the quality to which practitioners aspire. It signals the

strategies practitioners adopt, within a restrictive quality terrain to enliven the quality to which they aspire. I trace the lineage of this quality to the campaigning quality of the barefoot-professionalism that pre-dates *Skills for Life*.

The demands of quality create by design, or by default, a performance task-focused environment in which coercive managerial behaviour is the norm. Hitting performance targets at times takes over, that is it subsumes, teaching, managing and learning. *Skills for Life* departments become target-hitting enterprises. The distorting extremities of this are echoed in an anecdote offered by a presenter at an NRDC conference. She recounts that during a tutorial a student confesses to severe personal circumstances that made her continued study impossible: she had was experiencing the breakdown of a mental health diagnosis. Her tutor's reaction is bizarre and emotionally displaced. He initially expresses sympathy, perfunctory and polite, but Instead of attending to her needs for help, empathy, guidance, support, encouragement with working out how to interrupt formal study without interrupting her learning, he attempts to persuade her to complete a qualification in order to make sure a target-bearing opportunity is not lost from his programme. Quality and success in this exchange were wrapped around the performance-indicating target. The actual experience of the learner, the worthwhileness of the pedagogic exchange, was an incidental side issue. There is extreme pressure to meet targets. This is the most critical quality quartile, illustrated in *fig v*. It is an example of what can happen when the demands of quality are embodied.

I am forwarding a quite specific argument here. As quality achieves its ontological moment it creates a climate of excitement and fear, opportunity and intimidation, determination and anxiety. Practitioners are persuaded, bullied, threatened, seduced or bribed into compliance. What the sector achieves is the reward of standardisation through adherence to the safety of quality frameworks (Bell and Taylor 2005).

The general warm feeling of quality as benign, related to 'doing things well and with integrity' amounts to the institutionalisation of a series of organisational myths. These myths are built around policy definitions of who further education learners are and how their needs, desires and potentialities take institutional form; myths about the role literacy and learning play in a globalised economy; wrapped around other myths about quality as untainted by professional self-interest or political expediency. The ritualised quality process results in a tendency towards homogeneity in organisational forms and practices. Organisations responsible for the delivery of *Skills for Life* become

structurally and cognitively similar over time. Indeed the paperwork associated with *Skills for Life* amount to a form of branding as diverse contexts and workplaces all seem to exhibit the same furnishings through curricular documents, wall displays, boxed files of initial and diagnostic assessments, all featuring the DfES *Skills for Life* logo and colouring. Re-branded on a cyclical basis to signal a changed policy regime or a new agency. The rolling-out of good practice, the proliferation of mimetic templates, the sharing of good practice equates to an adoption of defined at-a-distance models which become embedded within local situations.

This climate of minutely-defined quality frameworks demands quality as standardisation. If creative practice takes place, it is a marginalized, obscured back-stage activity. Through quality the exploratory possibilities of ALLN pedagogies is limited. There is little scope for nomadic wonderings, imagination or creativity as the territory becomes pre-mapped and practice traces well-trodden lines to externally defined objectives. It is quite possible that policy proliferation (Coffield and Edward 2009) fixes colleges in a state of perpetual fire-fighting. Individual teachers and managers, course and management teams become taken up in intervention processes designed to mitigate the effects of negative change (Biesta and James *et al* 2007). I am not at this point asserting the self-justifications of practitioners who claim exclusive rights over 'a genuine concern for or understanding of students' interest'. My suggestion is that the constriction of demanded quality as it becomes part of the localised ecology of a college or course team creates a climate in which the needs, interests and possibilities of learners is merely one consideration amongst several other competing considerations that determine what decisions are made. The punitive exposure of quality as demanded creates professionals who, in an act of survival, discipline themselves into adhering to the rigidities of policy. This leads to a risk averse learning culture, one that rewards standardisation, consistency, compliance and measurability (Bell and Taylor 2005).

I draw in this study to a conclusion that the demands of quality conspire against the capacity of ALLN professionals to develop practice that meets the needs, desires, and possibilities of learners. ALLN learning is defined as a narrow, functional, acquisitive

laddering. This is a restrictive metaphor which, sanctioned by policy and enforced through the demands of quality, precipitates its own truth. Practitioners translate their experience to create the evidence required of them and in so doing obscure - deliberately or unintentionally -the actuality of ALLN teaching, learning and managing.

The demands of quality conspire against the capacity of practitioners to do the job to which they aspire. This is an unsettling view with provocative ramifications for research, practice and policy. Never fully or directly articulated by research participants, it is a gently hinted at possibility. Participants spoke of quality in terms reminiscent of Cooper's (2002b) extended shadow narrative of Christian Anderson's fairy tale, the Emperor's New Clothes. Policy appropriation of student-centeredness is dismissed as lip service. Evidencing is argued as irrelevant and time-wasting. A senior manager's robust and authentically personal retelling of New Labour policy unexpectedly falters when describing the process of quality improvement which quite unexpectedly becomes 'a vulnerable and precarious' process of translation. Practitioners struggle to make their back-stage activity, the embodiment of their abstract notions of quality, visible and valued. A college manager highlights – with barely restrained emotionality - the discomfort of making compromises that question her integrity 'as a human being'. In different guises research participants express fear, anxiety and frustration at being unsure about how to complete documentation to the satisfaction of auditors. With little prompting, a programme manager notices the contradiction between a pre-defined curriculum and one centred around learners' lives.

the policy, practice, research nexus

Before asking and answering the specific question what *might* this study imply for policy, practice and research, I intend to explore another more abstract question: what *can* research of any sort imply for policy and practice.

Once I have explicated for a moment the complicated policy, research, practice nexus, I will move towards concrete concluding recommendations.

My analysis of quality in teaching and managing ALLN has centred on the gap between the normalisations and standardisations of policy in contrast to the messy, lived practices of those who are the ever shape-shifting targets of policy. I have noticed the incommensurability between what is known about practice and what policy determines practice is or must be. In part this is connected to studies of workplace learning in the context of shifting knowledge bases. Further education colleges are places where policy around learning is shaped and implemented. They are also workplaces, sites of professional learning.

Antonelli (1999) distinguishes between four different forms and processes of workplace knowledge each positioned at either end of overlapping axes. Tacit / codified knowledge cuts across internal / external knowledge. This typology sits alongside several other typologies and draws attention to the significance of how and where knowledge is generated; the means through which it is learnt; the in/formality of the pedagogic exchange; the doing, using and transfer of what is learnt; the ways in which it is codified, recombined, reorganised and applied; and the space / time distance between initial conception and site of application. Each has a defining impact on the status, value, usefulness and appropriateness of knowledge. Wallace and Poulson (2003) identify five different templates for generating knowledge. Each template is guided by distinct values towards the phenomenon under scrutiny, leading investigators to ask particular questions.

What this research - along side the growing body of research into ALLN policy and practice demonstrates is that the translation of policy into practice is mediated through variously-layered filtration processes: from how the policy is communicated to how it is interpreted by senior management teams; how it interacts with existing policy and the timing of its announcements and implementation; the localised cultures of

organisations and curricular teams and the in/action of everyone implicated in the process (Spours *et al* 2007, James and Biesta *et al* 2007). The distinctions made between policy and practice are no less than the distinctions to be made between research and practice or between research, policy and practice.

In this shifting nexus informal propositional beliefs about and attitudes towards the world overlap academic theory, which has been subject to extensive analysis, criticism and testing, which interacts with problem-solving and short-term policy knowledge.

The study has focussed on a particular aspect of policy, quality and its relationship to practice. I do not want to explore this further at this point. I want to focus instead on the relationship between research and practice.

research and practice

The Moser Report included 21 different recommendations regarding effective ways to improve the language, literacy and numeracy skills of the population. The final recommendation was for the establishment of a research programme to provide a systematic evidence basis for strategy. The NRDC is the outcome of this. In the years since its inception in 2002, the NRDC has generated a formidable body of substantial work into what had, prior to 2002, been a sparsely-researched and barely brought together field of study. The research published by the NRDC represents a community's willingness to pick up the gauntlet thrown down by Blunkett (Whitty 2007), namely to develop research that productively contributes to improving practice, informing government policy and creating a culture of research.

The development of a strong research culture – part of an ongoing process of professionalizing ALLN - implies an unproblematic and uni-directional relationship between research and practice. It hints at the notion that these two distinct domains - research and practice - although peopled by different communities, each with its own values, practice, activities and beliefs, are able to share working definitions of policy, ALLN, quality and knowledge. The line of communication between the two communities is imagined as top-down. The researcher – at the top - generates knowledge which the practitioner – at the lower end - transforms into practical use; hence the NRDC's tag line: generating knowledge and transforming it into practice.

research transforms practice

It is possible that research may indeed transform practice. I am here conceptualising the knowledge contribution of organisations such as the NRDC as part of an ongoing transformative project which redefines what it means to be a professional working in this area and adds considerably to the scope of information and knowledge with which practitioners are required to acquaint themselves. The burgeoning body of literature published by the NRDC now defines the occupational terrain. If professionalism is associated with being saturated by a highly-codified and esoteric body of knowledge, the NRDC is pivotal in enclosing the area through defining its epistemic boundaries.

As a manager of ALLN, I am excited by the work published by the NRDC. As a researcher with a curiosity about ALLN, I am acutely aware of its limitations and dangers. The NRDC may be reframed as part of a growing movement towards the hyper-technicist pedagogy (Gerwitz 2003) of 'evidence-based practice' and an ongoing aspect of managerialist discourses. Practitioners are increasingly required to adopt practices proven by research to bring about improved results. In this framing of the research / practice relationship, ALLN teachers and managers know that a failure to

meet targets is a failure to properly implement practices validated by research. It is something that may be remedied from within a regulatory framework (Hammersley 2005). This mis-casts teachers in the role of 'knowledge surrogate', practitioners of others' design (Taylor-Webb 2005). Teaching becomes a teacher-proof activity as teachers are called upon to act as conduit, as implementers of a scripted and standardised curriculum that has been tried, tested and proven effective elsewhere. Once knowledge of teaching transcends the concrete exchange between teachers and learners, the social politics of race, class, gender, language and ability are scripted out of pedagogy. They are treated as irrelevant. The intellectual and pastoral role that teachers play in the lives of their 'un-teachable' students, their heroic restoration of damaged learner identities, and the centrality of the pedagogic encounter is, through the technologisation of teaching, by-passed (Schoonmaker 2007).

This framing negates the intellectual authority of practitioners. The grammar of professional practice (Schön 2002) - improvised, spontaneous and internalised - does not yield to the immediacy of bullet-point brevity, or explicitly accessible criteria. Professional expertise is an embodied processional knowledge-in-action. It enables innumerable day-to-day judgements. The insistence of evidence-based practice potentially subordinates this knowledge, treating it as if it should be something other than what it is. The implicit and inflated conceit of evidence-based practice is that only knowledge generated by research - decontextualised, transferable and theoretical – is truly valid.

research 'overlaps' practice

If evidence-based practice has the capacity to diminish professional knowldge, it may also be implicated in the belittlement of research itself. The 'what works' mantra of evidence-based practice offers what research in the social sciences is unable to deliver. Research in the social sciences is quite unlike scientific research - its truths unfold

unexpectedly. They are partial, tentative and suggestive rather than equivocal. To understand what works in teaching and managing may require diverse and seemingly irrelevant questions. The scope of considerations regarding what may or may not influence practice is open to contestation. For example teaching letter writing successful may well benefit from an ethnographic study into the out-of-college communicative practices of learners and only unexpectedly fold back to classroom activity. Why something works may inspire thoughts and ideas about the place of context and content in teaching. An approach which stimulates one group of learners may confuse another. There are so few all times and all places generalisables in research in the social sciences. What works here might not work there. What worked then, might not work now. There is no future-proof knowledge. The hyper-active rapid liquidity of a global economy may require unpredictable and unexpected textual engagements. The invitation for research to inform education practice is an attempt to erase the 'privilege and precariousness of human sciences, caught as they are in the interstices of the mathematizable and the philosophical' (Lather 2006: 784). It also threatens to usher in a purpose, procedure, reporting and dissemination standardisation future for research in the social sciences (Ball 2001b: 267). There is, in the move towards evidence-based practice, an uncomfortable coupling that casts researchers in the role of purveyors of snake-oil - promising what they cannot deliver for a community that would pay a high price if it were to accept the gift.

And yet – as a researcher and practitioner, I maintain that research and practice may fruitfully overlap.

Herrington and Kendal (2005) tabulate different intellectual projects or research narratives. They point to the fact that research and practice need not be distinct and separate domains of experience. Emerging from an organisation that forges conversational links between research and practice, Herrington and Kendal (2005) point out that the work settings in which practitioners operate are also sites where ALLN research is undertaken and that those involved in this research might well be the teachers and managers who debate, discuss, gather information, interpret data, make sense, theorise, challenge, test things out and report. The 'investigation of practice' is

not the exclusive province of the academy. Darville (2003) offers a similar overlapping.
He views research as expansive, as including activities normal to teachers and
managers – experimentation with learning materials, rephrasing explanations, models
for involving learners in the organisation of provision. These are everyday ways of
working that most teachers and managers would recognise even if they do not offer
them the lofty label of research. Is it possible that research and professional practice
are site-based and identity-based elements of an overlapping enterprise? I am
suggesting that what counts as research is a function of location of study, site of
practice and identity of the one carrying out the activity rather than an essential
element in the nature of the activity itself.

Indeed, in undertaking a professional doctorate I have continued to work and to study
ALLN practice. Researcher and practitioner may be a single entity – embodied in a
person or an organisation. The utilitarianism of the NRDC's strap line, implying a
separation between research and practice, has not prohibited their decisive role in
creating a cohort of researcher-practitioners who simultaneously work as ALLN teachers
and managers, study ALLN teaching and managing and publish.

The body of work published by the NRDC brings the contradictions of this nexus into
sharp relief. There are now evidential examples which point to the specific ways in
which requirements of policy defined quality undermines what according to
professional expertise would count as good, worthwhile, student-centred work. (Swain
2005, Swain *et al* 2005, Ivanič 2006). I am here suggesting that in some very specific
instances the achievement of quality may lead to a loss of professional integrity as it
requires practitioners to behave in ways that are evidentially to the detriment to student
learning. The promise of the CIF is exposed as not always and only true. A faithful
commitment to the needs of learners does not directly equate to positive outcomes in
inspection.

In moving between professional-practitioner-researcher networks I bring a specific set
of insights and biases. My experience of both terrains – research and practice - is

altered through my acquaintanceship with the other. As a practitioner I consume and analyse organisational texts, textual communications intended for a professional audience. My reading of them heightened. Straightforward implementation requires I hold critical scrutiny at bay. The interrogative, incredulous stance necessary in research creates too many avenues for nomadic exploration. Immediate action-without-thought becomes an impossibility. Research may foster a greater sense of professional community, thorough and forensic analysis of the tensions that define quality increases my understanding of why my colleagues and I experience practice in the ways we experience it. But this in itself need not make a material difference to what we experience. The framing of the 'professional as political' (Morley 2003) and the acute emotionality attached to a high-stakes quality culture changes shape and meaning between writing a research project and reading an inspectors judgement about the department I manage. This is more than a tension between different notions of quality: embodied / abstract; demanded / aspired. It is as if my earlier diagrammatic representations of quality require an altogether different dimension: cerebral / visceral? The constructs need to be layered or textured in multiple ways. They need to enable fluid elasticity rather than mere polarisation.

My reading of research based texts, textual communications intended for a research community, is similarly altered. Critical engagement is interrupted by pragmatic impulse. I want to work out if it would work in my own context of practice. I become fidgety when presented with the possibility of thought-without-action. I want to try it out, to try out what it means for who I am and what I do. I may be enthralled by research that notices learners motivations as driven by curiosity and pride, but find it impossible to create this possibility as true for the teachers and managers I work with. It may be apparent to me that the model of embedding adopted by a colleague I am in conversation with has been scathingly critiqued as likely to lead to poor results for both vocational and literacy course components, but there is enormous risk attached asserting my version of truth as knowledge in contrast to my colleagues version of truth as anecdote. So much of the exchange is based not on knowledge or understanding, but on disposition and sensibility. And of course, the version of truth I enthusiastically reterritorialise from research-networks to practitioner-networks may change, in the process of transportation but also through other bodies of work which emerge slowly or

in a slightly different terrain to contradict, adds significant detail to or merely cause us to pause and think again.

This positioning between research and practice is a provocative stance of defiance and aspiration, assertive non-compliance and desire.

research un-frames practice

In suggesting that research transforms or overlaps practice I have been critical but largely optimistic. My own experience of the research, policy and practice nexus is of an unravelling. Research informs, overlaps but also uncomfortably unravels my practice. Research into ALLN yields incommensurable truths that make the unification of policy, practice and research almost impossible. Street's (1984, 1995) notion of autonomous and ideological literacies is a radical critique of policy perceptions of ALLN learning and their translation into policy-sanctioned management and pedagogy. My own exploration into the puzzle of good practice contrasts professional judgement with policy requirements, but is unable to offer a neat resolution. Instead research promises practice little more that a Goliathian struggle. In the absence of pre-formatted mimetic templates there is a series of intricate and shifting compromises. Adhering exclusively to professional judgement is not possible and would place practitioners in a perpetual state of conflict. Yet ignoring professional judgement extracts high transaction costs. It causes stress and discomfort and limits professional possibilities. In an informal conversation a research participant describes a difference in view between auditors and his college about the appropriateness and possibilities of compliance with a particular, defined quality measure. The conflict was not a subjective one of contrasting judgements. His inability / unwillingness to comply was inescapably evident. What was at stake revolved around a concrete question of the financial resources the organisation had at its disposal. His denial of compromise / his inability to comply resulted in a down-grading of the organisation on one particular quality scale from excellent to good.

I have explored two strands of argumentation here. Firstly, the quality regime with its decontextualised strictures, exhausting array of mimetic templates and managerial tactics contributes towards, rather than illuminates, what policy-makers most fear: poor practice. Secondly, while it is true that the first wave of post-*Skills for Life* inspections exposed unacceptably high rates of poor practice, that is organisations judged as grade four and below, is it possible that these were, in part, the outcome of a newly-defined quality regime as it came into contact with shifting professional sensibilities. Teachers and managers spoke about pre-*Skills for Life* quality provision from a distance of time, place and personal experience. There was a strong suggestion that years into the new regime, colleges were enjoying the financial benefits of *Skills for Life* funding, but not investing this into existing provision. Is it possible that organisations were operating with pre-*Skills for Life* sensibilities within a post-*Skills for Life* environment?

implications: for policy

My research suggests the possibility of a more open, dialogic, less prescriptive approach to policy. One in which good governance, based on the possibilities of 'professional trust,' achieves longer lasting and more radical change than one based on the limitations of transparency and control. What has surprised me is how strongly and passionately practitioners feel about this area of work. They invest a great deal of their 'selves' in their practice. They are also in favour of key aspects of *Skills for Life* policy. There are, however, significant strains and fault lines which suggest that quality as demanded conspires against the quality to which they aspire. What quality demands is too often reducible to paperwork and good management of data. This diminished notion of quality, the embodied quality of practice, seems to satisfy auditors but practitioners are clear that it does not satisfy their aspiration. The suggested moves towards self-regulation is to be welcomed, but at this stage it is too early to comment

on if and how this will work. Several practitioners and other research studies have made reference to practitioners leaving the profession and the difficulty of recruiting to particular roles. If a skills agenda is set to remain in place for some time – as seems likely – a more dialogic approach to the implementation of policy will make a considerable difference.

What is also clear is that policy does not translate into practice in straight-forward unmitigated ways. An approach to policy formation and implementation based on dialogue is more likely to achieve a better fit between politicians' perceptions and the realities of practice as well as to generate a stronger sense of involved commitment from teachers and managers. A less constrained approach to quality is more likely to bring about the accomplishments that policy-makers themselves seek.

A dialogic approach to developing policy – one that includes reciprocal accountabilities based on the exchange of accounts - has the potential to offer policy-makers sources of information and knowledge about how education, learning, skills, employability, funding, qualifications, and the institutional frames that surround them, actually operate. The ways in which teaching and learning and ALLN practice are conceptualised restrict the emergence of good ALLN work. Policy may benefit from considering the implications of different forms of knowledge, of literacy as social practice, or of the growing body of research to emerge from the NRDC. The languages deployed by these two epistemic communities may make communication problematic. Whole-scale policy reform is an intricate and complicated process requiring a less monolithic, more guiding, decentralised, supportive and partnership-based approach. My suggestion is that a less feverishly furious, more timely and evaluative policy framing that offered broad, developmental goals, with scope for adaptation to suit local ecologies, may yet return significant social and economic change.

At its centre, *Skills for Life* policy attempts to implement an approach to skills development based on conceptions of teaching, learning, literacy, language and development that only exist as distilled abstractions. It is quite possible that conversations between policy, research and practice will remain diffused. This research has focussed attention on a critique of the means through which policy achieves its ends with an implied questioning of the ends of policy itself. Policy development is not a technical process of defining clear ends and the most effective means of achieving them. And my suggestion for less constraining approaches to policy development is more than a pure scientific reading of data inexorably drawing towards the logic of an evidential conclusion. My conclusion may also be driven by self-interest. As a practitioner a more flexible, locally adaptable approach to quality is what I would prefer. My reading of data suggests this would be more effective.

implications: for research

Questions of policy are inevitably entangled with moral judgements about equity, social justice, the place and purpose of education. What is needed is philosophical investigation. In *Skills for Life*, the demands of quality have shifted discourses of equity towards discourses of economy, with education served up as handmaiden. These are philosophical policy questions that cannot be addressed by empirical research alone.

This research offers considerable scope for further exploration of policy, ALLN practice and *Skills for Life*. I have hinted, based on what practitioners say, at the ways in which the distilled form of literacy as simulacrum impacts negatively on practice. I have positioned my approach to literacy as one that leans towards literacy as social practice, with an approach to pedagogy that implies researching everyday practices, taking account of learners' lives, learning by participation, learning in safe, supported

contexts and locating literacy in other forms of meaning making (Ivanič *et al* 2006, Barton *et al* 2007, Swain *et al* 2005). There is a substantial body of empirical research into the space between literacy as empirical ethnographic construct and literacy as schooled curriculum. It has a long and continuing history. There is also a growing body of research published and produced by practitioners. The ways in which further education students use literacy while in college has been studied extensively and invites enormous scope for further exploration (Ivanič *et al* 2007, Hull and Schultz 2001, Barton *et al* 2007). All of this work has quite profound implications for teaching and management practice.

I think this study implies scope for an exploration into the tacit literacy knowledge of practitioners, as well as research into how this knowledge maps onto different constructions of literacy – student experience, social practices and policy. The invitation here is to work as or with practitioners to create and experiment with pedagogies that acknowledge the ecology of reading and writing as everyday activities. Perhaps there is scope for a study with teachers and managers that notices moments of overspill, when learners behave in ways that would seem to defy the truths constructed by policy and curriculum.

This study has pointed to the differences between practitioners' and policy-makers constructions of quality and has hinted at the cost of compromise. Practitioners made reference during interviews to the impact that the demands of quality had on learners quoting, for example, learners' complaints about 'too much paperwork', of feeling that they wanted to be learning rather than completing forms (individual learning plans, feedback questionnaires, course reviews), of having to teach vocabulary and grammar to enable learners to complete time-consuming learner satisfaction surveys even if this meant interrupting more urgent and more relevant needs. How *Skills for Life* policy and the quality regime impact on student experience is an extensive and valuable area that has provoked (Coffield *et al* 2007) and continues to invite detailed study. My curiosity suggests a comparative study conducted over time between pre and post-*Skills for Life* learners or learners attending differently graded programmes.

Part of this study may include an examination of how to codify and measure aspects of provision that remain beyond tangible reach. This has, in part, been undertaken by the NIACE 'catching confidence' project. If the rage for accountability can only engage with measurable outputs, an experimental study that subjects intangible aspects of provision to ecologically sound quantitative measures generated by practitioners may be of considerable value.

Satisfying the demands of quality requires fundamental compromises. I have drawn out some of these compromises, but have tentatively opened rather then exhausted an exploration. If compromise is one of the strategies practitioners use to manage the demands of quality, so is exit (James and Biesta *et al* 2007). There is little literature about the experiences of practitioners who leave post-compulsory education. Do the motivations they initially brought to this area of work disappear or are they rearticulated through other forms of professional practice? Given that quality impacts on all aspects of public service, do they experience similar conflicts in other contexts.

This study has focused on quality as experienced by organisations who have performed well within the framework. In emotional terms this was a more appealing and uplifting study to undertake. However, this does not imply that organisations that have been awarded a grade three or four in the CIF are unable to articulate the experiences and contradictions of compromise. It may well be that these organisations have simply refused the seductions of quality as demanded and, in missing the target, have retained some sense of purpose. Perhaps they have succumbed to the demands of policy and refused the professional compromises others have struggled to attain and found the outcome other than what was predicted. It is hard to imagine provision that mimicked the demands of policy to the exclusion of local interpretation. Does this abstraction exist? What might the experiences of these organisations enable us to understand about quality? I am curious to know how other practitioners experience a grade three or grade four. A similar study may be undertaken with a different group of

professionals, if so in what ways would its conclusions cohere or contrast with what this study has identified? What other tensions and dimensions may quality contain?

implications: for practice

I have undertaken this study as an ALLN manager with experience of quality and inspection. I have an acute, emotionally driven, entirely subjective, anecdotal interest in the subject. As a professional I have refused the spoiled identity implied by naming and shaming. My experiences cannot be directly equated to a maverick-like professional determination to forge out a personal, aspired-to quality territory in defiance of monolithic expectations. I am shocked by the extent to which I recognise the compromises to integrity to which research participants refer. I understand fully the skewing that accompanies compliance with targets, funding, audit and the adoption of mimetic templates. I work in a large further education college that prides itself on its quality standing, that boasts about its influential closeness to policy-makers, that offers unexpected manoeuvrability for professional creativity and imagination and is just now beginning to experience the first waves of cuts to ALLN provision.

The trouble with research is that it may make practice impossible. Quality as an embodied, survivalist compromise between quality-as-demanded and quality as aspired-to creates in me the potential for disorientating disconnections made more acute by deeper understanding. With these qualifiers in mind I tentatively offer a few concluding suggestions for practice and research.

concluding suggestions

In these closing paragraphs, I offer suggestions for practice and suggestions for research. The closeness between the two communities requires these comments be

treated as merged, overlapping, mutually-shared activities, conversations which would benefit from the engaged contribution of those who determine policy.

Practitioners - that is teachers and managers working together - could explore ways of reducing the paperwork requirements attached to quality. They could theorise more explicitly about the relationships between what is written, what is experienced, what is required and what is aspired to and how they are dis/connected. Here, I am thinking of an experimental exercise where colleges consider what they are required to evidence and then try out different ways of doing this to the satisfaction of auditors and the acceptability of practice. Certainly managers and organisational structures have a major implication for how practitioners experience the 'paperwork' requirements of their role and different colleges seem to adopt more or less administratively demanding approaches. A specific quality review of essential documentation with a view to experimenting with alternatives may make a difference to staff morale and the time and energy spent on more central tasks.

Practitioners might also want to become involved with the gradually building body of research into pedagogy. Through this we may develop an awareness of moments of mismatch between what we experience to be true and what policy determines as the case. On those occasions when robust empirical research establishes the tenets of policy as dubious, the invitation is to adopt practices that cohere with what can be established as grounded in empiricism. There has been recent discussion about the efficacy of learning-styles resulting in a stark mismatch between practice and empiricism. The demands of quality determine that teachers take account of learners' approaches to learning. A comprehensive review of literature into learning styles establishes that there is no empirical basis for their use (Coffield *et al* 2004). Intuitively, teachers and managers may feel the learning styles heuristic makes lessons more meaningful for reasons they may not be able to immediately recount beyond saying it seems to help learners understand. Practitioner-led research may provide an exploratory understanding of this experience. The invitation is to continue to offer vibrant, energised, engaging teaching but with grounded, rigorous theorisation.

Practitioners may benefit from research into practice that forms part of continuous professional development. While teacher knowledge is characteristically informal, case specific and embedded in practice, it is not impossible to subject it to treatments that would enable it to become more like the generalisable codified knowledge that can become object and enjoy the recognition of the academy or a more relevant audience – other professionals. This research suggests there is a great deal involved in understanding policy, and even more involved in understanding ways of recognising and then mitigating its unintended and perverse consequences.

Perhaps the most significant invitation from this research is for practitioners to develop an awareness that quality has several different meanings. Its self-evident desirability may disarm practitioners, causing us to suspend critical judgement. We then adopt behaviours at odds with what we know to be true. This study invites practitioners to notice and make those differences explicit, to expose them and then to elaborate on their own perspectives of quality which are implied by conflicting ways of behaving. The compromise may mean accepting good instead of excellent. It may mean accepting a bullet-pointed weakness on an inspection report. The suggestion is that if a compromising choice is to be made, a full understanding of what that choice is may throw up alternatives that enable the reconciliation of polarised contradictions.

Research has the capacity to contribute to each of the recommendations detailed for practitioners. There are other suggestions that take these ideas somewhat further.

This study has not included any interviews with learners, yet at different times practitioners made reference to the student experience, most particularly that learners also found the paperwork implied by quality made them uneasy and detracted from them doing in class what they wanted to do. Other anecdotal experiences refer to learners taking tests as a favour to colleges grappling with stringent targets. The compromise here is starker than one which refers to practitioners' sensibilities in that it focuses on precise points of detriment to student learning. Research into this area may prove beneficial in influencing the shape, direction, pace and nature of policy and its implementation.

The focus of this study has been on perceptions of quality and compromise. Given that there are several examples of contrast between professional preferences and the demands of quality – subjecting the demands of quality to empirical study might be of enormous value. In part this is the remit of the NRDC. But NRDC's scope is limited by pragmatism and the organisation is balanced tentatively between policy and research. There is a need for research that explicitly examines the difference the demands of policy makes to practice, not to establish the extent to which it is detrimental as such – though this is of value – but actually to examine the extent to which what policy says about learners and learning can retain credibility after rigorous empirical interrogation.

The extent to which practice can determine or even significantly impact upon policy is questionable. Certainly the politicisation of post-compulsory education, the mobilisation of subjectivities has created an ambiguous potential, an emotional repertoire and a sense of stake-holding. The professionalisation of *Skills for Life* practice has increased the self-confidence of the sector. We now feel we can demand more of policy, and have the right to assert what and how we know.

I draw towards a conclusion with an anecdote. A colleague I met at a conference talked with me about a group of ALLN learners he was teaching. Together they had decided to write anti-war slogans. As an end-of-term activity he had organised a class trip to an anti-war demonstration where his learners walked, each holding the banner with their slogans that they had made in class. This activity is not listed in the core-curriculum for adult literacy. It is quite probable that those who have shaped policy around *Skills for Life* did not envisage adults using their skills in this way. I concluded with my colleague that his students, having learnt how to improve their confidence with literacy, wanted to do something with their changing self that felt meaningful. In the process they began to construct new ideas about learning, about language, place, politics, participation and culture, all of which were brought to life in writing their slogans and attending an anti-war demonstration. We agreed that these were entirely legitimate approaches to learning to be literate.

The demands of quality have opened new organisational territories. The micro-political world of practitioners' inner lives – their commitments and passions - have become resources to be mobilised. This point of ambiguity and arrival is also a point of potentiality and departure. We – ALLN teachers and managers - may not be able to resolve the tensions that surround quality. But in its ontological moment we surely determine its embodiment.

Appendix i

Common Inspection Framework

Department for
Innovation, Universities & Skills

Foreword

Introduction

At the heart of our adult literacy and numeracy strategy is the aim to raise the standard of provision, to engage and motivate potential learners, and to ensure that all those involved in literacy and numeracy skills teaching are working towards a common goal.

Skills for Life (DfES, 2001)

CURRENT ISSUES IN SKILLS FOR LIFE PROVISION IN FE COLLEGES

Staff in colleges know that language and number skills underpin all other areas of achievement and are crucial to raising standards. Improved and expanded literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision is vital to address the tasks set for colleges by Success for All. The Skills for Life strategy is also important to wider government goals for social inclusion, raised achievement and improved economic competitiveness. Foundation skills for sustainable employment are at the heart of the skills strategy. Improved core or generic skills are at the heart of 14-19 reform. We know that the literacy and numeracy skills gap is wider in the UK than in other developed countries. Those with low levels of language and number skills are at much higher risk of unemployment. Difficulties with literacy, numeracy and ESOL are also a barrier to active community participation and are clearly linked to other kinds of disadvantage.

Recognising these links, the Government continues to make a significant investment in Skills for Life. Promotional campaigns have raised demand. The new learning and teaching infrastructure has raised the capacity of further education (FE) colleges to meet this demand. Colleges have shown that they can raise standards and increase learner achievement, but there is still a long way to go. This Guide is designed to support colleges to meet the challenges set out in the 2003 White Paper *21st century skills: Realising our potential* and 14-19 reform through improved Skills for Life practice. Skills for Life practitioners in FE have shown that they can deliver challenging national targets. In the midst of ongoing growth and change, this Guide aims to help practitioners further reflect on and improve what they do.

The Skills for Life strategy is relevant to all post-16 learners working to improve their literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills. This includes:

• learners at all levels and ages up to and including Level 2

- all those studying key skills in communication and application of number, whether on discrete courses or as part of a vocational programme

- those preparing for GCSE mathematics or English

- those receiving additional learning support for literacy, numeracy or ESOL

- learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- all those working on language and number up to Level 2, whether through embedded or discrete provision and as full- or part-time learners

- workplace literacy, numeracy and language learners and all those developing their language and number skills through workforce development or work-based learning

- literacy, numeracy, ESOL and key skills learners in a range of community settings, including e-learning opportunities.

THE SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

This Guide is designed to help providers achieve excellence in their literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision for learners in FE colleges. By taking each of the five questions of the Common Inspection Framework for Inspecting Education and Training in turn, it is designed to help providers interpret the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework and the adult basic skills curricula for provision in communication, reading, writing and numeracy.

The Guide also sets out the characteristics of best practice in literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, in particular by drawing on real examples. The examples are designed to give staff in colleges practical help and ideas for improving their literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision.

We wanted this series of guides to offer practical help to providers and practitioners – a 'How to' guide that would really focus on what works. For that reason, as well as providing sample materials that can be adapted for different learning environments, the guides illustrate what success might look like. For example, how do we know when a learner has made an important new step in their learning? What might be the outcomes of a successful initial assessment? The short descriptions of the progress made by real learners in real situations help to answer such questions.

Finally, the guides all highlight comments from inspectors on this area of work in inspection reports and other documents. These extracts are included to help readers gain an insight into how Ofsted and the ALI evaluate and report on this context for learning.

WHAT IS SUCCESS IN THE FE COLLEGE CONTEXT?

Success in literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in FE colleges is based on:

- a strategic commitment to seek out and meet all local learning needs and to provide flexible opportunities for language and number development

- college-wide recognition that Skills for Life are the foundation of learner success, and a shared responsibility for effective provision

- a coherent structure that pulls together all the different elements of Skills for Life within a common framework of standards and core processes

- a senior management post to lead and coordinate the offer and to guard and raise shared standards

- attention to individual learning need informed by diagnostic assessment, clear target-setting and regular reviews of progress

- a conviction that language and number skills must be embedded in engaging, often vocational, contexts and that staff and strategies must be developed to resource this

- creative approaches to growing new teaching teams and to improving the effectiveness of all those delivering and supporting Skills for Life

- a focus on learner outcomes, effective monitoring of progress and clear systems for measuring the 'distance travelled'

- quality measures that ensure that all learners are well-served, problems are quickly addressed and all teams are supported to improve.

There are many instances of good and effective practice in FE colleges, but there is still work to do. Many colleges still need to:

- reach out to new groups of learners and build the partnerships that will trigger their learning

- train, qualify and support all those contributing to the Skills for Life offer and make sure that good practice is shared and built upon

- support and train teachers in vocational and other curriculum areas to recognise Skills for Life needs and work with specialists to provide embedded opportunities for skills development

- ensure that all learners have flexible opportunities to achieve Skills for Life or key skills qualifications

- provide and prepare for secure and relevant progression opportunities for all learners yet to achieve at Level 2

Although there have been clear improvements in FE-based Skills for Life provision – good or outstanding inspection grades went up by 14 per cent in 2003/04 – much is still to be done. The proportion of unsatisfactory area 14 grades is almost twice that across all areas of learning and the proportion of good or better teaching grades is lower. Ofsted inspectors found that targets were not sufficiently clear or specific and were often not understood by learners. They found continuing weaknesses in the monitoring of progress. The coordination of practice across the Skills for Life offer is reported as often being weak.

Much of this echoes the joint Ofsted and ALI survey of *Skills for Life (Literacy, Numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages: A survey of current practice in post-16 and adult provision)*, published in 2003. This found that initial and diagnostic assessment outcomes were not well used. This contributed to poor individual learning plans (ILPs), unclear targets and ineffective progress reviews. Management responsibility was often not clear, quality assurance systems were inadequate and there was no clear focus on learner outcomes.

We have every opportunity to improve. The FE sector now has several outstanding colleges which show how we can successfully manage and deliver Skills for Life. Some of their experience is captured in the 'What is success?' and 'How is success recognised?' sections of this Guide. These colleges work in different contexts, serving different communities and they work in different ways. But there are some shared messages, both clear and convincing, from which we can all learn.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision in the FE college context offers a crucial second chance – and not just for adults. Aliye Husseyin and Sinem Hakki have only just left school but their college course is already reshaping their futures.

I really didn't enjoy school – I didn't find it very interesting or anything. College is much more fun because I understand the subjects more clearly. English and Maths make more sense and I understand it more. I just did a punctuation exercise and everything was right – that didn't happen in school. It's quite serious at college – I'm on a tracking sheet so I have to come on time. I'm doing ok and I want to do travel and tourism next.

I just never did the work in school. I didn't really go to Maths – I just did not go. I enrolled in college at the last minute. Since I've come here I've been attending – I've had enough of all that bunking. I was a failure at school and I don't want to be a failure again. Here I do the work, I know I've done it. I feel relieved that I can do something.

These are learners who need and deserve the best that we can provide.

Further Education Colleges

1. How well do learners achieve?

Effective practice that secures continuous improvement is evidenced by:

- learners' success in achieving challenging targets, including qualifications and personal learning goals
- improving achievement trends over time and clear action to address any equality gaps or significant variations in performance between groups of learners
- the standards of learners' work in relation to their learning goals
- learners' progress relative to their prior attainment and potential

and, where appropriate, by:

- the acquisition of skills that enhance employability, effectiveness at work and personal prosperity
- the development of skills that contribute to the social and economic well-being of the learner and extend their opportunities for active citizenship
- the behaviour of learners
- the attendance of learners
- the extent to which learners adopt safe practices and a healthy lifestyle
- learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Supporting evidence could include:

- learner achievements, improving trends over time and progress against college targets
- achievement of Skills for Life and key skill qualifications
- positive learner achievements relative to national benchmarks
- the relative performance of different groups of learners (by age, mode, gender, ethnicity etc) and records of actions taken to remedy any equality gaps
- demonstrated learner progress relative to initial-assessed starting point
- clear evidence of distance travelled or added value
- improvements in literacy, numeracy and language skills which contribute to success on a learner's vocational or other main programme
- the use of challenging and realistic targets
- individual records and learning plans showing progress towards individual goals and measured against the national standards
- records showing the contribution made to the local and national Skills for Life targets
- regular progress review records monitoring performance against the individual learning plan
- interviews with learners that show ownership of targets and understanding of progress

- individual or group signs of growing confidence, independent learning skills and personal skills
- punctuality, attendance and retention records, and systems to deal with poor participation
- the positive impact of learning support and literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills learning on wider achievement
- learner destinations and progression records that show learners are meeting their goals.

Checkpoints for CIF 1

In effective self-assessment, achievement is evaluated by the extent to which...

1.1   results and retention rates compare well with local and national averages

1.2   trends in performance over time show continuous improvement or the maintenance of very high standards

1.3   the analysis of added value indicates that learners make at least the progress expected of them

1.4   standards are consistently high across the provider's work

1.5   challenging learning goals and targets are achieved

In effective self-assessment, achievement is evaluated by the extent to which learners...

1.6   make significant progress towards fulfilling their goals and potential

1.7   are prepared for effective participation in the workplace and in the community

1.8   progress to relevant further or higher education, training or employment

1.9   reach appropriate levels in basic and/or key skills consistent with their main programmes of study or training

1.10   develop the skills of critical evaluation, research and analysis

1.11   develop the attitudes and skills necessary to maintain lifelong learning, including the capacity to work independently and collaboratively

Further Education Colleges

1.   How well do learners achieve?

Add to bookmarks

1A:How to achieve success with learner achievement

Monitoring achievement

Gathering reliable information on learners' achievements should underpin providers' planning processes. This information is crucial to charting progress and showing trends over time. Successful providers can evidence progress and positive trends in achievement and retention rates across the college.

They relate learner achievements in Skills for Life and key skills qualifications to national benchmarks, and examine what contribution the achievements are making to local and national Skills for Life targets. Course teams can demonstrate good learner outcomes by:

- recruiting new learners, particularly from under-represented groups

- minimising drop-out

- demonstrating progress against individual learning plans (ILPs) that:

   o   are relevant to personal learning goals

   o   use initial assessment to build on existing skills and meet priority needs

   o   are mapped to the national standards for literacy, numeracy and ESOL

   o   are SMART and say exactly what the learner plans to do and the progress they have made

   o   prepare the learner for successful progression

- providing flexible opportunities for all learners to gain Skills for Life or key skills qualifications and to agree individual qualification targets related to their personal starting points and progress

- progressing learners from first-rung provision through to qualifications at Level 2 and beyond.

In monitoring the success of programmes in raising learner achievement, course teams should:

- review and agree a range of achievements appropriate to each group of learners

- agree annual recruitment, retention and achievement targets that take account of:

   o   individual learning goals

   o   previous performance

        ○   college and local LSC targets

- calculate the percentage of learners who successfully complete and achieve their target qualification

- examine the ways that retention and achievement contribute to this success rate and identify priorities for improvement

- compare these outcomes against:

        ○   individual learning goals

        ○   success, retention and achievement targets for the programme

        ○   national and local benchmarks where available

        ○   college benchmarks where relevant.

Demonstrating distance travelled

Any measure of achievement should take account of individual learning gain or the distance a learner travels over time. The new measures of learner success that are being developed as part of Success for All will look at added value for learners under 19 and distance travelled for older learners. Baseline measurement is simpler for younger learners who have recently left school. For the national qualifications that a young person might go on to study, there is statistical evidence that shows the progress each learner might be expected to achieve during their programme. Anything extra is 'added value'. There are no similar statistical measures for literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills, but the national standards do provide an agreed form of measurement. By plotting achievements at the start and end of a course against the levels and elements of the core curricula, a common way of measuring learning gain is established. This means individual progress can be compared within and between programmes. Measuring added value can help to spotlight particularly effective practice or areas in need of improvement. To measure added value effectively, course teams should:

- use initial assessment mapped to the core curricula

- record the starting point for each learner: the skills they demonstrate through initial assessment

- agree individual learning targets for the ILP that will take the learner to higher levels of skill

- record achievement using a progress grid mapped to the core curricula

- record each learner's end point: the skills they demonstrate through final assessment

- compare progress between individuals and across programmes

- identify and investigate any particularly strong or poor progress

- use investigation outcomes to plan improvements.

Developing the ILP

The main tool driving the achievement of each learner is the individual learning plan (ILP). The ILP drives the learner's progress through a development cycle (Figure 1), and achievement is evidenced by progress against it.

Figure 1: Development cycle of the ILP.

```
          ┌─────────────────┐
          │  assess skills  │
          │ where am I now? │
          └─────────────────┘
      ↗                          ↘
┌──────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────┐
│ monitor progress │        │   set targets   │
│  how am I doing? │        │ where am I going?│
└──────────────────┘        └─────────────────┘
      ↖                          ↙
          ┌─────────────────┐
          │   agree plan    │
          │    how do I     │
          │   get there?    │
          └─────────────────┘
```

Where possible, the achievements recorded against the targets in the ILP are accredited using qualifications mapped to the national standards for literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

The ILP needs to be a 'live' document. It will take time to agree and it needs to be regularly reviewed and updated. Effective ILPs provide a consistent framework for learning and progress throughout the learner's time at the college and take them through different levels and types of provision. The ILP sets out key actions to be taken at different stages of the learner's programme. The learner needs to be an active partner throughout the process.

The Planning Learning and Recording Achievement pack available from the Skills for Life Strategy Unit (www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus) provides invaluable guidance for ILP development. Sample ILPs for general and basic skills use are also available from the Raising Quality and Achievement Project (www.rqa.org.uk) through the Quality Information Packs. These should stimulate discussion about the options. The LSC Skills for Life Quality Initiative Organisational Development Materials, unit 2 module 4 (www.lsc.gov.uk/sflqi) look at the range of factors you may need to take into account when designing ILPs.

Course placement

Most learners will have an interview and some assessment of their language and number skills before a decision is taken about the course or learning programme that would best fit their needs. This provides initial information about what the learner wants to do in the future, what they can already do well and the things they most want to improve. There may also be information from a previous provider, such as a school or feeder course, about previous learning experience and achievements. If the learner is following a vocational or other main programme, there should be an audit or clear statement of the language and number skills needed for success on this course. All of this should be captured for the ILP.

Induction and diagnostic assessment

Effective teaching of literacy, numeracy and ESOL starts by being clear about individual needs and goals. College staff must know the learner's main strengths and weaknesses before work begins. The learner needs to be fully involved at every stage. The diagnostic work at induction is a critical first step. Such work is not a single activity and could include:

- a college-wide language and number test mapped to the core curricula, such as the Skills for Life diagnostic assessment

- programme-based diagnostic assessment

- self-assessment

- information about the learner's learning history and preferred learning style(s)

- close observation of course activities to get a sense of how a learner performs, but also, by discussion or observation, a record of which activities they most enjoy and those which feel less comfortable for them

- paying particular attention to signs that the learner has a specific difficulty such as dyslexia

- induction assignments.

By the end of induction, you should have a clear idea of:

- the learner's personal learning goals, including their qualification and career goals

- learning goals for the current learning programme(s)

- the particular contexts or tasks which the learner will find relevant and engaging

- language and number tasks where the learner already feels confident

- a profile of current performance against the national literacy and numeracy standards

- language and number tasks where the learner would most like to improve

- ways in which the learner prefers to learn

- specific learning targets for the first few weeks

- the action the learner needs to take to meet these short-term targets

- any particular support needed to meet the targets.

Clovis is studying Sport and Leisure. 'Doing the measurements helps us compare ourselves to others and we are constantly using our maths. We work out trends over three months to see our improvements'.

The development of targets in the ILP is fundamental to learner achievement. The starting point for setting challenging, realistic and relevant learning targets is a careful audit of the literacy, numeracy and language skills needed for success on learners' main programmes.

In FE colleges, targets set for improving learners' literacy, numeracy and ESOL skills are carefully designed to contribute to their success in their vocational or main programmes.

Short-term targets need to take the learner, step-by-step, towards their longer-term goals. These ILP targets need to be SMART, meaning:

- Specific – they say exactly what the learner needs to do

- Measurable – the learner can prove that he or she has reached the target

- Achievable – they build on current skills to take the learner to the next level

- Relevant – they take the learner further towards their personal goals, including vocational goals

- Timed – they have deadlines.

A SMART target might be 'I will be able to use upper and lower case correctly in my child observation reports by March' – not simply 'improve my writing'. The learner's personal goals and the demands of their main programme or their progression aims will suggest the areas in which they most need to improve.

Diagnostic assessment outcomes will describe the specific skills learners have at the start of their programme. Mapping current skills against the core curricula can suggest achievable targets for improvement at the next level. An engineering learner, for example, may need to use a technical workbook. He or she may already be able to 'identify the main points and ideas, and predict words from context' (curriculum reference Rt4/E3). But to use the index to find particular information in the workbook, there is a need to 'use organisational and structural features to locate information' (curriculum reference Rt4/L1).

The SMART target agreed with the learner in this case might be to 'use the index to find information in X book by half-term'.

As well as recording the targets agreed with the learner in the ILP, it is also important to record the actions that have been agreed to meet the target. This might include a log of the resources the learner will use and a list of the people who can help. All members of the course team, including those providing individual support, should know and use the learner's ILP.

Progress review

Each ILP should include an agreed review date. It helps to be flexible about review dates, shortening or extending the planning and review period depending on how often you see the learner and the amount of support and guidance each learner needs. The learner is a full partner in the review process and is prompted to consider:
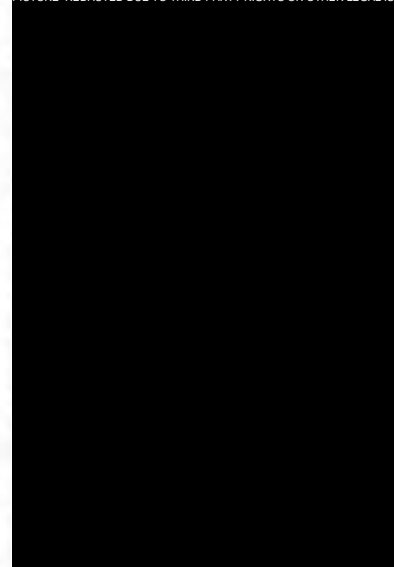
- did I meet my targets?

- what do I need to improve?

- what have I found helpful?

- what difficulties do I face?

- what should my new targets be?

- when should I finish them?

- what resources can I use?

- who can help?

- how will I know I'm on track?

Learners at Levels 1 and 2 might be asked to complete a self-assessment sheet; at Entry and Pre-entry Levels, self-assessment might be through discussion. Learners need plenty of opportunity to assess and reflect on their own performance and that of their peers. If this is built in to class activity, learners will find it easier and more natural to be fully involved in progress reviews.

The progress review needs to take account of:

- records of learning activity

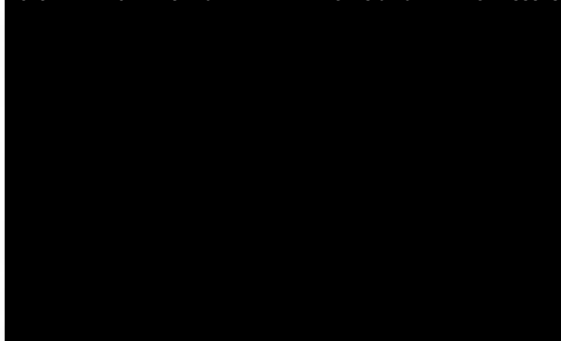- evidence of achievement against the targets

- the learner's self-assessment, whether formally recorded or simply discussed

- progress reports from other members of the course team, including those delivering any vocational or main programme that the learner is following.

It is important to ask whether the progress made has genuinely taken the learner nearer to their long-term learning goals and personal objectives. You are not monitoring progress for its own sake. You need to work with the learner to check the relevance of new skills to the achievement of their personal goals. Progress must be meaningful to the learner.

PICTURE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

The outcome of the progress review will inform the agreement of new targets for the next period and the updating of the ILP.

Learners on the Springboard Course for under-19s have a half-termly progress review where class activities give way to intensive individual tutorials.

If the learner is not making the expected progress, this is an opportunity to look at and discuss:

- the match between the targets and the longer-term learning goals

- the way the learner prefers to work

- the need for further support

- any obstacles that are slowing or preventing progress.

Planning and preparing for progression

The ILP will be related to the learner's progression goals from the start, and these progression goals will become more focused as the learner approaches their achievement. Individual targets related to progression are also likely to become more specific.

Lee is developing his work-ready and number skills through his Horticulture course.

College teams may find it useful to produce progression maps for curriculum areas that highlight potential next steps and further study for which learners are being prepared.

Progression mapping should start with community-based provision and provision at Entry and Pre-entry Levels.

Progression goals will vary at different stages of the learner's development, and learners in FE colleges may be at very different stages.

This means that course teams must design learning programmes to make sure the learner can move successfully to the next stage and that each learner has the language and number skills he or she needs to progress.

Evidencing achievement

At the end of the programme, a good ILP provides a summative assessment of the learner's achievements. This will:

- give evidence of progress against the targets

- provide a starting point for continued learning
- measure 'value added' against the learner's starting point.

Wherever possible, achievements should be accredited. However, in literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, accreditation is unlikely to capture the range of learner achievement. The ILP is therefore an opportunity to record additional, 'soft' or unaccredited achievement. For example, some targets set during the programme may have focused on improving punctuality. The summative assessment will record the learner's final performance on timekeeping as part of the distance travelled.

The summative assessment is also important for recording evidence of the effectiveness of the programme and is a valuable tool for evaluating the college provision. If one learner or one group makes significantly more or less progress than the others, course teams need to work out why, and what is going on.

Finally, the ILP is used to ensure continuity for learners who progress, either at the same college or with another provider, so the same ILP is updated and stays with the learner. That way, learners continue to build on the skills they have acquired.

Accreditation

As suggested above, it is unlikely that accreditation will reflect the full range of learner achievement, but recognised accreditation is still very important to most learners. Qualifications are often the passport to progression – employers and admissions tutors will want this kind of evidence of achievement. There is also a great deal of personal satisfaction and pride for many learners in gaining qualifications. In planning learning programmes, course teams and tutors need to choose the qualifications that best fit the learners and to give them a choice of qualifications wherever possible.

The Skills for Life qualifications offer a nationally recognised way to accredit achievements in literacy, numeracy and ESOL. There are a number of awarding bodies (listed at www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus) that offer these qualifications. All learners need to take the national tests to qualify at Levels 1 or 2 but Entry Level qualifications offer a choice of portfolio-based routes to achievement. Choice should take account of the learners' preferences for the style of assessment, the nature of the programme and the time available to develop portfolios. Learners who have been successful in the national literacy or numeracy test may find a key skill qualification, including the requirement for portfolio evidence of applied skills, offers a further stimulating challenge and an opportunity for continued skill development.

A critical part of the choice in colleges is likely to be the relevance of the assessment tasks, especially for vocational learners. At Levels 1 and 2, most learners will be preparing for key skills accreditation. Some individual learners, however, may not be ready for the full key skills award. You may have a mix of key skills and Skills for Life qualification targets within a single group. The choice of accreditation is an important part of curriculum planning and the more choice you can pass on to the individual learner, the better.

Further Education Colleges

1. How well do learners achieve?

Add to bookmarks

1B: What is 'success' in learner achievement?

The following case studies illustrate how providers are achieving success in Skills for Life, in their particular context of learning.

- Achieving for the first time
- A picture of performance
- Amir's targets
- Peer assessment
- A learning diary

Achieving for the first time

One college works in an area with high levels of disadvantage and where school leaver attainment is almost 20 per cent below the national average. Many learners arrive at the college with a history of exam failure, but the Skills for Life teams see this as a spur to ensuring that learners achieve this time around. This provider believes that they have an additional responsibility to qualify these learners. As the senior manager says, 'We don't do non-accredited'. Entry competence and initial progress are carefully assessed and then every learner signs a Curriculum Entitlement Agreement that sets out their target qualifications. Each agreement is based on the individual and there is flexibility about the choice of Skills for Life or key skill qualification and the target level. The agreement is also signed by the personal tutor and the relevant Skills for Life teachers. Progress and outcomes are carefully tracked and there is a clear focus on these targets throughout the learning programme. This provider's success rates are consistently above relevant benchmarks, and there is improvement each year.

- Return to top

A picture of performance

A very large college has made significant improvements in the success achieved by all its Skills for Life learners, including a dramatic increase in key skill achievement. Key skills provision is led by a specialist team in each school, who are also responsible for additional learning support and any discrete literacy and numeracy learning. Every single learner portfolio is moderated within the school and a sample moderation is also led by the Cross-College Key Skills Manager. An in-year audit reports on key skill developments within each school and ensures that any issues of concern are quickly addressed. This means that there is a clear and accurate picture of team performance and of the progress of individual learners. As well as providing for a good learning experience, this means that decisions about the target qualifications of learners are well-informed and matched to each individual.

Added value

One college has developed an added value system that learners find motivating and easy to grasp. This system calculates a numerical value for the progress made in skill development that is matched to movement through the levels of the core curricula. It also attaches a numerical value to the attitude taken to learning and to the associated learning behaviours, such as attendance. The system manages to combine these hard and soft outcomes in a simple way that helps learners to see their progress holistically. This is reviewed regularly and recorded on their ILPs.

Effective personal learning targets must be clear and relevant to the learner. Many learners find the business of target-setting challenging and need to be supported to develop targets that are meaningful. It may be important to narrow the targets as learners approach their long-term goals, as the following example shows.

Amir's targets

Amir is a 17-year-old ESOL learner who started with a broad learning goal to 'work with children'. As the programme progressed, he agreed targets for understanding the National Qualifications Framework and researching the opportunities for vocational learning. By the time he was approaching the end of the programme, Amir had agreed a specific target to 'apply for the GNVQ Foundation course in Health and Social Care' and to 'prepare for an interview in July.' These targets require particular writing, speaking and listening skills that were mapped to the ESOL curriculum. The targets and the required skills are clearly logged in Amir's ILP.

For all learners, achievement is supported by accurate self-assessment. In one college, practice in assessing their classmates is a motivating factor that also helps learners to assess their own progress accurately.

Peer assessment

On one course, peer assessment during a spoken presentation requires learners to complete an observer checklist. They report on performance against criteria such as 'uses too many fillers' or 'sums up'. The observer reports are collated to give a group assessment of current performance.

Number and language skills are both critical to success on Craft and other vocational courses.

PICTURE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

This is then used to set individual improvement targets. The observer checklist can also be used to support learners working at different levels.

For example, learners working at earlier levels of the Listening curriculum are asked to concentrate on one or two straightforward areas of reporting such as 'asks questions' or 'interrupts others'.

Achievement is likely to rise when learners take greater control of the learning

process. One provider has found that learners may be helped to succeed by tools that aid critical and reflective learning.

- Return to top

A learning diary

Each member of a group of ESOL learners keeps a learning diary, which they complete each week and share with their tutors. In the diary, they reflect on recent learning experiences and tasks and explore their own learning preferences, things they need to work on and areas where they need help. The diary is also part of a learning conversation with the tutor that doesn't always arrive at neat conclusions but can draw out issues that wouldn't otherwise surface.

Appendix ii

Project Participants

The coding used indicates a personal identification for each participant with incorporates a name and reference to the interview site. The first digit indicates whether this interview as the first, second or third participant based at a particular site and the final number indicate a specific interview number.

Organisational structures tend to differ between colleges with some having greater layers of management and others having different degrees of responsibility attached to similar positions within a hierarchy. I considered roles in relation to their direct connection to ALLN and the number of hours teaching they include.

These are broadly referenced as:

Teacher – the role includes direct classroom teaching and the administration, assessment, preparation and planning that goes alongside this

Programme Manager – usually a teacher with reduced contact time to enable some curricula management duties. Their role is largely teaching (18 or more hours per week) with responsibility for supporting other teachers.

College Managers – have reduced teaching (from none to six hours per week). Their management role is directly focussed on an aspect of ALLN or all three curricular area/s.

Senior Managers – have no teaching, and a distant management role in connection to ALLN. Most often their role includes ALLN along with other college curricular responsibilities.

There are some interviews that although transcribed and referenced are never directly quoted in the text. They have formed part of the analysis and may be referred to in more general terms in the body of my thesis.

In these pen portraits I refer to all research participants in feminised terms as 'she/her' to enable the text to flow without reference to their actual gender.

CC / 1 – 01 *Programme* *Manager*	*had a role that included both teaching and managing, two joined fractional posts to make up a single full-time role. Based in a further education college in London she has an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) background and had taught overseas for some years. The experience of working in the private sector and the entrepreneurial flare that came with it is something she carries with her into her current role. She arrived back in England at the start of the Skills for Life policy and has little recollection of a pre-Skills for Life FE sector.*
GC / 1 – 02 *Programme* *Manager*	*has worked in adult education as an ESOL specialist for some years. Her role includes a considerable amount of teaching and supporting other teachers. Although based in an FE college she is also responsible for off-site community provision. Employed as a manager with some teaching, she saw herself firstly as a teacher and placed great emphasis on the importance of this throughout our conversation. She narrates an organisational biography that equated quality with nothing more than hard work. She views ALLN provision as peripheral in a college that would rather be doing other more glamorous subjects.*
HM / 1 – 03 *College* *Manager*	*is an ESOL specialist whose role now includes all three Skills for Life curricular areas. She is responsible for on and off-site provision in an outer London adult and community education college. Although the department she manages had been graded as two by OfSTED she was not in post at the time of the most recent inspection. As a manager her role did not include teaching. She views ALLN as a highly specialised area of work that is not well understood by her organisation, but quotes several battles she has won in order to set things up in ways that meet the needs of her learners.*
KE / 1 – 04 *Programme* *Manager*	*has worked in further, adult and community education for some time. Her role includes managing ESOL (to the exclusion of the other Skills for Life curricular subjects) in an outer London further education college. She has been in her current role for less than five years. Prior to her starting the post, the organisation had been graded as unsatisfactory for its ESOL provision. She spoke with enormous pride about having turned the department from a failing to a grade two entity. Her role did not include any direct teaching though in her most recent role she had been a full-time teacher. She has had experience of being an adult education student and draws on her own learning experience to shape how she approaches managing the area.*

PB / 1 – 05 **Programme** **Manager**	*has worked in the post-compulsory education for a number of years. She has a strong background in what was English as a Foreign Language (EFL) having taught overseas for a number of years before taking up her current role. This outer London college offers both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) provision. She was promoted to her current role after a restructure in which the former Programme manager had left. The department had recently failed an inspection – as had several other departments in the college - and secured a grade two in a later round of inspection. She narrates a biography in which her understanding of quality changed considerably as she made a career move from teacher to manager.*
VC / 2 – 06 **Teacher**	*was working as a visiting tutor for a number of colleges for up to 20 hours per week. Although an ESOL specialist she taught both ESOL and Literacy. She has a mixed background that included overseas travel and studying politics and art. Teaching ESOL was viewed as a fallback career option rather than preferred choice. One of the adult education colleges she worked for had recently failed an inspection. Two of the other colleges were both graded as two. She spoke clearly about what she saw as being the differences between the two types of organisation.*
BH / 1 – 07 **Programme** **Manager**	*has worked in ALLN for a short number of years – was unable to remember anything pre-Skills for Life. Her role included no teaching. She had occupied the role for a short period of time and often referenced her most recent role as a teacher. Qualified in ESOL her management included no numeracy or literacy focus. The organisation had maintained a grade two for a number of years. She describes herself as feeling 'passionate' about ESOL and equated quality to 'quality of life' for learners – a reference to the potential for learning to create change at a very personal level.*
EC / 3 – 08 **College** **Manager**	*is a long-standing ALLN manager. An ESOL specialist who could compare and contrast pre and post-Skills for Life organisation of ALLN. Our conversation took place amidst the summer of campaign about ESOL cuts and she was actively involved in this and very concerned for what it would mean for provision in the college. The college had grown ALLN in response to policy over the past few years though none of the teachers or managers working in this site felt it was a core aspect of the college's provision.*

HM / 1 - 09 *Programme* *Manager*	*has worked in adult and community education for a considerable period of time. Her role includes managing all three curricular areas in one department that includes on-site and off-site community classes. She is an ESOL specialist. The central London College she works for is quite small – only five other college managers and a senior manager. It has maintained a Grade two during inspection for a number of years. She values the smallness of her organisation and views its flat structure as central to its capacity to offer quality provision. There was a sense of being able to initiate and follow things through, as well as senior managers being in touch with all aspects of organisational life and able to view the college through the eyes of learners.*
MM / 2 - 10 *Teacher*	*is a teacher working for at least three different adult, further and community education organisation. At least one of these organisation was graded as unsatisfactory during a recent inspection and the other two as good. An ESOL specialist who also teaches literacy, she has travelled and taught overseas. Her first experience of teaching was working with Somali refugees.*
GH / 1 – 12 *College* *Manager*	*as a senior manager her role did not include teaching. She is a long time veteran of Skills for Life and has retained much of the evangelical zeal that led her to this area of work. At the time of the interview she was just about to be promoted to a more senior management position. The department has had a varied recent past. Having sustained a grade two for a number of years and a self-referenced reputation for quality and innovative provision, it expanded exponentially in a very short period of time and in the inspection before last was graded as unsatisfactory. She has worked for the college throughout this time and her role has changed in relation to ALLN, from a direct curricular to overall strategic responsibility.*
TL / 1 – 13 *College* *Manager*	*has worked in ALLN for a short period of time and has little reference to a pre-Skills for Life era. Her role did not include teaching and her responsibility was primarily for literacy and numeracy. Her department included community outreach provision, which included a few ESOL classes. She was based in a further education college with a long-standing reputation for success in Skills for Life having secured and maintained a grade two over a number of years.*
PL / 2 – 14 *Senior* *Manager*	*is a long standing ALLN professional. Her role no longer had a direct ALLN focus and our conversation came about primarily because of her past connection. I have had an extended day-to-day working relationship with this participant. She has a 'holding brief' for ALLN rather then direct line management responsibility. She had worked in the organisation for a number of years and at times had been a manager and teacher of ALLN in the college. The college has a very high profile reputation for quality in the area of work and has maintained a grade two for some time. There is a strong narrative through the college of it having changed from a failing organisation to one with a national profile.*

SH / 2 – 15 *Programme* *Manager*	*is an ESOL specialist whose role included teaching and managing to the exclusion of other subjects. She worked in a central London College which had a varied past in terms of OfSTED inspection grades. The college had achieved a grade two at re-inspection after having been graded as unsatisfactory previously, There was a strong sense of the unsatisfactory grade having been a surprise, located to a specific aspect of the working relationship between managers and inconsistent with the long term history of the organisation.*
SB/2 – 16 *College* *Manager*	*has worked in further education for a long time and is a specialist in learning disabilities and difficulties (SLDD). Her professional past was varied and included overseas travel and working with young offenders. Adult language and literacy were only lately added to her area of responsibility. She talked about this area in surprisingly emotional and involved terms and made regular appeals to quality as a moral imperative, She has no direct teaching responsibility but our conversation left me with the impression that contact with learners is an important part of her working day. The department had been graded as satisfactory rather then good, against the backdrop of a college that had been rated as unsatisfactory in a number of curricular areas. The college was part of a local cluster and in her view was better (more effective and responsive with implementing policy) than other local organisations.*
SE / 1 – 17 *College* *Manager*	*offered the most informal of the conversations, a manager with whom I at one time had a direct day-to-day working relationship. She had been recently promoted and referenced by OfSTED as an example of good practice for a particular aspect of ALLN. Her most recent experience was working as a teacher / manager though her current role did not include any teaching. Her role covered Adult Literacy and Numeracy with little or no involvement with ESOL. Although she had a number of years experience of further education, changes in career meant that there was little reference to pre-Skills for Life. Thought and discussion about teaching, managing, policy and practice only became relevant to her in the past few years. She narrates an organisational biography that foregrounds a publicly celebrated and often quoted shift from good to outstanding.*

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