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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Faculty of Social and Human Sciences

School of Education

(Lifelong and Work-Related Learning)

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Life stories, social action and the Third Space: a biographical
narrative interpretive study of adult users of
a community IT centre

by

George Brooke Roberts

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2011

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOUR COMMUNITY IT CENTRE?

**LIFE STORIES, SOCIAL ACTION AND THE THIRD SPACE –
A BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF ADULT USERS OF
A COMMUNITY IT CENTRE**

by George Brooke Roberts

The Community IT centre (CITC) is a place where people engage in informal and formal activities leading to positive change in their lives. I undertook a multimodal, qualitative, participant-voice study based on the biographical narrative interpretive method (BNIM) at a CITC on a large housing estate in southern England, with 24 participants; 11 people provided extended life stories. The study addresses the conspicuous silence of learners' voices in the literature about community education and gives space to the voices of users of the CITC. In the UK and elsewhere, the dominant route to social inclusion is presumed to be employment, for which IT skills are needed. The analysis, using a Third Space conceptual framework informed by Activity Theory, challenges this assumption. The study makes specific and important contributions to knowledge about what people do with a CITC and makes policy recommendations in line with the findings (Ch 9, section 9.5). The thesis shows that the CITC is a social learning space, which supplies *critically* more IT access to those who don't have "enough" and basic facilities to those who don't have IT at all.

Positive change is manifested in an emergent, instrumental and interpersonal value system, discovered by this research, consisting of compassion, determination, professionalism, resourcefulness, respect and solidarity. CITCs are shown to provide invaluable spaces within which identity projects may be pursued and the formation of self-effective identities and communities supported. Through association with the CITC people can be enabled to be more effective managers (and self-managers) of the institutions of society. Engagement with the CITC also appears to be associated with critical reflexivity concerning social presence and participation. People are discovered to have a broad range of motivations for using the centre and to do many things with computers. Affective factors are shown to be significant in determining people's use of IT. Although they do engender strong feelings, people's relationship with computers is not fetishised nor do they form a particularly important aspect of identity. Despite assertions in policy about the importance of computers this thesis shows that IT is not the magnet that draws people into uncomfortable spaces; comfortable spaces draw people into IT use, and comfort is a factor of community.

A common-sense of the self as the subject of a personal activity system – the institution of the individual – is a useful unit of analysis however this is a complex notion. So too is the notion of community. People express forms of shared experience and interest, and negotiate concerns about identity on multiple scales (Panelli & Welch 2005). I take community as a consistent "intersubjective network" (Žižek 2008, p.12), which, as for Bhabha, "... enables a division between the private and the public, the civil and the familial." But, which also, "... enacts the impossibility of drawing an objective line between the two" (2004, p. 330). The stories of the participants reveal extensive hybridisation in respect of many factors including: nationality, occupation, domesticity, social class, locale/neighbourhood, and expectations of outcomes in life. Occupational identity: I am what I do – broadly conceived – is an important feature of participants' stories and there is wide community support for creative aspects of employment and for the transformative potential for individuals and communities of working together, whether or not money is involved. Wider social institutions (family, education, work) are discovered to be highly productive in shaping people's engagement with the CITC. Domestic circumstances and parenthood contribute significantly to people's use of the centre. In particular, lone parenthood has a profound impact on people but can be a positive choice leading to a fulfilled sense of self and strong bond with the child, which can be facilitated by the CITC. Importantly, some people do not want the Internet in their homes. They resent its intrusion for strongly held reasons which need not be subject of argument or coercion. The thesis shows that participants in this study have a rich conceptualisation of learning, education, IT, qualifications and work, and clear understandings of the differences between formal and informal learning as well as an understanding of the multiply inscribed role of qualifications in social inclusion. The thesis provides specific local evidence for the OfCom (2010) findings about people's preference for informal learning about ICT. The thesis recommends that communities take it upon themselves, with encouragement and support, to provide community IT centres.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, George Brooke Roberts,

declare that the thesis entitled

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Life stories, social action and the Third Space: a biographical narrative interpretive study of
adult users of a community IT centre

and the work presented in it are my own.

I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this theses has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed,
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself and jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed.....

Date.....

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Chapter 1 Introduction and rationale

This is a study of adult users of a community information technology (IT) centre (CITC), Bluefield Lanes IT Zone (BITZ), located in a community centre on a housing estate at the periphery of a city in southern England. The study draws on the experiences and activities of some 24 people, 11 of whom provided extended biographical narratives. These people use or have used this community IT centre set among “vernacular cosmopolitans” (Bhabha 2004, p.ix ff). In respect of the experience of users of community IT centres there is, generally, a gap in our knowledge (Colley *et al.* 2003, p.66; Cook & Smith 2004, p.36; NIACE 2005, p.55; Selwyn 2003, pp.355, 372; Webb 2006, pp.481, 484). While this is in part being redressed by recent initiatives (Biesta *et al.* 2008; Seale 2009a), the life histories, activities, experiences and voices of the users of community IT centres remain largely absent from the literature. Users of centres are represented by various synthetic descriptions – often of the problematic other – taken from research into the experience of centre managers and evaluation reports of various projects. This study therefore aims to focus on the largely absent voices and to “give voice”, cautiously (Mazzei & Jackson 2009), to the life histories and experiences of users of a CITC in order to better understand IT-based community-development and educational initiatives.

In understanding such experiences there are new conceptualisations emerging. I find myself in an exciting space, using Third Space Theory and third generation Activity Theory (Ch 1, section 1.3.2;) for my conceptual framework (Ch 4). It is an uncomfortable space, too: demanding reflexivity and self-exposure from all the participants, not least the author (Ch 1, section 1.3.1, Ch 3, section 3.6).

1.1 The research questions

I have been working, volunteering and learning in community contexts since 1978, and at one particular community IT centre, the focus of this study, for the past five years. Through this personal association with community education and community IT centres, in discussion with friends and colleagues, and in discussion latterly with researchers and through the literature, I have observed that the association with a community IT centre may lead to people making positive changes in their lives. This study will address some of the problematic concepts embedded in this observation, which has become the principal research question:

- RQ1 How do people, who associate themselves with the community IT centre, use that association to make positive changes in their lives?

From the overarching observation and principal research question, other observations and associated questions have been generated. At the community IT centre, people did things. Sometimes they did things with computers.

RQ2 What do people actually do with the community IT centre?

In addressing this question it became evident that people's use of the centre was influenced by various factors: family, children, education, employment and so on. I wanted to determine, therefore:

RQ3 What factors shape people's use of and engagement with the community IT centre?

I might say, even here, that among what people did at the community IT centre was to engage in identity projects (Neimeyer & Rareshide 1991). It is not until you begin to explore the questions of identity and values in the personal-historical trajectory or setting of a life story, which takes in the community IT centre, that it really becomes possible to begin to ask:

RQ4 What constitutes positive change for people?

Because, without addressing this question there is no possibility of addressing the first.

Finally, because there is a critically real world – of policies, agendas, and agencies; of discipline and social control, which has a powerful impact on the activity of people at and through the community IT centre, and because it is among my aims that this work will have an impact on that critically real world – I have to ask:

RQ5 What are the policy implications for community IT centres?

1.1.1 Structure of the thesis

The thesis has nine chapters. The four at the front present the rationale (Ch 1), a review of the contextual literature (Ch 2), the research methods (Ch 3) and the analytical framework (Ch 4). The four at the back present an analysis of the common-sense of the self (Ch 6), social action (Ch 7), community and identity (Ch 8) and finally answer the question, what do you do with your community IT centre and what might be the policy implications? (Ch 9). In the pivot point (Ch 5), "... the place they all encircle, the 'symptom' in their midst" (Žižek 2008, p.2) are

11 brief stories: words of the people, edited from life-story narratives. These narratives were informed by two focus groups and follow-up interviews between May 2008 and June 2009. All together, 24 individuals participated in this study.

1.1.2 Summary findings

This thesis will show that the community IT centre (CITC) is a place where people engage in informal and formal programmes of activity leading to positive change in their lives. Positive change will be seen to be manifested in an emergent instrumental and interpersonal value system (Ch 8, section 8.2). It will be seen that the CITC provides invaluable space within which identity projects may be pursued and the formation of self-effective identities and communities supported (Ch 8, section 8.4). Through association with the CITC people can be enabled to be more effective managers (and self-managers) of the institutions of society (Ch 7, section 7.1). Engagement with the CITC also appears to be associated with critical reflexivity concerning presence and participation in society (Ch 9, section 9.2.4). Most public ICT sites, it could be argued, do little to widen access, simply supplying more access to those who already have it (Ch 2, section 2.5.1). But, I will suggest community IT centres supply *critically* more and to those who don't have it. As well as adding to the provision of access to IT, CITCs can be seen to add significant value to IT, education, the community and the person in the process.

In addressing the subordinate research questions, many other discoveries will be presented, original in their particularity and generality. People will be shown to have many different reasons for using the CITC (Ch 6, section 6.2.1) and to do many different things with computers (Ch 6, section 6.2.2). A broad and not necessarily consistent range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for using the centre has been discovered and it will be shown that people's assertions about why they use the CITC do not always clearly align with their actions while they are there (Ch 6, sections 6.2.4 & 6.2.5). Affective factors have been discovered to be extremely significant in determining people's engagement with the CITC and their use of computers generally (Ch 6, section 6.4). It will be shown that although they do engender strong feelings in some participants (Ch 6, section 6.4.5), people's relationship with computers is not particularly strong. Computers are not fetishised nor do they form a particularly important aspect of participants' identity (Ch 6, section 6.2.3). Despite assertions in policy about the importance of computers (see Ch 1 section 1.2.1 & 1.2.4), further to OfCom (2010), Seale (2009a), Selwyn (2003) and Webb (2006) this thesis will show that IT is not the magnet that draws people into uncomfortable spaces; comfortable spaces draw people into IT use and comfort is a factor of community.

Throughout, three great institutions of society (the family, education and work) will be seen to be highly productive factors in shaping people's engagement with the CITC (Ch 7, section 7.1 and ff). The family, domestic circumstances and parenthood contribute significantly to shaping people's use of the centre. Parental expectation is a powerful motivating factor for the participants in this study and their expectations for their children will shape the next generation (Ch 7, section 7.2.3). In particular, lone parenthood, will be seen to have a profound impact on people but can be a very positive choice leading to a fulfilled sense of self and strong bond with the child, which can be facilitated by the CITC, despite continuing misplaced approbation by society (Ch 7, section 7.2.1). An important discovery, is that some participants in this study do not want the Internet in their homes, even though they are perfectly competent users of computers (Ch 7, section 7.2.4). Education, of course will be found to exert an explicit mediating influence on people's use of the CITC (Ch 7, section 7.3). But, we will also see that education is tightly woven into the domestic field as well as into people's affective response to computers and the centre. The institution of work will be seen to be a complex and problematic mediator of people's relationship with the CITC (Ch 7, section 7.4).

The thesis will show that participants have a rich conceptualisation of learning, education, IT and qualifications (Ch 7, section 7.3.3), and clear understandings of the differences between formal and informal learning (Ch 7, section 7.3.4) as well as an understanding of the multiply inscribed role of qualifications in social inclusion (Ch 6, section 6.2.7 & 6.2.8). The thesis will provide specific local evidence for the OfCom (2010) findings discussed in Chapter two (Ch 2, section 2.5.1) about people's preference for informal learning about information and communication technologies.

A common sense of the self as the subject of a personal activity system will be seen to be a productive and useful unit of analysis, however, this personal institution of the individual is a complex notion (Ch 6, section 6.3). The different stories and perspectives of the participants in this study will reveal extensive hybridisation in respect of many factors including: nationality, occupation, domesticity, social class, locale/neighbourhood identity, and expectations of outcomes in the life course. Occupational identity: I am what I do – broadly conceived – will be seen to be an important feature of participants' stories (Ch 7, section 7.4.2) and there is wide community support for creative aspects of employment and for the transformative potential for individuals and communities of working together, whether or not money is involved.

1.2 The research gap

There is a real gap in the educational research literature about what people actually do in community IT centres. In spite of a strong commitment to inclusion in the post-compulsory and community education sector, “...a deep commitment from tutors to students which is at the core of their professionalism... and the role of adult and community education in strengthening social cohesion” (Coffield 2006, p.5), there is a conspicuous silence of learners’ voices in the research literature about community education practice: they are spoken of, about and for, but seldom speak.

This gives rise to what might be seen as another strand in my inquiry, as important as the five research questions. I intend, through this work, to give some space in the research literature in the fields of lifelong learning, continuing, adult, community education and community IT centres to the narratives: the life stories in their own voices of people who are users, volunteers, managers, tutors, friends of the Bluefield Lanes IT Zone (BITZ).

There is a long history of research into policy (Ahier & Esland 1999; Avis 2009; Avis *et al.* 1996), into skills requirements and into the experiences of community educators (Coffield *et al.* 2007; Edward *et al.* 2007; Hodgson *et al.* 2007). There is work on school children’s experience of information technology and a growing body of work on university-based learners (Boyd 2007; Boyd 2009; Oblinger & Oblinger 2005; Ramanau *et al.* 2008; Sharpe *et al.* 2006; Sharpe *et al.* n.d.; JISC n.d.a; JISC n.d.b). But, there appears to be very little work that captures the recent experience of the users of community IT centres. There is an even wider shadow over the lived personal experience of community education generally: though there are a few bright parts (Massey & Bairstow 2009). There is much said about the policy context of community education (Coffield 2006) and there is much about the need to educate (or train) excluded or marginalised – “minoritarian” (Skott-Myhre 2005, p.46) – members of society. Such training is sometimes characterised as normalising or remedial, either for the individual or for segments of society (Bransford 2001).

According to Wengraf *et al.*, only recently has there been, “an understanding that ... material policies and practices are lived out or “filtered” through networks of relationships and shared assumptions and meanings that vary greatly between societies.” (Wengraf *et al.* 2002, p.253) At the community IT centre level, government policy does not yet appear to have taken this into account, or if it has, appears to ignore it. Government policy and the agencies of policy appear to see the provision of IT as associated with various social inclusion, national training and skills agendas, which have, in parts, a commodified, objectified and transmissive, deficit-model of

approved knowledge provision, rather than a locally rooted model of affiliative, socially co-constructed, networked knowledge. I suggest that it is this latter constructivist/connectivist (Siemens 2005a) epistemology that has some power to effect positive change (RQ4) in people and societies.

1.2.1 The connected commons

William Dutton argues strongly for the politically transformative power of the new networked elites, whom he calls the “Fifth Estate” (Dutton 2007, p.2). Dutton reviews the positive and negative aspects of networked publics (Boyd 2008, p.1) characterising them in a framework of technologies of freedom v. technologies of control (Dutton 2007, p.4). He goes on to say: “Self-selected individuals can build horizontal, peer-to-peer or even very centralized networks that are designed and used to meet broader social objectives.” (Dutton 2007, p.5)

While I accept Dutton’s description of the symptoms, I feel some anxiety about the proliferation of elites. We had the three great estates of society: warriors (aristocracy), priests (clergy) and peasants (the commons) that persisted through the middle ages and over which the enlightenment was eventually thrown. The French Revolution was largely about enfranchising the “third estate” – the commons – among the lords temporal (warriors, aristocracy) and spiritual (bishops, clergy). To these three estates was added the notion of a fourth, the press as an agent of polity. Dutton’s fifth estate is now asserted to be wresting power from this fourth. As we had military, wool, rail and press barons, we now live with a generation of information barons. Must we keep proliferating elites? I prefer the concept of the connected commons: conflate the lords temporal and spiritual and that is the basic antagonism.

1.2.2 The observable divide

There is an observable divide, globally (Gapminder 2008). When GDP per capita is compared to national rate of Internet use and population, the wealthy few are seen to dominate in percentage of population connected to the Internet. The rate of Internet use and education are also correlated, as are education and wealth. This is true regionally within nations also. UK National Statistics record 65 percent of households had Internet access in 2008 and 56 percent had broadband (ONS 2009). Dutton puts it higher. Seventy percent of British households have Internet access, and 66 percent have broadband (Dutton *et al.* 2009, p.12). If this divide is indicative of barriers to achievement, then a social justice policy agenda might suggest working to overcome it could help better achievement records individually as well as across a wider community or society. Such a discourse might also suggest wider agendas be furthered: employability improved, stress reduced, profits enhanced, competitive edge honed.

Community IT centres, and the lives and practices of the people who use them are set against a wider policy context where, as Selwyn puts it: “The use of information and communications technology (ICT) is considered to be a fundamental aspect of citizenship in contemporary society.” (Selwyn 2003, pp.350-351) This view is widely held. Webb, for example observes, “ICT skills are regarded as commodities that can increase human capital.” (Webb 2006, p.485) “...ICT-based learning is considered a tool for transforming the learning process and the learners themselves.” (Webb 2006, p.486)

Current research clearly shows great gaps in our understanding of the importance of context and identity for understanding of the role of community IT centres in the lives of people who use them. According to M. Hill *et al* (2004, p.79), the concept of exclusion is part of UK and European policy discourse. They note, “Perhaps because it has become a popularised policy concept, its exact definition is elusive”. They go on to say that Tony Blair, described social exclusion as: “... a short-hand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.” And, they further note: “Recently the tendency has been to use social exclusion to describe material disadvantage and marginalisation in a cluster fashion, often merging causes ... and outcomes...” (Hill, M. *et al*. 2004, p.79) Frank Webster summarising a generation of research into ICT’s impact on society concluded, “... the production of interesting, textured and localized studies ... demonstrated, time and again, that the technological determinism which underscored government debate and most other discussion of the ‘microelectronics revolution’ was intellectually weak.” (Webster, F 2005, p.445)

1.2.4 Community IT provision

As Selwyn’s work shows, despite many initiatives intended to provide public, state-supported access to ICT, there is limited research into either the use or the effectiveness of these initiatives (Selwyn 2003, p.372). Cook and Smith suggest that the emphasis on the commodification of ICT skills and the linking of such skills to employment and economic competitiveness misses key social outcomes: “such as confidence building or the drawing of excluded members of society into the online community centre that leads to an outcome of ... a personal goal to use ICT more frequently.” (Cook & Smith 2004, p.36)

Patterns of provision are highly unstable. Many of the initiatives cited by Selwyn, such as UK Online Centres, the People’s Network, ‘Wired-Up Communities’ and ‘Computers Within

Reach' were limited pilots lasting a brief period and reaching a small proportion of the population of the UK (Selwyn 2003, p.371). Another complicating factor is the pace with which Internet applications are being developed and introduced. For example, the Wired Up Communities Toolkit (DfES 2008), though only five years old at this writing, would be anachronistic if presented as representative of contemporary practice.

Community IT centres are a legacy of various initiatives, particularly UKonline which aimed to increase IT provision to communities with multiple indices of deprivation by establishing computer suites in, among other places, community centres. But, with approximately five percent of users, of all ages, genders and socio-economic status citing community centres as a place where they can obtain Internet access and only about two percent actually accessing IT through community centres, "there is a pressing need to explore the *actual* patterns of takeup and use of public ICT sites in the UK." (Selwyn 2003, p.355) Webb explicitly identifies a "research gap". "Empirical research is needed, including qualitative studies of the experiences of socially excluded learners using ICT." (Webb 2006, p.481). "There are few empirical studies of ICT-based learning with previously excluded groups in the UK." (Webb 2006, pp.482-483)

This study cannot address all gaps. It can at best address the five research questions and maybe give voice to the participants. It may contribute to the understanding of their particular experiences. It may also address some of the need identified by the research community.

1.3 Interpretive stance

No researcher comes to a research situation without a perspective (Gergen & Leach 2001, p.228). In my own practice I have long taught the need, in teachers, for authenticity, reciprocity and credibility – or what might be called critical authority. As Rodgers and Raider-Roth have observed, there is value in integrity, in there not being too great a distance between the personal and the professional (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, p.272). Further, in the conduct of this study trust has been established between me and the participants, who have contributed their stories to this work: trust based on reciprocal give and take. It would not be a fair representation of this work if did not acknowledge that the professional – and the political – is personal. If the scholarship of discovery is about gaining some purchase on a truth, there is something of a confessional thread of reflexivity running through this narrative. My own urge for truth-telling (Jackson 2009, p.166) has methodological relevance. I came to this project with an interpretive stance or orientation towards knowledge. The choice of biographical methods and appreciative inquiry for data collection, and a grounded – yet theorised – emergent approach to coding

arose from this orientation. My conceptual framework, which is the topic of chapter four, follows from it.

1.3.1 My critical-theoretical orientation

My orientation developed in opposition to the war in Vietnam and subsequent involvement in political campaigning to a left of the mainstream. There are the excluded and there are those who exclude (Žižek 2009a, pp. 47, 97-100). Equivalency in diversity is richly problematic but none the less equivalency of opportunity *and* outcome remain an aspiration. Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (Kropotkin 1987) and the anarchism which flows from it is one means of addressing equivalency in diversity. Feminism has been part of this paradigm since my undergraduate days in the early 1970s: the personal is political and the patriarchy is a problem (Hanisch 2006; Oakley 1985, p.196). As with the Third Space, it is all language (see section 1.3.2) and language is power (Fairclough 2001). Formal, neogrammarian, historical, comparative and structural linguistics (Chomsky 2002; Jakobsen 1980, pp.12-26) were part of my first masters degree, which taught me the fundamental mutability of language and the arbitrariness of the sign. Teaching basic literacy in adult community education contexts in late Thatcherite Britain converted me to the social perspective on language and gave me a grounding in Freireian learner-centred practice (Freire 1970; Freire 1974; Taylor, P. V. 1993). As an associate lecturer on the Open University course, "Language and Literacy in a Changing World" I explored multi-literacies every year for four years. (Kress 1997; Street 1997; New London Group 1996)

Now, my perspective is broadly sociocultural and critical-theoretical. Socioculturalism "...focuses on the link between language and learning, both of which are viewed as fundamentally social phenomena..." (Lillis 2003, p.xv). Language is never neutral. It does not exist outside communities of use. Ideologies: dominant and oppositional as well the force of discourse shapes beliefs and orientations to action (Herman & Chomsky 1988). To speak: to enunciate, is to enact an aspect of one's identity within and/or before a community of other speakers. Further, all language is suffused with cultural assumptions that makes understanding highly contingent. (Galison 2007a; Galison 2007b; Kuhn 1962). As Popper would have it, "All observation is theory laden" (Popper 1996). Theory then becomes "critical" according to Brookfield, when it has two distinct purposes:

... to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame and distort educational processes and interactions.

... to question [hegemonic] assumptions and practices that seem to make our ... lives easier but actually work against our long-term interests.” (Brookfield 2005b, p.8)

Critical theory according to Brookfield, is concerned with “Identifying and scrutinising assumptions...” (Brookfield 2005a, p.49), or according to Barnett, unpicking and making truth claims within defined contexts (Barnett 1997, pp.1-2; 11). Critical discourse analysis is as much a programme for transforming the world as for understanding it (Fairclough 2001). According to Barnett:

[W]e can call a body of thought or a discipline ‘critical’ when it takes on the character of illuminating social practices such that we become more aware that those practices could be other than they are. This critical capacity reaches its apotheosis when it reveals, perhaps through the use of concepts such as power, emancipation, ideology, discourse and empowerment, that the current state of play is the outcome of uneven forces. (Barnett 1997, p.72)

Very early into the project I had made assumptions about how I might interpret the data. However, it is also clear that my theoretical framework for this study (Ch 4) developed together and iteratively with the analysis of the data, and that this emergence influenced my methodology (Ch 3). While I had an orientation and a perspective, I certainly did not have a framework when I started. And, throughout the period of collecting and analysing the data I was still reading and being influenced by theoretical writers. My work has, if anything, become more grounded as it has progressed, less reliant on theoretical “givens” for understanding. I have come to use theory less for support and more for illumination.

My conceptual framework will be elaborated in chapter four. Here, briefly, I outline my stance, based in Third Space Theory (Bhabha 2004) and third generation Activity Theory (Engeström 2001).

1.3.2 The Third Space and Activity Theory

I am writing with and about voices. The Third Space (see Ch. 4, section 4. 4) is a theory of identity realised through voice, as enunciation. For Bhabha, the Third Space, while having important political consequences for cultural understanding, arises not from a political but a linguistic perspective: from, “the structure of symbolic representation itself – not the content of the symbol or its social function, but the structure of symbolization.” (Bhabha 2004, pp. 52-53) For Bhabha it is a fact of language that: “the structure of meaning and reference [is] an

ambivalent process.” (Bhabha 2004, p.54) In this respect Third Space Theory has roots in the dialogic (Bhabha 2004, p.269) and semiotic traditions where every utterance is unique (“univocal”) and yet heteroglossic: subject to the “multiplicity of its individual interpretations.” (Jakobsen 1980, p.18) Voice can at best re-present a perspective on reality, framed, mediated, consciously and unconsciously interpreted and informed by relationships of affection, affiliation and power. We all read between the lines never fully taking one another – *or ourselves* – at our word.

Third Space Theory explains the uniqueness of each person, actor or context as a “hybrid”, through refusing to simplify or structure the reduction of complexity, and through acknowledging the unknowable, uninterpretable ambivalence at the heart of all cultural statements (Bhabha 2004, p.55). Third Space Theory, further, resists normalisation or cultural inscription and generates a position against all identity politics by denying privilege to any originary culture. In explaining the uniqueness of each actor and resisting a politics of identity, Third Space Theory suggests that policies of remediation based in models of the other are likely to be inadequate. However, the Third Space throws a huge challenge up before anyone who would presume to write with authority about others, particularly with respect to cultural matters. At its heart Third Space Theory draws on “an epistemology of nonrepresentability” and resists dialectic (Kipfer 2007, p.703 & 708). Kipfer even regards this as dangerous or perhaps, in places, less than useful. It resists being the synthesis of thesis and antithesis; it resists even being a perpetual antithesis. It resists the hegemonisation of possibilities that allows pragmatic application. Writing of the experiences of Mexican women on the border with the U.S., Licona writes of a (b)orderland’s rhetoric, moving, “... beyond binary borders to a named third space of ambiguity and even contradiction.” (Licona 2005, p.105)

For this reason I have continued to rely on Activity Theory, despite concerns for its hegemonism discussed in chapter four. Recent expansions of Activity Theory are explicitly developed as guides for action and organisational development as in Engeström’s now classic “ongoing intervention study ... in the multi-organizational field of medical care for children in the Helsinki area in Finland” (Engeström 2001). But, therein lies a problem, picked up by Avis:

There is a tension in Engeström’s AT that readily lends itself to appropriation by capital, and is a consequence of its failure to seriously acknowledge social antagonism and wider patterns of social relations in which activity systems are located. As a result it can readily fold into a Foucauldian technology of control, or into a version of systems theory. (Avis 2009, p.162)

That is to say, for Avis, Activity Theory might be used to order society in a totalising and hierarchised scheme of procedures, even as described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

In the facts of social inequality and in the systems that allocate and administer services – such as the provision of community IT centres, which are, in part at least, aimed at mitigating the effects of social inequality – a discourse of the governor and the governed persists: almost medieval. As Bhabha puts it: “It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post colonial provenance.” (Bhabha 2004, p.56) But, that provenance is only the beginning of a journey. As Bhabha writes:

... the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exociticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalistic histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (Bhabha 2004, p.56 emphasis in the original)

It also means seeing the antagonisms, the awkward hybridity and discomfort of cultures at the edge of the metropolis. We are all vernacular cosmopolitans engaged by or in these antagonisms: probably not fully intentionally or complicit with any side: awkwardly inbetween.

1.4 Problems with definition

Throughout this study, there are problems with definitions. *Community, exclusion, identity, agency, participation* and *presence* are key terms, and all are problematic, or potentially so. Community and identity are complementary factors in a person’s sense of their self. For Fendler, the construction of communities, particularly third-way approaches like communities of practice, “...is infused with assumptions about identity, which usually connotes coherence, individuality, or ascription.” (Fendler 2006, p.320) Moreover, such notions of community and identity can serve to perpetuate unequal social relations, inclusion and exclusion, and may impact upon a person’s capacity for action.

1.4.1 Community

Community is a difficult term used in different ways to mean different things. “[C]ommunity is a social construct to be variously and continuously negotiated,” according to Panelli and Welch. It is a “constructed concept with complex and problematic meanings...” (2005, pp.1589, 1590), “... vague and muddy.” (Fendler 2006, p.303) According to Byrne, “‘Community’ is a tricky word in every sense. ... [A]lthough the term originally had a clear spatial referent, it is now being used to identify ‘communities of interest’ without a spatial basis.” (Byrne 1999, p.119) Panelli and Welch observe that there are, “... imagined communities, such as the nation, or an ethnicity-based subgrouping in which members of a community do not necessarily know most other members...” Community is no longer necessarily: “... associated with a particular scale or locality. Rather, [there are] multiple scales and the material, relational, and political ways in which people express forms of shared experience or interest; or negotiate concerns about identity, trust, care, or justice.” (Panelli & Welch 2005, p.1590)

Many variants are available: community of practice (Wenger 1998), of action, of purpose, of circumstance, of position (Wilson 2006), of inquiry (Wilson 2008). Bottery notes with respect to “learning communities”: “... the concepts can so easily be fitted into the agenda of different pressure groups, to be ‘filled up’ with particular preferred versions.” (Bottery 2003, p.188) There are many kinds of community, and the term is applied often uncritically in scholarly, political and common sense usage (Panelli & Welch 2005, p.1594). For the purposes of this study, I take Žižek’s formulation of community as a consistent “intersubjective network” (Žižek 2008, p.12), which, as for Bhabha, “... enables a division between the private and the public, the civil and the familial.” But, community also, “... enacts the impossibility of drawing an objective line between the two.” (Bhabha 2004, p.330) Putnam (2000) associates community with social capital as a means – and indicator – of social inclusion (Ch 9, section 9.3.2) . Community is the state, condition, mode and locus of social inclusion or the mirror of exclusion.

Identity and community are reflections of one another. Community, like identity, is a construct. It is erected at least in part to defend, deflect or project our singularity and our ultimate finitude (Welch & Panelli 2007) but it does not bear too close an examination. The notions of constructed community (see Ch 8, section 8.5) and constructed identity are highly contextualised, interdependent and necessarily fluid. If there were not a certain fluidity in these notions there could be adverse consequences, not least for an easy social discourse. Yet, this easy sociality, if carried beyond an ill-defined “(b)order” (Licona 2005) through policy or other instruments could become a means of communitarian identity politics, authoritarian

subordination, normalisation and control. For community itself is by no means always positive (Amsler *et al.* 2010, p.13). That said, like the common-sense of the self (Ch 6), a common-sense of community, fluid and contingent, in part symbolic, in part imaginary, sometimes geographically local and sometimes globally distributed, but always a very real Third Space, pervades the understandings in this study.

1.4.2 Exclusion

Although community may be the mirror of exclusion, to further complicate matters, Levitas has observed that exclusion is similarly tricky:

Part of the difficulty of finding indicators of social exclusion is that there is no agreed definition either of the phenomenon itself or of its main causes. ... It is related to poverty, especially understandings of poverty which go beyond low income and address the multiple dimensions of deprivation. But the nature of the relationship is not clear. Poverty and social exclusion may be analytically separated, with poverty being the 'lack of material resources, especially income, necessary to participate in British society' ... But some definitions of poverty include social exclusion understood as lack of participation in social life. (Levitas 1999)

As we will see through the stories of the people in this study, not everyone who may appear “deprived” (2009-06-02JamieRnd2) considers themselves to be. Nor would everyone living in a super output area (SOA) characterised by multiple indices of deprivation appear to be deprived. People with no qualifications may be highly literate and skilled with the use of ICT. Conversely people with high-level qualifications may find finding employment extremely hard. Work is not the only reason to live.

1.4.3 Identity

Identity, like community, can be seen from several perspectives, which are interrelated, for example: technical, forensic, developmental, deviant, social and common-sense. Technical identity has to do with access to IT and other systems. It may have to do with authentication, permissions, verification, persistence in and across sessions, and non-repudiation. Technical identity deals with tokens such as user names and swipe cards. These tokens may (but do not need to be) associated with a body through biometrics of some form (signature, photo, fingerprint, iris-scan, etc). Forensic (police) identity has to do with monitoring and controlling certain behaviours; it is related to technical identity: movement of physical people (immigration, passport, ID cards), certain permissions (drivers licences), and insurability (licences to practice).

Forensic identity is always trying to relate tokens to bodies and holds a body to be a single repository responsible for its identity, whether unitary, fragmented or multiple. As Harré puts it, there is a “... clear indication that bodily continuity plays a primary role when the cases become difficult.” (Foucault 1977, p.35; Harré 1983, p.35)

Developmental psychology regards an individual’s identity as going through stages from childhood through to an achieved adult sense of self (Litowitz 1997; Neimeyer & Rareshide 1991). Identity is located physically and, while consisting of parts, these parts are resolvable into a single “mature person”. There is a teleological and hierarchical, value-laden aspect to such a developmental view which aligns with the forensic (utilitarian and commonsense) view of maturity and responsibility. In the psychology of deviance, identity may on the one hand be unitary but extensively transgressive of norms, or on the other hand it may be multiple and fragmented (as in multiple personality disorder or schizophrenia). Divided selves are often held to be a risk even before deviance becomes an issue: “... distance between personal and professional selves can cause a tentativeness... that undermines ... trust.” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, p.272) Deviance or subversiveness is a highly politicised arena in which many forces compete.

In social perspectives on identity, identity – which may or may not be unitary, which may or may not be resident in the physical substrate of a body – is primarily located in relationships, networks and groups and is expressed through many different semiotic systems. Factors of the context are very likely to be more important than the dispositional attributes of any one individual (Willer 2010 lectures two and three).

Finally, as with the common-sense understanding of community, the common-sense presentation of the person is a particular and widely shared reading of the identity as perhaps best illustrated through the positioning of subjects and agents in the popular press (Scollon 1998, p.210 ff). The common-sense of the self underlies the analysis in chapter six.

1.4.4 Agency

According to Biesta and Tedder, “The idea of agency has played a central role in education at least since the Enlightenment.” (Biesta & Tedder 2007) There are two broad fields within which this term functions. The fields are related and overlap. One is more concrete and concerned with organisations, firms or other such groups, which deliver services. The other is more abstract and is concerned with individuals and their capacity for action. Both sorts of agency are central to this study. According to Biesta and Tedder, “The origins of the term

'agency' lie in the legal and commercial distinction between principal and agent, in which the latter is granted the capacity to act autonomously on behalf of the former" (Biesta & Tedder 2007). In the field of formally constituted organisations of people with a declared purpose or aim, often governmental and often concerned with the delivery of a service, we might think of an employment agency or of the (recently transformed) Learning and Skills Development Agency. Even without the word "agency" used in an organisation's title we might recognise many different sorts of agencies. In this sense "agency" implies a person, a group, a firm, a team "acting on behalf of": of a government, or of a larger organisation or of several organisations, as an insurance agency might. A community IT centre might be seen as an IT agency working on behalf of the community.

This concept of agency is important because multi-agency working is a key component of many strategies for providing services, including education services, for excluded groups (Hill, L. *et al.* 2009; Leadbetter *et al.* 2007). The community IT centre at the heart of this study is a small agency, and while its constitution has changed over the years, its aim – and its agency – have not, really.

1.4.5 Boundaries: complex ownership and tenancy patterns

There remains, however an issue with boundaries. The community IT centre is located in a building known as a community centre. Community centres often have complex ownership and tenancy patterns and are occupied by multiple agencies, such as credit unions, regional regeneration projects, youth projects (after school clubs), education projects (UFL, Adult Learning Services, Lifelong Learning Networks, college and university partnerships), arts projects and Social Services, voluntary-sector, and faith-based agencies. When it comes to developing social capital and wider community cohesion it is important that the boundaries between these agencies are invisible, or nearly so. We shall see that the users of the community IT centre have little awareness of its independence from the other agencies that operate from the community centre. But, when it comes to funding the various services, boundaries become very important.

1.4.6 A more abstract agency

The more abstract use of the term "agency" is also important to this study. Agency refers to the capacity of people to act, as well as the capacity for other actors to function within social structures. Theories of social action (Scollon 2001), actor networks (ANT n.d.; Latour 1999), and Activity Theory (Engeström 1999), as well as many others, are concerned with explaining the capacity of people to act, and the capacity of social structures and other people to influence,

circumscribe or even determine people's actions. In this study we presume some agency for the participants and others to associate themselves with the community IT centre, and to use that association to make positive changes in their lives (RQ1). But, we also presume that there are factors beyond the individual which shape their use of and engagement with the community IT centre. Could we say that a community IT centre is an agency, which facilitates the development of agency – for itself and others (see Ch 9, section 9.4.4)?

In respect to the capacity for people to act, the issue of boundaries again appears. In a professional sense, how far is it appropriate to go in any relationship? At what point does revelation become transgression or complicity? In the ambiguous shared Third Space how much discretion do we allow ourselves? Do I admit to having failed in parts of my own education trajectory? Do I admit to having experienced family court and an immigrant detention centre? In terms of agency, where are the boundaries that define the subject of any action? Who am I, who does this?

1.4.7 Life cycles

Cook and Smith make an important observation that there are life cycles in respect of community IT centres. They identify a centre life cycle, an ICT literacy life cycle, and inter-related centre-beneficiary and centre-staff life cycles. The centre beneficiary life cycle is described as proceeding via various “hook” activities: something brings a person in, and then various offerings keep them coming back:

An initial hook at this stage is either a crèche facility or “beautiful” new computers. These users then progress and as they gain enough confidence they may decide to take part in a more formal activity; a second stage hook activity may facilitate this, e.g. writing a CV or sessions called ‘keeping up with the kids’. (Cook & Smith 2002, p.3)

In addressing cycles and trajectories through life and its various parts, and in consideration of the previous discussions of community, identity, and agency, three terms become important: *presence*, *participation* and *progression*.

In the early days of the community IT centre at the heart of this study, there was extensive outreach work undertaken by staff recruited from the immediate, local community to attract people to the new facility. The multiple agencies collocated at the community centre provided other hooks: art, credit union, Sure Start etc., and very quickly the fact of a public-access “pooled computer room” located not in a library or school, where you could just drop in and

log on to do anything – and get help if you wanted or needed – caught on. Some of the centre users in this study exhibit life-cycle features such as those identified above. But, equally, there are others who don't: who come to do a course and that's it; or, who have a pressing need to use a computer for a phase of their life and when that phase passes no longer need the facility. A related centre-staff lifecycle is illustrated by Cook and Smith (2002, p.24).

In respect to some of the participants in this study, a similar cycle can be seen. Sandra, for example dropped in to use the centre because the facility was more convenient than going to the local University, where she was studying, because that was five miles away. She became integrated into the life of the centre, assumed volunteer status and has since from time to time held part-time, short-term paid roles with various of the development agencies that operate out of the same facility (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript, 2009-06-04SandraRnd2). But, there were also other networks that flowed around the community IT centre as a result of people and agencies that had or developed associations with the community IT centre or with other agencies located in the same building. The community IT centre is a node in a complex network of many actors, coalescing and fragmenting along a myriad of lines.

1.4.8 Trajectories

The concept of a life cycle and the concept of a trajectory both have time and motion at their hearts. In the concept of a cycle there is an implicit idea of a return to origins, while trajectory suggests a more teleological notion of origin and destination or goal. We can imagine a life's trajectory having many cyclical side-currents, some of which may fundamentally alter the course of the trajectory. Problematic in the concept of a trajectory is the suggestion of inertia and inevitability of outcome – for good or ill – unless some intervention deflects the course (Edwards & Mackenzie 2005, p.287). Edwards and Mackenzie resist a deterministic understanding of trajectories as some how “predetermined” and see them as “... as complex and situated within configurations of practices which may or may not support dispositions to engage with opportunities.” (Edwards & Mackenzie 2005, p.289)

1.4.9 Presence, participation, progression

For Rodgers and Raider-Roth, presence has to do with the “subjective, qualitative experience of ... human beings” and is a crucial factor in addressing the “... current climate of education, one that is receptive to and indeed enamoured with positivism, standardisation and quantification.” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, p.266) Presence is traditionally understood as “... bringing one's whole self to full attention so as to perceive what is happening in the moment.” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, p.267) Presence has a reflexive component suggesting a measure of self-

awareness in order to be present. However presence can be problematic. We have all talked about being present in body but otherwise absent from many situations. There is a scale of values implicit in the kind of presence Rodgers and Raider-Roth are describing. There is the flowing presence of being self-manifested in the moment, on top of things, there, with others, engaged. And, there is the more disconnected presence of being simply in attendance, a bum on a seat. Participation and progression are similarly problematic: often used as a measure for funding learning programmes. But does the number of bums on seats indicate presence, participation or progression? If so, how? For Dreier, it is important that we understand participation to mean “always already involved in social practice.” However any individual participation, certainly when viewed from a Third Space perspective, while always situated is also always partial in any one practice and simultaneously extending into other practices (Dreier 1999, pp.5-6). We may, for example, be participating in a practice of learning while simultaneously practicing courtship.

1.5 Looking forward

In this chapter I have introduced the study of adult users of a community information technology (IT) centre, framed around five research questions. I have shown that there is a gap in the research literature concerning the life histories, activities, experiences and voices of the users of community IT centres. The interpretive stance has been introduced and key problematic concepts have been addressed. In the next chapter (Ch 2), I will consider the local, global and policy contexts within which community IT centres operate. In chapter three, I set out the methods that have been used to undertake the study. In chapter four, the conceptual framework is developed and I explore the tensions between Third Space Theory and Activity Theory. In chapter five, 11 life stories are presented. I briefly explain the editorial decisions that I have taken and address some of the problems with voice. In chapter six, I consider the question of the “common-sense of the self” focusing on key events in people’s lives, what they actually do with the community IT centre (RQ2) and how they feel about it: the affective factors that have shaped their engagement. In chapter seven, I address research question three: what factors shape people’s use of and engagement with the community IT centre (RQ3)? In this chapter the great institutions of society: the family (domestic), school (education) and work (employment) are seen as powerful actors in shaping people’s lives. In chapter eight, I address research question four: what constitutes positive change for people (RQ4)? In this chapter evidence of values and community comes to the fore. Chapter eight also sets the stage for the final chapter 9, in which the evidence of the life stories, the common-sense of the self is brought together with the analysis of the institutions of society and community values to address the primary research question: how do people who associate with the community IT centre use that

association to make positive changes in their lives (RQ1)? And, politically, how can that be helped (RQ5)?

Chapter 2 Contexts local and political

2.1 Introduction

The community IT centre and participants in this study are set in the physical/concrete space of the built and natural environment, and the “imaginaries”: abstract/conceptual spaces: politics, community, domestic, where norms or habitus (Herzberg 2006 cited on line) are explicitly described or profoundly implied. As Cole, Engeström and Vasquez have put it, my starting point is, “... the actions of people participating in routine cultural contexts”, where context has “... a central role in the constitution of human nature”. (Cole *et al.* 1997, pp.1, 2) I look first at the local context, the community IT centre itself, taking into account the demographics of the locale. I then look at the policy context within which the community IT centre is sited, considering education, employment and civic or community engagement. Finally I look at the disconnect, or loosely coupled articulation between policy and the people for (and rarely with) whom policy is created and operated.

2.2 The site of engagement

The highly contextualised culture of the “site of engagement” – people, place and things – (Scollon 2001, pp.3-4) where formal and informal work and learning opportunities co-exist, is the salient feature of any community IT centre.

This study is based in one community IT centre on a large 1960s housing estate on the periphery of a city in southern England. The city, the estate and the centre are anonymised throughout this research, however contextual information may make it locally identifiable. The estate will here be called “Bluefield Lanes”, for the bright linseed and flax crops grown in the area. The IT centre is “Bluefield Lanes IT Zone” (BITZ).

2.2.1 Exclusion and the digital divide: uneven and/or unique?

About Bluefield Lanes we find features of a geography of exclusion (Graham 2002; Mohan 2000, p.293 ff), cluster definitions (multiple indices) of social exclusion, and initiatives fitting all three of Levitas’s discourses of poverty and exclusion (Levitas 1999). Some discourses see exclusion *caused by* poverty and the unequal distribution of resources in society, where the provision of resources – such as information technology – can to some extent redress the inequality and lead to greater social inclusion. Some discourses see exclusion *causing* poverty through a failure of social integration and workforce attachment, where the provision of routes to employment through ICT skills training, for example, can lead to inclusion and thence out of

poverty. Finally other discourses may see exclusion and poverty separately, each caused by individual or group (moral/values) failings: anti-social behaviour, family breakdown, immigration, crime, dependency, and so on. (Levitas 1999 cited on line).

2.2.2 Bluefield Lanes geography and demographics

As Graham observes, “The societal diffusion of ICTs remains starkly uneven at all scales. It is in the contemporary city that this unevenness becomes most visible.” (Graham 2002, p.34).

Bluefield Lanes is the largest neighbourhood in its quadrant. The UK Office of National Statistics reports data for eight Super Output Areas (SOA) in Bluefield Lanes. I have used data from 2004 and 2007 (ONS n.d.). The City Council’s SOA profile report suggests, “it should be noted that in general these measures relate to long-standing social issues which are not subject to rapid change, and so the conclusions drawn from them are likely to remain valid.” (anonymised 2006, p.5)

The [quadrant] area has a population of 23,874 which is 18% of [the city’s] population. The area forms the ... boundary of the City and includes [three] distinct neighbourhoods... [of which Bluefield Lanes is the largest]

The area comprises a mix of Council, Housing Association and private and shared ownership housing, the largest concentration of social housing in the City. There are high indicators of social disadvantage in the [quadrant] including high unemployment/underemployment and educational under achievement (anonymised n.d.)

Education is of particular concern in the quadrant:

The most significant issue across the [quadrant] is education, skills & training attainment with two SOAs in the top third and ten SOAs, across all [quadrant] wards, in the top ten percent most deprived areas in England on this measure. (anonymised 2006, p.7)

Bluefield Lanes can be divided into two parts: the old estate built in the late 1950s and 1960s and the new estate built in the late 1980s. Of the four SOAs on the new estate, there is one that is anomalous, corresponding to that part of the new estate that was sold from the start to private homeowners. The other three SOAs on the new estate and all four SOAs on the old estate have a similar mix of social housing interspersed with private rentals and owner occupied houses. Of these seven SOAs on both the old and new estate, the statistics are aligned. In the

2004 data set, between 80% and 90% of the residents did not stay on in school past the age of 16. In the 2007 data set this figure had improved markedly to between 30% and 50%. Although more young people are staying on in school, the figures for older learners are slower to change. In both data sets, between 50% and 60% of adults have no or low qualifications and between 17% and 25% have been claiming benefits for more than 12 months. Although unemployment statistics are not available at this level of analysis, and unemployment figures for the city as a whole belie the local evidence, the local SOA Profile Reports for 2006 and 2008 place these SOAs as either medium or high for unemployment, where high “indicates that this SOA is in the third most deprived SOAs in England on this measure.” (anonymised 2006; anonymised 2008)

The City Learning Communities project (Yarnit 2008), funded by the Regional Development Authority was established to address learning and skills on three large housing estates in the city, two in the quadrant. The project was centred on the Bluefield Lanes estate and the project office was at the community centre, where the community IT centre is co-located.

2.3 What is a community IT centre: a social learning centre?

There are many different models of a “community IT centre”. As Selwyn observes, “Although sites such as schools, libraries, colleges and museums may well be *physically* located in communities, whether they are that deeply connected with all segments of the community is debatable.” (Selwyn 2003, pp.369-370) This is borne out by evidence from this study:

I felt accepted at the IT centre even with my differences. It was a place where people accepted and supported people for having their differences. Far much more than the other world that I went to afterwards: the Library. There was a way you needed to be and anyone who didn't fit in was completely unsupported and unwelcome. Whereas in the IT Hub we had a really welcoming respect. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt1)

For Edwards and Mackenzie, a focus on education as training for skills acquisition by the individual and on “within person accounts of identity change” is antithetical to the situated notion of learning (Lave & Wenger 1990) where for both learning and identity “...certain features of social practice need to be in place.” (Edwards & Mackenzie 2005, p.289) Identity projects are social and contextual: there is a formal relationship between identity and unity. Edwards and Mackenzie gathered their evidence through observations in six family learning centres, with focus group interviews and individual interviews with people who used the centres (Edwards & Mackenzie 2005, p.293): “... we examined how family learning centres, as informal

spaces, have provided flexible client-centred learning zones for participants.” (Edwards & Mackenzie 2005, p.290) Although not explicitly focused on community IT, ICT does feature in the trajectories of the participants. Echoes of the voices of users of the community learning centres come through, revealing a complex, contextualised world where learning, identity, family and community are intertwined and ICT is an actor.

2.4 UKonline Centres

Cook and Smith undertook a grounded study of UKonline centres. This presents an analysis of face to face interviews with “twelve workers and users at five centres” and sixteen telephone interviews with centre managers (Cook & Smith 2002, p.22). Although the key stakeholders of this study were government agencies, Becta, the Learning and Skills Council and the management of the UKonline project, and not presented as a learner-voice study, extracts from interviews with subjects are presented in support of arguments. Through this study one hears the story of the centre user (Cook & Smith 2002, p.25) told by a centre manager, as an illustration of a notable success. Penny’s life is transformed, in part, through her association with a community IT centre. Might we say that other lives are so transformed? Possibly.

In respect of informal community education, Cook and Smith draw heavily on Freireian educational thought. They observe, “... currently there appears to be a narrow evidence base in the area of informal learning,” (Cook & Smith 2004, pp.36, 37) an issue reiterated by Cook and Light two years later, pointing to “...a lack of qualitative and quantitative studies, in the area of informal, adult and community learning.” (Cook & Light 2006, p.52) In a major study of formal and informal learning Colley *et al* conclude that, “there are many examples of learning situations about which very little is known on the basis of robust empirical research.” (Colley *et al.* 2003, p.66) They provide a list of examples, including, “... learning related to community renewal.” Colley, *et al* continue: “Research of this kind is best equipped to explore the complex interrelationships found in learning, and to articulate the subtleties attaching to what we have termed attributes of in/formality of learning. (Colley *et al.* 2003, p.67)

2.5 NIACE study of the Skills for Life standard

In one of the few studies of its kind, a large action research study was carried out by the National Institute for Adult Continuing education (NAICE) into the QCA’s ICT Skills for Life standard. Over 500 learners were involved. Of these a proportion were reached through community IT centres (UKonline) as well as other places not traditionally associated with education such as housing associations, prisons, and residential homes (NIACE 2005). The

study showed that the age profile of learners engaged with the ICT Skills for Life across the locations had two spikes, at 20 and 35-45 (NIACE 2005, p.16). The study observes: “This profile is significantly different from that to be found in the NIACE *Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2005*. The NIACE survey shows that the participation decreases consistently as people age...” Whereas, in the Skills for Life study there was a bimodal pattern and a slower tailing off of participation by older learners. It is too early to speculate on whether this is to do with ICT in particular, or if ICT is simply the key route for re-entry to education these days (NIACE 2005, pp.19-20).

At the time of this study (2003-2004), these users access to a computer at home and use of the Internet was significantly higher than the national figure. (NIACE 2005, p.20) As far as the learners’ skills went, the profile was described as “spikey”(NIACE 2005, p.22). For many of the learners on these trials the acquisition of computer skills was seen as an end in itself (27%) or as a means to unspecified qualifications (15%). A proportion (12%) cited a desire to acquire information and communication skills explicitly (NIACE 2005, p.24). There is evidence in the study of many modes of learning being explored, such as:

- An Afro Caribbean group of learners who have dropped out of traditional education are interested in hip-hop music, and this is being used as a focus for the ICT delivery with learning how to download music and appreciating copyright factors, burning CDs and creating websites based around the topic. ...
- The booklet produced in Word by a Chinese community group demonstrates a good use of ICT within learning, enabling learners to work both as a team and individually sharing their culture beliefs and individual experiences in the booklet... (NIACE 2005, p.49)

2.5.1 Local similarities to NIACE observations

Similar modes of learning have been observed informally at the BITZ community IT centre. National cultures have been celebrated through the creation of a multimedia resource of Sudanese music, musicians and musical instruments, and the creation of a website devoted to the preservation of a Timorese minority language. Groups have produced collections of writing and exhibitions of digital photography. These practices are part of the ongoing creative, civic and social lives of people at the centre, not part of a formalised programme of learning. Although illustrated with comments from users, and containing a short section of extracts from learners’ postings to a discussion forum (section 2.6), the NIACE (2005) study does not present

learners' extended accounts of ICT Skills for Life. The study concluded that, "... there is a need to better understand how learners prefer to learn ICT Skills." (NIACE 2005, p.55)

In looking more closely at all public ICT sites, three things become evident. Most of the sites are in settings associated with formal education and formalised knowledge (schools, colleges, adult learning centres, libraries). Most of the people using these sites already have a high level of ICT skills and use ICT facilities at many other sites as well (home, friends houses, workplace, etc). And from the policy-makers' and implementers' perspective these sites are "... seen as being both convenient and appropriate for encouraging ICT use." (Selwyn 2003, p.369) However, Seale observes that: "... excluded groups can feel uncomfortable approaching providers of formal educational opportunities." She concludes, "It is therefore important that marginalised learners can access technology and support in contexts and locations that they feel comfortable about using or being in." (Seale 2009a, p.20) The most recent OfCom report into adult media literacy notes that overall interest in digital technologies and the Internet is declining significantly (OfCom 2010, p.86). Against this general decline OfCom notes adults rate formal, classroom-based learning the *least preferred* of all methods surveyed of learning about ICT and how to use ICT (OfCom 2010, p.88 my emphasis).

We could conclude that there is not an issue. By far most people have ready access to ICT. However questions persist. Selwyn goes on to say: "The institutional barriers that prevent people from previously entering facilities such as a library, adult education institute or FE college are unlikely to disappear merely because a site of 'free' ICT access has been located within them." (Selwyn 2003, pp.369-370) IT is not the magnet that draws people into uncomfortable spaces. Webb notes that, "...participants in publicly accessible community-based ICT centres were more likely to be female, less qualified, and from lower socio-economic groups." (Webb 2006, p.483) There is a research gap about learners' experience and particularly "...a need to go beyond the debates that focus on ... the 'conditions of access' and examine... the experiences and meanings of this participation." (Webb 2006, p.484) As Cook and Smith observed, "Individualisation of an activity to a particular centre beneficiary is very important in adult learning." (Cook & Smith 2002, p.4)

2.6 Silwood: Voice used rhetorically

As a part of the UKonline programme the Silwood Cybercentre (Silwood Cybercentre 2008) gives access to a number of short video clips of centre users and workers providing a glimpse into the concerns of the people who associate with a centre. However, the conditions under which the recordings were made is not exposed, and they are presented with a purpose to

cushion the re-entry to education for participants, addressing the confidence problem identified by McClenaghan (2000). The clips are intended to make new entrants to the centre feel comfortable and welcomed but one would hesitate to generalise about the speakers from these few quotes outside their context.

2.7 Global context

The community IT centre in Bluefield Lanes, can be contextualised globally. Graham uses the term e-gateways or community telecentres to gather together a diverse range of initiatives around the world from, for example, India, Egypt, the US and China. According to Graham, “Community telecentres strive to deliver the ‘street-level’ interface between ICTs and the Internet and marginalised populations. Most offer training, support, drop-in services and access to fax, computers and the Internet...” (Graham 2002, p.50) In the US such facilities are called Community Technology Centres.

2.7.1 Community Technology Centres in the US

Davies *et al* explore “... how community technology centers (CTCs) could function more effectively ... as forces for positive social change at the community level”. CTCs were established in the US in the 1980s and became a focus of policies aimed at reducing the “digital divide”. CTCs in the US had similarities to UKonline centres, and their evolution could be compared to the development of community IT centres in the UK. They conclude that community technology centres “... act as key public spaces in areas where there is a dearth of such community places.” (Davies *et al*. 2008, p.4) That is, community or comfortable spaces (real and metaphorical) are the magnets that draws people to IT. They go on to argue that community development initiatives and community technology initiatives have natural synergies and that technology centres need to conceive of themselves as community centres more broadly, aligning their technology-centred activities with community centred activities.

2.7.2 Directors’ cut

Not unlike Cook and Smith’s work on UKonline Centres (Cook & Smith 2002), Davis *et al*’s interviews and focus groups were conducted with directors of centres, while participants’ data was collected in workshops – with directors – and through surveys (Davies *et al*. 2008, pp.16-21); there are fewer directors; there are more participants; we are all in this together. However, what emerges is a highly synthesised view of participants’ experience compiled by directors and managers leading McClenaghan to suggest:

... the community sector, and the social movements which have informed it, may well come to be dominated in the sphere of paid employment by a professional and semi-professional elite; and community members, some of whom may have helped initiate and construct these employing organisations, may find themselves marginalised to spheres of activity characterised by more precarious remunerative forms.
(McClenaghan 2000, p.578)

2.7.3 Positive public provision

A community IT centre may stand in contrast to the provision of everything by market mechanisms. It addresses, in part, the question of what to do for people who choose not to, or are otherwise prevented from interfacing with agencies of society through their domestic environment. Seventy percent of British households have Internet access, and 66 percent have broadband (Dutton *et al.* 2009, p.12). But, 30 percent still do not have the Internet at home. Dutton *et al.* identify, “Divides between Internet users and nonusers are created by both exclusion and choice.” (Dutton *et al.* 2009, p.18) In at least three of the 11 stories in this study, not having the Internet at home was in part a positive choice (interestingly more or less in line with national figures). Evidence from the focus groups suggests about a quarter of people associated with this community IT centre do not have home Internet, though they may have home computer and games consoles.

2.8 This Community IT Centre

This community IT centre is a room on the ground floor of the Community Centre in the centre of the estate. One wall of the room is an exterior wall with large windows looking onto one of the main walkway entrances to the Community Centre. The windows give the room a very light aspect and because you can see in to and out from a very public place, the room feels at the centre of things, not shut away. Access is obvious. The wall opposite to the exterior windowed wall is an interior wall, also of glass which looks on to a common meeting area where a credit union is located, next to open kitchen facilities where tea and coffee are available on a make your-own-put-the-money-in-the-box basis. The community IT centre is at the heart of a community. There is always movement however inside it is not noisy. The doors and windows are solid. There are 16 identical Windows work stations, all with headphones, USB hubs, and open Internet connections. The machines have the same software setups, with FireFox and Internet Explorer, the full MS Office suite as well as MS FrontPage and PhotoDraw. The machines also have Adobe Photoshop, as well as audio and video editing tools and a range of tools for managing digital cameras and camcorders. There is a rather battered electronic

whiteboard and ceiling mounted projector connected to one computer, which can be used by a tutor/workshop leader. There are no usernames or passwords required. Users have to bring their own memory sticks or use web services and are not allowed to leave files on the desktop or user directories. The openness of the regime does mean that the hard disk images need to be rebuilt regularly. But that said, with antivirus protection and most users being mostly sensible, most of the machines are usable most of the time. The appearance of the room is as good as most and better than some small pooled computer rooms at British universities.

2.8.1 An ownership question

At the beginning of my work, the community IT centre had recently passed out of the framework of UKonline Centres, through a brief stint as a UFI/LearnDirect Centre and was under the formal control of the County Adult Learning Service. However, it was largely peopled by a group of “Learning Champions” and was for a brief time managed by the Learning Estates Project, which provided development education resources in community centres on housing estates around the city (Yarnit 2008).

2.8.2 Diversity

At the centre, people can be found who have arrived from Afghanistan, Iran, the Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, the US, and many other countries as refugees, asylum seekers, dependents of military personnel, students, and workers. There are second and third generation descendants of immigrants from the New Commonwealth: West Indian and Indian sub-continental Britons. There are people of white English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, South and North American ancestry. There are people whose parents are from different ethnic backgrounds. Most are not wealthy. Some are recently cut off from key social ties.

2.8.3 Age cohort

I have restricted my investigation to adults. This is not an unproblematic concept, given the Learning and Skills Sector focus on 14 – 19 education, and the higher education concept of a “mature learner” kicking in at 25. I decided simply to keep my attention on people age 18 and over. The community IT centre at the heart of this study has a policy of excluding under 18s. There is a neighbouring room in the community centre known as the Youth IT Hub where younger people can use computers. It is acknowledged that for the 14 – 19 year olds this can be problematic and different segmenting regimes operate from time to time with under 12s sessions for the “little ones,” and games sessions where multi-player first-person shooters attract older kids, sometimes pushing over the 18 year old limit in the Youth Hub. Sometimes BITZ allows kids under 18 in to use the machines in their space if they need the space for study.

2.9 The wider policy context: inclusion, key skills and IT literacy

Education policy for a time largely replaced industrial policy as the means by which governments seek to maintain or improve the economic well being of the nation state (e.g. Ahier & Esland 1999; Avis *et al.* 1996; Carnoy 1997).

2.9.1 Policy drivers

Education policy is shaped by four key factors: globalisation, deregulation (or liberalisation), widening participation and innovation. Globalisation and liberalisation are the backdrop against which widening participation and innovation policies are enacted. The widening participation agenda is further presumed to be supported by the innovation agenda (DfES 2003a, pp.39-42). However, innovation is not primarily expressed in terms of pedagogies or institutional structures. The chief manifestation of innovation is in the broad field of ICT. While the participation agenda struggles to be emancipatory and empowering for the individual, and at the same time ensuring a supply of appropriately skilled workers for industry (Ball 1990; Brown & Lauder 1996; Carnoy 1997; Field 1995; Hodgson & Spours 1999; Moore & Hickox 1994; Noble 1998), learning technologies struggle to be seen as other, or anything more, than technical innovation in content packaging and delivery systems. This impoverished notion ironically in part explains the existence of community IT centres even as it is challenged by them.

2.9.2 A skills competition

Although the government asserts that sustainable development (“meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”) is to be placed “... at the heart of skills provision, ensuring that it is a fundamental goal of our economic and social progress”, this assertion is tacked on as a single paragraph, a subsection of its own at the end of a section with no elaboration. It hardly takes critical discourse analysis to note the assertion has no links to indicators, no targets: no substance. (DIUS 2007, p.20) The consistent aim of the government has been to encourage the acquisition of “productive skills” for the purpose of the nation state being competitive on an international field against other states, as a recent Learning and Skills Council report, *Delivering World-Class Skills in a Demand-Led System*, notes (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.3). Competitive benchmarking, ranking, performance measures and league tables lead to a reduced view of sustainability and what counts as learning. The truly positive benefits of learning to individuals, communities and even nations are obscured by the focus on productivity.

Fixation on production and competition leads to atomisation, fragmentation and focus on failure. It puts blame on the individual for not being sufficiently competitive: “Another implicit assumption here is that these learners should share the Government’s economic analysis and shoulder the ‘responsibility to improve their employability to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them.’” (Hodgson *et al.* 2007, p.317) The fixation on production and competition appears to be in direct opposition to sustainable development and forces education institutions, “... to operate in an open and competitive market.” (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.3)

2.9.3 Geographies of exclusion

Mohan (2000), drawing on Levitas (1999), addresses the geography of exclusion and the elusive terminology of related concepts such as, “Social polarization, segregation and exclusion”. According to Mohan, “...the underlying processes are complex.” (Mohan 2000, pp.293-294) Graham formalises the notion of a geography of exclusion and its link to the, “... extraordinarily rapid (but highly uneven) application of digital information and communications technologies (ICTs). (Graham 2002, p.33) He has observed, “Dominant logics of ICT based change seem to be underpinning urban polarisation, the ‘disembedding’ of dominant economic, social and cultural activities, and the social and technological distancing of the powerful from the less powerful.” (Graham 2002, p.35) Graham goes on to draw a model in which ICT: 1) extends the power of the powerful, 2) underpins uneven international distribution of labour, 3) allows the affluent to bypass the local social, and 4) has an inbuilt – or encoded – economic and cultural bias in terms of the “information marketplace”. (Graham 2002, p.36) He goes on to emphasise that, “Within liberalised markets ... infrastructure providers are unlikely to target new investment, ... in poor communities ... places which also tend to face stark exclusion from ... other services.” (Graham 2002, p.41)

2.9.4 Digital literacies, skills and inclusion

According to Seale (2009a):

Where definitions of Digital Inclusion can be found, they tend to embed within them an expectation or imperative that digital inclusion happens when all members of society are able to access the affordances offered by technology ... Digital Inclusion is therefore concerned with addressing inequalities, where those unable to access the affordance of technologies are, disadvantaged, marginalised in society and therefore digitally excluded. In addition to equality, explicit and implicit definitions of digital inclusion

encompass a number of inter-related concepts: Access, Use, Empowerment, Participation (Seale 2009a, p.3)

Education policy has encouraged the adoption of an instrumentalist, competency-based curriculum intended to be closely aligned to the needs of industry. This has been presented as a market solution to relative economic decline in the face of "inevitable" globalisation (DfEE 1999, p.66; Field 1995; Ranson 1994).

There are current debates about multiple literacies with particular reference to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the emergence of ICT as a "Key Skill" (Miller *et al.* 2007, p.1). "... required for success in all aspects of education, training, work and life in general." (QCA 2004b, p.10) Literacy is considered to be a "Key Skill" by the recent DIUS report on Implementing the Leitch review of skills in England (DIUS 2007, p.14). As Webb puts it, "ICT literacy is more than a cluster of skills. Instead it is a set of literacy practices." (Webb 2006, p.493) According to DfES *Skills for Life*, "The aim of any civilised society ... must be the virtual elimination of poor literacy, language and numeracy" (DfES 2003a, p.5). Similar sentiments about literacy are heard in the US (Street 1997) and widely throughout the world (UNESCO 2005). Research commissioned by the Adult Basic Skills Unit (ABSU) in 2003 showed that from both learner and employer perspectives ICT was the number one national training priority (CfBT 2003). Consequently, in 2003, the British Government noted, "We have particular skill gaps in basic skills for employability, including literacy, numeracy and use of IT..." (DfES 2003b) and, "... made the commitment to help adults to develop ICT as a third 'skill for life' alongside literacy and numeracy" (QCA 2004a). While all this has been overtaken by Key Skills and now Functional Skills, the substance remains. Computer Literacy has at least a 30-year history (Jones, B. 1991 Introduction, cited on line). Education policy still recognises that ICT is a basic skill and fears that we, or some of us, don't have enough of it.

2.10 Community education and community IT policy

"Personal and community development learning" (PCDL) is a small backwater in the Learning and Skills Sector (Coffield 2006, pp.1-2). For the moment it is outwith current consumer-focused, employer-led funding regimes. It is regarded as a problem area and is often collocated with "programmes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities." It appears as though the Leitch report cast community learning centres adrift from the mainstream, associating community learning with a conflation of dystopian exclusions: the remediation of learning difficulties and disability (Leitch Review of Skills 2008, p.111), and the rehabilitation of offenders (DfES 2003a, pp.12, 14, 28, 40; DIUS 2007, p.34). As Hodgson *et al* (2007) observe,

this is characteristic of educational policy in respect of post-compulsory learning. Throughout the documents relating to policy for community education there is a consistent othering of the users of these services that is not matched in, for examples, policies aimed at middle-class parents which are characterised by the politics of choice, as Hodgson *et al.* observed, largely blind to a world of others. (Hodgson *et al.* 2007, p.316) Policy agendas and agencies are always transitory: dependent on the electoral cycle and initiatives. In respect of marginalised communities where there are multiple indices of deprivation policy agendas can appear to be directed at influencing dominant audience opinion.

The principal policy reason for funding learning programmes appears to be to return people to productivity through employment. Despite the association of “computer literacy” and social networks with employability, there is a reluctance to recognise or to support informal acquisition of ICT skills through social networks. And, despite the clear evidence that employability is not simply linked directly to skills acquisition but is a much more complex, nuanced and contextualised piece of social capital (see Ch 9, section 9.3.2) enacted through a person’s identity practices, there is a reluctance to support community development education.

2.10.1 Vernacular literacy

Miller *et al* have observed that there are “‘vernacular’ literacy practices”, and, “students engage in them.” (Miller *et al.* 2007, p.2) As there are multiple vernacular literacies or local literacies (see, e.g. Olson 2003; Wallace 2003), so too there are growing vernacular computer-literacy practices. Hartnell-Young, *et al* suggest that: “There is great potential to make connections between e-portfolio processes, such as storing, reflecting and publishing, and learners’ use of emerging social software tools used outside formal education.” (Hartnell-Young 2008, p.5) A brief example serves. Mobile phones incorporating digital cameras have become ubiquitous. Many people use the community IT centre in order to edit their photo collections and share them either by email or through popular photo sharing services. The concept of storing items on-line, reflecting on them and selectively publishing to different audiences – fundamental to portfolio learning practices – is illustrated by the wedding scenario: photos from the church and reception are public; photos from the stag or hen do are private. The conceptions are as ubiquitous as the cameras. It is the context of use in education that is the problem. As one person at the centre said when I was running a workshop on keeping an electronic portfolio for learning: “Those are my pictures. They are beautiful. I hated school.” (researchDiary05, 30 October 2006)

2.10.2 Community learning in the skills sector?

Jane Slowey's Foyer Federation policy briefing observes, "Adult Community Learning is not currently to be included in the demand led funding models although there is no clarity about what is meant by 'community learning'" (Slowey 2008, p.5): "Funding of Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) will remain outside these funding models for the time being." And, "Leitch Review of Skills has recommended that all publicly-funded adult vocational skills in England, *apart from community learning and programmes for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*, should go through demand-led routes by 2010." (Learning and Skills Council 2007, pp.22, 39 *my emphasis*)

The skills sector is conceived of as having three "markets": 14-19 year old learners, adult learners and employers. For the adult learner: "We expect a greater proportion of government funding for adult learning to focus on employability outcomes, using qualifications to help people enter and progress in sustainable employment to meet the changing needs of the economy." (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.14) It would appear that in this context, community centres have little chance of being directly funded to provide learning opportunities. Community centres are primarily seen as locations for the provision of advice to learners, who are deemed to be a problem, about learning opportunities elsewhere, rather than locations where learning opportunities are funded and where learning takes place (Leitch Review of Skills 2008, p.110).

And, we also note that, "... by 2015 more government funding will be routed through the Employer-responsive/Train to Gain model than through the Adult Learner-responsive/Learner Accounts model." (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.8) In practice, "Colleges and providers will only be funded for qualifications approved by SSCs [Sector Skills Councils]..." (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.17) The new Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) is being shaped to deliver "preferred" qualifications for employers, who will have direct input "... into the prioritisation and development of qualifications and through a more responsive and flexible qualification framework." (Learning and Skills Council 2007, p.18) As Coffield has argued: "...employability as the core mission, ... is an empty, unsatisfying concept which will sell our people short. ... employability turns the public issue of the dearth of good jobs into the private trouble of constant retraining." (Coffield 2006, p.6)

2.11 Community development and the labour market

In a study of the role of labour market intermediaries (LMI) in two major US metropolitan areas, the authors observe that the main labour market intermediary is the temporary

employment agency, though they provide the least services (Benner *et al.* 2004, p.181). The authors go on to observe that social networks lead to reduced dependency on labour market intermediaries and to the use of intermediaries that provide better services. In fact, it is not a focus on employability that leads to employability, but a focus on community (Benner *et al.* 2004, p.ES5).

2.11.1 Community education as active citizenship

In the UK, Ellis and Scott (2003) do not separate community development from community education seeing the two as intimately linked. Community development in this model follows the transferable thinking skills model as set out by Livingston *et al.* (2004). Ellis and Scott (2003) follow Compton (1971), seeing Community development as “a program”, “a method”, “a process” and critically, “a movement”: “... including a “philosophy of life; a cause; a way of relating to people in various kinds of communities—homes, schools, universities, offices, neighbourhoods”. (Ellis & Scott 2003, pp.261-262) In a similar vein, McClenaghan asserts that: “... community action, as an expression of active citizenship, becomes a desirable social asset.” (McClenaghan 2000, p.567)

Ellis and Scott (2003) observe that, “... the problem facing much of the modern Western world is that community is missing.” (Ellis & Scott 2003, p.262) For them, community, the word and concept, supplies the framework for addressing those very issues identified as being problematic in contemporary society and which policy is seeking to address through a focus on remediating individual inadequacy. For Ellis and Scott, community education is about the “survival of democracy” (2003, p. 267) and redressing the powerlessness of individuals and communities. Or as Coffield has argued: “Employability ... cannot be the core mission for this crucial sector, because it militates against students understanding or criticising power relations in college or at work or forming a strong vocational identity.” (Coffield 2006, p.7) The diminution of state support for community education may be directly related to the state’s desire to make employability the core mission of its education policy, and this employability is understood as requiring both compliance as well as competence. Community networks may help people form strong vocational identities that develop in competence, but those identities may not necessarily be oriented towards compliance.

2.11.2 A holism of approach to contexts

However, to sound a note of caution, taking a community development model of community education is unlikely to lead automatically to the increase of democracy or the diminution of state complicity with capital. Colley *et al* (2003, p.65) observe, “that all learning situations

contain significant power inequalities.” But equally, Pastor *et al* (2003, p.5) suggest that the power differentials arise from within a context in which the State and firms are complicit with capital and are complicated by multidimensional, top-down state control of education (Coffield 2006, p.3).

McClenaghan (2000, p.576) comes to a similar conclusion that the physical place of learning is as important as the subject matter and the social networks in which the place and topics are embedded. It is this holism of place, topic and network that helps learners and communities to benefit from the formalisation of learning (Graham 2002, p.49).

Throughout the literature on community education, community technology centres, and even more widely on the use of ICT in education the question of context is important (Sharpe *et al*. 2006, p.3). Even more widely, as Webster observed, “... highly context-specific studies ... demonstrated that technologies always incorporated values, that innovation was a highly negotiated affair, and that the presupposition of technology’s privileged role in bringing about social change was misplaced.” (Webster, F. 2005, p.445)

This is the wider context in which the community IT centre sits and within which the research questions need to be addressed. In the next chapter, I set out the specific methods that have been used to undertake the study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the methods by which I have examined the research questions and addressed the silence of learners' voices in the research literature about community education. This chapter is the story of the gathering and telling of stories.

3.1.1 Structure of the chapter: multi modal, qualitative approach

I have taken a multimodal qualitative approach to the study, drawing on Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) and Appreciative inquiry (AI) for the collection of data through interviews and focus groups. I have used Grounded Theory (GT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for the preliminary analysis (coding of the interview and focus group data) prior to the development of a conceptual framework (Ch 4) based on Third Space theory and third generation Activity Theory in order to explain the findings, presented as stories in chapter five.

I chose Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Chamberlayne *et al.* 2000, p.374; Chamberlayne *et al.* 2002, p.371; Chamberlayne *et al.* 2004, p.372; Wengraf *et al.* 2002, p.354) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Berrisford 2005, p.376; Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, p.378; Cooperrider *et al.* 2003, p.375; Cowling 2001, p.346; Grant & Humphries 2006, p.344) because both de-centre the researcher and put the participants in the research at the centre of the process.

I was first introduced to BNIM at the third Ideas in Cyberspace Education (ICE) symposium, where Holley and Oliver suggested that the BNIM approach:

... offers a richness and depth of interpretation which leaves us feeling we know much more about how an individual student perceives the world in terms of the digital divide, and how the 'haves' and the 'have nots' experience access to ICT in ways that replicate the unequal power structures of society. (Holley & Oliver 2007)

Given the absence of participant voices in studies of community IT centres, I was particularly interested to acquire extended passages of narrative in the voices of the participants in this study. At least initially, constructing a semi-structured interview schedule might have been possible, but it would not have been possible to simply use the research questions. I needed not only to discover what people did but to discover the motivations behind what they did. I was

seeking to make the tacit explicit and to discover as much what we did not know about ourselves as what we already did. Before I constructed a schedule I needed more information.

Moreover I wanted to avoid as much as possible imposing my structures on the interviews, thereby running the risk of only hearing what I wanted to hear. Even the “Listening to Learners” approach, in which open questions about educational experience are asked seemed, at the outset, to present too narrow a focus. As Tedder *et al* observed:

... when people are invited to tell stories about learning in their lives, they often recount stories of formal education but stories about informal learning are much less common. Yet such stories can reveal another kind of learning: an understanding of, an insight into, or even a conclusion about the storyteller's life that has significance for how people subsequently lead their lives. (Tedder *et al.* 2008, p.26)

To supplement information from the interviews and focus groups, I have kept a reflective notebook and research diaries – as electronic files on my computer (see Ch 6, section 3.6 in respect to my position in the research).

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss biographical methods in general, and their suitability to this study. Then, I look in some detail at the story telling, focus groups and interpretations. The focus groups contributed to all the research questions and particularly add depth to the understanding of community values. The initial coding framework arises from both the life stories and the focus groups. I developed a discussion guide from this (appendix 6) and used it to conduct a series of second-round interpretive interviews with participants from both the biographical narrative strand and the focus group strand. The initial framework is taken forward into the following chapter in which it contributes to the development of the explanatory conceptual framework, which is tried in the final four chapters of this study.

The chapter then discusses research ethics and the protocols-followed including questions of anonymisation, payments, inducement, vouchers, attribution and bias. The last section of this chapter provides detail of the data collection process: names (anonymised), dates of interventions and case attributes.

3.2 The biographical turn

My methodology reflects a “biographical turn” in the Social Sciences. As Tedder and Biesta summarised in a review of the literature for the TLRP Learning Lives project, “Over the past

three decades the field of adult education has witnessed a strong rise in the use of biographical and life history approaches. (Tedder & Biesta 2007, p.3) Herzberg sets biography against “... two predominant perspectives on lifelong learning; the politico-educational perspective and the pedagogical perspective.” (Herzberg 2006 cited on line)

Tedder and Biesta are particularly concerned to understand biographical narrative as not merely a means of gathering information from an informant, but as a social action with educative, even pedagogic, purpose (see Ch 5, section 5.4) for the participants (Tedder & Biesta 2007, p.3). This was an explicit part of the extended briefing for the focus groups (appendix 3).

The Literature around the use of narrative in educational research appears to take two directions: narrative as an element of reflective practice and professional development for teachers and researchers in education (Webster & Mertova 2007); and, narrative as a pedagogical device to be used by teachers with learners (Dominicé 2000; Mezirow 1990).

My purpose is understanding. I am not seeking to intervene educationally in the lives of the participants. However, it is important to realise that there is always a shared learning aspect to collecting a narrative. Further, the narrator is likely to come with a set of expectations about the exercise. For the narrator the collection of a life story is an encounter with the wide institution of education: it is an educational intervention. The narrator has few qualifications, the researcher has many. The researcher is associated with an educational institution. The research is about a place where some educational activities take place and where there is some conflict over what educational activities *should* take place. When asked questions, even very open questions, in an educational context the narrator is concerned to perform appropriately. Narrators in this project have asked, after recording sessions, if I have got what I wanted; was that OK? They are concerned to have *done well* (researchDiary10 23 May 2009).

3.3 Biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM)

Biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) is based in the assumption that narrative expression is closest to people’s lived experience both of conscious concerns and also of less conscious cultural, social and individual presuppositions and processes. Jones calls it “... narrated ‘identity work’”. (Jones, K. 2006, p.220) And, as we see, identity becomes a central theme of this work. Biographical narrative interpretive method, BNIM (Chamberlayne *et al.* 2000; Chamberlayne *et al.* 2004; Wengraf *et al.* 2002) is described as a “method” and not a theory, but BNIM brings with it a rich set of underlying assumptions about individual human beings and the importance of hearing the individual voice when trying to develop

understandings of contexts. BNIM is increasingly being used in social-psychological investigations of people in traumatic, post-traumatic and extended care situations as a means of surfacing the mainly invisible experiences and contexts of issues that are difficult for society and individuals to confront (Ganzevoort 2002; Jones, K. 2006; McAndrew 2008). As Kosberg observes, such methods are “... an important antecedent effort in identifying a problem that heretofore has not received needed attention.” (Kosberg 2004, p.142 reviewing; Pritchard 2001)

3.3.1 BNIM process

In each BNIM interview, there are three sub sessions. In the first, the interviewer offers only a single narrative question (e.g., “Please tell me the story of your life, all the events and experiences that have been important to you personally, from wherever you want to begin up to now”). In the second, sticking to the sequence of topics raised in the first sub session, the interviewer asks for more narratives about some or all of the topics that were raised. Sometimes, a third sub session can follow in which non-narrative questions can be posed. “The role of the interviewer was primarily one of encouraging further narratives rather than eliciting explanations or reactions.” (Ganzevoort 2002, p.315) In the interviews that I conducted, I decided the open invitation would be, following Ganzevoort (2002, p.315) and Jones (2006, p.215):

Please tell me the story of your life, the events and experiences that have been important to you, from wherever you want to begin, up to and including the present time: you as a user/volunteer/manager/tutor/friend of the Bluefield Lanes IT Zone.

Information sheets and instruments are included in appendices one through four and six. A sample transcript is at appendix five.

During the narrative I took notes. After the narrative reached its conclusion, I would identify three or four points from the narrative and ask the participant to continue the narrative in greater depth or detail on these points. In all the interviews, the final point will be the same:

Please expand on your time in/at/with/around Bluefield Lanes IT Zone.

All the BNIM sessions were recorded and transcribed and the transcripts were given to the participants for verification. These informed the second round interviews.

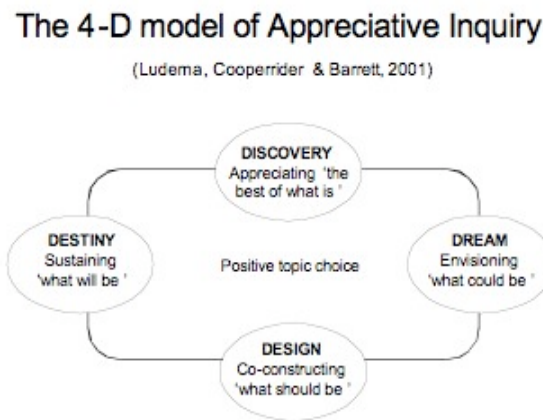
3.4 Appreciative inquiry

Because I was particularly looking for evidence of what constitutes positive change (RQ4), I decided, in the focus groups to make use of the Appreciative inquiry (AI) cycle. The appreciative inquiry approach was formulated by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) in response to the dominance of problem-orientated approaches to organisational development. This approach acknowledges that the act of undertaking research has a transforming effect on organisation itself. Positive questioning techniques are used to determine what works rather than highlighting barriers and problems. According to Ludema *et al*, “If we devote our attention to what is wrong ... we lose the ability to see and understand what gives life to organizations.” (Ludema *et al*. 2001, p.189) Appreciative inquiry also shares in the learner-centred, emancipatory education movement (Luckcock 2007, p.130) and in the broader constructivist challenge to positivist epistemologies (Grant & Humphries 2006, p. 407). Gergen identifies the appreciative approach with forms of practice that attempt to get beyond essentialism, ethical foundationalism and hierarchical ordering of identity politics to embrace a more radical constructionism in relational theory (Gergen 1999).

There are many links made between community education and community development. Mathie and Cunningham explicitly link appreciative inquiry (AI) with social capital theory (see Ch 9, section 9.3.1-4) as a part of an integrated approach to community-driven development (Mathie & Cunningham 2003). They show how asset-based community development (ABCD) and Appreciative Inquiry are complementary approaches (Mathie & Cunningham 2003, p.478). Needs-based approaches to community development tend to reinforce the circumstances of exclusion (see Ch 9, section 9.3.8). Resources are allocated to communities in proportion to their need. Community leaders are valued in proportion to the resources they can attract to an area. Therefore the discourse of problems dominates. Leaders must say how bad things are in order to attract resources to the area (Mathie & Cunningham 2003, p.476). Consequently local people learn to articulate their disempowered, subaltern status (English 2005, p.87) and more worryingly, to enact it, constructing a colonised other, “...subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite”, (Bhabha 2004, p.122).

3.4.1 Appreciative Inquiry process

Common to all perspectives on appreciative inquiry is the four-stage method.



(Ludema *et al.* 2001)

Figure 3.1: Appreciative inquiry cycle

The first stage, variously called "discovery", "initiation" or simply "appreciating" is aimed at building a community through the discovery of shared meaning. The second stage variously called "dream" or "envisioning" constructs a collective and shared vision of the future with the researcher as a co-participant in the community. The third stage, "design", "imagine" or "dialoguing" develops synoptic strategies and concrete steps for realising the vision. Finally, the fourth stage, called variously, "destiny", "delivery" or "innovation", is about the transformative implementation of the design strategies.

I used only the first two stages of AI in my focus groups. A fully implemented cycle of appreciative inquiry for asset-based community development was not within the scope of this study. There were two main parts or “sub-sessions” to each focus group, each lasting about 45 minutes. Part of the focus groups were recorded and I took notes throughout.

3.4.2 Affective recall

I have come to call the first part of the discovery stage of an appreciative inquiry, “affective recall”. The aim is to call forth in the respondents minds and make available to them terms from their own experience that have positive associations. In the first stage of the focus group, participants were grouped into pairs (and a three if necessary). They were asked to:

Describe a time when you felt really energized, creative and happy. Describe the situation to your partner.

This question is not addressed particularly at the experience of the IT centre, but is intended to recall to the participants any time, however brief, in their life, past or present, when things felt like they were “going right”. The aim is to produce positive descriptive terms that are relevant to the participants, rather than imposed by the researcher. After each person has had an opportunity to speak in the pairs, the pairs were asked to come up with key words or phrases that describe the experience of the discussion: how the discussion felt. This was discussed as a whole group and was recorded.

3.4.3 Shared discovery

In the second stage, the groups were reformed into pairs and each person was asked to interview the other. Again the questions are phrased positively.

1. *What was your first positive experience of BITZ?*
2. *What are you enjoying most about your association with BITZ?*
3. *What do you like most about using the computers?*
4. *What is helping you to feel like you belong? What has been your contribution?*
5. *If you had a magic wand, and could have any three wishes granted to heighten the health and vitality of this community, what would they be?*

Again the groups were brought back to a plenary discussion to report on the discussions, which were recorded (see Ch 6 section 6.2.4).

3.5 Interpretive interviews

Following preliminary analysis of the biographic interviews and focus groups, individual, semi-structured, in-depth, follow-up interviews were conducted to explore emerging themes. The protocols for these interviews (appendix 6) were drawn up based on the initial analysis the biographical narratives and the focus groups.

The aim of these interviews was:

- to elicit detailed information in light of emerging themes
- to test my understanding
- to begin to explore the possibility of generalising from the initial results.

All participants in the biographical interviews were scheduled for structured, in-depth interviews. All participants in the focus groups were invited to volunteer for the in-depth interviews).

Sequentially, these need to be mentioned here, but before picking up the story at section 3.10, I discuss the reflexivity, analytical tools, research ethics and coding system that led to the interpretive interviews.

3.6 Reflexivity, observer participation and research diaries

3.6.1 The history of my involvement

During the course of the research my role at the community IT centre evolved.

I have been involved in a continuous study of the people around the IT hub since 14 January 2005. It has not been total immersion, but the participant observation has been part-time and ongoing. (researchDiary10 22 March 2009)

I was first introduced to the Centre by a colleague at the university where I worked. The introduction was as simple as: they are doing interesting things here; you might be interested. I decided initially that I would volunteer to do whatever might be useful at the centre.

First meeting at [BITZ] I say that I have learned from the Outreach Working session that projects need to emerge from the community centre, that just because I have a small fund with which to do some research and development it does not mean that my ideas will gain traction at the centre. [name] agrees to my volunteering on a twice weekly basis. (researchDiary01 14 January 2005)

I was an observer-participant in this world: more observer than participant on the continuum. I visited the community IT centre. I made tea. I washed up. In my first week I clarified my interest in writing about the Centre with the two people who were running the facility:

I ask [name] and [name] if I can write about them. I explain it is not yet "Research" because I do not know what question I will be investigating. But, that I expect questions to emerge as we work together. [They both] say yes and ask me to share my writing with them. (researchDiary01 1 February 2005)

I participated in a small way in the life of the community:

At the Centre [name] has organised a party for the re-opening of the Youth IT Hub. I spend much of the day sticking pineapple to cubes of cheese. Such is learning technology in the community. (researchDiary01 4 February 2005)

And through this some trust and understanding was gained:

I have gained the trust of some members of the community. My presence is tolerated. My presence even seems valued at times. Allen teased me about not coming often enough: "You give us the big George love and then you take it away!" (researchDiary10 22 March 2009)

I helped people print documents and gave informal and ad hoc advice on anything from computers to education to employability. I kept diaries that recorded some of the substance of my visits and conversations.

My initial aim had been "... to discover how Learning Technology was practised in [adult community education]..." with a particular focus on, "How do self-reported beliefs about learning change for adult learners in the course of developing an e-portfolio?" (researchDiary01 14 January 2005). This aim evolved rapidly. Although the people who ran the centre participated in a JISC-funded project on which I was engaged, it became very rapidly evident that the use of eportfolios was hardly regarded as important or even useful by users of the centre.

There is a big job to do to convince ACL folks that there is a use for e-portfolios. I can "see" what we need but I do not know to what extent I will be able to realise it with Petal [the eportfolio tool].

Keep it simple!! But how?

[Alexandra:] Too many words. It looks like a big news paper. You know some people like to read big newspapers. It makes them feel good to have a big newspaper and not a small newspaper. Some people like to read a small newspaper: sport and celebrity gossip. Some people can only handle small newspapers but they want to look like they are reading a big newspaper. This is why there is the Daily Telegraph. I do not know what to make of it now that big newspapers are getting small, so I read celebrity gossip.

There is an art to conversation: start with asking, “how you did you get here” and then on to where do you live. But if you read celebrity gossip you do not have to have such subterfuges. With celebrity gossip there is always plenty to talk about.

(researchDiary01 7 March 2005)

In a side note to Research Diary 3 on 16 December 2006 it becomes evident that my eportfolio efforts are not really going anywhere. I observed, what in retrospect was a pivotal moment:

People use community centres; “...as educators, we need to start our understanding in and with the community.”(Wilson & Summers 2006, p.22) ... How do people use community IT centres? (researchDiary03.1 16 December 2006)

I continued to participate in the life of the centre. I ran workshops on “Introduction to the Internet” (Roberts 2006) and I provided tutorials on CV building, but these never merged into on-line CVs or electronic portfolios. CVs were novel. The Internet and email was novel. Putting them together was a step too far. And, I became interested in what people actually **did** rather than why they did not do what I was trying to investigate. I wanted to investigate the positive questions, not the negative. I did not want to predicate my research on why-don’t-you-do-eportfolios?

Through the course of the study the management of the centre changed three or four times. The people I first worked with left or changed their roles. There were emotional back-stories and journeys of self-discovery. Some participants have become friends and colleagues. I am still engaged with the centre as a formal mentor to one of the tutors who is undertaking a PGCE in teaching in the lifelong learning sector. Perhaps if I didn’t have to earn a living I would be more satisfied working in and for a place like BITZ instead of squeezing it into a busy professional schedule.

3.6.2 The influence of my presence on the results

As I have acknowledged, no researcher comes to a research situation without a perspective (Ch 1, section 1.3; Gergen & Leach 2001, p.228). I am a part of the research process and have a particular socially constructed position with respect to this thesis. I am certainly not making a pretence of standing aside as an abstracted, objective, outside observer inducing and testing hypotheses from a remove. I am present in the research and there is a reflective strand running through it. My work is engaged with the life of the CITC and among other purposes is aimed at addressing and correcting a gap in the research literature. My work is as much a programme for

transforming the world as for understanding it (Fairclough 2001). I intend, through this work, to give some space in the literature of the fields of lifelong learning, continuing, adult, community education and community IT centres to the narratives - the life stories in their own voices - of people who are users, volunteers, managers, tutors, friends of the Bluefield Lanes IT Zone (BITZ) (Ch 1, section 1.2). And, as will become clear, I am something of a (minor) champion for community education and community IT centres.

There are at least three broad dimensions in which my presence in the research will have influenced the results: the individual, the social and the political. These three dimensions are reflected in the conceptual framework (Ch 4) and in the perspectives of the three analysis chapters (Ch 6 Common-sense of the self, Ch 7 The sphere of social action and Ch 8 Community and identity values: positive change). As with the conceptual framework, the dimensions of my presence are not clearly delineated. Aspects of the individual are social and political. The personal is political (Hanisch 2006).

Individually, I bring a personal history to the research. I have 25 years of experience with IT and I acknowledge that computers are part of my identity. I do a lot with them. I have described myself as a Learning Technologist. I was one of the team who defined the criteria by which members of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) might become professionally certificated (ALT 2010) and was one of the first holders of the title CMALT. I have an affective relationship with computers. I am an enthusiast for the Internet and have for years espoused its potential as a tool for human liberation (e.g. Roberts 2001; Roberts 2002). But, in acknowledging this I must also be aware that others do not necessarily have such a relationship with learning technology. Just because it is so important to me does not mean that it should be so - for me or for others. But, that said, it is hard to see that my enthusiasm for IT will not be evident to others. Indeed, this can cause reactions. Even if I am not intentionally presenting a side, others may well have sides in a contemporary popular debate about IT. That there is a popular debate and that there are sides to be taken, means that some elements of the conversations that I have with people will be dealing with these positionings.

My personal history, what I do with computers and my affective relationship with computers and community education cannot be cleanly separated from the social dimensions in which my presence can influence the research. Chief among the social dimensions is education. Education exerts a powerful and quite explicit mediating influence on people's stories. The participants know that I am working towards a PhD, "the really big degree" (Alexandra, researchDiary11, 21/06/2010). The participants all bring a history of their experience of

education to the interviews. I am placed in the position of being “educated”, perhaps even a “teacher”. I work at a university as a lecturer. Even if I try to downplay the formal educational uses of the community IT centre and foreground the social, economic and recreational aspects of computer use, the engagement is educationalised (Ch 6, section 6.4.4) from the outset. As I am educated, so too am I employed, in a job that has some ring of status about it. And, I am not from the estate. I am not even from the country. The language I speak sets me apart. I need, throughout my engagement with the participants, to try to modulate my use of language. I am conscious and self-conscious of “keeping it simple” and “using normal language”.

And, the social dimensions of my engagement cannot be clearly separated from the political dimensions. I am not using political in the sense of party politics or even, in this case, of promulgating a particular model of political economic governance, but simply in that I am concerned that the good work of the CITC might be recognised and enabled to continue. But, my perspective, set out in chapter one, will not be far below the surface and may influence the interpretation that I give to the findings. The good work that I see in the centre is at least in part counter-hegemonic (Taylor, P. V. 1993, p.146) and a challenge to the mechanisms of power (Seale 2009b).

Maybe I sympathised more than empathised, perhaps, because my background and experience appeared often quite different from other users of the community IT centre. But I also often found more commonality than difference. My middle-class framework of white, male privilege broke down when I discovered other centre users from similar backgrounds to mine, some participating, like me, by choice and others there “but for the grace of god”. And, if it is not being too categorically simplistic, it is easy to discover that a class framework of categorical gendered exclusion/ivity is no more or less circumscribed by shared contexts, activities and actor networks than any other: all mostly wherever “but for the grace of god”. That is to say, the situation is important and we are launched into life in the middle of a situation. For some that has not been a smooth landing and the bumps still resonate.

Sandelowski (2002, p.108) draws attention to the challenges and contradictions where the observer is simultaneously part of the observed context and yet written out of it. Hall and Callery warn of the dangers of mistaking observation and interview data for “... reproductions of participants’ realities” and point out that in participant observation and interview, data are socially constructed. “*Reflexivity* ... and *relationality* ... have the potential to increase the validity of the findings in grounded theory studies.” (Hall & Callery 2001, pp.257-258). This increased validity is, however, highly and necessarily contextualised: value and theory laden. While not

relying wholly on grounded theory, my approach might be recognised within the broad postpositivist paradigm and shares the risk of succumbing to relativism. I acknowledge a debt to Karl Popper's "Myth of the framework". With Popper, I do not hold that incompatible frameworks irrevocably condemn us to alienated universes: "... a strange conceptual framework... is no absolute barrier: we can break into it, just as we can break out of our own framework..." (Popper 1996, p.61)

I trust that through this work my efforts to break out of my own framework and into those of the other participants might be seen. And I trust that I have not used any of the broad dimensions by which my presence might influence the research to misrepresent the participants or the CITC. I have been, throughout, concerned that this thesis might give the reader an honestly brokered perspective into the CITC and the people who use it.

3.7 Analytical tools and preliminary analysis

3.7.1 Grounded theory

While I declare my perspective and am working with and within established frameworks, this study nevertheless has many affinities with grounded theory (Hall & Callery 2001, pp.257- 258). Stillman understands grounded theory as a part of systems theory. (Stillman 2006, p.498) or "a *system* for discovering a theory." (Stillman 2006, p.499) Grounded theory is particularly useful when a field is under-researched or ill defined, as I believe this is. According to Richardson and Kramer, Grounded Theory is "...a type of qualitative research to 'uncover and understand what lies behind phenomenon about which little is known'". (Richardson & Kramer 2006, p.497) Grounded Theory proceeds through "observation, conversation and interview" (Dick 2008) However, as Dick emphasises, "What most differentiates grounded theory from much other research is that it is explicitly emergent. It does not test a hypothesis." As Richardson and Kramer observe, "... the general sentiment within the GT approach is against using theoretical concepts for analysing the empirical world." (Richardson & Kramer 2006, p.501) While Grounded Theory tends to eschew literature, at least in the early stages of research, I am explicitly using literature in three directions: 1) to survey the field of adult community education and community IT centres, particularly in contexts of social and economic exclusion; 2) to review the literature on policy in this area (that is to say: this literature is data); and 3) to develop and elaborate a theoretical perspective for understanding the data I will collect.

3.7.2 Discourse analysis

Particularly in respect of what constitutes positive change (RQ4) and what the policy implications for community IT centres might be (RQ5) these methods have been supported by an orientation to discourse informed by critical and mediated discourse analysis (Fairclough 2001; Scollon 2001). As Rajagopalan has it, “Problems are, all of them, *products* of the specific ‘angle of viewing’ that we have adopted in the first place.” (Rajagopalan 1999, pp.450-451) Chiapello and Fairclough make clear that the “text” wherein which the problem might be discerned or enunciated is also to be broadly construed within “networks of practice” (Chiapello & Fairclough 2002, p.186)

Traditionally, discourse analysis (DA) is that branch of linguistics concerned with understanding those functions that yield or afford coherence between units of language, utterances, beyond the level of the sentence. Coherence within sentences is largely governed by paradigms of grammar and syntactic structures. Beyond the individual sentence the problem of coherence is more complex. Coherence in discourse depends not on any strict higher-order logic or grammar-like structure, but on the more subtle patterning of inference, assumption, prior knowledge, shared experience and so on. Discourse paradigms and structures include concerns for and about context and include media and mediation through the objects and *realia* of the world (including individual people) and social institutions.

Discourse analysis starts from the premise that language is ambiguous and requires culture and context to yield meaning. In respect of scientific discourse, for example, this has involved recognising particular styles and conventions of argument. These conventions broadly cluster in two directions: what Oliver *et al.* calls “in here” against “out there” epistemologies (Oliver *et al.* 2007), or as Chouliaraki describes it: constructionism against realism (Chouliaraki 2002) or Scollon: constructivist against classical hypothetico-deductive (Scollon 2003, p.71).

Constructivism is credited with opening up richer ways of using positivistic technologies aligned with systems of commerce and manufacture (e.g. Oliver *et al.* 2007, p.27). And, the reciprocal: people assert constructivist credentials yet use positivistic approaches when they believe they require a defence for using extrinsic (othering) motivators (Dyke *et al.* 2007, p.89; Oliver *et al.* 2007, p.26).

Ellis creates a very grammatical paradigm of case-based learning where learning is experienced in two primary aspects: the structural and the referential, or the “how” and “what” of learning. The structural is further sub-divided into the act of learning and the “indirect object” of

learning, while the referential remains always the “direct object” of learning. The “indirect object” of learning comprises behaviours such as “communication skills and teamwork” (Ellis, R.A. *et al.* 2005, p.242). Through the concept of the “indirect object of learning” this paradigm maps onto the overt-covert and formal-informal aspects of learning, where the formal and overt are the “direct object” and the informal and covert are the “indirect object” of learning.

3.7.3 Critical Discourse Analysis and interpretation

Behind critical discourse analysis (CDA) lies the assumption that communication is inherently ambiguous and is bound up with questions of coherence, identity, power, direction and difference. Critical Discourse Analysis is helpful in unpicking the “indirect objects” of learning. Critical Discourse Analysis might be said to “license” alternate – or multiple – readings of interviews or other documents (policy and research), to allow reading between the lines, to acknowledge that some parts of some interviews are conducted under the rules of nods and winks. Whenever we go off the record, “address the absent,” or go “backstage” (Goffman 1969, p.168 for example), we create a critical opening in the discourse.

There is a hegemonising tendency in critical theory and multi-cultural discourses can be deterministic (Bhabha 2004, pp.45-46; Khan 1998, p.463) however they provide: “... conceptual potential for change and innovation [enabling] the major imperialising discourses to be confronted by their own historical limitations.” (Bhabha 2004, pp.46-47). The principal infection of my process by Critical Discourse Analysis has been the fundamental understanding that all language in use is affected by factors of social distance and power difference. (Fairclough 2001) and that, regardless of the stated intention of the researcher and author, any text should be read for its “indirect object of learning” as much as for its “direct object” (Ellis, R.A. *et al.* 2005, p.183). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) presumes that there is always an indirect object of learning, all observations are “theory laden” (Popper 1996), and that those indirect objects are all to some extent shaped by power relationships of greater or lesser, but ever-present, significance. CDA works to expose evidence of particular and concrete parts of that indirect object in particular and concrete parts of any activity (Leont'ev 1978). In understanding power relationships I have taken as my starting point the Medieval tradition of estates literature (Dutton 2007; Zafirovski 2007) and the macro economic understanding of productive (mining, agriculture, manufacturing, etc.) and reproductive institutions (education, religion, government, etc.) (Bash 2001; Dahlström & Liljeström 1983; Roberts & Huggins 2004).

3.8 Research Ethics

Research ethics were addressed through consideration of: harm mitigation, informed consent, inducements, attribution and bias (see Ethics Protocols at appendix 8).

3.8.1 Harm mitigation

The principal risk might have been psychological disturbance to the participant. There was a risk that some participant might have substance misuse or other mental health issues harmful to others or themselves. This would not be known in advance. In the event, I did not discover any person who appeared not to be able to give informed consent, and although some of the life stories recounted disturbing incidents, participants appeared to have taken account of these and reflected on them, sometimes with professional psychological support. However, I had multi-agency strategy of adaptation should such an occasion have arisen.

Most of the interviews took place at the community centre during open hours with a manager of the community IT centre on the site, as well as the managers and staff of the other agencies operating from the building. For those interviews that took place in respondents own homes, I ensured that there was someone else who knew where I was going and when I was expected to return. In addition, the community IT centre manager knew the times and locations of most of my interviews.

Although not working explicitly with any particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. people with learning disabilities, or children in care), nonetheless, agency managers do have a beneficial, protective gate-keeping role on behalf of their agency and the people who rely on it, even if they do not have an explicit advocacy role. Research will involve many individuals who may or may not identify themselves with any group for which an agency manager may or may not advocate. However, in order to ensure access and good communication, it was necessary to be transparent about my purpose when obtaining the co-operation of key agency managers prior to accessing the centre. The Learning Communities manager and the manager of the community IT centre were kept informed of the progress of my research and the community IT centre manager had a key role in supporting the research, facilitating my access to the centre and recruiting participants.

For adult returners to learning, the formalising of learning can bring back to the surface issues of failing and being failed. Attention needed to be paid to the possible impact on the psychological state of participants, if caused, incidentally, to face prior failure. Although the aim of the research is not to address prior failures, nor expectations or anticipation of potential

future success or failure, this tension is inevitable. There is a conflict between not wanting to guide or steer the interviews and at the same time reassuring the participant that this particular confrontation with education is seeking, in part to mitigate the impacts of a system, not an individual. The research approach of appreciative inquiry and biographic-narrative interpretation was intended to ensure the subjects' voices are allowed to dominate, not the voices of the institutions of society.

3.8.2 Informed consent

Informed consent was through a short series of briefing documents (appendix 1 & 2) used as objects for conversations prior to the researcher and participant co-signing the consent form(s) (appendix 4).

The consent forms give permission to include the interview and focus group information in reporting and representing the engagement between people and the community IT centre. The forms also acknowledge receipt of payment. I offered anonymity, and where people are going to be quoted, I have checked (or not heard from two people) that the pseudonym is acceptable. I have acknowledged that people may be locally identifiable but that outside the immediate sphere of the community IT centre, the city and region would only be a "city in Southern England." For one person, this was not enough, and she withdrew. In the event: for two people I only have first round interview and consent; for another two people I only have second round interview data and consent; and, for seven people I have both first and second-round data and consent. For another 15 I have focus-group consent. (See sample consent forms at appendix 4).

3.8.3 Inducements and "traditional vouchers"

Participants were to be offered inducements to participate in the research. Participants in the focus groups receive a cooked lunch as a part of the "Learning Lunches" programme being run by the Learning Communities project. For biographical narratives, the intention had been to offer vouchers to the value of £25 for participating in each stage of the interview. There are two stages to the interviews meaning a total of £50 pounds of vouchers would have been offered to each interviewee.

Inducements can be problematic because they expose issues of power, trust and conscience. Even the timing of the handing over of the voucher: before or after the interview can be significant. If the researcher gives the voucher at the beginning the signal is being given that, "I trust you": to stay and complete the interview. The participant may thereby be put under some pressure of their conscience to "perform". Conversely if the voucher is withheld until after the

interview, the participant is required to trust the interviewer to honour the agreement to pay; participation in this circumstance could be felt to be more coercive. I intended to signal my trust in the interviewees rather than require them to trust me. In all cases I gave the vouchers before the interview, immediately prior to the signing of the consent forms.

I very quickly came to understand that “traditional vouchers with the Queen’s head on them” – cash payments – were less problematic than vouchers. Vouchers are supposed to be a “token” of thanks, not a payment for services. But, vouchers carry far narrower and more explicit value systems with them than cash. Initially I offered book tokens or Marks and Spencer vouchers. But, book tokens make an explicitly educative statement. Were my informants making a calculation about how I might feel about them depending on which they chose? Should they show off their interest in education and take the book token when really £25 would pay off the electricity? Vouchers would also tie the research into a particular economic structure. You cannot give vouchers for a car boot sale or a corner shop. Every act is nuanced. I do not want to make presumptions about social shopping habits. Do I give Primark vouchers? Matalan? Wilkinson? Cash carries none of the stigmas of vouchers. It levels the economic playing field.

3.8.4 Attribution and bias

Throughout, observer bias is a strong feature of this study. However, I have tried to maintain a reflexive dialogue with the findings, the questions, and the framework. This has been methodologically significant in a formal, structural sense of producing the framework. It has also been a reminder to strive continually to apply some criticality to my own work: uncovering the assumptions, the covert curricula (Roberts 2007), the indirect object of my own learning.

3.9 Data collection

I collected data at 22 points from 24 people: ten biographic narrative interviews, two focus groups, ten semi-structured interpretive interviews. Throughout the study from 14 January 2005, I have kept reflective research diaries.

3.9.1 Selection of participants

Because I wanted to do in-depth biographical work and was working alone and part-time, I was not going to be able to interview a large number of people. I would not be able to obtain a valid sampling of the overall demographic of either the estate or the users of the centre. Participants in the study were selected opportunistically with the help of the centre manager, with an

instruction to be broadly representative of the people who visited and used the community IT centre.

During the time that I was working on this study the centre was undergoing a transformation in its management. The operation of the community IT centre itself was turned over to a social enterprise company, principally funded by economic development grants from the city council, and having service agreements to provide drop-in Internet access facilities and beginner-level access-to-IT courses. The manager/director of this social enterprise company had for the previous years been a user and then volunteer at the centre. He had come to the centre as a drop-in to learn to use computers and later led the initiative to turn the operation of the centre over to a social enterprise company. His story might well illustrate one of Cook and Smith's cycles (Ch 1, section 1.4.7-8; Cook & Smith 2002)

I initially identified two key centre users whom I wanted to interview. One (*Alexandra* is her pseudonym) had been a County-Council outreach worker based at the centre when it was part of the UKonline initiative. The other (*Sandra*, is her pseudonym) was a "Learning Champion" (see Ch 2, section 2.8.1) and an outgoing, visible member of the community. My intention had been to cascade out from these two, identifying other potential participants from their different networks of connections. I also sought and obtained the permission of the manager of the Learning Estates Project to undertake research at the centre. The first focus group was organised by Sandra around Learning Champions and people with ties to the manager of the Learning Estates Project. They were community activists. I then approached the man who was to become the head of the social enterprise. He was an active volunteer, trusted with keys, but not officially a manager. I explained my research to him and sought his assistance in identifying participants for the interviews and organising a second focus group. I explained that I wanted a representative sample of people, as near as that might be possible, given the limited time and budget. I wanted people who represented a range of ages, genders and ethnicities. And, given the initial focus group had been with general participants in the life of the centre, I wanted the second focus group to be with people who had taken courses at the centre.

The first figure below shows which people took part in which data collection session. The next figure plots the date of each data collection point according to its kind: biographical narrative, focus group, interpretive interview. All of the names have been changed. Other details are as reported.

Engagements	Participants
First round biographical narrative interview (10, 1 withdrew)	Alexandra*, Haidar, Jamie*, anon [†] , Marie*, Patricia*, Philippe, Robert*, Sandra**, Shona*
Appreciative Inquiry Focus group 1, Learning Lunch (6)	Allen, Jean, Sandra**, Jo, Matt, Rosa
Appreciative Inquiry Focus group 2, Learners (9)	Angela*, anon**, Catherine*, Charles, Cicely, George, Harriet, Jocasta, Lucy
Second round semi-structured, interpretive interviews (10, 1 withdrew)	Alexandra, Angela, anon [†] , Catherine, Jamie, Marie, Patricia, Robert, Sandra**, Shona

Notes

* also took part in second round interpretive interviews

** helped organise Focus Group 1, appears in 3 engagements: biographical narrative, focus group 1 and semi-structured interpretive interview.

[†] subsequently withdrew from the study

Figure 3.2 Engagements

The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded in order to make an accurate record of what was said. These recordings were not used for any other purpose than for transcribing comments. Individual interviewees were provided with a copy of the transcript, in order to verify that the representation is acceptable or to request modifications.

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed by the researcher and assistants, and manually coded for themes. (See appendix 5, sample transcripts.)

3.9.2 A note on qualitative analysis software

I decided to use QSR Nvivo to categorise my data. Using software would require me to make my coding decisions explicit, and might provide one self-consistent view into the study. The decision about what software to use was not completely straight forward. I use a Mac. But Nvivo only runs in Windows. I looked at TAMS Analyze quite seriously. It is open source and Mac-native but does not read Word docs in native format and the user interface is rudimentary. In the end I installed and am using Nvivo running in a Parallels virtual machine (Windows on the Mac).

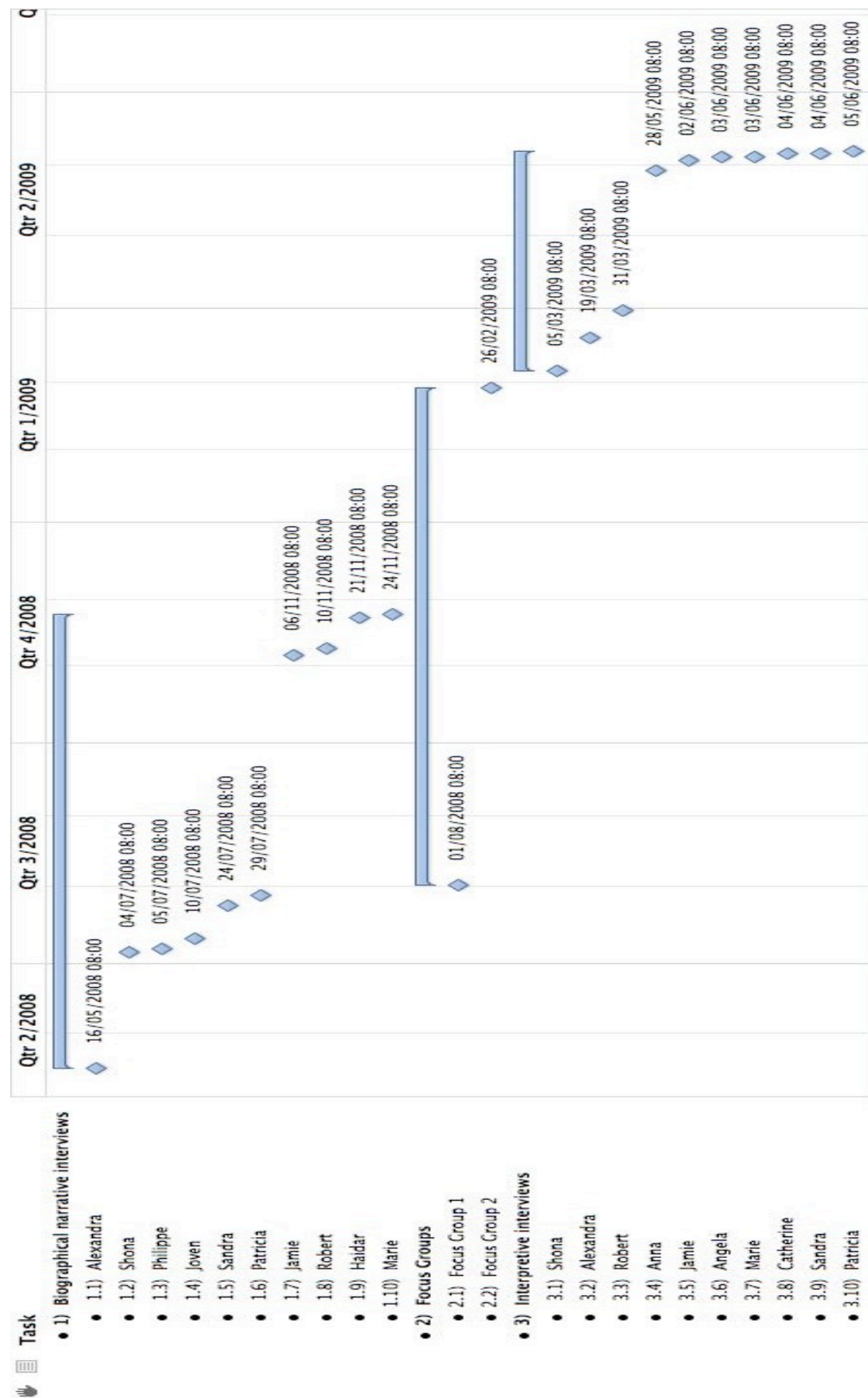


Figure 3.3 Data collection points

3.9.3 Case classification, rejected

Nvivo embeds the term “case” into its top level taxonomy. Passages can be coded as either “free nodes”, “tree nodes” or “cases”. Although not necessarily focused on human subjects, the implication in the software is that all the data collected would be associated with a “case”, which could then be studied. I initially set up a very simple case classification structure, making use of HESA codes (HESA 2009) and having the following attributes:

Category	Values
Age	Number (sometimes cohort decades reported)
Education level	left school with no quals, left school with GCSE's below grade C, left school with GCSEs grade C or above, A-level-HNC-GNVQs level 2, FD-HND-DipHE, First Degree, Postgraduate
Ethnic	white, black or black British - Caribbean, black or black British - African, other black background, Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Gender	male & female
National identity	British, English, African, [others...]

I subsequently added the category “Parent” to the classification:

Parent	Whether the participant is a parent, with options 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more children
--------	--

Figure 3.4 case classification codes

It wasn't until the second round interviews that questions related to the case attributes were asked explicitly and any assumptions I might have made either confirmed or denied.

Although I set up this “case” structure, I have not found it particularly useful as an analytical tool, except to reassure myself that my selection of life stories appears representative of the diversity of the community IT centre. Further, treating the participants as “cases” treats people in a manner reminiscent of either medical or legal practice, implying a remedial relationship to the research. This is not at all my intention. I have, therefore not made use of the term “case” beyond here. Tabulation of case properties is at appendix 7.

3.9.4 Coding

Coding is the process of assigning terms to passages of text, saying something of what that passage is about.

In coding there is always a value-laden act of interpretation and some negotiation between the researcher's values and those of the researched. These criteria, by which I have somehow recognised or named statements that people have made, should not be given any artificially enhanced generalisability. While there must be a relationship between these names and a typology of wider social values (See Ch. 8), the words with which I generalise do as much to reveal the underlying assumptions of this research, and what I value.

3.9.5 Emergence and coalescence

I created my initial coding structure by starting from my research questions. I created codes:

- life change
- trajectory
- IT practice
- policy.

I then imported my first transcript and created a "case" using the pseudonym, Alexandra.

I assigned attributes to Alexandra's case, and started reading and coding. Initially I used only free nodes. Words expressing a lot of feelings started to emerge: ambition, determination, failure, fear, pride. I created free nodes for these. I then created a tree node called "affect" and gathered all these feeling words under that.

Similarly, there were various terms that related to education: formal, secondary, training schemes. So I gathered these free nodes into a tree node called "education".

"Employment" started as a free node, but then other free nodes seemed to associate with it:

- *job seeking*
- *need to earn living*
- *workplace*

"Skills" suggested another category under which various items might cluster. I decided that, for example, "professional literacy" was a skill. (Memo, Initial coding 08/12/2008)

The hierarchical elaboration of terms, clustering, grouping and regrouping begins to bring some order which may help the activity of the participants to be better understood. For example:

Been coding Jamie for about an hour. Added a few nodes: domestic violence, drugs. I decided to include drugs and crime in the community tree. It is hard not to adopt the conventional pejorative views: category, anti social behaviour, sub category, drugs. Try to code without too many values and let the values emerge or be part of the respondent's value system, not convention. For example Jamie observes that to blame the shoplifter for higher prices in the shops is probably spurious. Prices, he says are affected by the stock market and wider economics more than by petty criminals. To be fair, he doesn't appear to see his crime as politically motivated, but he contextualises it in a very wide framework and does not appear to feel overly guilty for the immorality of it. (Memo, Initial coding, 14/12/2008)

After coding, Alexandra Shona, Jamie and Philippe, consolidation was necessary.

3.9.6 Initial consolidation

There were a number groupings into which many of my codes could be clustered. Work, home-life, the community, and education were readily available and reasonably unproblematic clusters. Home-life, or domestic or family embraced participants' domestic circumstances, children and child-care, cohabitants, family members, personal finance, and partner(s) or ex-partners. Education, interestingly, appeared to be more of what might be called "learning for learning's sake" than instrumental policy discourses would suggest. Community incorporated formal and informal structures and activities such as community organisations, volunteering, but also crime, drugs, prison, familiarity and strangers.

The two clusters: "IT practice" and "what you do at the IT centre" arose directly from my questioning. I tried to distinguish what *tools people used* and *what they did with computers* such as word processing, online shopping and so on, from the *reasons* that they used the IT centre, such as having access to help, or taking a course, or not having a computer of the Internet at home. People certainly used the resources of the centre for social and recreational purposes as well as for work and learning.

Initially there were three other clusters that became apparent from my coding. It appeared that emotional or affective factors were as important as educational, domestic, community or employment factors and warranted a category of their own. Affective factors included: confusion, fatigue, fear, guilt, happiness, humour, loss, love, pride, respect, success, unhappiness. Similarly there were a number of statements that people made which implied value orientations that cut across the other categories, such as: challenging wrongs, making the

best of what you got, no harm in trying, do what you love, learning together, being popular, determination, professionalism. Finally it seemed that signal events of people's lives led them to where they were at the time. People found themselves on or near the estate for any number of reasons, and needed to use a computer.

At this stage I felt reasonably confident that my categories were emergent, grounded in the data and were beginning to address the research questions. I was getting some idea of what people actually did with this community IT centre (RQ2). It was clear that in some cases what they did with the community IT centre did lead to some changes in some lives that could be considered "positive" (RQ1). But, there were some unsettling and counter-intuitive observations. The importance of affective factors in determining people's inclination to use the centre did not align with any obvious policy drivers. While in some cases people's use of the centre was aligned with work-related learning, in other cases people were not interested in work-related qualifications or indeed any qualifications. Similarly there appeared to be scepticism as to the value of work-related qualifications. Qualifications may be necessary but they were far from sufficient. Things did appear more complex than simply that using the community IT centre led to work related learning which led in turn to employment. At this stage my coding structure looked like this (figure 3.5).

Category	Items
Domestic	abuse, children and childcare, distance/physical separation, domestic violence, fatherhood, home-life/domestic environments, lone parent, parental expectations, suicide
Community	bonding/strengthening the community (including: organisations with 12 sub categories, similarity/familiarity, support teams, volunteering, work in community), culture (including: art, music, crime, with 5 sub categories, religion, wider economy), diversity/many different kinds of people (including: global community, strangers, youth), locale (including Bluefield Lanes, the city)
Education	access barriers, access routes, conference, cost, digital literacy, distance learning, education a luxury, informal learning, learning champion, learning styles, mature student, mentoring, parental education, parental expectation, PCDL, purely to learn, qualifications (and 8 sub categories), reasons to go into education (including: continuing personal development, improve employment prospects, televangelism, way out of poverty), school, short courses (and 7 sub categories), subjects (and 9 sub categories), teachers, tertiary, training schemes, workshops
Employment	career, disciplinary action, experience, job seeking, job type (and 30 sub categories/kinds of job), management, need to earn a living, own business, part time, professional behaviour, reason to leave, routes in, social enterprise, tasks, unemployed, workplace
Emotion	accepted, confusion, envy, failure, fatigue, fear, gratitude, guilt, happiness, hate/dislike, humour, loneliness, loss, love, pride, respect, sorrow, success, suicidality, unhappiness

Values	compassion-empathy-humanity, determination-self discipline-confidence, learning together, professionalism-service ethic-helpfulness, resourceful-making the best of what you got, respect-respectfulness-integrity
Identity	ego identity (including developmental: motivation, role model; embodied: active person, drug user; experiential: aspiration, boundaries, Christian, club-scene, defensiveness, detachment, detractors, digital habitus, home owner, immigration, music, Muslim, strength of character, technophobe, underlying issues), social identity (including categories: African, Asian, black, British, Jamaican, male, middle-class, local person, Pakistan, posh; and roles: educated, hippy, mentor/facilitator, on benefits, perpetual student, person with a job, teacher), identity projects
History	achievements, continuous onward journey, downshifting, evaluation to move forward, expanding horizons, funny old world, sense of future, things are hard, trajectory
IT Practices	As IT Practices, I coded 28 items (see Ch 6. section 6.2.2), such as information seeking, Internet, leaflets and flyers, presentations, printing, record keeping, shopping, social networking systems, spreadsheets, studying, etc.; I coded for 17 particular applications such as: Word, Outlook and Photoshop, etc.
Reasons to use BITZ	There were a total of 32 items for which I coded (Ch 6, section 6.2.1), such as build confidence, civilised community, contact family, flexible time to use, free, friendly, supportive place, ... etc

Figure 3.5 Preliminary coding

3.10 Second round interpretive interview

I return now to the account of data collection and the interpretive interviews. Subsequent to the initial coding and consolidation, I developed the interview schedule for the second round interviews (see appendix 6).

My intention was to offer second round interviews to everyone who participated in any of the first round interviews or either focus group. Interestingly, recruitment remained problematic. I initially focused on the participants in the biographical narrative interviews and the first focus group. I had assumed that I would be able to make appointments with all of the life-story participants with relative ease. However, there were three people to whom I wrote and rang but was unable to either make an appointment, or having made the appointment, it was missed. In the event, seven of the ten people who participated in the first round interviews participated in the second round.

Of the six people who participated in the first focus group, one (Sandra) also had given a first round interview and gave a second round interview. Of the remaining five, I failed to make appointments or the appointments that were made were not kept. In one case three appointments were made and missed. Illness prevented another from attending. Two others

had busy schedules and we could not find a mutually convenient time. The final person, I failed to make further contact with.

I was more successful in recruiting participants in the second focus group to second round interviews, although in the end I only was able to make appointments with three of the nine people who participated, and one of these subsequently withdrew from the study.

3.10.1 The interview schedule

I intended to use the second round interviews to extend the narratives and explore the preliminary themes that I had identified. The interview schedule was not intended as a questionnaire but as a discussion guide.

After developing the instrument but prior to using it with participants in the study, I undertook cognitive trials with two researcher colleagues and the centre manager, refining the phrasing and ensuring that there were adequate opportunities for participants to offer their own interpretations. My aim was always to stimulate conversation, not to fill out an inventory.

I prepared a personal version of the discussion guide for each person I interviewed and printed out two copies, one for me and one for them. I decided not to hand it out in advance, but to work through it together, addressing any questions of interpretation as they arose.

I started it off with simple questions related to the case properties, confirming age, educational attainment, number of children and so on. I also used the opening minutes to agree a choice of pseudonym. I decided that I would offer a suggestion and invite the participants to accept or reject it. Only one person rejected my suggested name. I had offered “Charles”, but the association with the Prince of Wales wasn’t appreciated. He chose “Robert”.

I then explored the emergent coding system moving through the narrative interpretation, category by category. I used the term “matters”, as in “domestic matters”, “community matters”, “education matters”, and so on to head each section of the discussion. The ambiguity was intentional. I wanted to signal that this wasn’t just *about* community, but that community appeared to be important: it *mattered*. The second round interviews were recorded however they were not transcribed in full. I coded them straight from the audio file, making a partial transcription of passages that I might want to cite. As with the first round, I conducted ten second round interviews. The second round interviews were, for the most part longer than the first and produced extremely rich narratives.

3.11 Final contact

Shortly before completing this study, I wrote one more time to all the participants, sending them their final, abbreviated and edited story as it would appear in chapter five (see appendix 7). Five participants responded to this correspondence. One had minor corrections relating to anonymity; two wrote to thank me for my concern and interest; but, two withdrew from the study at this last minute. One withdrew citing concerns for anonymity “... even your mother shouldn’t recognise you”: difficult when the matter addressed is personal biographical narrative. The other simply, “didn’t like it”. I can’t draw any conclusions. However it is unfortunate that these two participants were, coincidentally (?), the two oldest in the study, who had brought very interesting perspectives to the story. I was very sorry to lose them. Had I invested more effort in developing the relational aspects of the project and involved these two more closely, might they have stayed in? I offered the opportunity to discuss in more depth but neither has taken me up.

3.12 Methodological summary

A multimodal qualitative approach was undertaken with 24 participants, 11 of whom provided life stories. As well as the participants I was helped by the volunteer centre manager. My method consisted of, Biographical Narrative Interpretive Methods (BNIM), Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Interpretive Interviews and analytical coding using Nvivo software. Broadly this approach reflects the current “biographical turn” in the social sciences. This approach aligned with my orientation as set out in chapter one (section 1.3), addressed the research questions, and supported the development of a theoretical, conceptual framework (Ch. 4).

The initial open-ended questioning allowed the research questions to be addressed freely by the participants with very little pre-structuring. Initial coding was driven by the questions themselves. Categories emerged, which were shaped using Critical Discourse Analysis according to institutions of society and were given a positive orientation with Appreciative Inquiry. Interpretive interviews tested understandings and produced the final analytical structure.

In the next chapter I will discuss the development of the theoretical, conceptual framework which I have subsequently used to explore and explain the findings. In chapters six, seven and eight I then address the research questions through the lens of the conceptual framework.

Chapter 4 Conceptual framework

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I develop a conceptual framework based on Third Space Theory (Bhabha 2004; English 2005; Wallace, C. S. 2004), informed by third generation Activity Theory (AT) (Engeström 2001, pp.133-137) and grounded in the process of coming to understand the life stories of the community ICT centre. I have developed this framework because it is consistent with the orientation I described in the introductory chapter (section 1.3.1) and because Third Space theory is particularly suited to questions of identity in communities, while Activity Theory remains useful – despite reservations – for understanding social action and actors.

Third Space Theory has been brought into association with Activity Theory (AT) by Engeström (Engeström 2001, p.135). The Third Space is a useful lens for scrutinising the tensions between on the one hand simply understanding the direction of community development; and on the other hand organising, controlling, indeed directing that development (see Ch 4, section 4.3.5 and Ch 9, section 9.3.9) in a manner similar to how that which Bhabha calls a government of “recording” inscribes its norms on the colony (Bhabha 2004, pp.133-136).

4.1.1 Structure of the framework

There are three broad aspects to the framework. I call these: 1) Common-sense of the self, 2) Social action, and 3) Community & identity. I am illustrating this framework with three intersecting spheres.

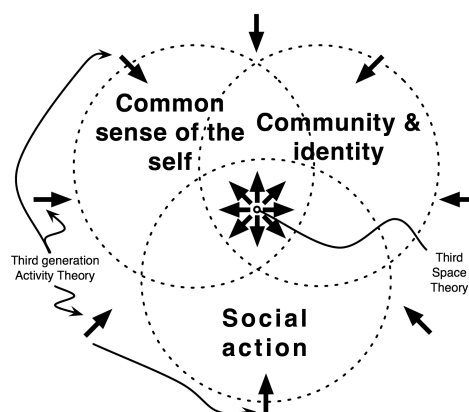


Figure 4.1 Conceptual framework

There is not an easy mapping onto discrete territories. Each of Third Space Theory and Activity Theory could be used to make claims on the whole. But, to over-simplify, Activity Theory presses from without the field, a unifying, interpretive pre-existing imposition: a

utilitarian narrative instrument, facilitating order and providing discourse technologies of control. This facility for order (Licona 2005) is a useful aspect of Activity Theory. While, on the other hand, Third Space Theory presses out from the centre: from the space claimed or forced between, from the unique intersection of the spheres.

Furthermore, each of the three spheres contains its own problematics. A Common-sense of the self is theoretically problematic (Bayne 2004; Bayne 2005; Haraway 1991), yet remains firmly embedded not only in most people but also in news and policy discourses (Scollon 2003, pp.71-72) by which people and groups seek to organise themselves and others. Social action is the notion at the core of Activity Theory: and all social constructivism. The simple concept of social action is that all activity is mediated by other actors. These may be people as well as artefacts, tools, roles and both tacit and explicit rules, ideologies, conceptions and beliefs (Engeström 2001, pp.134-135): what Scollon would call “mediational means” (Scollon 2001). But there is an interpretive problem at the heart of social action: interpretation is always ambiguous because language is always ambiguous. This doesn’t mean clear signals are impossible, it is that there are also other meanings, echoes of developments past. There is always some degree of motivation and explanation beyond the reach of any standpoint. This is the idea at the heart of Third Space Theory. But, it is also a space wherein which an us-and-them, “othering” hermeneutic heuristic for inducing collective action and individual will might be asserted by those who purport to understand the other better than the other understands themselves (*I know you better than you know yourself*). This is the application to which Activity Theory (AT) is available. This move risks patronising the subjects. Though equally AT might be applied reflexively in a Third Space, where I am the *other* of myself. This is a space in which I acknowledge those other echoes of identity and mediation that thread through my writing: the institutions of society, gender, biology and language, etc. These facilitate a deeper understanding of such things as the workings of presence, participation, social action, social and self control, mediation, complicity, collegiality and comradeship.

4.1.2 Structure of this chapter

I first introduce the problems of values and identity at the heart of the questions and then I set out the origin of this framework in Activity Theory. While I may assert that the choice of terms used to name the categories, which I have observed, is justifiable from within the narratives, perhaps more importantly the category names and indeed the identification at all of the categories must have arisen in part from shared stories. After discussing the origin of the framework, I introduce Third Space Theory and my rationale for using it the way that I do. I then elaborate the framework in its parts.

4.2 The problem of values and identity

It is immediately apparent that my first research question contains a significant value proposition: how do people, who associate themselves with the community IT centre, use that association to make *positive changes* in their lives (RQ1)?

As Cook and Smith observed with respect to their concept of personal progression, "... progression takes place over a period of time and will include a *value judgement*." (Cook & Smith 2002, p.23 my emphasis) The notion of positive change is complex. For some, positive change may imply normatively adopting a set of behaviours. For others positive change might imply rejecting the same set of behaviours. It is not until one has addressed the question of what constitutes positive change for people that it is meaningful to attempt an answer to the question of how they use any association – *let alone* a community IT centre – to achieve it. However it is not as simple as just asking. There are many factors that influenced people's use of and engagement with the community IT centre (RQ3) and what they actually did with the community IT centre (RQ2). It was the observation of these factors that began to shape the framework, at first around Activity Theory.

4.2.1 Values are closely tied to individual identity

Values, positive and negative, are closely tied to individual identity and identity practices, and values are central to any understanding of community. It is important, therefore, to seek to discover what is valued by individuals and by groups of individuals. While people may assert values, their behaviours may not be wholly in line with the asserted values. Groups of people may exhibit collective or imperfectly shared values. Institutions, too, are not value-free. Indeed, tools, artefacts and contexts all may, themselves, express, encode and communicate values, and for any individual, group of individuals, institution, community or culture it may be impossible to resolve a single, consistent set of values.

Neither are values unproblematically linked to identity. As Henderson and McEwen directly state, "Identity construction is a political process that serves a political purpose." (Henderson & McEwen 2005, p.173) This is no less true at the very local level than at the national. Identity is a key means by which a person and groups of people can assert or defend their entitlements or confront their exclusion from them. Wolton argues that the debate over British national values arises not because of either immigration or a decline in values or a loss of identity among the wider population, but because, "...it is the political class who have changed their values."

(Wolton 2006, p.454) Gouveia, *et al* (2002) suggest that, “social identity/identification appears to be related in a logical and coherent way to values assumed by people.” (p. 336)

4.2.2 Ways of talking about personal identity

Personal identity constructs may include instruments such as authentication and access controls, log-ins to computer systems, driving licenses, state ID cards, and so on. More powerful identity constructs include categories such as gender, age cohort, race and ethnicity, locale, sexuality, trade/profession, supermarket, taste, parentage, offspring and so on. Identity constructs are often divided into social identity and ego (or personal) identity (Gouveia *et al.* 2002, pp.334-335). I will adhere principally to this two dimensional model. There may be occasion to consider other dimensions, such as embodied identity and transcendental identity. These two dimensions might be considered aspects of the personal and social. Embodied (and disembodied) identities may be socially constructed (Bayne 2004; Haraway 1991) Similarly transcendental identities, for example, at-one-with-god or collective consciousness, might be constructed or imposed even while being an aspiration for a member of a faith community (Green & Ives 2009, pp.27-28; Stoddart 2007, pp.763-764).

4.2.3 Identity of self

An ego identity or a self has been seen as an essential component of coming to be as a person. The systematic belief in the essential self, constructed from an amalgam of factors such as body, parentage, place, and culture, but essentially unitary and whole, is a foundational component of liberalism, utilitarianism and modernism. The commonsense view of personal identity and the utilitarian practice of identity management are closely aligned with the idea that there is an essential self, unitary and indivisible from a single body. A fragmented identity could be seen as pathological: a danger to itself and to public order. Set against this foundation is an emerging postfoundational understanding that sees identity as fluid, contingent, continually re-negotiated, independent from corporeality and caught up in discourses of social control, oppression, affiliation, resistance, dominance, subordination, desire and transgression.

Neimeyer and Rareshide, drawing on Marcia, presents a framework for considering identity development in which, “... four different identity statuses can develop.” (Neimeyer & Rareshide 1991, p.562) Using a standard two dimensional array of high and low scales along the axes of commitment and crisis (or exploration), these are summarised anti clockwise from top left as foreclosed, diffuse, moratorium, and achieved.

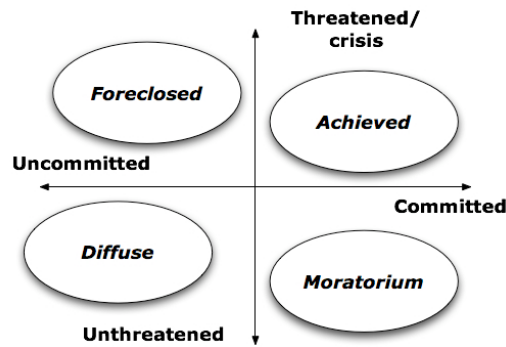


Figure 4.2 Identity (Neimeyer & Raeshide 1991)

This model leads to a typology of predictable behaviours and is discussed developmentally. Moratorium and achieved statuses are said to show more developmentally “advanced” concerns in their recall of earlier memories and that “... more advanced statuses [are] marked by a greater orientation towards the future” (Neimeyer & Raeshide 1991, p.562). It may be useful to characterise patterns, and then to name the pattern. However, then to use named patterns as a diagnostic and having diagnosed a pattern, to extrapolate anticipated behaviours may have a modelling effect (the researcher sees what the researcher wants to see). In the case of this study, for adults returning to learn, or beginning to engage with a community IT centre, it might be suggested that an increasing ability to recall the past and to show “advanced concerns” in respect to personal narratives could be associated with a greater orientation towards the future. That is to say people may become, over time and with application in practice, more reflective on and engaged in their presence and participation. Or, when asked to speak of the past, they simply are motivated to speak historically. This raises the question of the utility of biographical work as a component of participatory community development education.

4.3 Origin of the framework: Activity Theory

The development of this framework was marked by early conceptualisations (Ch 1, section 1.3). The next phase was largely emergent: through preliminary coding of the recordings and transcripts, described in the preceding chapter, I identified ten categories into which I could gather statements made by the participants (Ch 3 section 3.9.6, figure 3.5)

4.3.1 Introduction to third generation Activity Theory

Activity Theory (AT) provides a recognised and consistent but adaptable framework for investigating the development of knowledge in and through the use of tools, signs and mediating artefacts in communities. Activity Theory lends itself (too?) well to schematisation. Originating in Vygotsky’s theory of child development, originating from a highly developed Marxist framework, which held that human development was first social and then individual, and that

all individuals are actors in social networks, AT provides a well elaborated approach to describing social factors that motivate people's behaviours. Vygotsky set out to investigate "... the specifically human forms of practical intellect." (Vygotsky & Luria 1934) The basic activity system was developed as a counter move to both the stimulus/response proto-behaviourist, Pavlovian discourse models and the individual cognitivism of Piaget's description of child development, which were becoming used widely.

In the first move in the construction of the activity paradigm, it is observed that a person acts on an object to achieve an outcome.



Figure 4.3 Any activity, stage one

As Engeström observed (figure 4.4, stage 2):

This idea was crystallized in Vygotsky's ... famous triangular model in which the conditioned direct connection between stimulus (S) and response (R) was transcended by 'a complex, mediated act' ... Vygotsky's idea of cultural mediation of actions is commonly expressed as the triad of subject, object, and mediating artifact. (Engeström 2001, p.134)

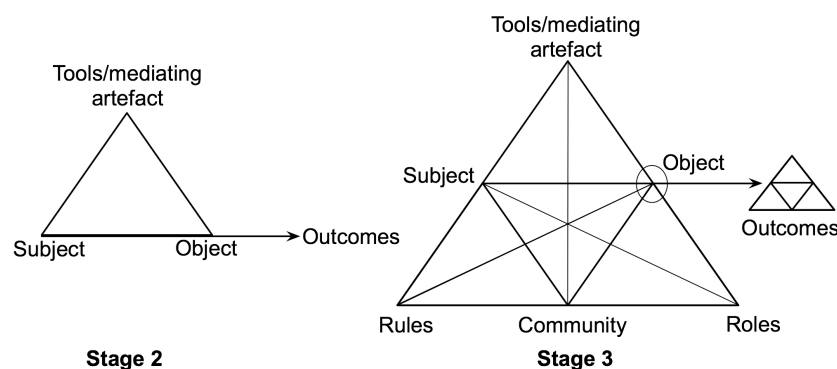


Figure 4.4 Any activity, stages two and three

4.3.2 Expansion of the model

Engeström expands the model in two ways. First there is a layer added below that of the subject and the object to show that the application of a tool or mediating artefact takes place in a community where there are rules governing the use of the tool and a division of labour (or roles) which determines who may or may not engage in activity (figure 4.4, stage 3). Second he has recognised that between the nodes in any systematic description of social action there is

tension. No one node can be described perfectly as playing its part to the exclusion of any other: subject and object collapse into one another; tools shape rules and rules shape tools; outcomes may well be unintended.

From an inchoate discourse analysis of a site of engagement, such as this representation (fig 4.5), Activity Theory can help impose order and provides a means of analysis and discussion.

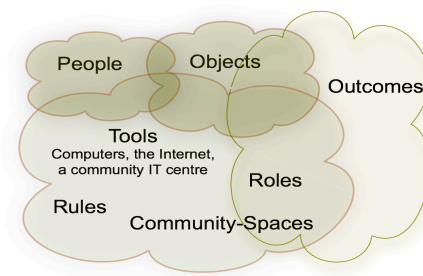
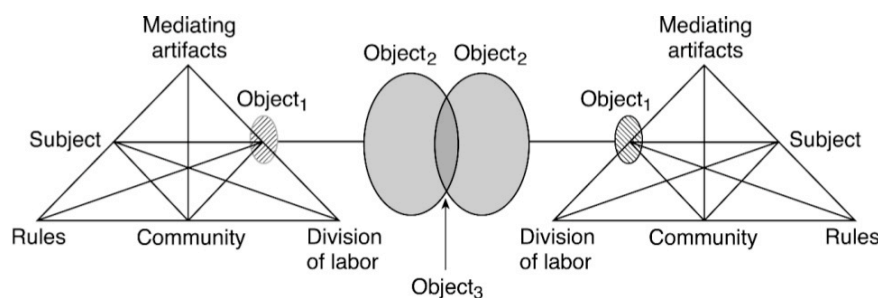


Figure 4.5 The site of engagement (Scollon 2001)

4.3.3 Third generation Activity Theory

Garrison observes that Activity Theorists are engaged in a “... multifaceted search for connections and hybrids between activity theory and other related traditions.” (2001, p.275) In its latest manifestation, third generation Activity Theory has embraced both Actor Network Theory (ANT n.d., Latour 1999; Law, J. 2004) and Third Space Theory. Through Third Space Theory, the concept of the space between any number of activity networks is visualised. Engeström shows this as the interaction or intersection of outcomes of two activity systems (“Object 3” in fig 4.6).



(Engeström 2001, p.136)

Figure 4.6 Third generation AT: space between multiple networks

A superficial, instrumental intentionality might be asserted on one’s own behalf or on behalf of another. As an illustrative anecdote, for example, in my experience as a volunteer in the community IT centre, one role I often assumed was as mentor to people wanting to create a

CV. In the superficial instrumental scenario, the person uses the community IT centre to write a CV in order to get a job. And, this is how the scenario inevitably presents itself. However it becomes apparent that the act of creating a CV has more outcomes than getting a job. Indeed that might not be an outcome at all. For people who have never created a CV before, the whole process is novel. An outcome may well be a personal transformation from a person without a CV to a person with a CV. That is having a CV becomes a component of personal identity. The declared outcome, to get a job, is supplemented, or even superseded by another outcome.

The CV itself as an outcome is transformed into a tool with which to act on the self. The CV transforms the person, and the changed person is the “output”. There is an assumption that there are explicit rules about what information should be on a CV. There is a fear of *getting it wrong* and a concern to know *what I have to write* and *where*. During the mentoring process it begins to become more complicated as people discover that the rules that govern the construction of a CV are only in a small part explicit. The CV is an tool with which a person negotiates and enacts a role or roles (job seeker, grant seeker, professional) in a wider community in which there are other roles being enacted (gate keeper, employer, funding body). At best the direct routes through the diagram, starting from the person or actor, could only really be represented by broken lines (figure 4.7). The heavier lines are an attempt to represent actual practice, where the route from an actor through an object to an outcome involves multiple reflections, tensions and recapitulations between the person, rules, roles and community, set against a background of identity development.

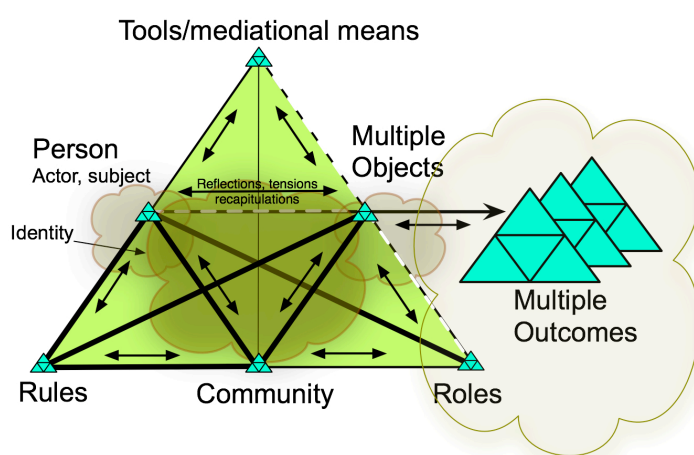


Figure 4.7 Any activity: multiple reflections, tensions and recapitulations

The utility of Activity Theory makes it attractive when seeking an explanatory framework and a guide to action. However, in personal community development learning situations, while at the

level of the individual it might help explicate one's place in a scheme of things, the tension and contradictions eventually overcome the explanatory power.

4.3.4 Activity theory runs out

I spent some considerable time trying to force a fit to Activity Theory. At the apex, or top triad, of the familiar diagram I could place four items: the person (subject/actor), individual IT practices, reasons for using the community IT centre and the outcomes of such an engagement (figure 4.8).

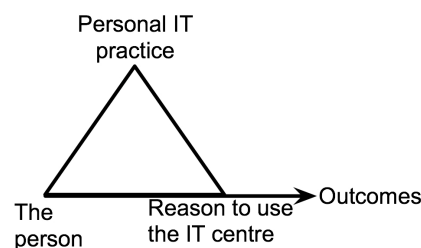


Figure 4.8 Simple AT triad applied to community IT centre

In one case, Philippe, this might be nearly sufficient. Philippe used the IT centre to type his dissertation because his own laptop broke down. But this over simplifies the struggle through which he went and the extent to which he was helped by the people at the community IT centre to achieve his goal. Similarly for the other participants in this study, while reducing their engagement to a simple diagrammatic representation might be possible, it would not be particularly useful (see Ch 6, section 6.3.5).

I also began to array the collection of factors against the second layer – the expansive lower triads – of the activity diagram.

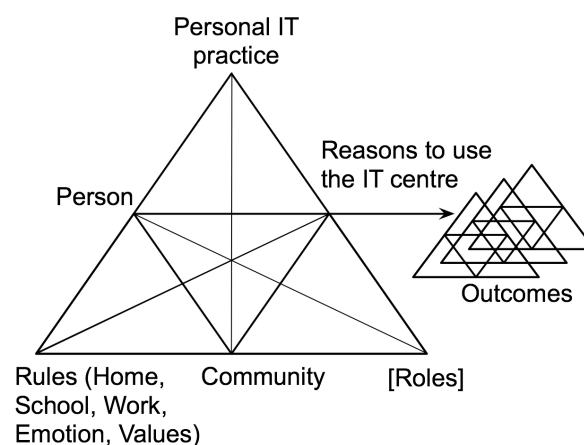


Figure 4.9 Expanded AT network for community IT centre

This gave rise to a number of questions and observations. Could I use the term “rules” as a heading under which to gather all the factors which had emerged from my coding? I had not elaborated any typology of roles; would this matter? There were clearly multiple outcomes for everyone, and these were difficult to resolve. However the facility of the available terminology continued to be tempting.

Fullick provides a comprehensive example of the utility of Activity theory as a framework for understanding in his study of the use of computer supported learning environments in the teaching of science in schools (Fullick 2004, pp.79-82). He illustrates the principle of selecting “triads” from within the diagram in order to focus on those aspects of the framework that are the most relevant. (Fullick 2004, pp.82-85) I considered focussing my discussion around the Rules, Community, and Reasons triad. Here, for me was where the complexity lay. However, there were issues that such a reduction could not resolve. As Fullick says, Activity Theory is, “... concerned with the ways in which individuals cooperate in communities in order to perform some kind of activity towards a common goal (or *object*) ... something that all members of the community can share for the purpose of manipulation and transformation during the activity, (Fullick 2004, pp.80-81) It could not be said that the participants in my study were pursuing any explicit common goal. Neither could they be said either to be – or to belong to – a particular community. The community IT centre could be seen as a node in several communities. Further, the “rules” which I discerned could not be described as explicit or even tacit in the sense that Activity Theory requires (Fullick 2004, p.85).

The “rules” I discerned were like the rules of grammar: descriptive not normative. But, they were not narrowly descriptive of the conditions of membership in the community IT centre nor were they emergent social norms: guides to appropriate social action.

The “rules” are a set of peaks in the enunciated landscapes of people’s lives: their contexts, their signal nodes. These were the “noisy” areas, the points that appeared from my analysis of the recordings and their transcripts to have the greatest salience, the ones that attracted the most attention. The ones that explained why people did things. The “rules” I was working towards described the discursive functions of the dominant institutions of cultural reproduction in society (see Ch 3, section 3.7.3).

4.3.5 A wider critical perspective on Activity Theory

In order to use Activity Theory, I would have to take a highly abstracted view of the participants and the community IT centre. I would have to deal with the question of multiple, undefined

outcomes or competing outcomes. I could address the community IT centre using Activity Theory, but it would require imposing outcomes such as employability goals or qualifications and this would transform the participants from subject to object. It would be a denial of the participatory aims of the study. The biographical narratives would, or could, become – once again – voices of the excluded, appropriated and colonised within a discourse of dominance.

Pachler *et al.* share the view that Activity Theory is “... at best a heuristic” and that, “... there is actually a danger of it potentially obfuscating, rather than clarifying the issues involved” (Pachler *et al.* 2010, p.166).

As Peim has observed, Activity Theory, particularly as promulgated by Engeström, is “stripped of any conflictual, political dimension” (Peim 2009, p.179) and indeed might be seen as an “expression of a will-to-power” (Peim 2009, p.167 and ff). Similarly Wheelahan has asserted:

While activity theory makes power relations explicit, unless the sites of learning go beyond the activity system, then the individual (novice) is at the mercy of these power relations. It is difficult to create spaces where the individual can question practice, criticise what they see, and develop their own theories and ideas. (Wheelahan 2007 cited on-line)

4.3.6 Other frameworks

Structuration and the Third Way

At this point I experimented with other frameworks while reading Giddens theory of structuration (Giddens 1984) and “third way” writings with Bhabha’s Third Space Theory (Bhabha 2004).

Using these concepts, I developed and explored a three dimensional paradigm (figure 4.10) with three scales:

- X, a Politological/Governance scale running from Professional, disciplinary autonomy to Managerial (authoritarian) control;
- Y, a Psycho-social/Human scale running from interiorised (ego identity) to exteriorised (social identity) reflections;
- Z, an Institutional/Epistemological scale running from the local and concrete to the global and abstract.

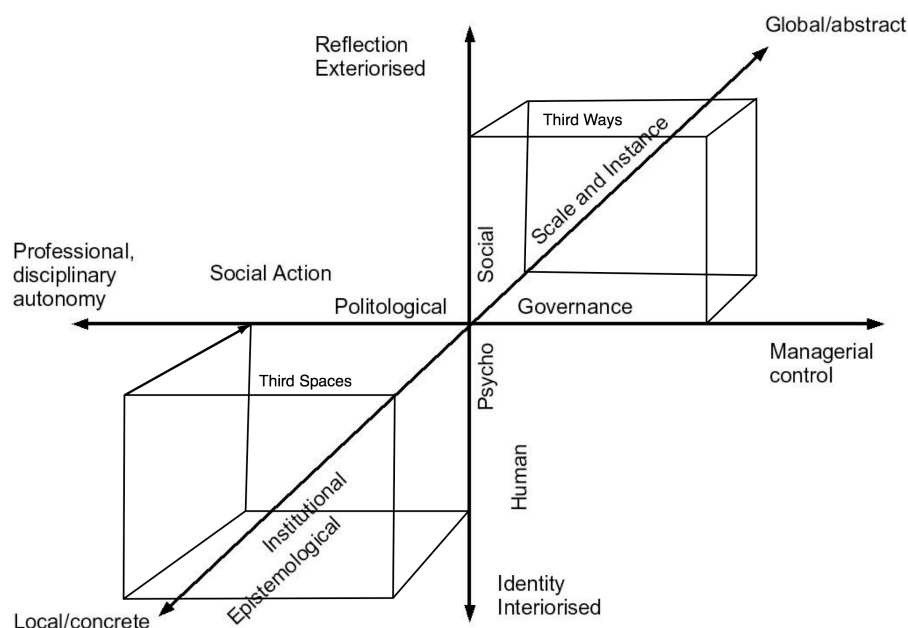


Figure 4.10 Three dimensional paradigm

It struck me that Third Way approaches tended towards the abstracted, exteriorised and authoritarian, while Third Space approaches tended towards the local or concrete, interiorised and autonomous. Although the cubes that I drew to represent these spaces are shown in discrete quadrants, I do not mean to suggest that these conceptualisations are fixed and do not overlap, only that they tend in these directions. Nor do I suggest any political-economic dimension to this paradigm. However, I do suggest that Activity Theory can work as a Third Way approach as an instrument of regularisation. It also provides the means of objectifying subjects, treating them as objects upon which the tools and mediations of others might be applied in order to bring about outcomes upon them.

Conversational framework

I also considered returning to theories of learning and teaching practice. Laurillard's application of Conversation Theory to the use of learning technologies in higher education (Laurillard 2002) has had a long and wide influence (e.g. Britain & Liber 1999) as "... an appropriation model that locates communicative activities within teaching and learning frames" (Pachler *et al.* 2010, p.160). However I was not looking directly at "teaching and learning frames", at classroom practice, or specifically at the design of teaching interventions in the community information technology centre (CITC). Indeed there was a problem even framing the study within an educational framework (see Ch 3, section 3.6.2 and Ch 7, section 7.3.1). Much of the learning observed at the CITC could be characterised as informal rather than formal or classroom based. The evidence suggested that participants resisted the achievement of qualifications and some participants even questioned education as a universal social good (2009-06-

02JamieRnd2). While the concepts of “development” and “learning” may be conflated (e.g. Fry *et al.* 2009, p.8) the notion of expert guidance embedded in Laurillard’s model made it inappropriate for helping to understand the wider role that the CITC played in the life of the community or the participants in this study.

4.4 Introduction to Third Space Theory

I began the account of Third Space Theory at section 1.3.2. Here I elaborate. Third Space theory explicitly arises from the ambiguity of language, social antagonism and the wider patterns of social relations metaphorised into spatiality.

Behind words, there is the independent grammar of thought, the syntax of word meanings. The simplest utterance, far from reflecting a constant, rigid correspondence between sound and meaning, is really a process. (Vygotsky 1962, Ch 7 II)

While the resistance to being folded into a system or a technology of control enables Third Space theory to retain its critical powers of explanation and provides practitioners with a flexible framework for responding to the complex needs of learners at different levels (Hulme, R. *et al.* 2009; Levy 2008), as a guide to institutional policy and direction it remains challenging. As soon as an activity system becomes formalised as a design, a plan, a code, a set of rules, a Third Space will be opened by, to and for the people who appropriate those rules, even who inhabit the design space, whom the rules and the space seek to direct, to channel, to normalise. People will only ever partially occupy any activity system and they will always occupy it to some extent on their own terms. While there may certainly be charity in the Third Space (Žižek 2009a, p.47), a Third Space may also appear threatening to one who strays near to normalise or to dominate.

4.4.1 Third Space and Socioculturalism

Third Space theory emerges from, and is located within the sociocultural tradition in psychology identified with Vygotsky and the semiotic tradition in linguistics. As Vygotsky observed, in respect of language acquisition, when attempting to “...discover the relationship between thought and speech... it became plain that the inner relationship we were looking for was not a prerequisite for, but rather a product of, the historical development of human consciousness” (Vygotsky 1962, p.Ch 7 I). Further, Vygotsky also noted the essential ambiguity at the heart of language, observing that:

The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process the relation of thought to word undergoes changes which themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relationship between things. (Vygotsky 1962, Ch 7 II)

This continual movement is cultural, in that language and meaning are inseparable from the social context in which they are produced and historical in that language and meaning emerge, develop and change over time. As Hatano and Wertsch put it, sociocultural approaches are all concerned with the “... constitutive role of culture in mind, i.e., on how mind develops by incorporating the community’s shared artifacts accumulated over generations” (Hatano & Wertsch 2001, p.78). What Bhabha does with the sociocultural tradition, drawing on Bakhtin, Fanon and Kristeva, in developing Third Space Theory is to apply socioculturalism directly to the postcolonial condition, where there are, “... unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation” (Bhabha 2004, p.245).

4.4.2 Third Space and community-of practice

The Third Space is a privileged location, perhaps a “community garden” (Goodman 2009) core to a person’s identity. The Third Space may have some physical or geographical locus in buildings, rooms, neighbourhoods or even nations; it may have some cultural or ethnic dimension: e.g. the black community. The Third Space is where people are together as a result of being distinct, self included or excluded, or in/excluded by others. It is where embodied affect is as powerful as any other factor of affiliation, the “community of feeling” as Grattan (2007) puts it; where legislation can only be contingent or momentarily convenient; where consensus may be unspoken but is much of the law. Third Space both demands and causes individual identity practices to be exposed and scrutinised by co-inhabitants of that space. As such, Third Space Theory is distinct from – but can contribute to an understanding of – Situated Learning and of Community of Practice theories (Lave & Wenger 1990; Wenger 1998), and in particular of the limits of those perspectives. Like Socioculturalism and Third Space Theory, Situated Learning puts language at the heart of practice (Lave & Wenger 1990, p.85), and further notes that “... ambiguity is an inherent condition to be put to work” (Wenger 1998, p.84).

Community of Practice theory is concerned with movement by a person into (or, indeed out of) a group of practitioners with a common purpose, aim, identity and practices, by which that aim

is realised and identity achieved. Applying a Third Space understanding to communities of practice leads in two directions. One, that the community of practice is but one aspect of its members' hybridised identities, and two that members of a community of practice probably share other elements of their respective hybridities than that of the core practice. Practice is social (Wenger 1998, p.47) and practice reifies its forms into coherence that gives localised meanings sufficient stability for groups to function effectively (Wenger 1998, pp.58-62). That is, the community of practice levels out difference, marginalising some aspects of its members identities in order that the practice, which is both core and boundary, is able to continue. Should those differences be too great, individuals will move out of – or be excluded from – the community of practice. Should too many individuals have too many differences, the community of practice will fall apart. Or, to put it another way, communities of practice may colonise and subject individuals to the service of the beneficiaries of the practice.

4.4.3 Wide use of the concept of the Third Space

The concept of the Third Space is becoming widely used. As Levy puts it: “Third space theory has been used within a variety of different disciplines to explore and understand the space ‘in between’ ... two or more discourses or conceptualizations.” (Levy 2008, p.44) Licona identifies Third Space writings beyond the academic sphere (Licona 2005). The Third Space is a space of unstable, hybrid identities, neither the one nor the other, and resistant to stabilisation. The concept has come to operate on several levels. Dissent operates in a Third Space. In post colonial critique we can identify the space of the oppressor: for example, the colonial mansion, the Viceroy's palace, or the literature of the mother country; and, we can identify the space of the oppressed: the servant's quarters, the visa office, the detention centre, or the native dances. The Third Space, in this discourse, has come to have two interpretations, one is that space where the oppressed plot their liberation: the whispering corners of the tavern or the bazaar. The other is that space where oppressed and oppressor are both able to come together in the mirror of each other, free (maybe only momentarily) of oppression itself, embodied in their particularity.

4.4.4 Third Space in educational studies

Third Space Theory has been making inroads into educational studies, where Skerrett (2010, p.67) associates it with a multiliteracies approach (New London Group 1996). A more usual contemporary construction of the three “spaces” is that one space is the domestic sphere: the family and the home, for example as Walsh puts it, “...the meaning of home, as it is used in everyday life, describes both a space of imagined belonging and a lived space.” (Walsh 2006, p.125) A second space is the sphere of civic engagement including school, work and other

forms of public participation. Set against these is a third space where individual, sometimes professional (Hulme, R., *et al.* 2009; Whitchurch 2008, p.377) and sometimes transgressive acts are played out: where people let their "real" selves show. Third Space Theory has been applied to the pre-school space within which children learn to read, bringing domestic and school literacy practices into their own constructions of literacy (Levy 2008).

4.4.5 Third Space in recreational settings

Sporting associations may be labelled as Third Space (Ruddock 2005, p.373). Often bars and nightclubs are so labeled:

... indeed in a metaphorical and material sense this third space is the bar. The bar is the location of difference, particularly of the cultural, racial and sexual differences between white, Western men and Filipino [sic] women. (Law, L. 2000, pp.46-47)

The phrase, "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," captures a Third Space conceptualisation of the pre-nuptial stag or hen do. To over simplify, we might assert that we are one person at home, one person at work and one person down the pub with our mates.

4.4.6 Third Space and branding

Latterly and conventionally the term Third Space has been appropriated into brand marketing where the domestic space and the work/school/civic-engagement spaces are set against the recreational retail space: shopping malls as third spaces. As Postrel put it, the shopping centre "... would be, as we say now, a 'third place,' a congenial gathering spot separate from home and work." (Postrel 2006; and see also Davis 2008) Bill Thompson critiques "The race to preserve the third space" (Thompson 2007), where he conceptualises Third Space as public, civic space in the built environment under pressure from shopping malls and city centre management policies of leasing the public realm to corporate enterprises, transforming public, civic space into an extension of the market.

4.4.7 Third Space and post-colonialism

Third Space Theory originates from Bhabha's writings on post-colonialism and post-colonial people with hybridised identities, e.g. British-Indian or African-American. However, such identities are not, as it were, reserved for those whose identities are formed from the fall-out of nineteenth century European empires or even contemporary globalising neo-liberalism. All subjectivities are hybridised; all groups demand allegiance; we all have a Third Space.

4.4.8 Third Space as a theory of social identity and self-categorisation

As a theory of social identity and self-categorisation, Third Space Theory is concerned with the relationship between social identity and all the possible identities in the rich diversity of everyone's life (Deaux 2000, p.1) There are different conceptualisations of social identities and of their relationship to personal identity and group diversity. All people have multiple social identities, or, depending on one's perspective, identity components or factors. Identity may be seen as unitary or fragmentary, incomplete and contradictory (Calhoun 1995, p.199) consisting of multiple identities with no unitary core. There may be an element of choice in the deployment of identities, as well as an element of determination (Deaux 2000, p.9). There are also elements of emergence and awareness which may be biologically developmental (a child becoming aware of their genitals) or socially constructed (religious group affiliation). And, there is an extent to which the element of choice is socially determined (and hence in part – or even largely – illusory). However, as Calhoun warns: "Social constructionist approaches could be just as determinist as naturalising approaches" (Calhoun 1995, p.201).

Within Third Space theory, personal and social identities are "simultaneously significant" (Capozza & Brown 2000, p.x). Further, "...different group identities may vary considerably in their psychological significance and social consequences." (p.xi) However, Third Space theory is not so much concerned with the instrumental operations of in-groups as it is with what might be understood as permanently hybridising out-groups. Above all, Third Space theory might be seen as radically anti-essentialist, whether such essentialism derives from nature or nurture is less important.

4.4.9 New hybrid subjectivities

The Third Space is where individual identity is emergent through interaction within both idealised originary cultures and homogenising global empires. According to Khan, "... Bhabha's notion of hybridized subjectivity in the third space helps to explain how individuals negotiate the contradictory demands and polarities of their lives," (Khan 1998, p.464) where people are, as English has it, "... moving beyond binaries and unitary identities to a third hybridized location that is fluid, shifting, and political." (English 2005, p.85) This emphasis on the political construction of identity, and the emergence of hybridised identities from not only personal and individual conflict, essentialist identity politics or identity crises but also from the interactions of global forces that originate from beyond – but manifest within – local communities is what gives Third Space Theory its power. Not only is the personal political, it is political on all scales, from the domestic to the global. As an actor in the network, the community IT centre has its Third Space – an institutional history (cf. Clandinin & Connolly 2000, pp.66-67). From the

perspective of the individual, the community IT centre is one node of many in their social and personal identity – a piece of their habitus – through which they may find access to a Third Space of their own, and possibly even reflective access to that space.

4.5 The framework

Using Third Space Theory and third generation Activity Theory, I consolidated and clustered my original coding categories (figure 3.5). The dynamics of Third Space Theory strongly suggested two intersecting spheres: something like “self” and “community” with the third space represented by the intersection. But this lacked explanatory power as all the categories were drawn to the intersecting space. The spheres, under pressure from Activity Theory from without and Third Space theory from within, wanted to collapse into one undifferentiated – and not particularly useful – whole. It seemed to me that each sphere was going to have to sustain pressure from both directions, and that forcing a tidy mapping was untenable. I had to return to my research questions and consider the needs of the study.

4.5.1 Social Action

Research question three, what factors shape people’s use of and engagement with the community IT centre, could be addressed under the rubric of “rules” drawn from Activity Theory. Despite my concerns, the AT principle of mediated social action remained robust and the mediating influence of social institutions appeared to be reflected in the evidence of the transcripts and recordings. There is an available mapping to the AT triad of “tools”, “rules” and “objects”. This simple reading is contested by a Third Space reading which resists the objectification of the subject and a totalising and to some extent determining constructivism.

Under the heading, “Social action” (figure 4.11), I was able to gather three of my coding categories (Ch 3, section 3.7.3):

- Domestic factors
- Education factors
- Employment factors.

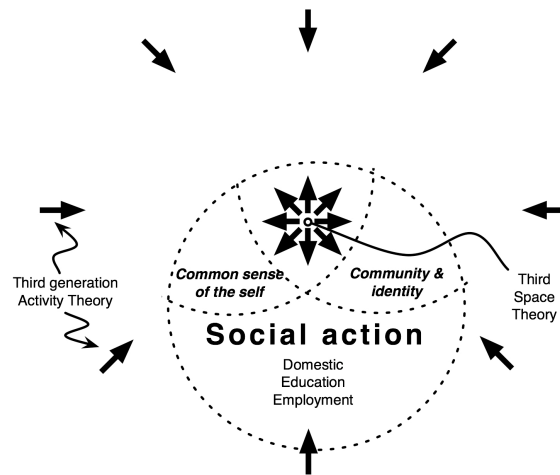


Figure 4.11 The sphere of social action

In the sphere of social action we see three great institutions of society, the family, school, and work exerting influencing rules and norms of behaviour and practice. In the Third Space we see the interplay between the personal and the social and the rise of the communal. In this frame we are concerned with social action, public action, what we do as people in the world. Regarding the instrumentality of this study, this frame concerns the centre, the object or reasons to use it, people's IT practice and the wider skills they use: *what* they do. In this frame we see the explanatory and normative influences of *why* people do things.

4.5.2 Common sense of the self

While not phrased as a research question, the "conspicuous silence of learners' voices in the research literature about community education practice" has led me to use biographical methods and through this study to give voice to the participants. In doing so, the question of the individual self is raised in what we might call a common-sense way (figure 4.12).

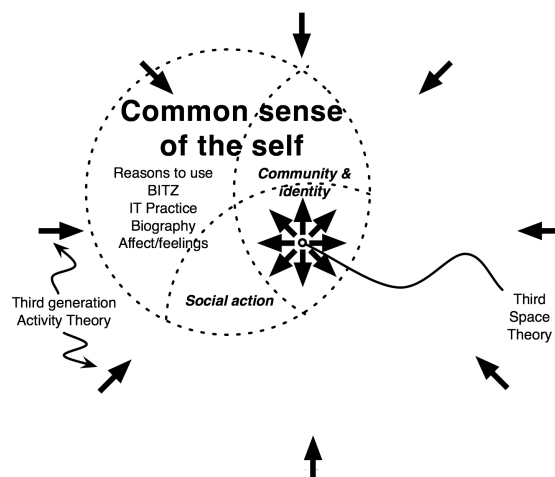


Figure 4.12 The sphere of the common-sense of the self

In the sphere of the common-sense of self: *I did this; this happened to me; this is how I felt; its my life and my feelings*. Under this heading I gathered my coding categories

- Reasons to use the community IT centre
- IT practice
- Biography.
- and Affect

This is the self of the mind-body split: I have a self that I can comment upon. This common-sense of the self is manifested through affect (the feelings and sensibilities of the sensitive body/mind/spirit) and the continuity of the personal narrative, the interior monologue of the embodied self's biography or biographical narrative. Regardless of causality, it all happened to and by myself and I felt it, viscerally, physiologically, pre-intellectually.

A person's feelings are an important factor in their engagement with the community IT centre. This became evident in the early analysis of the first transcripts. Through the interpretive interviews this question of feeling was developed. The feeling self (as distinct from the thinking self) is a primitive component, the component upon which brute force acts, the component upon which love acts; you may deny me all my reason, all my social identity but you cannot deny me my passion and my pain.

4.5.4 Community and identity

Three components of my coding structure allow me to address the key questions of what constitutes positive change for people (RQ4) and then how people who associate with the community IT centre use that association to bring about positive change in their own lives (RQ1):

- values
- community factors
- explicit (mostly social) identity statements.

This is the sphere of community and identity (figure 4.13).

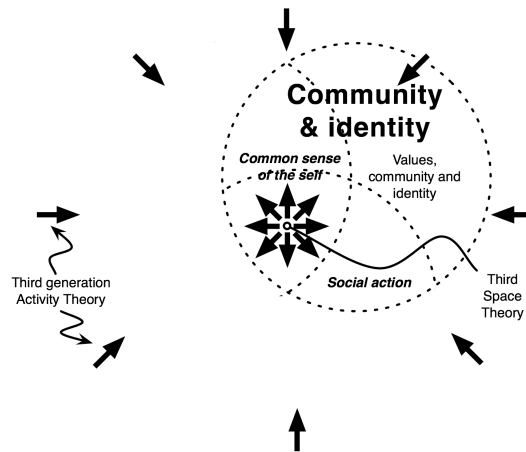


Figure 4.13 The sphere of community and identity

It was tempting to represent this sphere as the preserve of third space thinking, to declare community as the space between. However this would deny many important aspects of the use of this term as well as the common-sense understandings of individuals and the workings of policy. As with the other spheres, here, too, there are tensions between Third Space Theory readings and Activity Theory readings. It would be ineffective to take the term community, then to qualify it and to give that qualified reading a privileged status above other uses of the term. The fact that a term has many shades of meaning indicates as much of its utility as the futility of trying to pin it down.

4.5.5 The full framework

The full framework (figure 4.14), then comprises three interpenetrating spheres: social action, common-sense of the self, and community and identity. The spheres, individually and together, are pressed upon from without by third generation Activity Theory and from within by Third Space theory.

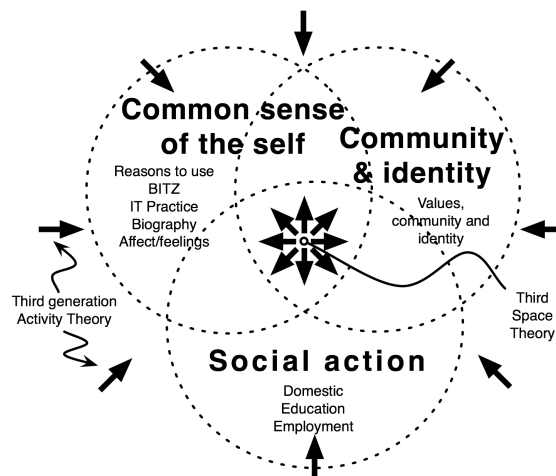


Figure 4.14 The framework incorporating all 10 coding categories

In the next chapter, I present the life stories of users of the community IT centre. Then, in the chapters that follow, I address the components of the framework as I strive to answer the research questions.

Chapter 5 The people

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present a collection of 11 stories. These stories represent a subset of the 24 people I have spoken to in focus groups or interviews in the course of this study. I present the participants' stories, as told to me, as much as possible in their own voices. But, what does this mean?

Literary considerations serve to lower the barriers to access and may, paradoxically, be less mediated than a transcript that preserves aspects of an interview. By paying attention to the multiple inter-media effects of taking a discourse from memories of lived experience through conversation, audio recording, transcribing, co-interpreting re-writing and editing to some semi-stable representation, here, anything other than a literary representation would be a pretention to a (theoretically impossible) less mediated channel. I have not sought to replace the evidence of the audio recording with a phonetic transcript. I am not studying the variants of dialect on a cosmopolitan estate. A seemingly more accurate transcript, retaining some of the features of the interview – hesitations, “umms and ahhs”, dialect phonetics, “innit” – is conversely less accessible to a reader, less respectful of the participant's position: “I sound awful!” said one participant, when she didn't, and less effective as a means of illustrating the complex relationships between people, places and policies.

5.1.1 Structure of this chapter

First, the reasons for presenting these stories, here in this way, are given. Then, the problem of representation itself is addressed, looking at mediation, authority and responsibility, drawing on the idea of voice as not just a communication modality but a significant carrier of identity. Finally, before turning to the stories themselves, I discuss the editorial approach taken in respect to selection and reduction of content, choice of lexicon, grammar, syntax, and register.

5.2 Reason for choosing these stories

I decided initially to use all the stories I collected from the 10 people who gave me a one-to-one biographical narrative interview. Of these, seven people provided follow-up interpretive interviews and three did not; and, of the three, one dropped out. I also wanted to include stories that were elicited from participants from the focus groups using the same follow-up interpretive interview schedule (appendix 6) as was used with participants who had contributed a biographical narrative in round one.

There were five approaches I could have taken in considering which stories to select. I could have used all the stories of those who gave me first round interviews. The first round interviews were intended to be less mediated and interpreted than the second round interviews. Given one dropped out, this would have given me nine stories with limited interference by the researcher. I could have used only the stories of those who gave me both first and second round interviews. This would have reduced the number of stories to seven and might have helped to structure the stories along similar lines, allowing for easier comparison and introducing thematic and narrative interpretive consistency. Either of these first two approaches might have been a pragmatic means to reduce the amount of information I had to consider and could have been justified to the respondents without having to draw on qualitative criteria for inclusion.

I could have used some qualitative criteria to select “better” stories for inclusion. But, what would these criteria have been? How would I explain to the people whose stories were left out that I had decided not to include them? I decided that, as a piece of work being co-constructed by me and the respondents, there could be no qualitative inclusion criteria imposed by the researcher. Everyone gave me highly privileged access to their personal history. There could be no qualitative basis for leaving anyone out.

Finally, I decided to include the stories of the people who gave me a one-to-one, face-to-face interview. This included all seven who gave both first and second round interviews, two people who gave only first round interviews and two people who gave only second round interviews.

5.2.1 Other voices

Throughout the transcripts, diaries and recordings, voices of up to 24 participants appear regularly. There are a few other voices as well. My voice appears and occasional other voices are heard.

The CIC is up and running. Alexandra dropped in. Sandra on the front desk. The manager and the head of the community development initiative (CDI) come in. Alexandra, the manager and I banter. The manager thinks Facebook is a waste of time and that people should be doing "serious" things with "his" computers. Alexandra and I tease him about when he was evacuated from London in the Blitz. I say I am going to offer a course on: "Facebook, Flickr, mySpace and YouTube"

Sandra is working with a woman on her CV, job application and covering letter. The woman is of African origin via Germany. She is a drama teacher [fluent in 3 European languages, unemployed and in temporary accommodation].

Another woman [white British from Cornwall] is being helped to get grant funding to go on a course to be a doula. The head of the CDI tells me about plans for a youth multimedia hub with a rack of Macs opposite the games machines so kids can make movies. The drama teacher overhears her and asks if she can get involved with film making with the kids. The head of the CDI says they are writing bids just looking for money: no funding, no project. The drama teacher mis-hears "bids" for "script" and the conversation moves along parallel rails for a moment with the CDI looking for money and the drama teacher looking for - well - drama. Eventually they reach an understanding with the head promising nothing: "Remember, a promise is a fool's bargain", she says. (researchDiary11, 27/05/2009)

5.3 Representation and mediation

My principal task as researcher/editor has been representing the other people in this study in as accessible a manner as possible, trying to remain true to the stories as told, without "cluttering the interface." In representing people I have assumed, or been granted, some small authority, or right to speak on behalf of the centre and its users. Perhaps even more importantly I am being granted/taking the authority to speak on behalf of individual people. With this authority comes responsibility. The participants are not simply subjects of this research. They are participants in an investigation of the use of a community IT centre that is being undertaken, with purpose, to inform policy.

5.3.1 Representation as re-presentation not advocacy

Representation is here taken to be more re-presentation than advocacy on behalf of any particular or individual position or constituency. Writing is a mediating – and mediated – interpretive practice. I do not want to pretend that these stories are in any sense transparently transmitted; they are more oblique reflections in a mirror that both frames and, however well made, distorts. The concept of transparency may be at best a popular fiction and may be, worse, a means of manipulating a naïve audience or propagating a particular perspective masked as the naked truth. As author and compiler of this study, I have taken on a role as mediator and strived to reduce the barriers to access. For the *appearance* of transparency I have edited all the stories.

There is no unmediated communication. At the very least there is the mediation of the physical, natural environment: the atmosphere and its ambient noises in spoken communication; the body and the biomechanics of speech and hearing; the brain and consciousness. Heaped immediately upon this there is the complex mediation of culture through artefacts and their arrangement in the built environment (Scollon 2001). Moreover there is the mediation of language itself and all the apparatus of memory, desire, feelings and belief. All experience is mediated by the habitus of the person(s) in the experience. There is no complete reading of anything from one medium to another.

5.3.2 Cultural mediation

Cultural mediation describes the effect that all social action has on human activity. Language carries with it the traces of the history of its use by all speakers. This is not to say that we are linguistically determined (Pinker 1994, pp.49 ff.), but that all language has a cultural history of use and has in it the echoes of other language users (Bhabha 2004, pp.269-275). The echoes of those users closer to the speaker, or otherwise influential through social and cultural relations will be heard more strongly, while those whose power or distance is greater will be less strongly heard. This is to say that people acquire the habits of speech of those near to them and those who have influence with them, and that these habits of speech themselves are continually productive in the speakers' use of language. These habits of speech are in dialogue with all the habits of speech that the speaker has acquired.

So, language itself is a mediating influence on the use of language. If an attempt is made to remove an utterance from its original context it will be mediated by its new context. If I, or any other writer, quotes another, or uses reported speech, aspects of the original context are lost. The writer chooses which of those aspects to try to retain, and that retention of context is itself made through language mediated by the conventions of the forms of expression – the genre – chosen by the writer.

We must also remind ourselves that the participants in this study have mediated their own stories in the telling. A person's voice is an important component of their identity. Voice cannot be reduced to simple universals. Voice is much more than a means of getting a message into someone else's ear. Much work in development education is described in terms of helping people who are somehow marginalised to "find their voice" (Freire 1970; Postman & Weingartner 1969) to enable them to speak against oppression. Kristeva speaks of language as having two modes: speaking and writing (Kristeva 1989). For Taylor, the literacy of reading "gives oppression its voice." (1993, p.139) while that of writing: "...raises ... the possibility that

something can be ‘said against’ ... counter-hegemonic ... fundamentally iconoclastic ... that encourages heresy, even deviance.” (Taylor, P. V. 1993, p.146)

5.3.3 Voice problematics

There has been a lot of interest recently in learners’ voices (Conole 2008; JISC n.d.a; JISC n.d.b) driven in part by a concern to listen to learners as “customers” in the increasingly marketised and business-driven models of post-compulsory education. Much of this work appears lightly theorised and questions are beginning to be asked about the explanatory power of learner voice studies (Jackson & Mazzei 2009; Seale 2009b). But, learner voice studies also raise uncomfortable issues for labour-market driven models of education. They reveal the complexity of learners’ motivations and methodologies. Usefully they have provided evidence to suggest that the “digital native” is a chimera and that we are all – and always have been – immigrants (digital or otherwise) to any community of practice. More so they may signal complex strategies to resist inscription and to subvert intended, policy-led learning outcomes (Ch 9, section 9.3.5). At the heart of the middle-class experience of educational progression with its reasonably smooth transitions from school, to college, to university, to work, to continuing professional development, voice is mainstream, confident, articulate and heard. To this voice, policy offers choice (Ch 2, section 2.10). However, as we move towards the increasingly marginalised: that substantial fraction of those who are excluded from participation by multiple factors, the interpretation of the learners’ voice becomes not only more challenging, but the desire to normalise it, to bring it into the acceptable bounds of the hegemony – to stop listening and start telling – becomes more and more powerful. As Seale observes, “a significant aspect of learner voice is challenging mechanisms of power...” (2009b, p.3).

5.3.4 Cultural mediators

Cultural mediation has another meaning, too. Rather than culture being the mediational means, cultural mediation is a role that can be taken on. In migration studies, cultural mediators are people with a set of knowledge, skills and awarenesses to act effectively to bridge the distance between cultures, to facilitate – if not assimilation, exactly – integration and harmonious co-habitation. And, not forgetting the obverse, there is complex cultural mediation in the subterranean migration networks that involve freight lorries. The question of mediation in the context of this study requires considering the role of the observer-participant researcher. This has been discussed in chapter three, (section 3.6) with respect to reflexivity and relationality (Hall & Callery 2001, p.258). Not only is the data socially co-constructed, the interpretation and representation of that data is similarly co-constructed. Here the nature of relationality is different to that enacted through interview, observation and participation. There is time and

distance between the researcher and the participants. In this space relations are transformed through reflection.

If we see education as a “world” and, moreover, a world that for some of the participants in this study has been a foreign country, I am a cultural mediator for that world. This works both ways. I am a stranger, or at least a recent non-native arrival, to the estate and its culture. My participants are cultural mediators, too. They explain their world to me: its conventions and features which might go un-noticed were it not for their experienced and sympathetic guidance. So not only are culture and language mediating factors, we, the participants in this study are all cultural mediators.

5.4 Editing the stories

I will leave it to others to judge the literary merit of the stories. They are not offered as literary works, as such. Nevertheless, my editorial decisions can only be called literary in character. As I have been transcribing interviews I have frequently encountered questions of accuracy, which can only be answered with respect to the pragmatics of this piece: what effect am I aiming for? There is an educative purpose (Ch 3, section 3.2) in this work, if only for me. I hope it goes more widely. While recognising that having a pedagogic purpose might cause me to reflect on bias in the research, there is an aspect of shared, peer-to-peer learning, too. There will continue to be a debate in respect of the place of authorial intention in literary interpretation (see for example, Hurley 2007, p.54). We are all to some extent hybrids (Ch 4, section 4.4.1), not fully in command of our intentions or representations, negotiating meaning in a “personal information economy” (Oram 2009), where, every utterance “...is subjected first, consciously or unconsciously, to a key question: will we get some benefit from the social network commensurate with the value of the information we are about to give our contacts?” (Oram 2009) And, we make these decisions on the fly, without reflection, forgetting that we have made them and retrofit a story to impose consistency that is itself subject to the same contingencies. As Žižek puts it, “... the story we tell ourselves about ourselves to account for what we are doing is ... a lie – the truth lies, rather outside, in what we do.” (2009a, p.40)

5.4.1 Editing for readability

This is not a close study of language. My aim has been to make the stories readable: keeping as close as possible to the narrative. I am studying people and their relationship with a community IT Centre. My aim in selecting parts of the transcripts for inclusion in these stories has been to give a representation of the person who has contributed their story. My principal task as an

editor of these stories has been to condense them. As space and time are not unlimited every representation is a selected reduction from the reality as it happened. I aimed to produce a piece of about one to two thousand words for each of my respondents. In some cases, this has meant cutting out quite a lot of material and editing for brevity. In other cases I was able to use nearly all the transcript.

5.4.2 Participants' vocabulary, grammar and syntax

In all the stories I have used the words of the respondents and have not introduced any verbs or substantives (nouns and adjectives) that were not used by the person who told the story. I have occasionally introduced pronouns and simple conjunctions ("and", "but", "when"). My principal rule has been to acknowledge that spoken grammar and written grammar are different. I have tried to use the grammar of the participants. I have not changed the tense of verbs and have for the most part left the agreement between nouns and adjectives as they were spoken, unless the participant corrects themselves, in which case I delete the false start and construct the sentence as it would be constructed had it been spoken according to the self-correction from the outset. I have tried to use a fairly tight syntax: short sentences with few relative or subordinate clauses. This sometimes required me to introduce pronominal subjects to avoid run-on sentences.

5.4.3 Edited for brevity

I have edited for brevity and concision. I have left out some parts of some stories, I have punctuated, throughout to shorten sentences and unify concepts. I have removed many, but not all, instances of "you know" and "like..." and most ums and ahs. I have not indicated source, ellipses or edits using typographic conventions; the page would be full of holes and the flow of the narrative would be interrupted. In short, I have worked to heighten the literary quality of the narrative in order to focus not on the linguistic or phonological features of the text itself but on the person.

5.5 What follows: the stories

What follows are 11 stories.

- Alexandra is 36 years old, English, with three children, one of whom lives with her. At the time of the first interview she was completing a Foundation Degree in Community Development. At the time of the second interview she had embarked on an MA in

Community Development. She lives on the old part of the estate in a housing association house.

- Angela is 38 years old, British. She has recently given up a career in nursing and now works in an advice centre. She has two young children. They live in a house on the new part of the estate.
- Catherine is 36 years old, English, with two young boys. She has an A level, an HNC and two GNVQs at level 2. They live with her partner in a house on the new part of the estate.
- Haidar is 43 years old, English of Pakistani background, born and raised in the city. He has an HND in electronics. He is the lone parent to a 12 year-old daughter.
- Jamie is 29, English of Irish ancestry. He has a daughter who doesn't live with him. He left school with no qualifications and is now studying GNVQs at level 2. He lives with his girlfriend, who recently left care, in a flat on the old part of the estate.
- Marie is 41, English, with a master's degree and a child under one. She lives in her own house with her child on the old part of the estate.
- Patricia is 34, English. She has a degree in art. She lives in a shared, rented house in another part of the city. She has no children. She is a part-time tutor at the community IT centre.
- Philippe is about 35 years old. He is from Africa, married with two children. He has an MSc in energy policy and works in a local post office counters branch in a newsagent.
- Robert is 54, English. He is a writer. He has no children and lives on his own in a flat in an adjacent district, about a mile from Bluefields.
- Sandra is in her mid thirties. She is English of Jamaican background. She has a 16 year old son and a HND.
- Shona is in her early 30s, English of African ancestry. She has three children and a diploma in higher education.

Here, then, are their stories: words of the people.

Alexandra

My dad got a bike for passing his 11+ and went to grammar school but fell out with his parents because he wanted to be an artist. They said he should do something practical so he became a hairdresser. He had long hair and a big moustache. But there was no money in it so he went into the motor industry: managing a parts depot; he said it *deh póh*. His life is all lost dreams. His approach is that you don't want to mess around with dreams. My mum spent her childhood wanting to be a ballet dancer. She got through two auditions but her parents stopped her and she studied hairdressing, too. Met my dad.

My parents separated when I was 18 months. My mum worked in school kitchens: dinner lady, college kitchens, porter. She has never had much ambition. Once she wanted to do a GCSE course. She was very excited. She got a book out of the library by Thomas Hardy. It was big deal for my mum. And, then they cancelled the course. She never tried again.

My dad didn't really know how to relate to me as a father so he used to give me long division to do. My mother always used to say oh you are so clever but there was never anything concrete about what that could look like or what that meant.

I was always having this dream about having some amazing job one day and never really actually having one. And I think that that happened because I left school when I was 14. I had a bit of school phobia. I used to have panic attacks and not go into classrooms. I didn't do really well when I was at school.

When I was older they got me on to an A-level course which I had to abandon because I was pregnant with my first child. That was when I was 18. Then I got married and had another so that stopped the whole working and learning stuff.

Look. This is my house. I - have - my - books - on - my - table. That is something to do with my childhood where I wasn't allowed to do homework. I wasn't allowed stuff out. My mother didn't like books on the table or anything messy.

But during all that time I had been involved in voluntary work here and there. When my third child was old enough to go to nursery I volunteered for a mental health project in the city centre that had funding to support child care. It meant that my child could go to nursery a couple of days a week. I spent that time developing skills.

I was plonked in front of a computer and they said don't worry just press the buttons and that was really scary. I was so determined to prove myself. So I just pressed the buttons and found somebody else to help me out. I remember they set me a task of writing a letter. And, I could not, I could not, I could not write a letter. I could not put words together in sentences and paragraphs to make a letter. When I realised that I could not write a letter I felt quite awful. I thought how can I ever be somebody that does jobs and works and stuff. I do remember sitting, sitting and staring at that screen thinking that I can't write this letter I really can't do that. I'm useless, I'm no good, I'm never going to make it.

I sort of found my feet by the end. I started training other volunteers and going out and doing outreach programmes. I started trying new things and getting the organisation to take on new things, which I'd been suggesting. And, I was quite able to write a letter without having to cry too much.

Anyway, they could no longer support me for child care so that was the end of me volunteering. That summer I saw an advertisement for training to be an independent care adviser. I think the government decided that they were spending too much money on disabled people and older people and they thought well how can we make some savings? Right! Let's stop giving them any Social Services. They can buy their own.

But do you know what? People who do social work have been on years of courses and had loads of training and they are part of a department that has in-house training and ongoing support and management structures and policies in place. These people on this course were like me. We had a series of two or three hour sessions on working with people with mental health problems and working with older people. I was shocked at the little amount of training we were being provided with. So I decided to leave this course because it was just the most awful, awful thing. It was just chaos. They didn't know what they were expecting of people. They didn't know what they were doing. And, what they were training people to do I didn't believe in. I left feeling like a failure and thought, what on earth am I going to do now?

So, I decided to go to the women's training scheme and do one of their women-only courses. It was a computer course but they would have speakers come in: people that had been students there, who had gone off into the world of work and been successful and came back. Like, ah! My! That person came on the same course as me and now they are doing that! Really hopeful. I really felt good about it.

I wrote to the *Lanes News* saying that I was an adult student who needed a work placement, that I was really interested in *The Lanes News*, that I liked reading it, that I'm doing this course with office skills and that I make a great cup of tea. I was so keen! It was so important to me. I want a job. I want a life. I want to do this! So anyway I had to do things like typing labels, filing, but I also did delivering the newspaper and I was amazed by how much cake and tea and biscuits I got offered because we went to every community group and every community event, everywhere.

They supported me looking for work and I applied for two jobs. The first job was as a church administrator. Two days before my interview I had a cycling accident and I had two black eyes. I always remember one of the interview questions was how do you feel about being the face of the church! Ah dear. I didn't get that job.

The next one was with another charity locally that wanted an administrator. I was working for three senior managers. I was all keen and they really didn't want that. I remember one of the managers said, when someone asked who I was, oh she's just the girl who comes in to do our clerical work. And, my whole world crashed. Illegible stuff would be written and put into my tray. I'd take the stuff out of my tray, type it, save it, print a copy and put it in the manager's tray. They would write with their red pen and I'd have to do it again. It was really, really tough. I felt like a piece of rubbish. I really felt like they were people who were worth while and I was someone who wasn't. So I was determined that when they gave me a piece of work to do I was just going to do it perfect so they had no reason to make any complaints. I would never ask their help at all because I was saving my face.

Anyway, I'd heard that there was going to be this IT project and I really liked my computer course. I felt like I was someone that knew a few things but nothing too much. So, I said to this manager, when he came back from one of these partnership meetings about the IT project, I said oh about the jobs that are coming up, do you think there might be anything that I could do? And he laughed. Oh no, he said, they're all management jobs, and let's face it, you're not quite there yet. He was horrible.

But, then I talked to the head of *The Lanes News* and he said, that outreach one, I'm sure you could do that. So I didn't mention another word about it in my office. I sneaked to the interview and there were all the other candidates there and I was like putting on a real front: brave face trying to be somebody really confident. They didn't phone me to tell me I had that job for hours. It was seven o'clock at night. I ran out of my front door and I was crying. You

know outside my house I've got that path that goes all the way around? I ran all the way around shouting at my neighbours, I got the job! I got the job!

And, here's the moment you were waiting for. I went into my office and I said to this manager, there is something I have to tell you. I found another job. And, he was like, oh. Well, it is to be expected. People in this kind of job never stay for long. What are you going to do? And, this was my moment and I felt bad for him. I said, you know that new IT project? I'm going to be an outreach worker. And I sat there grinning. So, the next time I saw him I was sat at a meeting around a table with him as an equal. Apart from he probably wasn't as terrified as I was. He probably didn't have to apply half as much deodorant as me.

So that's how I came to be in the IT hub.

Angela

I am British. I have two children. The boy is eight and the girl is seven: exactly 18 months between them. I am the youngest of two. My mum was a lot younger when she had my brother and me. I had my twenties. She had them early. I didn't have my first pregnancy until I was 29.

My father's educational background was very poor because he was one of eight. He had to leave school to support the family. My mum was an only child. She trained as a florist and worked for the woman who did the flowers for Churchill's funeral. The shop is still there but it is all different now. It is all women fanackypanning around. She would have hated it.

My parents didn't have great expectations for my education. My brother was the intelligent one as we were growing up. I did what I could do. I had 3 O-Levels English, English Lit and Art. Such was my leanings, I got a mixture of CSEs, O Levels and GCSE (m) for Mature. I did one year in the 6th form: Environmental Studies, Sports Studies, Geography, re-took Maths and then I went to do my Nurse Training when I was 17 and a half.

I think my Mum leaned me towards nursing. I think she recognised that it was my nature to care and look after. Also, it was a very good professional qualification to have under your belt. It was hard work. I had to work a 37 hour week and study and get drunk in between. It was hard work, but I did it. Of my dad's family and my mum's family I am the only person with a professional qualification.

My brother was the one who was the maths genius. He got three A-Levels in Maths, Physics and Economics. He did a year in London but then he dropped out. He had a lot of mental health problems. It's not very pretty. I might as well just say it. My father abused my brother and he also abused my son. And, he committed suicide after I confronted him. So yes it has had a big impact. So, you can feel the love for my Mum coming through and not wanting to talk about my dad.

My brother did go to London but he couldn't handle any more. He's been on the streets. He came back. They helped get him back on his feet. We didn't know all this at the time. Then he just took off. We didn't know where he was for about two years. It culminated in a lot of hospitals. I always knew my family was dysfunctional and that my parents weren't happy but I didn't know why. So I used to be working on that for a lot of years. All the bad's gone and the good's in, but hence why my brain got exploded from being quite doing one thing to completely changing directions: not nursing any more. That's my lot. Ten, 15 years.

I worked on infectious disease and tropical medicine. I got to an E-grade. That was quite good. It was interesting. Worked with quite a few people with HIV. Nursed quite a few people through when it became fully blown. That sort of thing. I've known more people on the other side than I do on this. And, it is balancing out now.

I've got a computer at home but I am not actually on the Internet. I am reluctant because of all the stuff that goes on, child pornography, I've got a real thing about that. I'm on a double-edged sword now, whether to get hooked up or whether just to use the library facilities for the Internet or here if needs be or work.

I did use the Internet to find out what's on at the stadium at the cinema club there. But there is so much on the Internet, I could have walked there, picked up a leaflet and enjoyed the view. I'd rather go to a book or ask someone. If it becomes a home thing and everybody's shopping from home it can only cause damage to local economy and shops in the long term which I think is really sad.

You come here to be part of the group. If you stay at home you aren't learning. Some people can manage to live the same routine day after day after day. What a waste. I can't say I like computers but I can pat myself on the back and say I used one! You pushed yourself to a point at work where you got to write up the case notes for a lady at the advice centre. I could look back ten years and say that would have been me. Maybe I wouldn't have had this to be a part of, to have a go. It wouldn't have been as readily available. Now, I tend to say yes. Keeping up with the children tippy tapping away If something goes wrong I can come in and learn with them.

Everybody who can still manage should be doing education. If you are lucky enough to have the opportunity: *carpe diem*, seize the day and that. Go for it. Keep trying. It doesn't matter if you fail. Education is a right. It's for everybody. ... I don't like lazy minded people.

Catherine

Dad's a computer whiz. Mum's a Pharmacist. Dad went to poly. Mum recently qualified. They gave me no pressure whatsoever. They wanted me to do what I was interested in. They didn't press to sit down and do your homework. They didn't put reins on me but at the same time they were very supportive of me doing what I wanted to do.

I went to an all-girls school. Could not stand it. I remember walking in, I think I was in year two. I lived just down the road. I used to go up and in that side and I was thinking that in such and such years time I'd be walking up here for the last time. Then it was the last time I walked out of there and never went back. It was quite sad really. It was the end of my schooling days. But then I went to college. BTEC. I got 5 GCSEs and an A level.

I didn't like being at an all-girl's school. It was awful. I was a real tomboy. Because it was an all-girls school a lot of the Asian families sent their daughters to the school. They really played the racist card all the time. For instance my computer teacher said can I have your homework. And everyone's like, there's my homework. But these two girls were like, we haven't done it. Teacher said, where's your homework? You have to be in detention. And, they turned around and said, you are being racist. And it was like, yeah? No. I want your homework. And it was always them and us. But, then one of my best friends was Asian so it was a real separate issue in the school. And there was very few people who mixed together. Rather than ... it was hard because it was really bitchy as well. Obviously. All girls at that sort of age. But a lot of the time I was doing sports. I wasn't sort of a mad academic person. I was majorly into sports: football, rugby.

We don't have a computer at home. We have a Wii games console. If there is one computer, the kids will fight over it. They fight over the Wii now. My partner has a home recording studio. The kids use the Wii with music programs and games. The younger just figured it out. Now he keeps a beat and everything. We are getting a computer. Going to put it in the kitchen. Too obtrusive in living room. The kitchen is family area but "away".

I did my Teaching Assistant course here and I got to talk to [the manager] and he said there was a computer course. it was free. I did the theology course. Did something else and something else. I didn't have to approach anyone. They approached me. I was grateful because it was them approaching me rather than the other way around. What was nice was you were there in a room with someone that knew what they were doing. If you completely messed it up they would be able to come back and say you do such and such and sort it out. I don't know what it would be like if you were at home sat at a computer with no one around and you were

like uh, uh, uh. But then, again, what you going to do to it? Just turn it off, re-boot it, and start again. You are not going to destroy the computer by messing around on it.

Formal learning is from school. You sit down write what's on the blackboard. The IT course, the teacher let you progress at your own level. I was surprised at how much I did know. Learning is learning. It doesn't need a tuxedo. There should be a mix. If you are too strict people wouldn't come in.

This place did not relate to my work at all. I work for Kids on Wheels. I can only do fifteen hours because we have working family tax credit. It is really good for the money. It has paid for the holiday this year. Day trips out and whatnot. I did my level one over at Crescent Corner. Then they said they had a level two course so I said I'll do that. I passed that. I didn't know about Kids on Wheels at that time. I was at home and I had a phone call from a friend of mine, who does the drop in Monday, Tuesdays, Thursday and Friday in the Tithe Barn. They have a really nice set-up room where its like all young parents and young kids under five: kiddie club. My now boss came down and asked my friend whether she knew of any people who wanted to do crèche work. So then she phoned me up. I went there. Went upstairs. I didn't have like even a formal interview. It was like do you want to work with us? Yes, I would, thank you very much. Sign this piece of paper. See you tomorrow.

When the kids are old enough to come home from school and let themselves in and not destroy the house I may do more work. I may even do my level three. May do after-school club. I could even set my own crèche up.

Haidar

I'm a single parent with a single daughter. She is now 12 years of age. I've come to live in Bluefield Lanes since I became a single parent eleven years ago. I was living in temporary accommodation for a while and now I'm living in permanent accommodation for the past five years. My daughter is progressing in school nearby and she's moved up a year. I've been working with children for the last six years in a Church of England primary school. It's been rewarding working in school.

I'm also beginning to use the facilities in the community around me, such as this IT Centre. I've been using it for the last two years. I come here almost everyday during the weekdays with my daughter after school. It's something that she looks forward to and what else have we got? I'm currently studying computer maintenance on Saturdays, here at the centre, which is local to me. It's updating my old skills as an electrical-mechanical engineer, I've worked in PCs and stuff before, but it's really updating my knowledge. And, the IT Centre has also helped me acquire information on the Internet as I do not have the Internet at home. PCs have come quite a long way from where I last opened up a PC, probably late eighties, early nineties. I think I may have seen it in an advert or something, you know, local community course they advertised, and I thought this is a very good opportunity for me to take advantage of. Currently I'm applying for jobs, I'm using the IT Centre. My daughter comes here and uses the IT hub on Saturday to do homework. She wants to be part of the community team, while Dad's doing his PC Maintenance Course, she's very keen to come and do her homework. So it's a very good bonding station where people are free to talk and exchange information and experiences.

I don't watch TV at home, you know, I'd rather be doing something active. I have two dogs and I go out for walks regularly. The fields are very local as well so it's like the English countryside is five minutes away, people don't understand, you come to Bluefield Lanes. It has its good and has its ups and downs you know. It's what you want out of Bluefield Lanes. Over here you won't find alcoholics and drinking in the IT Centre, which is why I bring my daughter, because it's a suitable environment.

OK, it's somewhere where I can get away too. That's why I go out with my dogs most of the time. But, you know, this IT Centre is also like a safe haven for me, where I can come and maybe talk to someone because I'm a single parent.

I used to go out with the Mods, late seventies. I've seen the band the Police at [a local pub] as a teenager. I managed O-Level standard but I didn't really like school much. After I left school I

went to college. I think I did another O-Level and then I went onto a Youth Training Scheme. I went to a computer centre to do some basic programming skills at the University Social Studies Centre, right. I went over there. I still remember that because that was very, very helpful for me. It was the first time when PCs were out; they were that, that big! I ended up going to a Skill Centre in another town for a whole year and I managed to achieve a very good television electronics service engineering course, City and Guilds Parts One and Two, and before I even finished the course I managed to go to City Television [across town] and they pulled out a circuit diagram and I said 'blah, blah, blah, blah, blah' and they said 'you've got the job', and I started a job the next day!

I'm the oldest out of three boys, both my younger brothers, we've got two years gap between us, I'm 43. My next one down, he's a pilot and he trains people to fly 747's. He's been doing it since the eighties. He's in Kazakhstan at the moment. He's all over the world. My other youngest brother, he's got a PhD in Biotechnology. He's working in Germany. My father's retired. He used to work at the factory, like everybody else. He's done his shift. I was offered a tool making apprenticeship many years ago as a teenager but I wanted to do something else. I followed more or less my mum's line. She got an HND in electronics and computer studies at South Bank Polytechnic. She's more qualified than I am! I'm part of a team. Oh, yeah, yeah, that's right.

Jamie

I started off life being raised by a single parent father on the estate. He had 3 children. My mum shot off when I was 18 months. My father's an Irish man and on Bluefield Lanes at the time they were seen as immigrants so it was difficult for him growing up. He was from a large family of 11 kids. As a youngster Dad worked in fish and chips shops, anything to bring the money in. He went into the building trade and become a plasterer and an odd job man.

From an early age I started getting wrapped up in all aspects of deprived areas: the crime, the smoking of cannabis and going into jail. I was always an onlooker on the situations that were developing. I would never really engage myself in the crime but I would view it from an angle which has taught me now to be the best that I can be.

My first arrest was about the age of 16. Me and my friends were involved in a burglary. I was coming out the window and the police caught me and they mistreated me: officers smashing bottles in my arms. It was quite a shock to be treated like that by an authority.

So then, due to being arrested I ended up on a run down to Bournemouth. I was living with a friend of mine. I could never nick a car. I could drive because my dad had me driving; you know when he was drunk he'd get me to drive him home from the pub at an early age so it is quite a funny story in my life. Anyway. So, I waited round the corner when he nicked the car and then we jumped in and we went down to Bournemouth. It ended up me getting involved in a ruckus on the pier. It was a street robbery. I was seen on camera standing between the two... the offender and the victim and actually pushing them apart and trying to diffuse it. I got two and a half years probation. So again I felt like maybe the only thing for me was to remove myself and not be in them situations. Do I want to be a victim?

I'm bringing you up to a point where I started accessing services on Bluefield Lanes. This is coming to a point where you know, you'll see the impact that a centre like this can have on somebody's life.

Whilst I was in Bournemouth I was staying underneath the pier and I started using heroin. It wasn't a major habit. I'd maybe go shoplift a little bit. So I've gone into jail, come out, I've met a young girl and we've settled down, we've had a baby. We moved in together and it crumbled, it fell apart and I ended up going back onto the drugs. Well, I was actually on the drugs during the relationship, part of the reason why it crumbled. So she ended up going, "Oh Jamie don't get *all* mixed up in crime again". There was like a big surge in the 90's of crack and heroin use

on the estate. Prior to that it was the odd junkie. So use escalated, relationship breakdowns, the personal hygiene, you know the isolation, homelessness, you know the suicidal tendencies, all flushed in at once and I ended up going away again from the city.

I'm coming on to about 20, now. I was aware that the impact of theft on the shoplifter from the shops is that consumers pay a higher price. Well politics dictate and stock markets dictate what price we pay for our goods. I think that the profits these corporations make in these businesses is not viable. It's not viable to use a shoplifter to say that's why the prices have gone up. I was useless at it. I kept getting caught. It was blatantly obvious when I walked in a shop. You could just see that I was really on edge.

I went down to my sister's in another county and started living with her. Her neighbour was quite a big drug dealer. She was coming back and forth by ferries. I started raiding her stashes. My sister found out. I was reported. I went guilty to it. I ended up doing a two and a half year sentence for burglary. I ended up spending some time in a jail there. Got picked on and bullied bad because I was the only boy from my city.

At this time I've got my daughter with my partner: me coming home one day, looking out the back window and she's packing the boot, my daughter in the back seat and she's off. You know, never to see her again for a while. Sent me off the rails. I let a couple of yardies move into my room upstairs. They were involved in a shooting which put the scares up me.

Anyway, I went away again on a 18 month sentence. I think the judge took pity on me that time. I really was due a three and a half year sentence. During that time my daughter, who was six months when I first went in ... from that day then I documented every day of my stay in jail, my feelings around the situation with my daughter and the history repeating itself. So I took notes every day and I accepted responsibility for the situation: why me and her mother wasn't together.

I would have been round about 22, 23 when I came out of jail and I went for access to my daughter. I become part of the Dad's UK Potential Posse. That was the first point I starting accessing this centre and what it had to offer. I was going for a court case. I was having to document phone calls, visits. For the first time in my life I was having to keep evidence for my own purposes. So it come about, you know I could come and use the centre for little things, you know to start typing little things up and what not. I went through a 3 year court case with the courts, the county court, for access. I won access: started to take visits. I didn't put the support

court in action for me to continue with them visits on my allowance. I was unrealistic at the time and I was trying to dive in. In that time I started working with a charity. We were coming here on a daily basis to print off Healthy Living Workshop leaflets, typing up funding applications, all aspects of running a charity based community.

We used the centre for filming my story on the troubles of access that I was having to my child. They offered me a digital video editing courses at Uni where you received the digital camera. I took that course and I made a video. I was accessing the Internet workshop for my media to cut and edit, paste you know the Windows Movie Maker and what not. I was trying to make video documentaries for my daughter.

At that point I said no to drugs. I was hooked on drugs for 7 years, heroin and crack. I was offered treatment in jail and I refused. The professionals that were trying to model me were not professional enough and I just didn't feel that that kind of treatment was right for me. So I come out of jail and I said right, that's enough. The only person who is going to help is me by getting involved in the charity down the road which was working with drug users. It was a drop in centre for informal information around drugs and alcohol, housing benefits, alternative therapies and training. It was only like little short courses but it was enough to model me.

I was using this centre for most of my information. I was doing lottery funding applications, sports grants and I've started my own business, a boxing class. I use this for my leaflet distributing, you know sending out you know confirmation of times and dates, you know printing out my flyers to post all over the estate, I used this as a base for that.

I continue to use it, I'm now at the point where I'm studying my GNVQ Level 2 in Health and Social Care which I come and access the computer there, I don't have a computer at home so I use them now for writing up my modules for my studying, I come in to write them up.

Marie

Okay, so I'm now 41. I've been living in Bluefield Lanes for four and a bit years and I've been in the city for about seven. I moved onto Bluefield Lanes when I was breaking up with my long-term partner. I think the main reason was that it was somewhere I could actually afford to live. I scoped out a few places and well, the Lanes had a nice sort of atmosphere: a nice feeling about it. It seemed quite quiet. I felt a bit lairy moving over here, I guess, because I'd always lived in much more sort of, how can I put it, sort of mixed areas or middle class areas. I've never lived on an estate before and that felt like quite a big shift for me although I felt quite positive about it. I'm fortunate to be able to buy my own home with one income, so that was good. And, very positive to be able to live in a house as well. I really appreciate being able to have my own front garden and back garden and room to run around in.

I also work very locally, on the business park as a counsellor, which is my main paid occupation. So, it's great to be able to walk to work and walk home, particularly because I do shift work: work funny hours. And I guess I see my life here, as part of my overall life pattern of downshifting, having done the frenetic London full-time, manic running around drinking a lot of coffee. At one point I was working at a fairly high level sort of career thing. It was a deliberate choice to step down, giving more time to quality of life and friends and other interests that I have. I've got quite a few interests.

So, when I first moved on to the Lanes, I found the experience pretty stressful. I mean, I was very delighted to have my own place, but I immediately encountered quite a lot of anti-social behaviour. People were pulling up my garden and throwing stones at my windows and that kind of thing: random teenage behaviour, which can obviously happen anywhere. But, having had a bit of a spate of it right at the beginning, I did wonder about moving here and how it would be. But, within a sort of quite short period of time I met up with people and got involved in the community. I joined Bluefield Lanes community Arts Group. I've always loved doing art stuff: really wanted to get back into it. It was great fun. They were a group of women – there were five of us at that point – who met up in the art room, round the back of the community centre. We partly encourage and support each other to do community arts, to do arts ourselves, and we also do workshops for adults and children. We help promote public art on the estate and make it a more beautiful place for us and everyone else to live in.

So I've been involved in that for about three and a half years, and we're kind of a social business too. We fund raise and do some paid work so we have a bit of an income from doing it for the love of the community and our own enjoyment. So that's kind of another really

interesting development. I've not been involved with a co-operative before so that's definitely one of the great pleasures in my life and one of the ways in which I've got to know people and formed friendships where I live, which I brilliant. It allows us to tap into the whole community spirit of the Lanes, which is you know, much more so than anywhere else I've ever lived. So, I'd say that was the real up side: the biggest up side of living here. That's something that's really important to me. I looked for it in other places and not really found it. So that's been you know, really positive and that's still going on and you know the fact that we're responsible for initiating the Sculpture in front of the Community Centre. There's a mosaic outside the GP surgery which we were involved in and some other pieces.

So through getting involved in the community activities, you know it's made me feel much more rooted here and getting to start to use the IT Hub as part of that for me. I kind of knew it was there for ages before I went along, I'm not sure why it took me so long to get there but I don't actually have Internet access at home so that's one factor and the others are I guess I'm quite an extrovert sort of person.

So yeah, I started to use it regularly. Partly sort of casual access I guess, just lots of Internet research to do with my personal life or my professional life. And then for about 6 months I was studying life coaching, getting a qualification in that because it's something I practice in that I wasn't actually qualified in. So I used the centre in a much more sort of formal way at that point and it's great having it there sort of nine to five, five days a week although obviously not when courses are on. Just to be able to sort of pop in.

Before that I tended to do a lot of my own studying stuff at work, kind of on the quiet which was fine but I suppose less kind of confidential. I just decided I wanted to keep what I was doing personally separate from work. So you know I've really made some friends up there which again has been really, really nice, an important part of me of feeling, what's the word, sort of culturally accepted.

I guess when I first moved here I felt... I'm quite posh compared to a lot of people on the Lanes, in the sense that I talk quite posh. I went to public school and I still think that shows to some degree. I think it marked me out to some degree. And, I dress a bit differently. So, well these things weren't important to me. I subsequently found that it's much less homogeneous here than I thought it was when I first arrived, which is a positive thing and you know I feel a lot more accepted now.

Yeah and having my baby sort of being of a part of various other pregnant ladies. You know there seem to be masses of us all having babies at the same time. That's been a really enjoyable bit immediately about being on the estate.

I'm trying to think what else to go into really. There's a lot I could say. Oh the other thing I've been doing at the IT Centre is writing a book which I've just practically forgot about that, my memory seems to be completely shot since having my baby (laughs) which I've just about finished and I'm looking for an agent at the moment. I've always wanted to write a book, I mean my previous career was in communications of various types. But I've always enjoyed creative writing. It's sort of basically a story of how I came to have my baby because I'm a... I suppose I might call it a single mum by choice, it's a pretty hideous expression. So having had... yeah this experience which I didn't expect to have in my life. My long-term partner changed his mind about having children and I left him and sort of got to that point where I was either going to do it on my own or not do it so I decided to do it and ... happy outcome!

Patricia

Right. I'm currently one of the tutors at the IT Hub. I've been teaching beginners lately, one or two sessions a week. My background, well I'm local to the city. I grew up here in this quadrant of the city. I went to local schools. I did live on the estate at one point for about a year, a year and a half, with my dad who lives on the new estate. So, you know, going back into my life, my school experience in the city, basically as I say, I did very well academically but from age about ten onwards I was deeply deeply unhappy at school, so I had sort of mixed educational experiences to start off with.

The school I went to the norm was A-levels. It was always going to be university or art college. I remember I wanted to leave school at 16 and they said that if you leave school you are going to end up in a rubbish job you hate and we're not going to support you. So that was kind of you have to go to FE college or stay on at school so that's pretty coercive at that point. and I remember my mum saying that if you want to be a drop out you are better off dropping out after university.

It was the culture in that school as much as my parents. I was the first person who did a degree in my whole family. I then went on to art school, art foundation and then a degree.

OK so, roundabout, my sort of initial connection with working in the Bluefield Lanes, Greater Lanes community was through the Lanes News, the local newspaper. Anyway, I started there, I'd been ill for a bit, and I started volunteering. Then, a job came up as administrator there. I forget what it was called but it was basically keeping the books, selling the ads, doing whatever else needed doing. Did that for a bit; was doing a lot of production work on the paper. Still doing bits of freelance design on and off as well. And from working doing the more admin side, I then moved into, I was editing the paper for about, I don't know, six or eight months. Again it's one of these small community projects where you have two or three staff and they sort of do everything between them as needs doing. With the teaching I started doing a bit of, I did a bit of computer teaching then, I did a Quark Express course. I also taught art from when I left college. I was teaching a course in collage at what was then Blooming Arts, and did various community art projects as well.

When I stopped working at The Lanes News I was asked by Alexandra, who then managed the hub, if I wanted to do some teaching here. I taught Dreamweaver, I taught a couple of Word fairly introductory level courses, and I taught some Photoshop sessions. My main interest, you

know the stuff I find most exciting myself, is definitely the Photoshop, Quark design. I do a bit of web design freelance.

I was asked if I'd write some training materials on design and do a one off session for them. So that's how I first came back into the IT hub, which was round about last summer. As a result of that then John asked me if I wanted some work here, so I took on one or two sessions a week. I've been doing that since about November.

Skills incidental to my degree, seem to have become those by which I earn my living to the extent that I do. I'm still not free of the benefits system, and don't expect to be for a bit. But they have been skills that I've used for employment. And that's a really common situation for artists.

Philippe

The sole purpose of me being here was to study all the way up to Postgraduate level. Because that is how my father saw things. And, this is how he's still seeing things. Thank God he's still alive. So I backed into a long project studying first with some financial support from home, because that was tradition, until I sent him a letter and said to him "look, I'm a grown up man you have to understand that things aren't as they were."

My story is this one.

I had already been to the second year of university. But, things were getting really messy. We suffered a heavy currency devaluation in 1993. My dad said, "You have to get yourself out of here otherwise you are going to be one of the casualties." So I came to this country. When I came here I had about £1,800 in my pocket; £2,700 was paid just for me to learn English and get myself somewhere. I said to myself, why should I expect a pensioner to send me money? Even though he was able to, it would not be fair because things were getting harder.

So, no more money from home. I had to make it from here. I had cleaning jobs: one cleaning job in the morning, one cleaning job in the evening and I had two jobs over the weekend. I was working Saturday all day and Sunday half a day. It lasted until I had my grant because I was going full-time.

My first school was Central London College. After Central London I went to the College of North East London where I got a National Diploma as a mature student. Then I was ill advised. I should have gone to Jesus College, Cambridge. But, it was suggested that I would be better off staying in London. Middlesex University was close with the College of North East London. The larger the number of students from the College going to Middlesex University, the better the funding for that university. So I was a casualty of the process.

I was told how successful I would end up to be if I went on a money banking and finance BA course. They said it was one of the best courses ever. But, it turned out a few months later that it was a pilot scheme. So I went there for a term. By the second term I realised that it was not what I expected. The substance was very weak. So, I decided from the third term to transfer. I lost quite a lot on the process. You did not have many options, going for a transfer so thankfully the local university had me as an undergraduate but I had to make up for some of the credits. I was enrolled as a second year: Finance and Economics.

I spent three years very stretched financially. I had to work cleaning jobs as well as working at the Hospital. The grant and all the help and support was not enough. I wouldn't say that I had an expensive spending pattern but you must admit that here life is expensive.

I graduated with a Diploma of Higher Education. Short of one module for the BSc. So, I enrolled for another course, a Scottish MA fourth at the University of Dundee: Business Economics. Sometimes I say to myself: you've done quite well, you have, because when it comes to disciplining myself and working hard to achieve, I would do anything. When I set myself a goal – I mean I wouldn't do anything stupid, but I would work really, really hard to achieve. Whatever goals, if I have the minimum I would just push myself all the way. And, going to Scotland was a real adventure. I did not know anybody.

Our finances were stretched. I was then married with my second daughter born in July 2000. I left in September 2000 for Scotland. My family remained here. Family separation is one hell of an experience: kind of tears the fabric apart. You're stressed and you have to be able to separate yourself, you know, after the emotional whatever, in the evening, over the phone. I had to sometimes during the day stop after some lectures and deal with the issues over the phone: write here, phone there, deal with that and then separate myself again. So it lasted for one year but I made sure that that year was successful. I got the MA.

I applied for work across the board. Maybe it was the wrong way of applying. So you had Unilever, you had Price Waterhouse, you have all these leading institutions and I submitted my CV's and covering letters. And, I don't know. I really don't know. I never had even an offer to an interview. So I said to myself: maybe you haven't got what they'd expected you to get. Go all the way. Get a PHD. Maybe then you'll find a job. So after the MA I applied for an MSc course with the Centre for Energy and Mineral Law and Policy at the same university.

It required nine grand: tuition fees as well as cost of living in Dundee. It was pretty hard. Pretty, pretty hard. I expected the government back home to help. I told them I was doing something quite specific in my field and my project was to do with you lot! I expected them to contribute because this work would be used by some consultancy firm, here or elsewhere, to come up with answers to their problems. It's research. I wouldn't say that you can just take it and apply it but you can use the information here and turn that into answers because they are facts. I was supervised by somebody who actually does consultancy work for the World Bank. Now, why don't you help me. It might just cost you something like £5,000 at most, and you would not mind giving a million pounds to a consultancy firm. When I went there for an interview I was

supposed to meet them on the Wednesday. And, guess what? They had an attempted coup. The coup fell and it turned into a rebellion. Everybody went into hiding. They all disappeared. All the contacts that I had. I never managed to meet anybody. I came back empty handed: rather wounded because the little money that I had, I spent it flying. You do spend money when you travel and rather than putting the money aside. That cost me a lot: delayed my course. That's why I could not complete it in two and a half or three years.

But I completed. I started in 2001 and finished in 2006. It was a really bitter experience. They never bothered to come back to me, never. Even when I met the Director of Finance here for the National Oil Company. We had supper at my house. He made me some wonderful promises. He said, "You will be needed as soon as you finish, so you have already invested so much into this course, it is very small for us to give you £5,000 because once you finish you are an asset!" Well, nothing was done.

That was how I came into contact with the IT Hub. I was looking for every possible means of support, whether logistical or financial. I happened to look around here, when I saw the Community Centre. So very friendly, very open, very helpful. I got to know them and I got to build a relationship. I found them very professional in the sense that when you needed something they would deal with that issue before getting themselves distracted by something else. There was that element of it and there was another element which is, if you needed some information or you needed some help, if they were not able to give you that, they would give you some information about it or refer you to the right person.

My laptop packed up. I had a second hand laptop, which I got for 70 quid from a shop down the road. I managed to mend it: the basic things on. Nothing extra. Just for my work. It packed up. So, I was left very wounded. I was at the writing stage. My finances were extremely bad.. Hardly any money. I had to find a way to complete this. And, I was mentally very, very tired. So, I said to myself: get yourself organised here, this is the wrong time and the wrong place to be tired. At least if you finish to write it, first draft, you take it back to Scotland, they would see what you have achieved and maybe they might feel sorry for you and dish out another £200 or £300 plus your cost of travelling, that would help you to survive for the next 3 to 6 months.

I took this big pile of tables and calculations and everything else to Scotland. My supervisor said, "I don't want this, I don't want that, come back to me within a week". It didn't take him a week like he said. It took him 3 days because he knew exactly what had to come out, what has to stay in: give me some few directions and say, "You are fine".

When I came back, that was a crucial part because I had a deadline and I realised that the staff here, they were very stretched. I think some people left and some reshuffle happened. Fewer people were around but I needed to do more work. So I needed all the time, and I happened to apologise almost every other time, “I’m sorry but I might need you again, I’m sorry but I might need you again”. And I did. I got the help and the support. They even told me, I can see that what you’re doing is not what other people are doing there. A lot of them who come just to look through the Internet, some people do come because they just want to write a letter, but you **NEED** to have a PC to work on. I did get that kind of help and support and I’m ever so grateful because when I walked into here I did not have to queue up. I was almost like a member of staff because I had something on the screen to say, “This computer is busy.”

From January to March it was done. The final product was there by March. I think I completed it in two months. The paper belongs to here. I paid for it but it belongs to here. A week later my supervisor rung me and he said “I have to congratulate you. It doesn’t happen often but you have scored 83%, a distinction on your thesis”.

I am ever so thankful and grateful to this hub in that with very little means, when you look at the facilities here compared with what they have in other places, you know there’s not much in here but the amount of benefit that people gets out of this little Hub: it’s huge! I mean who would believe that I would be able to complete this here? Some people who look at it and say, “There’s so much here that people could benefit from”. And I’d say, “Yes!” And some other people who look at it are going and saying, “When you compare this Hub to other places this is almost perfect”. Because the amount of investment that could have gone in should be larger, but look with the little that they’ve got this is what they are able to give to other people.

Robert

It just occurred to me, that I can remember being frightened by computers, not very many years ago. I remember seeing people on TV using them, in drama or in documentaries or whatever, and it being a mixture of fear and envy that they were using a computer and I wasn't. Years ago, a computer would have been very useful for me.

I don't know about my parents' educational background. I lost them when I was nine or ten. I haven't a clue actually. There's lots of things. A relative recently told me dad was with the eighth army in Egypt. I knew he was in Burma but not in Egypt. I am completely ignorant about what schools they went to. Before the age of nine I was raised by my parents and then went to various relatives and so forth. I ended up with foster parents. It was a confusion of various adults and relationships. I think I went to about five or even six primary schools. I often think it's strange I haven't ended up a raving psycho. I may have done. I don't know. I mean there were awful teachers. Funnily enough I am just writing a story about a school stocked with awful teachers. People I can remember from my boyhood being just dreadful teachers really. Not being able to inspire pupils or get them interested in learning. There were odd teachers who did have that gift of communication and were able to maintain order in the classroom without violence or threat of violence.

I think tolerance is an important part of community life or society. There was that chap at the weekend saying we are becoming an angrier society, a more violent society. The one that was killed in that incident, you know. The irony is in some ways we have become more tolerant and in some ways more intolerant. It is kind of polarised society. But, unfortunately I don't have the solution. I don't think anybody has, funnily enough. I mean, I look back – I am sure it is an illusion – but I look back and I can just remember the '50s. I was sort of alive for five years in the '50s and it does seem a sort of a golden age. Alright it was a sort of a grey decade but it was a more balanced peaceful time. Even though we were living under the shadow of the bomb. There were post-war problems. I mean society seemed more settled. If I did have a time machine, I think I would go back to the '50s to live in, I think. Maybe me being rose-tinted-spectacles about it because, I mean, as a kid you don't know about the problems that are in the world. And you just see your own world. Which to me was very settled and happy and fine, really.

I've done all sorts of things, I've worked in insurance, I've worked in journalism, I've worked in publishing, been a book packer. I think I've had about nine jobs over the years. I've stayed in various jobs for two or three years, I think I was in insurance for God knows, too long, for five

years, I think. I was in journalism for ten years, twelve years: reporter and an editor, and sub-editor. I'm a film extra now. It's a job where they ring you and if you don't want to do it, you don't have to do it. We did *The Wolf Man* this year: the big remake of the werewolf film. That was fun to do. I can live on that more or less and devote my time to editing or writing in my spare time. You can choose when you work, although work's been very thin on the ground recently. The recession is obviously biting the film industry like anything else. That's been my career thing, I've not been sufficiently...what's the word? Acquisitive with money. I've been stupid really about money and earnings and so forth, which is why I haven't got any. It goes back to lack of discipline. I'm in my fifties now. It's frightening really. I've not written a book. I've edited books, I've edited books for professional publishers.

When I was unemployed perhaps ten years ago, the Job Centre sent a group of us, very unwillingly, to a fortnight's course at the College of Further Education. It's all a mist now, but we did a full range of computer courses. We did Excel, we did word processing, we did PowerPoint. We were thrown in right at the deep end: very confusing courses I must say. I've never mastered Excel. Any firm that employed me would soon find it would go bankrupt if it left the accounts to me. But, I got from the course what I wanted to get from it and that was word processing skills, which of course, you can pick up in a few hours really. I mean you just sit down, switch the computer on, learn how to save things on disk. It's coming back to me that of course, you would close down the disk without saving it and lose all your work (laughs). I remember thinking that the course itself was very confusing because one hour, one session you were doing Excel and then the next you're word processing and then the next you're doing PowerPoint. It's not the way I would have done it on a three week course: a week on word processing, a week on Excel, a week on PowerPoint, rather than jumbling it all up. I can remember coming out of the sessions in the afternoon, my mind being absolutely boggled, thinking, I'm never gonna master this thing, it's too Star Wars. But of course, I was wrong, apart from Excel. Even when the computer was working out the calculations, mine still didn't add up properly. But, I'm not interested in any job which advertises, you need Excel. But with shortcuts and one thing and another, I've got enough to go on with. I did, in a way, master the art of computing.

I can't remember when I first used the IT Hub here: five years ago? I've been coming in here for years to check my e-mail and to send e-mail. I've never had e-mail at home because I'd never really been able to afford a computer, unless of course, you go second hand. I didn't really want to get a second hand one just in case it went wrong. And now, the week before, I actually bought a computer! The first time: a computer of my own. I've had it a fortnight. It's

the cheapest thing I could find: a Minibook. It's about the size of a paperback: very user-friendly. It's got something called AbiWord, which is some sort of community, free word processing system. But, it's compatible with Microsoft Word, so I can use the memory stick at home on the Minibook and then bring it in here and it works; its readable. I'm delighted with this little thing. At some stage, I'll get my finger out and I'll learn how to get Internet access. I might have to get Broadband.

What I've been using the Hub for is, I and a group of friends publish booklets. We're a small press. I must have bought some fanzines in the 70's and that gave the idea. My own province is literature. The fanzines I'm involved in are opportunities for emerging writers to have their fiction or their poetry published. A lot of it is awful, obviously, naturally, but some of it is of high quality. It proved very useful. I edited a book for the Arthur Machen Society: an ancient biography of Machen written in the 1930's. It's a huge book, 500 pages; somebody keyed it in and then I edited it. There were huge errors in it. It was a nightmare. It took me a year to edit this book. So The Hub proved very, very useful. If it hadn't have been for The Hub, I would have had to have bought or hired some computer, obviously, because there was no other way of doing it.

In recent years, I have curtailed my involvement with fanzines. There's nothing really at the end of it. It's great fun to do but it's really a young person's pursuit, when you're at school or you're in your early twenties. I can't understand why schools aren't doing these things. They could produce the fanzines and swap them and send them to other schools and have competitions. I've thought about writing an article: contacting schools and saying: "Do you have the equivalent of fanzines? Do your pupils produce them on whatever subject there are, football or music or whatever?" A lot of it's very nerdish you know, it's fanzines about Star Trek or Star Wars or whatever, that sort of thing. But it's all kind of the fanzine empire.

I don't really read blogs. I've never written one. I think it's just time. Probably if I had the Internet at home, which I'm hoping to get through this Minibook, I probably would start reading them because, of course, there are quite interesting blogs out there...what's her name? Huffington in the States talking about the election, I'd thought about logging on last week when I saw her on Newsnight, I thought: Oh, I must look her up. And, I remember when she lived over here. But I think it's because I get the opinion, rightly or wrongly, that it's just people's opinions and I'm quite a fact person, I will continue to surf the Internet endlessly for facts, Wikipedia and dates and so forth. But once again, I try and double check them because, of course, there's an awful lot of misinformation on the net. I've only accessed Facebook because

somebody wanted to show me some pictures of something, some film they were in. Of course, they were on her Facebook site, so I had to join so I could access the site. I forget what the name is or how I log in but I am a Facebook member, much to my shame.

So that's, I think, my main achievement here at The Hub, other than it being as I say, a very useful place. It's a nightmare when it closes down for the holidays. Sometimes I get a fortnight and I cannot check my e-mails unless I go to the library. In the library, you only get an hour, even if there's no queue of people. Here, you can sit for several hours and nobody will disturb you unless, obviously, there is a queue of people and they need the machine. In which case, I've given the machine up and said, "Oh well, I don't need it at the moment, I can come back in a week or something." But, in the library, you are restricted to that hour. I don't know whether you can go back to the desk. I've never done it in the library. I've never gone back to the desk to say, "May I have another hour, I haven't quite finished that e-mail I've been sending." So this has an advantage over the library and, of course, the commercial IT cafe's. I think the cheapest I've found is £1 an hour, which isn't too bad but obviously if you want to do three or four hours work, it can be a fiver. And, in the library you can't go to a member of staff and say, "I've got these lines on my file, sort of a black border and I can't get rid of them." You know, they just wouldn't be interested. But, the staff here are very good. You can pick their brains really and learn how to delete things that you don't want or add things.

Sandra

Well, I'll go back to when I was at school. I totally loved school. I was really popular. So, my overall experience of school was really, really good. I stayed for one year and while I was in 6th form I was working part-time in McDonalds. Really enjoyed it! Some of the guys that I'd hung around with, they worked there as well and we used to socialise together. Even now there's people that I've formed bonds with back then in the late 80s that I work and am friends with. I worked my way up to floor manager: enjoyed that job immensely. I went to Birmingham to do a course. At that time when I done my exam I had the highest score for a female floor manager. I was quite proud of that. Through working with my friends and socialising, I got in to the nightclub and pub scene and done that for quite a few years, even up until now.

A defining moment for me was after I had my son. I thought, "I can't do this forever, what else can I do?" So, I decided, "I know! I'll go to college and learn about computers." I done it for the fact that if I got a computer I wanted to make sure my son was safe using one. So I applied for the Access IT course. I didn't know about the Access course being a step to university for mature students. I done it purely to learn about computers. And then within weeks of being at college my tutor said, "Apply for university". So I thought, "Do you know what? There's no harm in applying for university. I'll do it for the sake of doing it."

Enjoyed my Access course. My tutor - I'll never forget her - absolutely brilliant tutor. She's one of my first mentors, actually. I said, "Oh, there's no point in me applying for university, I'm just a single parent." And she said, "You're not just a single parent you know. You've got all these skills: all the stuff that you do on a daily basis that you can apply to work in a job: managing your money, managing your time." And, that day, I walked away thinking, "I'm not just a single parent."

So, I applied for university, had an interview. If I passed the Access course I got a place. And, then, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. The one thing I did know was one day I would like to be my own boss, so I decided I'd do a business and marketing degree. Anyway, I done the Access course and I can't remember how many passes I needed but I was one short. But, I contacted the Head of Business. I explained to them what had happened. They still said, "We'll take a chance on you. The place is still there for you."

It was a really nice moment for me. It wasn't so much telling my mum but I remember telling my nan, that's my dad's mum, that I'd got a place at university and she actually cried that day. She was so proud! Really, proud as punch. Like I said, I was the first one, the first one in the

family to actually go to university. Even now, the sad bit about it was that within four weeks of starting university my Nan got ill and she died. But, it was nice: she actually went to her grave knowing that one of her grandkids had gone to university.

I didn't really enjoy university. I had to be really strict with myself. The fact that I was a parent, the fact that I was working and the fact that I was studying, you know I had to manage my time really well. But, it worked because I set a routine for myself. It was all about making the best of the time that you have. For instance, because I used to travel to study sometimes I'd get back late. So on the days I was getting back late, I cooked a stew before I went: get up at five in the morning. That's the kind of stuff I do now. If I've got a busy day I still get up early and manage my time.

After my Nan died in my first year, I messed up my first two terms. And, some of my tutors wasn't supportive. They were like, "You should be over this by now." It left a bit of a sour taste in my mouth about certain tutors and about some of the experiences I had at university.

I'm glad I did it. My Nan was proud of me. I think it's had a knock on effect in my family. My twin sister's now at university. She's in Leeds. She's training to be a primary school teacher. I don't want to sound big headed but would she have done it if I never went to university? I don't know. But, sometimes, I want to take credit. And, even amongst my friends, some of the people I used to hang around with, several of them have gone on to do degree courses.

So that ties in with the IT Hub, because in my first year at university I didn't have a computer. I was travelling to the campus, seven miles each way. And, then I got to hear about this place. I thought, "I'll pop in, have a look." A friend was here and a few others that I knew of personally. I thought, it was on my doorstep. I only lived round the corner at the time. Rather than travelling all the way to campus, I could do a lot of my work here. My son was at school, so I could come in here, use the computers, use the Internet. So for the first year I basically done all my course work in this IT Hub.

Second year I actually got some funding through a bursary to get a computer. I can't believe I spent two and a half thousand pounds on a computer! But I still didn't have Internet access. Having a computer at home was a lot easier. I could sit up till two o'clock in the morning if I needed to. It was handy having the IT Hub on the doorstep, so if I needed to do some kind of research, if I needed to email someone that I was doing some group work with or my tutor, I didn't have to go all the way to campus.

I dropped out of university at the end of second year. It was too much. I mean it was a real struggle. My Nan dying knocked the wind out of me. I found it really hard to get back in to it. I had a bit of depression as well and I was on medication. I made the decision that I had to do what made me happy. I dropped out, but I still had ambitions. I still wanted to get a job. I wanted to get a job that I would enjoy doing. I didn't want to get a job just so I could pay my bills. It goes back to something, I remember when I was in my last two years of upper school. My mum was actually a parent governor. My mum had struggled. My mum had a totally different education. She was born and raised in Jamaica and she came here when she was 13. From the stories my mum's told me about life in Jamaica, it wasn't easy. Education was a way out of poverty. Even now, talking to people that have recently come to this country from Jamaica, for some people it was about you've got to stay at home on the farm and help plough the fields. Some people couldn't afford to. They couldn't A) get to school and B) there was more important things than going to school. If you managed to get an education there was a way out. In Jamaica back in the 60s, education was a luxury and if you got it, you made the most of it.

My mum had three kids under the age of one. She was 17 when that happened. She was always telling us, "Don't do what I've done. Take the opportunities that are available." One thing my mum always said, you're better off, you're halfway there, doing a job that you enjoy waking up and going to, as opposed to waking up and dragging yourself out of bed because you need money to pay your bills. I suppose my mum was a Learning Champion before Learning Champions ever existed. She was always on at us: strict you know: come in from school, do your homework. If there wasn't any homework my mum would give us homework!

That's something that I tell my son now. He's done his exams and he's trying to decide what he wants to do. He's not sure what he wants and although I can't tell him what to do, and sometimes he'll have to make his own mistakes in life, I always encourage him: "Do a job because you want to get out of bed and go to it rather than dragging yourself there because you need money."

I left university with an HND and did some marketing but I was still here, still using the IT Hub. I spent a lot of time here: made lots of friends, reacquainted myself with some other people that I'd known from years ago that I'd never saw while we was all raising our kids when they were little. So, while I was here, I met up with old friends and new friends who were involved in the Learning Champions stuff. They was like. "Oh, you might be a good Learning

Champion.” And thought, “It’s a good thing to get involved in.” My first idea was, “Do you know what? Do this and I might even get a reference out of it.” And, as much as you can have qualifications, I’m aware that most of my job skills and experience were around bars and clubs and that kind of work. And, I thought, “I need to get my foot in to somewhere, learn some skills that will serve me down the line.”

I’ve been a Learning Champion for a couple of years. It’s served me well. I done a presentation back in February and met this guy from the Business Link Enterprise Gateway. So I’m working 16 hours a week for him. So the experience that I’ve had surpassed my expectations. Whereas I was hoping that I might get a good reference out of it, I didn’t actually think I would get a paid job out of it. I’m still working in the community. It has been my home since I was nine or ten. I like to think that this has shaped me in to the person that I am.

I’ve seen what it can do. Because, the pub next door, my uncle is the landlord. He’s a real technophobe. It’s incredible, but with a bit of persuasion my uncle and one of his bar staff came and done an IT course about eight months ago. It’s quite funny actually. My uncle’s famous for being a technophobe. He’ll buy a new phone and he’ll have to get someone to set it up for him. Then he went out one day and came back with a computer! Everyone was like, “Oh my God! What are you doing? You’ve got a computer in your hand!” I mean he doesn’t use it to its full potential but he’s a lot more forward than I ever thought he would be. For a technophobe in his category that’s really amazing.

The reason why I like community learning is because it’s not structured. It fits round people and whatever that’s going on with them. Universities and colleges are like, “This is what we’ve got to offer, take it or leave it.” Whereas, with the Learning Champion side of stuff we can talk to people like, “What do you want?”

Recently I went over the Family Centre and there was a group of women. They’ve done a course together and it came to the end of the course and they decided they were going to do a little get together. It was a bring and share. Everyone brought a dish. And, all the different people there, they’re from different walks of life. You’ve got Asians, you’ve got White, you’ve got Black, you’ve got old, you’ve got young: it’s varied amongst that group. And the time that they’d spent together socialising, eating and drinking, that stuff, they’re learning about each other. And, them learning about each other I think has a knock on effect. In that time that they’re sharing together they’re understanding different cultures. By learning and understanding, you can gain a respect that helps you to live together.

Shona

My Story ... Originally born in Africa. I suppose I am English. I still consider myself as African even though I am English. Zambian, but in general I say African. People get excited about the whereabouts. Came to England when I was seven. Dad was a metal analyst. Physics, engineering kind of thing.

Went to school in England. Straight from school went and done hairdressing. Done some bar work. Done factory work, bus driving, and I think it was when I was about 21 that I actually started getting involved in youth and community work and the big emphasis at those times was getting qualified. People kept telling me that I am not going to get a good job, I'm going to need to get qualifications if I want a job so then I went on to college and done my access course in youth and community work. Originally it was for a year but I struggled because I had two children at the time. I then had to take another year to finish that course. After that I went on to Reading University. Done two years at Reading and got my Diploma in Youth and Community Work.

Basically in terms of the IT Hub, I used it very rarely. Until, I was approached by Matthew asking if I'd become a Learning Champion and I think that's basically where a lot of my input or involvement in the IT and the Community Centre kind of kicked off. And, that would be coming up to two years in February so yeah. I've enjoyed my time working around the IT Hub and community centre and I think it could have a lot more to offer them than it is offering them right now. Even in regards to kind of evaluating the courses that the place puts on and the different involvement with other different establishments such as the College, and the local university, various little tasters and independent tutors and stuff. The main thing for me was trying to get a lot of those courses evaluated to a point where the things that needed changing could get changed within the establishment but that hasn't happened or whether that is feasible, I am not sure. But I feel that the IT Hub's offered a lot to the community, really. A lot of people have taken part in different courses including myself. I mean since I've been involved I've done the film realisation course. I've done the PhotoShop course. I've done video editing course. Exercise and Fitness. I've done a taster in massage. Is there anything else I done? Probably a few other bits and pieces I can't think of off the top of my head. But, yeah, I found it quite useful. I'm a person that doesn't like to be sat home anyway. You got quite a few single mums who will be sat at home not doing a lot. I'm not one of those people.

Like I said, I went to college and university and when I started college my son was only four months old so. He's just trying to get a job now. Paid. I've enjoyed seeing the variety of people

getting involved down here as well, I mean the 50th anniversary of Bluefield Lanes definitely got a lot of people involved young and old. That exhibition was good as well. Kind of relaying the story of the whole estate back to the community, um. So, yeah I just hope it really doesn't stop. I hope it continues, really. But the main thing for me like I said is trying to get ... make sure that everyone's learning experience is a positive one and that they feel like they get something out of it at the end and also to move into something else afterwards. That's the biggest thing for me.

5.6 Conclusion: public writing

This study has made space at the heart of an academic enterprise for the voices of people who associate with a community IT centre: narratives by people who are users, volunteers, managers, tutors and friends of the Bluefield Lanes IT Zone (BITZ). These narratives are presented not as problematic others, syntheses, user profiles, or models, but in their own rich particularity. For myself and the participants:

In public writing, writers and audiences reciprocally take and make spaces through acts that are simultaneously verbal and physical. These experiences are meant to propel students outside the boundaries of academic discourse into public spaces, relationships, and discussions that students are invested in and committed to. (Burns 2009, p.29)

Public writing involves embodiedness and virtuality: putting oneself somewhere where there may be physical and/or psychological discomfort, not only in the imagined extremes but in the daily world. It involves multiple reflections: I see the other. I reflect the other. The other sees me and reflects me. The other sees themselves reflected in me and I see myself reflected in the other. The reader sees these reflections and, if they are sensitive, sees themselves reflected back, as in, "... the way I see the other seeing me." (Žižek 2008, p.13)

In making editorial decisions in order to present the participants' stories readably, in their own words and voice, I have considered the related questions of representation and mediation, and our shared roles as cultural mediators. We mediate between each other, and through this work, between ourselves and more distant others, particularly those who would bring disciplines of social inclusion, education and employment to the complex world of personal and community development. In the chapters that follow I use the theoretical and conceptual framework (Ch. 4) to look more closely at the what people do with the community IT centre (RQ2), at what factors influence their use of the centre (RQ3), and at what constitutes positive change for people (RQ4) in order to address the central question of how people who associate with a community IT centre use their association to make positive changes in their lives (RQ1).

Chapter 6 Common-sense of the self

6.1 Introduction: the institution of the individual

In this chapter I begin the process of analysing the data and answering the research questions, beginning with the second question: what do people actually do with the community IT centre? I also begin to apply the analytical framework (figure 6.1), which I developed in chapter four.

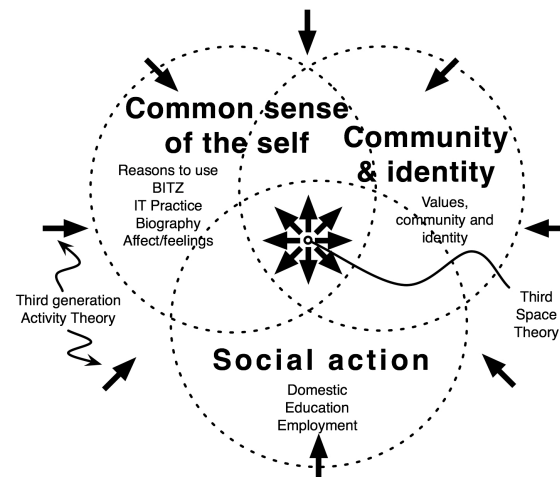


Figure 6.1 The framework incorporating all 10 coding categories

In this chapter I will look at the Common-sense of the self (figure 6.2), or the institution of the individual. I will start with reasons given for using the community IT centre and then consider the accounts of the people whose stories appear in this study. Finally, I will consider affect or feelings as a factor of engagement.

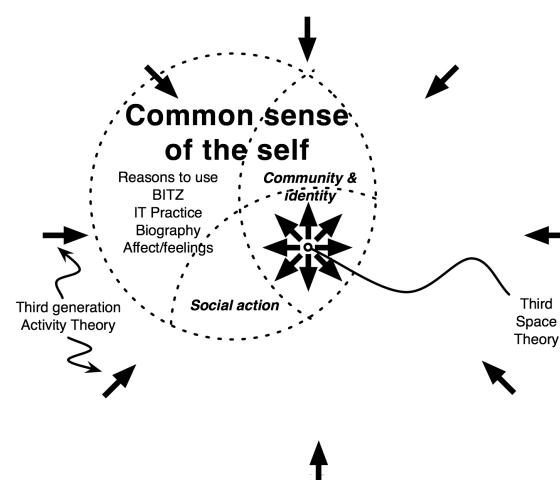


Figure 6.2 The sphere of the common-sense of the self

As with each of the spheres – and each of the chapters that follows – we will see Activity Theory pressing in to contain explanation and the Third Space pressing out, resisting inscription. Each sphere is, of course, penetrated by the others, and boundaries are porous.

6.2 What do people do with the community IT centre?

In the centre people act and interact with others present in the centre. Or, they act and interact with others at distance via email, social network, instant messaging and so on. The interactions may be synchronous, or nearly so as through instant messaging and chat forums. The interactions may be asynchronous, occurring over more or less protracted periods of time with variable periodicity. Interaction may be crafted, as in writing an email over several days before sending it. Or, interaction may be more or less unplanned.

6.2.1 Reasons for using the centre

Many reasons for using the centre were cited.

build confidence	opportunity to help others	do courses
civilised community	peer support	gain knowledge
contact family	place for children	gain skills informally
flexible time to use	place to write	get a reference
free	run a business	get help with computers
friendly, supportive place	safe haven	study in shared space
individual support	sense of belonging	support formal education
keep active	social dimension of computer	support house purchase
multi-agency collocation	use	support informal learning
no computer at home	strengthen the community	support job seeking
no Internet at home	supplement home computer	support therapeutic
	support in domestic disputes	rehabilitation
		tutors are good

Figure 6.3 Reasons to use the community IT centre

6.2.2 What people did with computers

As well as having many reasons for using the centre, people did many things with computers.

Used applications	Engaged in practices	
Abiword Facebook Fish4Jobs Google MS Excel MS Office MS PhotoDraw MS PowerPoint MS Publisher MS Word Outlook Photoshop Sims2 SuperCalc Wikipedia Wordstar	audio recording computer safety CV services database digital photo digital video DTP education email email attachments games graphics hand written drafts hardware holiday purchase	information seeking Internet leaflets and flyers networks operating systems presentations printing record keeping shopping social networking systems spreadsheets studying web development wordprocessing writing

Figure 6.4 What people did with computers

A remarkably wide range of IT practices was revealed taking place at the community IT centre. Few people only did one thing, and even Philippe, who was single minded in his use of the centre for support of education, engaged in a wide range of practices while doing so: information seeking, presentations, wordprocessing, graphics, email, and CV services:

I did use the Internet, yes, of course yes, I used the Internet, I had, you know, a pile of... a huge pile of, what do you call, books because you have to photocopy some pages, you get a quote here and you get one information there so I had this but I used to use the Internet and I had also journals and articles and all the rest of it. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

6.2.3 Relationship between people and their computers is not strong

This study found the relationship between people and their computers was not a particularly strong one. One or two participants were computer enthusiasts. Alexandra “loves” computers. Sandra does too much on the computer. But most could take them or leave them. They are tools, part of the ambience, occasionally intimidating, occasionally symbolic, but more simply, just there: part of life.

6.2.4 Few straight-forward objects, many small opportunities

Similarly, the assertion of reasons to use the centre does not always align directly with the practice. People come in to print something out and end up drinking tea and chatting all

morning. Consequently, the alignment between the object and the outcome is indirect. The object might be to apply for a passport and buy a holiday but the outcome is a wider network of associates with good social capital.

Most participants in the study express a broad complex of motivations. Like Philippe, Jamie used the centre to study for college courses, but he also used it also to support a small business as a boxing coach, to support his own therapeutic rehabilitation programme, and to gain access to his daughter (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript).

The second focus group was with people who had taken introductory computer courses at the community IT centre. The discussion revealed an ecology of small opportunities and flexible pathways where serendipity could play an important role.

- For me it has been quite diverse and colourful since I started coming down. I ended up doing a theology course. There's no way I would have done a theology course on the back of the IT

- Me I done it the other way around

- Try something different, something you wouldn't usually do. When you were a child, how many strings you can put on your bow. You reach another stage and you need an environment where you can do that. I did relief work, then the mosaic, then two IT courses then the theology course.

- I did a TA course here, teaching assistant course, then did the Theology class, then I got to know [the centre manager]. He said how about doing the basic computer course? So, why not because I got two young boys and computers, unless you know about computers. I didn't know how to turn the thing on, let alone...and so I came along to the basic computer course and we are now looking into getting a computer and like sit down. I think my boys, they are only 4 and 6 but they know more about the computer than I do so it'd be them teaching me, so it'll be a family get together around the computer rather than all ...

- being isolated...

- Yeah

- The computer as a domestic social centre...

- It is bridging generational gaps as well because my age group never heard of a computer. (2009-02-26FG2-2)

Alexandra's motivation was to have a job, but she needed a job that would reward her in more than just material ways: she loved computers and felt this was an area in which she had something to offer (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript).

As Sandra asserted, work is not only valued for the money but for the sense of purpose:

I remember being at school, my mum being a parent governor, she was also at college doing a part-time course, can't remember what it was, and it was always about, you're better off, doing a job that you enjoy waking up and going to as opposed to waking up and dragging yourself out of bed because you need to go to work because you need money to pay your bills. ... And that's something that I tell my son now who's just done his exams and he's trying to decide what he wants to do. He's not sure what he wants to do and although I can't tell him what to do and sometimes he'll have to make his own mistakes in life, I always encourage him to say "do a job because you want to get out of bed and go to it rather than dragging yourself there because you need money". (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

Patricia can teach in a supportive environment with people who want to learn and respect her work.

One of the reasons I tutor here, apart from the money, is that I feel people are really glad to learn and have the social interaction with other people and build their confidence. (2009-06-05PatriciaRnd2)

The tutor made it interesting. You wanted to come back for more (2009-02-26FG2-2)

Haidar can catch up with PC technology while his daughter does her homework.

I come here almost every day during the weekdays with my daughter after school. It's something that she looks forward to coming to. She wants to be part of the community team, while Dad's doing his PC Maintenance Course, she's very keen to come and do her homework and really wants to know what's going on. I think it's a very good bonding station, (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

Marie was active in other community groups before she came to the IT centre. Her motivation was that she did not have the Internet at home, but there were other factors: her extroversion and enjoyment of working in public space.

So through getting involved in the community activities, you know it's made me feel much more rooted here and getting to start to use the IT Hub as part of that for me. I kind of knew it was there for ages before I went along, I'm not sure why it took me so long to get there but I don't actually have Internet access at home so that's one factor and the others are I guess I'm quite an extrovert sort of person, I like actually being in a sort of public place, studying or using the Internet. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

6.2.5 Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators

Broadly the objects of using the centre could be grouped into those with extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Extrinsic motivators include the support series: support for formal education (*Jamie, Philippe, Sandra*), housing (*Jamie, Robert, Alexandra*), informal learning (*Haidar, Jamie, Robert*), job seeking (*Haidar, Jamie*). Other extrinsic factors include no computer or Internet at home (*Robert, Angela, Catherine, Haidar, Shona*) or to supplement the home computer (*Shona, Robert, Alexandra*), such as by printing or emailing documents prepared at home. Another area was information seeking in support of appeals to family court in respect to access (or denial of access) to children (*Jamie, Haidar*).

Intrinsic factors motivating people to use the IT centre included building confidence, to participate in a civilised community:

... over here you won't find alcoholics and drinking in the IT Centre (laughs), it's quite, you know, a very civilised community ... more focussed, more focussed within a learning sector and helpful with no antisocial behaviour at all in here. I have not ever seen anything antisocial behaviour in here which is why I bring my daughter here because it's a suitable environment. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

Sandra has a sense of belonging:

... even though I don't live here I still kind of think I belong here, I spend most of my time here. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

People found support in domestic disputes which included both powerful intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to use the service.

... because I'm a single parent with the maternal family are actually making an application for contact order, I've been able to get information from the computer, on the PC also, using the resources like I can. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

For Jamie it wasn't only the support in a domestic dispute:

So it come about, you know I could come and use the centre for little things, you know to start typing little things up and what not. I went through a 3 year court case with the courts, the county court, for access, I won access, started to take visits, I didn't put the support order in action for me to continue with them visits on my allowance, you know I was unrealistic at the time and I was trying to dive in. In that time I started working with a charity over the bridge where we were coming here on a daily basis to print off Healthy Living Workshop leaflets, typing up funding applications, all aspects of running a charity based community. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

Others chose to use the facilities simply to study in a shared space (2008-11-24Marie-transcript), to have a place to write (2008-11-10Robert-transcript), or because they enjoyed the social aspects of computer use.

Some participants positively noted the opportunity to help others.

I was still here hanging around and while I was here if I was using the computer, if I was doing something on the computer and someone next to me was stuck on a problem and the staff were busy with other stuff I kind of would help people out as and when and then helping people here as and when they needed a hand on something simple, something really quick, (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

And this was appreciated by the Centre users:

It was a welcoming place, you know when I first started coming here the people wanted to help you, you know people were the same as you, they were here you know, they wanted to help you, they were offering you courses that you wouldn't think was available to people from areas like this, (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

6.2.6 A very complex activity system

As an activity system the community IT centre is immensely complex. The centre is also diffused through many people's lives in many different ways. The complexity persists even if you take the people one by one. Only Philippe really had a clearly focused reason or objective for using the centre. Several other participants had motives similar to Philippe's. Sandra's introduction to the centre was because it was easier to get to than the pooled computer rooms at university. Jamie used the centre to do his level 2 coursework. Marie and Robert both like writing in public spaces. But for each of these people there were other reasons to use the place as well. For Sandra the place became somewhere where she could be herself, where she was a person with a purpose doing what she loved: using computers, computer-gaming, helping others.

6.2.7 Disinterest in formal qualifications

It is interesting to note that even among focus group two, who were recruited from people who had taken courses at the centre, the opportunity to study for qualifications was rarely mentioned. People who had taken courses were not principally motivated by the qualifications, and the people who expressed a desire that the centre should offer qualifications were not, themselves, interested in pursuing this path. I also witnessed this in a short course I taught: Introduction to the Internet and Email (Roberts 2006). I was asked by the centre managers of the time to ask participants if they wanted to obtain a qualification attesting to their computer skills. To a person, none did. They were happy to receive a certificate of attendance, but did not want to be formally assessed (see Ch 2, section 2.5.1).

6.2.8 Interest in informal "taster" courses

The clearest articulation between reasons to use the centre and the IT applications actually used was to do with taster courses.

The volunteer centre manager is taking initiative himself, creating ad hoc groups. He takes inquiries. When there is a critical mass of interest in a topic he puts it together with a tutor and runs a course. Current courses include: Beginner IT, Improvers, File management, Internet and email, Beginners digital photography, Web design, Video journalism, Beginners photoshop (researchDiary09, 28 January 2008 & 21 April 2008)

Shona has taken advantage of various taster courses. She doesn't distinguish between courses offered by the community IT centre and those offered by other agencies operating within the

wider community centre building. She suggests that there might be a mechanism for returning value to the community:

It would be nice if there were an agreement. If someone does a session on photoshop. They could put back into their community their skills: design the next flyer. Not only do they develop skills they help with the work load. They are also part of the whole process here (2009-03-05ShonaRnd2)

6.3 Common sense of the self

Without needing the support of theory, most people have an experience of their self. This self may have many parts and may be abstracted; that is, I can think about myself. Regardless of the number of components that a self might have, there is, for most people, a sense of (or imperative towards) unity, autonomy (agency) and continuity. A reading of policy documents, particularly those concerned with lifelong learning records, access and authentication (EDUCAUSE 2010, p.15ff; MIAP 2008) shows this unified, autonomous and continuous self is the basic constituent of the individual's relationship with state authority, education, the law and commerce (Scollon 2003). This common-sense of the self incorporates two important components of my coding structure: affective factors (feelings, emotions); and personal biography (the events or trajectory of one's life).

It is a convenient over simplification but this common-sense self can be seen as the subject of an activity system (figure 6.5), where a person has a reason to use the IT centre and they use their personal IT practice to achieve outcomes. The use of the centre and its tools is governed by community, rules and roles.

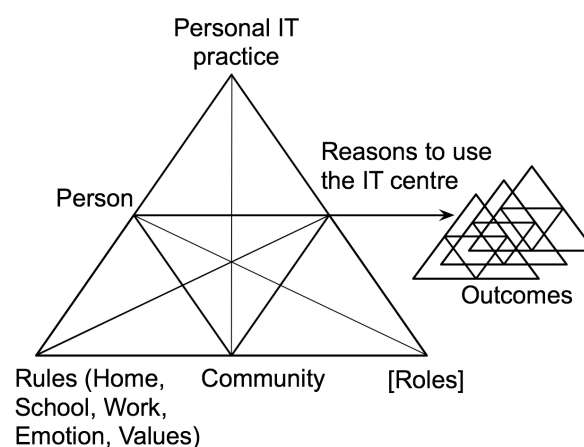


Figure 6.5 Expanded AT network for community IT centre

6.3.1 Examples of different perspectives: Robert and Marie

Both Robert and Marie identify, in part, as writers. Their use of the centre has a lot in common. Neither has the Internet at home. Both are working on substantial writing projects. Marie is writing a book. Robert has recently edited one and is working on a number of articles and a radio documentary. Both also use the centre for email correspondence with family and friends. But there are a number of important differences as well. Robert does paid work only very occasionally and has very little money. It is not certain if he could take on the commitment to fund an Internet connection at home. Marie has voluntarily stepped down from full-time work to a part-time job in order to focus on other aspects of her life. She could afford a home Internet connection but on the one hand hasn't gotten around to it and on the other enjoys the sociality of the community IT centre.

I like actually being in a sort of public place, studying or using the Internet. I find it much more fun doing it with other people around really. I mean I can study on my own and I'm horribly over educated but you know, I just get much more out of having other people about and it was another way to get to know more people. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

But, Robert's experience and practice is quite different:

I can imagine coming in here and not saying anything to anybody. I am not drawn to the things they do. Music festivals, bring and buy sales and so on. The IT hub is kind of sufficient. (2009-03-31RobertRnd2)

It is not that Robert is disengaged. He is active in many networks, in contact with his family, motivated by a sense of right and justice. For Robert the centre is predominantly instrumental. His role is as a user. He recognises that some people get their sense of community, in part, from the place, as Marie does, but he doesn't. For him the regime operated at the community IT centre is perfect. Robert follows the rules. At the library there is a sign saying that no one can use the public Internet terminals for more than an hour. So he doesn't. Even if there is no one there he doesn't feel comfortable asking the librarian to extend his time. Whereas at the IT centre he feels he can sit as long as he likes. If he sees there is a queue he will give up his place, but it is his sense of right that motivates him, not a written rule. Through his story we see that he is not reclusive. Robert's object for using the centre is reasonably direct. The rules that circumscribe his use of the community IT centre are clear. His domestic situation requires that should he wish to use the Internet he must find access outside his house. He is not at all

wealthy so free access is important. The regime operated by libraries is mildly intimidating even though affective issues to do with computers are in his past. As a user his role is clear and he can ask others who have clear helper roles for assistance should he need it.

6.3.2 Examples of different perspectives: Philippe and Sandra

In a similar way, we could compare Philippe's and Sandra's use of the centre. Both came to the centre to use it to support their studies at university. Philippe was driven by great need at the time. He had very little money, his personal computer had died and he had no other option. His university was in Scotland. His family lived on the estate. The community IT centre was a site of access of last resort. For Sandra it was a matter of pressing convenience. The campus on which she was studying was seven miles in one direction. The university's other campus was five miles in the opposite direction. To get to either would require two bus rides of up to an hour each way. She could walk to the IT centre easily. But in the longer term, each took a different path. When Philippe no longer needed the centre for his studies he pretty much stopped coming. But Sandra's involvement grew and grew until the centre became a very significant focus for her personal, professional and civic engagement.

While I was here if I was using the computer and someone next to me was stuck on a problem and the staff were busy with other stuff I would help people out. I thought, "I like computers. This could be a way forward for me, as in looking for a job once I've finished university."

I made the subconscious decision: I like working with computers; I like working with people; I like working in my own community; I had recent qualifications. But, I didn't have any work experience. So I volunteered here to pick up and learn more stuff. I basically self-taught myself a lot of what I knew on computers. I thought, "Yeah, I can see myself doing this."

I ended up getting a paid job through it. (2008-07-24 Sandra-transcript)

6.3.3 Examples of different perspectives: Jamie and Haidar

There are other similarities we can find between people's stories. Both Jamie and Haidar used the centre to support family court cases in disputes with former partners, to continue their education and to develop CVs. But in many ways they are very different people with very different motivations. Jamie is a frustrated young man with a keen sense of social injustice and a history of victimisation, who is struggling hard, pulling his life around, seemingly against a lot of odds. Haidar, on the other hand presents himself as being from a stable supportive, high achieving family. Haidar is the lone-parent sole-carer for his daughter, while Jamie, struggling

with his personal history of heroin addiction is trying to gain access to his daughter. Both Jamie and Haidar see the IT centre as force for good in the wider community.

The IT Centre has also given me a lot of access to information for job hunting. It's a very civilised community within a learning sector with no antisocial behaviour at all. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

So with that, anybody that I got up there, I would try and engage them in this IT hub even if it was only the games workshop or to set up Hotmail. Email can be a viable source of contact for some people because some people don't have contract mobile phones so they go in on the computer; they've been uprooted, moved to the city and they get in contact with their family. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

6.3.4 Examples of different perspectives: Catherine and Angela

Catherine and Angela both used the Centre as a place to be an “adult” and to spend time with adults after having spent several years at home with young families:

It's nice from having kids to have your own time to achieve something.. Kids seem to take all your time all your energy but it is nice to be able to do something for yourself rather than for your family and kids, ironing for your partner, making the boys' beds. Come away from the drudge of everyday to actually do something different and interesting. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

To spend some time with adults after being stuck with children. It's me 24/7 so to get that bit more of adult communication. So, yes, it was social, to see what was left of my head. (2009-06-03AngelaRnd2)

For Angela, the computer course was oriented towards her redefining her professional identity as an advice centre worker after many years as a nurse, while for Catherine:

This place did not relate to my work at all. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

6.3.5 Irreducibility of the common-sense of the self

Whether these might be reduced to models, typologies or profiles is, from a Third Space perspective, moot. Profiling (what Jamie calls “modeling”) is always problematic. When looking for similarities, we see difference. When looking for difference we see similarity. Again and

again we see that, while Activity Theory may provide us with a structure for framing a discussion of the community IT centre and its users, there is no one perspective that can dominate the centre over all nor is there one purpose (object) shared by users. Although perhaps, of the stories considered here, Robert and Philippe might be said to have the least complex reasons for using the community IT centre, even their use is contextualised in more than one individualised frame. And, they admit to other people having other purposes.

Even the documentation for the establishment of a community interest company (social enterprise) lists multiple aims:

The primary aim of the BLITZ CIC is to develop digital literacy and reduce the effect of the digital divide for people in Bluefield Lanes and the surrounding area by operating a community interest company to provide drop-in Internet facilities in a social learning space, together with formal and informal learning and development opportunities leading to recognised qualifications.

To promote community cohesion in what is nationally known as a deprived area BLITZ CIC will provide a social learning facility within the locality which is welcoming and where local people can come and share ideas and frustrations, where relationships can form and develop. (quoted from researchDiary10)

One is either forced to draw activity system after activity system to take in all the purposes, perspectives and outcomes until the space between “any number of activity networks” becomes the only salient feature (Engeström 2001), or to select (and impose) a limited number of purposes and perspectives. It is the latter approach that is taken when adopting an Activity-Theoretical approach to organisational analysis and development. Key perspectives are taken into account, key outcomes determined, and key “triads” are identified. Such an approach may have a utilitarian justification or may have pragmatic practicability in situations where there are constraints of time and resources. Decisions are taken, norms are established and outliers are externalised. It is this process that gives Avis cause for concern in respect to the potential for complicity between Activity Theoretical approaches and “capital”.

As a consequence Engeström’s AT veers towards becoming a form of comfort radicalism, its transformative rhetoric has a progressive appeal but ultimately it readily lends itself to becoming no more than a management technique ... [through which] worker knowledge can be appropriated and used to transform the labour process in the interest of capital. (Avis 2009, p.161)

Since I have been associated with the community IT centre there have been various initiatives trying to frame use within an explicitly formalised educational remit. These illustrate the deleterious effects of imposing or assuming a limited range of purposes or perspectives on organisational development. One early manager of the centre was strongly drawn to entering an agreement with a commercial provider of swipe card technology coupled to process control automation software adapted from manufacturing industry to report on educational units of attainment. Later the brief assumption of the centre into the County Council's Adult Learning Service saw the restriction of drop-in facilities in favour of delivering fee-paid courses from a limited menu of approved courses.

Ultimately the common-sense of the self has to be asserted in two ways. Even though the myth of the individual's relationship with the state and formal education is presumed to be based on a common-sense unitary self with a physical substrate, the state tries to reduce this common-sense self to models and profiles. None the less the individual is still required to negotiate their relationship with power. And, related to the position of the common-sense self with respect to power and authority, the complexity of each person's particular circumstances and motivations very quickly becomes so great, that a sense of uniqueness pervades our relationships with the world.

6.4 Affect

Early on in the analysis of the life stories and focus groups, it became apparent that people's feelings were an important factor in their engagement with the community IT centre and their use of computers generally. Recent studies are beginning to provide more support for this observation. As Heather Hodgkinson has observed: "Emotions are a significant but often neglected part of a person's dispositions, and their dispositions influence and are influenced by learning." (Hodgkinson 2008, p.4)

6.4.1 Feelings cannot be reduced to an institution

According to Grattan, "... 'emotion' is a crucial ingredient in relation to the defence and maintenance of Identity and community." (Grattan 2007, p.93) Affective factors are, however, hard to fit into an Activity-Theoretical framework. In one sense they could be seen among the "rules" that shape people's engagement, but it is hard to reduce emotion to an institution. Some affective factors do show an institutional quality: love is frequently discussed as an institution, and different cultural conceptions of love are the stuff of daily newspapers. However, here, I

am more interested in the embodied viscosity of affect: feelings in a more immediate sense of pain and pleasure; feelings that have some physiological correlative; feelings that reinforce the common sense of the self; feelings that are difficult to deny; feelings that are *mine* (or someone's): I might not be able to explain it, but I know how (or that) I feel. Affect is one of the strongest factors reinforcing the common sense of the self and attaching the Cartesian I/me to my body.

Different aspects of a person's identity can show very different degrees of tolerance to feelings – as acknowledged by Philippe when talking about separation from his family. Not only does Philippe separate himself from his family, in order to survive in the academic environment, he needs to “separate” himself time and again, taking on one aspect of his self and then putting it off:

Family separation is one hell of an experience, you know, tears, kind of tears the fabrics apart but you have to remain very strong in your mind to withstand that. And on top of that you have to deal with the issues of the day and deal with the issues here, domestic issues here, academic issues there, yeah, and you're stressed and you have to be able to separate yourself, you know, after the emotional whatever, in the evening, over the phone, sleep and wake up in the morning 5 or 6, revise and start lecture at 8. And then stay there until 8, 9, they close the library, come back because that was the only time I had for myself, from 8 to 9, then come back and deal with the emotions of the day, you know whatever, went to eat food, what happened here, my wife relayed that to me and I had to sometimes during the day, I had to stop after some lectures and deal with the issues over the phone, write here, phone there, deal with that and then separate myself again. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

In extremis, feelings can reduce us to one core: a core that might be theorised to be only one part of a complex individual, but, in the midst of the feeling self, the other parts are mere aspects: in the feelings of the moment, theory folds. Drug use, for example, can serve to unify the person around an affective core, though the ecstatic can lead literally to self-destruction:

There was a big influx of heroin and crack so use escalated, relationship breakdowns, the personal hygiene, you know the isolation, homelessness, you know the suicidal tendencies, all flushed in at once and I ended up going away again. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

As Jamie comes out from some of his more difficult issues, he begins to see that his identity is actually healthier for having more than one dimension. He can examine parts of his makeup that lead to less happiness for him and those around him:

I'm trying, I am bloody trying my bloody hardest at every angle of my life. And it's easy for me now, you know like the suicidal tendencies you know the depression and you know, believe me they've come through this smelling of roses, you know there's underlying issues there, you know I'm recognising them and working with them. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

He also sees a generational effect: his life recapitulating that of his father.

You know my father's been in a state where he's been trying to kill himself slowly all his life through guilt and so you know as a child I had to watch that and be careful that I don't take the same steps as him because the good qualities that he's got, you know I've got part of them. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

6.4.2 Groups of affective factors

In understanding that his identity has multiple aspects and that these aspects have different affective signatures Jamie appears to be gaining some control over them. We can observe that the common-sense of the self allows for an identity of multiple components, but perhaps does expect that all these might, with sufficient reflection, become knowable.

There appear to be four groups of affective factors that have shaped people's use of and engagement with the community IT centre. First is people's affection for the community itself. Second, people's history of education and particularly their early experience of school has a lasting emotional effect, as Hodgkinson (2008) has noted. The third group of affective factors that appear to be important in these stories is feelings for computers. These may be positive or negative. The final group of factors that appear to be important is desire for acceptance or social inclusion at a very local level.

6.4.3 Affection for the community itself

Affection for Bluefield Lanes is a notable feature of some narratives. Marie, who has moved onto the estate from elsewhere observes:

I've got to know people and formed friendships where I live which is brilliant and it allows us to tap into the whole kind of community spirit of the Lanes which is you know, much more so than anywhere else I've ever lived so I'd say that was the real upside or the biggest upside of living here. And that's something that's really important to me and I kind of looked for in another places and not really found it. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

For Haidar, the estate's location on the edge of the city is a positive advantage and contributes to his feelings for the place:

Actually the fields are very local as well so it's like the English countryside is five minutes away. People don't understand, you come to Bluefield Lanes, that, but you know, Bluefield Lanes has its good and has its ups and downs you know, it's what you want out of Bluefield Lanes. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

But, in the first focus group, when people were together this affection for the locale emerged strongly:

Jo: *Where I used to live it was all about cliques. It was all about fitting in with certain people there. But, coming to Bluefield Lanes, everyone just got on with everyone. Everyone had a sense of belonging. You weren't just the white person or the black person. You weren't the older person or the younger person. You were all together, all united. I had a strong sense of belonging after moving to Bluefield Lanes. I made really strong friendships and I still have them. And, I keep making more friendships through, thing, here. I can walk from my house up to the shops and I am sure I'll meet several people on the way that I either know or are just passing acquaintances.*

Rosa: *People just greet each other.*

Alan: *How long did it take? From the time you moved into your ..*

Jo: *I moved here when my daughter was two. And, then went to the family centre when I've been here seven years. It took me a year to really get to know people. And, it's my best friend now that actually took me up to the family centre. We started talking at the bus stop because we lived near each other. So maybe it's not just the family centre that gave me that energy and that. I think its Bluefield Lanes. That's when I became more energised. Moving up here. Coming away from what I'd always been brought up with, to coming here, where, you know I've got that sense of belonging and my child's the happiest I think she'll ever be.*

Jean: *That's good, because they tend to give this estate such a bad name and a lot of people are afraid to come onto Bluefield Lanes. Because they say where do you live and you say Bluefield Lanes and they: aowwooh, how can you live up there.*

Matt: *It's a great place.*

[... general assent ...]

Jo: *Coming from where I lived until the age of 18 - 19 years old. Never felt belonging .. that sense of belonging. Living up here from when my daughter was three until the present day, I just keep on improving on myself.*

Sandra: *Like you were saying, Like you were saying about walking up the street you can walk from one place to another. I think that everyone can say that. You're bound to run into someone you know and even if you don't know they'll all say hello. you know what I mean..*

Jo: *Because it is just a face you know.*

Rosa: *If you go to other areas you don't really get that. People hate that. People in Bluefield Lanes and the new estate, because we are such a large community in ourselves and what we have here you don't get in other places. (2008-08-01FG1Part1transcript)*

6.4.4 Affective response to learning

The lasting effect of school experiences on people's affective response to learning is a clear feature of many of the narratives. While the community IT centre has not tried to position itself as exclusively a site of educational engagement, the persistent triad of computers, learning and work creates an educational ambience that pervades the life of the centre. Consequently, people associate much of what goes on at the centre as being in some way educational. My role is also unintentionally influential in this way. I am known as that guy from the local university; I have run some courses and offered one-to-one tuition; and people know that I am working towards a PhD. Therefore, people's educational background and the emotional burden they carry from that comes very quickly to the fore.

Patricia and Alexandra each had high academic potential, which was scarred by an antipathy to school.

I had a bit of school phobia. I used to have panic attacks and not go into classrooms. I didn't do really well when I was at school. (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

I did very well academically but from age about ten onwards I was deeply deeply unhappy at school, so I had sort of mixed educational experiences to start off with.
(2008-07-29Patricia-transcript)

Each found their way to the IT centre by way of the community newspaper. Through the community IT centre they each developed roles that were satisfying and useful. But their family backgrounds and the roles they assumed were quite different. For Alexandra, the community IT centre became a transformative place and the role she found, as an outreach worker, led to both professional and academic development. Patricia finds the centre a place where she can practice as an occasional community education tutor at a pace that suits her, working with people who care to learn and who value her contribution. But, this role gives her time to practice as an artist.

Catherine did not have such a hard time, but neither is her account of her school days filled with joy.

I went to an all-girls school. Could not stand it. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

For Robert, similarly, his school days were chaotic. After he lost his parents he moved around between relations and ended up in care.

I haven't worked out how many schools I went to. It was a bit of a confusing time. I often think its strange I haven't ended up a raving psycho. I may have done. I don't know. I mean there were awful teachers. (2009-03-31RobertRnd2)

However in contrast to Patricia and Alexandra, Catherine has not talked about lasting emotional impacts from her school days and Robert, too, does not speak of being held back or otherwise adversely affected by his schooling.

But in contrast, for Sandra:

I totally loved school. I was really popular. So, my overall experience of school was really, really good. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

In fact for Sandra, there is a golden age in her narrative extending from her late school days through the immediately post-school years of pubs, clubs, work and play.

Through working with my friends and socialising, I kind of got in to the nightclub and pub scene so I left that and started working in pubs and that and done that for quite a few years, even up until now. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

It is not until later, as an adult learner in university that her love of education sours. Initially she enters an Access IT course to learn about computers. She enjoyed this course, too. On it, she is readily susceptible to her tutor's encouragements to go to university.

I kind of done it purely to learn about computers and then within weeks of being at college my tutor had said "Apply for university", and blah de blah and I was just like "No, university's not for me, no one in my family's ever been to university, no, I don't think I will", and she kind of said "Just apply for it, just for the sake of applying for it", so I thought "Do you know what, there's no harm in applying for university, I'll just do it just for the sake of doing it". (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

But university was a stumbling block. In university the pleasure came to an end.

I didn't really enjoy university purely a kind of, the reason why I didn't, I had to be really strict with myself, the fact that I was a parent, the fact that I was working and the fact that I was studying you know. ... Let me go back to the other reason why I didn't enjoy university, because I was quite disciplined with my time and getting my son from A to B, one of the things I didn't like about university was that we had to do, quite a lot of group work and I, we ended up carrying a lot of people. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

There is a similar account in Shona's story, but it is expressed as anger..

I didn't go on to do my third year because I had too much stuff going on. But, one time I was saying to my tutor about how I was finding the whole thing hard. And, he said, "I remember when I was third year and I used to bounce my daughter on my knee and I'd be typing my essay at the same time". And, the thing that pissed me off about it was like, yeah, but you had your wife to take that child whenever you'd had it. You know, I didn't have that luxury, being a single parent. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

The consequences of a negative affective experience of school continue to reverberate through a person's life and influences later engagement. Negative early experiences may not necessarily produce a negative affective response to later educational engagement. Similarly, early positive experience of school does not necessarily lead to positive experiences of later education. Feelings about school lie like a long shadow on people's lives.

6.4.5 Feelings about computers

Feelings about computers are another key affective dimension that has had some influence on people's engagement with the centre. This can be observed on a one-to-one basis with individuals and with some participants on courses. Alexandra, Robert and Angela come right out and admit fear:

I first started there they asked me to make some labels on the computer and the computer was a really scary thing in the hall there (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

I can remember being frightened by computers, not very many years ago. I can remember seeing people on TV using them, in drama or in documentaries or whatever, and it being a mixture of fear and an envy that they were using a computer and I wasn't. (2008-11-10Robert-transcript)

Robert and Alexandra have both completely overcome their fear about computers and have each become highly competent users. Alexandra trains people in their use and even, from time to time, catches herself having a "gadget conversation". Angela on the other hand is not yet over her anxiety.

I've got a computer, a printer and a digital camera and at the minute it is like sort of technology overload. I know that once I get my head around it, it will be ok. But I have this sort of fear at the minute (2009-06-03AngelaRnd2)

Feelings about computers are not all negative. For Sandra it has almost been love at first sight.

Yeah, and I love it, she showed me how to use it and ever since then I just love it (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

And Robert is delighted with his new netbook:

I've just bought, this Minibook, I'm delighted (laughs) with it. (2008-11-10Robert-transcript)

6.4.6 Desire for acceptance or social inclusion at a very local level

I compared Robert and Marie's reasons for using the centre as a place to write (section 6.3.1). Robert was not particularly interested in the community aspects of the centre, though he recognises the centre as a community good and he understands that others do get more out of this aspect than he does. Marie's perspective on the centre is quite different. She does use the available tools for writing, but people's roles are not only those of helpers:

So you know nice, friendly faces there and that's important to me and [the manager] obviously a great, you know, chatty, sardonic kind of bloke and [Sandra] good fun and yeah I've really made some friends up there which again has been really, really nice, an important part of me of feeling, what's the word, sort of culturally accepted. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

Marie has used the community IT centre as a means – one of many – of engineering her cultural acceptance into the community. Like Robert, her domestic circumstances did have some influence on her use of the community IT centre, but she could have gotten Internet access at home if she had wanted to.

I do think going to the IT Centre a lot and hanging out there and chatting to people, people just kind of see me as me, rather than, you know, sort of a very middle class kind of person wandering round the estate. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

Alexandra talks about her own feelings of acceptance by the community, reinforcing the importance of feelings in determining appropriate action:

I felt accepted at the IT centre even with my differences. It was a place where people accepted and supported people for having their differences. Far much more than the other world that I went to afterwards: the Library. There was a way you needed to be and anyone who didn't fit in was completely unsupported and unwelcome... (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt1)

And this sense of acceptance is echoed in focus group discussions:

Jo: Her first experience was going back again to that community spirit thing, the belonging, the feeling of being welcomed by the people here. Staff and other people using the facility.

Jean: They didn't make you feel unwanted or unwelcome. They made you feel welcomed and all just got on with it. It was nice when we could all just have a little chat.
(2008-08-01FG1Part2transcript)

Most of the participants, in various ways have used the community IT centre as a means to increase their acceptance in a community. For Alexandra, Sandra and Patricia this had a professional dimension; working in a community context is important to them. Catherine, Angela and Haidar have used it as a place to help make the transition from early to later parenthood, finding the centre a place for “civilised” adult company. Marie has found the community IT centre as one node among many that have helped her to become and to be supported as a single parent. Shona and Angela use the centre as a place of safety on the Internet. For Jamie it is a place that is allowing him to transform his local (well known) identity from that of a young man with a chaotic life to a more settled person with a lot to offer; the community IT centre is something he can now give back to others. Only Robert and Philippe have not particularly sought closer ties of their own with the community through the community IT centre, although they have both acknowledged the beneficial impact on the community by the centre.

6.5 Reading the common sense of the self

A Third Space reading of the common-sense of the self would affirm that there is a widely shared understanding of the self. A part of this shared understanding of the self is that all selves are to some extent vulnerable, occasionally given to existential doubt, identity crises, even depression. On the positive side, such an understanding combined with an empathetic principle might contribute to treating one another with due care and attention not to impact adversely on this vulnerability. Accepting that we all are to some extent this common-sense self, recorded and inscribed by outside agencies of social control, enables us to know something of the common experience of humanity. On another side, such a common-sense understanding might limit our critical faculties and cause us to be more accepting of harmful ideologies than we might be if we had a more fluid understanding of the workings of the self and identity. The common-sense of the self may be to some extent intentionally manufactured and maintained by interests of the powerful. The common-sense of the self governs all the policy apparatus of education. Education works with other information sharing partners of government through a dual process of record-keeping and inscription. The maintenance of the common-sense of the

self allows appeals to the vulnerability of this self for the purposes of exploiting it, for labour directly or for some of the surplus value of labour.

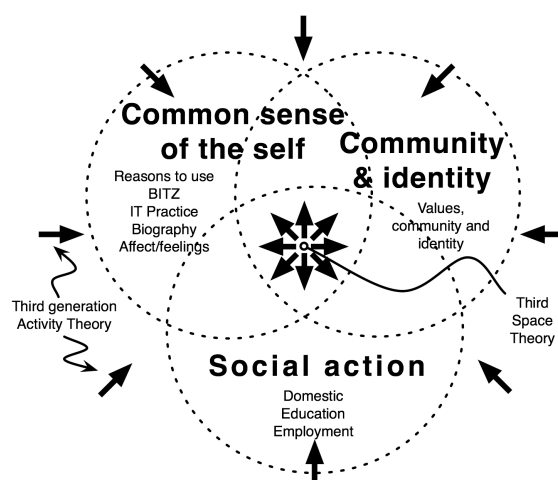


Figure 6.6 The common-sense of the self in the framework

This common-sense of the self in the framework (figure 6.6) could be seen as the institution of the individual, having a similar force and influence on us as the great social institutions.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have made very specific and local contributions to knowledge about what these people do with this community IT centre (CITC) and answered research question two. This has allowed me to observe that people's relationship with computers is not particularly strong. Computers are not fetishised nor do they form an important aspect of participants identity. I have also discovered that people's assertions about why they use the CITC does not clearly align with their actions while they are there. They express a broad and not necessarily consistent range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for using the centre. I have discovered that the centre is a very complex activity system diffused through people's lives in many different ways. While people are interested in learning, I have discovered that they are not interested in qualifications. This issue will be further discussed in the following chapter (Ch 7, section 7.3.3). I have discovered that affective factors are extremely significant in determining people's engagement with the CITC and their use of computers generally.

Finally, I have discovered that a common sense of the self is a productive and useful unit of analysis, and that this common sense of the self as the subject of a personal activity system (see Ch 8, section 8.4.1) might be described as the institution of the individual. However this personal institution of the individual is, itself, a complex notion. The different stories and

perspectives of the participants in this study reveal extensive hybridisation in respect of many factors including: nationality (see particularly Shona's, Philippe's and Jamie's life stories and Jean in the first focus group), occupation, domesticity (Jamie), social class (particularly, Marie, Shona and Philippe), locale/neighbourhood identity (Sandra), and expectations of outcomes in their life course.

In the next chapter I will turn away from this common-sense of the self, or its institution, to look at three other great institutions of society: home, school and work.

Chapter 7 The sphere of social action

7.1 Introduction: the institutions of society

In this chapter I address the factors that shape people's use of and engagement with the community IT centre (RQ3). The discussion is oriented around the sphere of social action (figure 7.1). I consider the influence of three great institutions of society and how they contribute to shaping people's use of the community IT centre: domestic factors, education, and employment or other act of public social and cultural engagement. These might be summarised as: family, school and work. This sometimes involves unweaving complex narratives where work, family and education are intertwined.

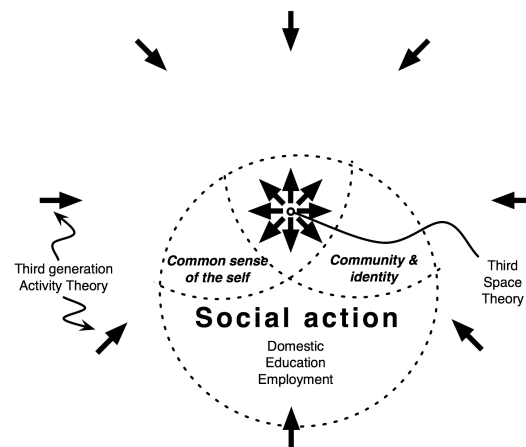


Figure 7.1 Sphere of social action

As Scollon (2001) puts it, social action is:

... the person or persons in the moment of taking an action along with the mediational means which are used by them...

[S]ocial action is based in habitus and habitus is the aggregation of history in concrete sociocultural circumstances...

[S]ocial action implies a common or shared system of meaning. To be social an action must be communicated. (Scollon 2001, pp. 6-7)

He goes on to say that, "The production of meanings is mediated by a very wide range of mediational means or cultural tools such as language, gesture, material objects and *institutions* which are carriers of their sociocultural histories." (p. 7, my emphasis)

But if there are the overt reasons for using the community IT centre (see Ch 6, section 6.2.1) , and if the institution of the individual or common-sense of the self in part shapes use, what other factors might be involved in shaping people's association with the community IT centre? Through coding the life stories, interviews and focus groups three broad factors or modes emerged as having particular importance for people: domestic, education and work.

Mode	note: alphabetical listing of nodes
domestic	abuse, child care, distance, domestic harmony, domestic violence, fatherhood, home life, homelessness, lone parent, nurturing, parental expectation, suicide
education	access barriers, access routes, cost, distance learning, education a luxury, informal learning, learning champions, learning styles, mature student, mentoring, parental expectation, PCDL, purely to learn, qualifications, reasons to go into education, school, short courses, subjects, teachers, tertiary, training scheme, workshops
work	career, disciplinary action, experience, job seeking, job type (30 listed), management, need to earn a living, own business, part time, professional behaviour, reason to leave, routes in, social enterprise, unemployed, workplace

Figure 7.2 Social action coding factors

This should not be surprising. These are three of the great institutions of cultural reproduction. While in chapter six there is a strong sense of individuals who have a certain autonomy, in this chapter we see the individual as very much a product of times, places and communities, whose actions are often unconsciously shaped by the workings of society through institutions.

In an Activity-Theoretical reading of these institutions, domestic, educational and employment represent the “rules” by which people undertake the use of “tools” in pursuit of some goal or object: the codifications and norms that circumscribe the mediational means, and the objects of their use. These “rules”: the rule of the home, the rule of school and the rule of work are in dialogue with each other, with the individual “actor” – the person, and with the community or communities within which the person does things.

From a Third Space perspective, it is from such institutions that the imagined community of the (mythic originary) culture is built and upon which an edifice of identity politics might be raised – if only to be continuously undone by the ever-hybridising present, as multiple origins compete for the identity of the individual, as the individual struggles for inclusion in a continuously emergent cosmopolitanism, and the scripts of the community continuously reframe contexts around us.

7.2 Domestic factors

7.2.1 Lone parents

One of the powerful frames that can circumscribe people is their status as a parent, and the particular impact of being a parent who is not one half of a dyad: a single or lone parent. Sandra introduces herself as a “single parent” and hastily corrects herself:

I’m a single parent, sorry, a lone parent.

She then goes on to describe the signal moment in her own consciousness-raising (conscienceization as Freire might put it), when her tutor convinced her to apply for university:

... so I said, “Oh there’s no point in me applying for university, I’m just a single parent.” And she kind of said, “You’re not just a single parent you know, you’ve got all these skills, all the stuff that you do on a daily basis that you can go and apply to a job: managing your money, managing your time, just kind of usual household stuff that you do everyday.” I mean they are skills but I kind of saw it in a different light when she explained it to me. (2008-07-24 Sandra-transcript)

But, whatever term might be used, being a parent without a partner has social ramifications. Alexandra shares her direct experience of the way lone parenthood can be framed by society:

The whole single parent thing really affects you. How schools talk to you. The school still calls me Mrs It can be really awkward. I feel really judged by the school. I think they have a low expectation of parents. You know how you always hear about schools having a low expectation of their students, I think schools have a really low expectation of the parents. It makes you feel really awful when you go in there. (2009-03-19 AlexandraRnd2pt1)

But there is not only the negative aspect of single parenthood. People will bend rules as far as they can in order to achieve what they will for and because of children. Alexandra took a voluntary placement with an organisation because it provided childcare and proceeded to maximise her use of this facility:

So well anyway so I spent the whole of this organisation's funding on child care. (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

As Sandra came to understand, the coping strategies adopted by lone parents can be seen as transferrable skills with applicability beyond the domestic sphere. She makes the best of the time she has to feed her family, getting up at five in the morning to prepare the evening meal (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript).

For Marie becoming and being a single parent (her phrase) is fundamental to her decision to move to Bluefields, and is a big factor behind her use of the IT centre.

My long-term partner changed his mind about having children and I left him and sort of got to that point where I was either going to do it on my own or not do it so I decided to do it and you're [speaking to the baby] the happy outcome. ... I was very fortunate really, particularly at my age being able to do that. So yeah, and I kind of achieved it by having a bit of a relationship with a private sperm donor but it's sort of an unusual story really so I thought well, I'm going to write it, I'm sure about all the ethics of it, I'm not sure about whether I put my name on it but I've sort of written it for my own purpose, it's ended up being a book and you know, as I say, if I can find a publisher I'm thinking about publishing it because it's the kind of book I would have liked to have read, you know, if I three years ago sort of thing when I was you know, actively considering it. I know there's an awful lot of women particularly out there sort of thinking about, doing it on the private, you know it's quite a sort of, well maybe less taboo subject now than it used to be but it's still fairly taboo so... And I've been very out about it because that's the sort of person I am and you know I don't feel I have something to be ashamed of. So yeah, so that's sort of the other thing I've been doing at the IT Centre and for obvious reasons I didn't really want to be... and I wrote some of the book at work when it was quiet but I thought, you know it's a good thing to keep it fairly separate from work, didn't really want to... everyone knowing about it at the time. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

Haidar is very direct about his own lone-parent status. With his gender and his ethnic background it is the first of the points he makes in his life story:

I'm a male, Asian and I'm a single parent with a single daughter, she is now 12 years of age and I've come to live in Bluefield Lanes since I have become a single parent eleven years ago. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

This emerges as an important factor in his use of the IT centre. Haidar is very assertive, displaying strength, but some vulnerability does appear. At the IT centre he meets people in similar positions to his own. It is a place where he can gather himself and find both emotional as well as informational support.

This IT Centre is also like a safe haven for me, where I can come and maybe talk to someone about my problems or maybe, because I've been, oh, this is, also because I'm a single parent with the maternal family actually making an application for contact order. I've been able to get information from the computer, on the pc also, using the resources like I can. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

7.2.2 Parenthood in general

But it is not only the singleness of Haidar's parenthood that is important. Throughout his story, his parenthood itself is one of its defining features. Much of what he does, he does for his daughter: teaching assistant, weekend homework together, protecting her from the antisocial elements of society. He is offered formal work as a teaching assistant and someone suggests that he train as a teacher. His response is that teachers do not always appear to him as good parents.

I found that a lot of the teachers had a problem with their own children, they forget (laughs) their own children (laughs). (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

For Haidar being a good parent to his own child is more important than taking on a social role of working with children, despite what would appear to be an aptitude for it.

For many participants, the community IT centre does not only provide an exemplary and safe location for the socialisation of children, it also provides a place to get away from the kids. As was reported in chapter six, Angela and Catherine have both used the community IT centre as a place to assert their individual adult identity as their parental ties loosen while children grow up (Ch. 6, section 6.3.4).

7.2.3 Parental expectation

As well as being a parent, parental expectation continues to be an important factor in people's life stories, both the influence of their parents as well as their expectations for their children. Philippe, although in his late 30s is still very strongly motivated by his relationship to a high-achieving father. Patricia, although the first in her family to do a degree was raised in a culture both domestic and educational that clearly expected her to go to university.

It was the culture in that school as much as my parents. (2008-07-29Patricia-transcript)

I remember I wanted to leave school at 16 and they said that if you leave school you are going to end up in a rubbish job you hate and we're not going to support you. So that was, kind of, you have to go to FE college or stay on at school. So, that's pretty coercive at that point. And I remember my mum saying that if you want to be a drop out you are better off dropping out after university (2009-06-05PatriciaRnd2)

Similarly, Sandra was the first of her line to go to university but there was no pressure and no expectation:

it wasn't so much telling my mum but I remember telling my Nan, that's my dad's mum, telling my Nan that I'd got a place at university and she actually cried that day and she was so proud, really proud as punch, like I said I was the first one, the first one in the family to actually go to university. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

For Shona, the sense of expectation didn't come directly from her parents, but from her uncle:

Dad was a metal analyst. Physics, engineering kind of thing. I left school and went into hair dressing. That was when I discovered that my uncle had expectations of me. But my dad never really... My uncle was a computer person: IT stuff. Worked in IT department of a hospital in London. (2009-03-05ShonaRnd2)

And Catherine felt supported, not pressured by two parents with degrees and professional qualifications:

No pressure whatsoever. They wanted me to do what I was interested in. They didn't press to sit down and do your homework. They didn't put reins on me but at the same

time they were very supportive of me doing what I wanted to do. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

But, Shona, who was influenced by her uncle, clearly has expectations for her children:

What kind of expectation do you have for your children? A lot! [laughs] I have a lot. (2009-03-05ShonaRnd2)

7.2.4 The Internet at home

Another domestic factor that is extremely important for some people is a reluctance to be connected to the Internet at home (Ch 2, section 2.4.7). In several of the stories recorded through this study, we see competent computer users who have a computer but won't attach it to the Internet at home. There is technical anxiety expressed about being able to control the Internet and its agents well enough to protect children.

I think one of the reasons I am a bit reluctant to get a computer and the Internet at home is because I'm not that clued up about it myself and therefore wouldn't know how to put certain things on there to make sure that my kids couldn't access certain things. So, for me it's kind of like, I'm not that good. We'll just come down here where people know what they're doing. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

And, this anxiety may be reinforced by a lived experience of child abuse and suicide (2009-06-03AngelaRnd2).

This reluctance to let the Internet into the home is seen in the stories of Angela, Catherine, Haidar and Shona. For Marie it was the confusion of communication marketing ploys and expiring contracts coincident upon the birth of her daughter. There may, for some, be an element of post-hoc justification of not being able to afford the Internet. Certainly Haidar's, Jamie's and Robert's lack of service at home is partly financial. But, there is an indication that for some people having the Internet at home is not desired, even if it were free and well supported. Others, of course (Sandra, Alexandra) were wired up at home. Sandra mentioned spending too much time on the Internet. She has understood for a while that her identity is in part woven through her IT practices: the Sims, gaming, phones, messaging, professional IT skills, Internet, email, poster design and print.

7.2.5 The “outlaws”

Other domestic arrangements might be more problematic, influencing many parts of a person’s life. Shona’s brother is in prison and her son has “anger management issues”.

Jamie, moved among domestic networks of what might be termed a latter-day borderers’ culture. While staying with his sister in another county after a domestic breakdown, he raided his sister’s friend’s drugs stash. The sister and the friend (another woman) arranged for him to be arrested for theft for which he had to “go guilty”, leading to a time in prison in another county, where he was subjected to bullying for being from elsewhere. Later:

I let a couple of yardies move into my room upstairs, you know they were involved in a shooting... which put the scares up me a little bit. (2008-11-06 Jamie-transcript)

7.3 Education

Education exerts a powerful and quite explicit mediating influence on people’s stories. This study has taken place in a broadly educational context. The community IT centre is largely, though not exclusively, framed by an educational ambience. The centre does offer courses and rents itself out from time to time to other course providers. The second focus group was composed of people who had taken courses at the centre. Other educational practices will be embedded in the proximal practices and policy utterances which have influenced people’s experience of IT. People associate computers strongly with education and work, either explicitly as objects on which to practice their technical skills (Haidar) or implicitly as tools for work and learning (Ch 7, section 7.3.5). Moreover, as the funding for the centre comes either directly from some educational apparatus (e.g. Adult Learning Service, LearnDirect) or from an economic initiative with a workforce development mission to provide skills for work (e.g. the RDA Learning Communities project, Yarnit 2008), there is an explicit and formalised educational mission that is never far beneath the surface of the daily life of the centre.

7.3.1 Impact of education on personal identity

As we have seen, education is tightly woven into the domestic texture. There is considerable overlapping of the influence of social institutions on identity and community. Education of itself is hugely important to the people who have participated in this study. However, this is a problematic situation. It is impossible to know how education might have appeared if the study could have been framed differently. The persistent linking of computers, learning and work creates a pervasive educationalised ambience (Ch 5 section 5.3.4). The impact of education on personal identity is so infused with notions of social position, social and cultural capital that

even without triangulation between “rules” of work and the home, the Third Space in respect of education, even as simplistically as behind-the-bikeshed, is a persistent retreat as well as source of strength for people (Levy 2008).

7.3.2 Education and power

As with all social practice, community IT practices participate in the on-going discourses of emancipation and subordination. Through information technologies, the frontiers of education are made extremely permeable, and the most disputed frontier is the one that separates education from the field of power (Bourdieu 1993, p.42). For Bourdieu, the discourses of the education system can be understood, “... as a field of competition for the legitimate exercise of symbolic violence,” that is a locus of conflict between rival principles of legitimacy and competition for the power to grant cultural consecration (Bourdieu 1993, p.121). It is also a system for reproducing actors who are both producers of certain cultural goods as well consumers of those goods. As colonial markets were sometimes used as dumping grounds for shoddy manufactured goods, so too can we see news of substandard educational “products” being dumped on minoritarian communities by “tricksters” (BBC News 2001).

7.3.3 Rich conceptions of education and qualifications

The steps of the argument can be presented in various sequences, but the elements are consistent: computers are largely about education and work; other uses may be considered in policy frivolous. The social provision of computers is for the purpose of preparing people for work. But, the people’s purposes in using the IT centre are only in part, if at all, about work.

There are rich conceptions of education: of formal and informal learning, the role of qualifications and the importance of peer learning and support. It would be safe to say that no participant has a monolithic view of the importance of qualifications.

Shona acquires the belief that she needs qualifications to get a job.

I was about 21 that I actually started getting involved in youth and community work and the big emphasis at those times was getting qualified. People kept telling me that I am not going to get a good job, I’m going to need to get qualifications if I want a job (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

But soon finds it is not as simple as that.

It just wasn't happening. I see people without qualifications getting jobs. I've done my two years of college and two years of university. I've got my qualifications. I can't get employment. What am I doing wrong? What's going on? Why aren't I getting any work? Talking to people they're saying to me it's because you're not putting yourself out there. You're not applying for the jobs so you can't really complain about that. And, I suppose that in one sense that is true, but at the same time because of this whole friends thing what's the point of applying anyway? Certain jobs have already been earmarked for somebody else. (2009-03-05ShonaRnd2)

While she as much as admits that there is an element of truth to the suggestion that she is not putting herself out there, there is also the recognition that qualifications alone are not enough. Philippe's story, too illustrates the principle that qualifications are not everything when it comes to getting work. After completing his Scottish MA:

I never had even an offer an interview. So I said to myself, maybe you haven't got what they'd expected you to get. Go all the way, you know get a PhD, maybe then you'll find a job. So, I said to myself, after the MA look into the possibilities of going for an MSc and PHD. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

When he did, after five years of very hard work, complete his MSc, with distinction:

I was just beyond belief, I was just beyond belief! I was working at the counter at the local Post Office - that was another means of surviving - and it was two in the afternoon. I just got to my afternoon shift, picked up my phone and that was my tutor's voice. I just threw my mobile phone and say, I'm done! You know? I'm done! So I am going to graduate with an overall distinction because when I did my calculation I had to have 80 to push me to 70; 83 got me straight. I was ever so pleased with myself and the lady manager said, would you like to take the afternoon off? I said, I can't afford it. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

7.3.4 Formal and informal education

Shona has quite an antipathy towards formal educational practice:

With formal learning you come across people who think they are experts. They don't think they can learn from their students. They do not see it as a two-way thing. Formal education makes people feel inferior. Informal learning is more friendly, more learning

from each other. Participatory learning is all based on our personal experience. (2009-03-05ShonaRnd2)

However she wouldn't want to do away all together with traditional courses, but she is concerned that if too many courses are run, the open, informal, social-learning function is compromised, "if we have too many courses, no more drop-ins." Catherine has a similar perception of formal learning:

Formal learning is from school. You sit down, write what's on the blackboard. The IT course [at the community IT centre], the teacher let you progress at your own level. I was surprised at how much I did know. It all depends on your views. Learning is learning. It doesn't need a tuxedo. There should be a mix. If you are strict people wouldn't come in. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

Jamie clearly draws a distinction between qualifications and courses: "Formal is the courses, whether or not it heads to a qualifications, because of the structuredness." And, he challenges the need for formal education – for everyone – at a very basic level:

Education can be a burden to some people. In this diverse world now you can have no qualifications, you know, nothing and you can be the happiest person. I've worked with many people who haven't got what you would call a great lot. But out of all of them every door open. (2009-06-02JamieRnd2)

There is clearly value, shared by many participants, in informal or semi-formal learning opportunities. Robert observes:

Formal learning would be in one respect structured classes, actual course of work, which obviously they do here in very many ways and informal learning would be non course work, surfing the net. I think a mixture is important: not just the one thing: formal learning or informal learning. Because, of course, if it is just devoted to formal learning in itself you are going to perhaps alienate people. Whereas if you have a mixture of things, a mixture of social gatherings a mixture of fun things, you know, get people into the community centre on the simplest level. (2009-03-31RobertRnd2)

7.3.5 Protracted and purposive relationships

For everyone engaged in this study, education history is protracted:

Like I said, I went to college and university and when I started college my son was only four months old so. He's just trying to get a job now. Paid. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

And, education is not only chronologically linked to work in people's life trajectories. As there was a link between the domestic field and the field of education, so too is there a link between education and work. And, like education, it is impossible to know how work might appear if this study could be framed differently.

7.4 Employment

As with education, work is a problematic area of concern, not the least because unemployment and associated cultural practices such as living on benefits are widespread on the estate and its quadrant of the city. However, one of the observations that can be made when reading the transcripts is the number of different jobs that have been done by the participants in this study. At least 27 different occupations were mentioned by the participants (see figure 7.3). All of the participants had had more than one job; and, to note the obvious corollary, none had been permanently unemployed since leaving school. Of the participants, at the time of the study four were more or less unemployed Jamie, Haidar, Shona and Robert. However, this is not to suggest that they were in any way un-occupied. Jamie was engaged in setting up a small business as a boxing coach, Haidar and Shona were full-time lone-parent carers of their children and Robert was between jobs as a film extra and actively engaged on several writing projects. Philippe was employed, but in a low-paid job unrelated to his qualifications. Five of the participants were working either full or part time in occupations for which they were qualified and in each case had worked hard to achieve. One was on maternity leave.

Jobs		
administrator	electro-mechanical engineer	nurse
alumni relations	factory work	post office clerk
bar work	fast food	publishing
call centre	film extra	receptionist
care worker	hairdressing	rehab support worker
child-care	hospital porter	secretary
cleaner	housing association	teaching assistant
community outreach	insurance	television repair
counsellor	journalist	youth & community work

Figure 7.3 Jobs done by the participants in the study

7.4.1 Qualifications and work

The relationship between qualifications and work is ambiguous. Catherine, for example, might illustrate the issue that has Shona so vexed. Qualifications are important, but they are by no means all. Catherine had worked in catering and was forced out of a job, with which she was familiar and at which she was competent, because she did not have the required qualification. Later she qualified as a Nursery Nurse at another community learning centre on the Estate. Because she had the qualification she found her personal connections: social capital, as important:

I did my level one over at [another community education centre]. Then they said they had a level two course so I said I'll do that. I passed that. I didn't know about the Kids on Wheels at that time. I was at home and I had a phone call from a friend of mine, who does the drop in Monday, Tuesdays, Thursday and Friday in the [family centre]. They have a really nice set-up room where its like all young parents and young kids under five: kiddy club. My now boss came down and asked my friend whether she knew of any people who wanted to do crèche work. So then she phoned me up. I went there. Went upstairs. I didn't have like even a formal interview. It was like, do you want to work with us? Yes, I would, thank you very much – sign this piece of paper – see you tomorrow. (2009-06-04CatherineRnd2)

Shona and Philippe have similar experiences to one another, which stand in contrast to Catherine's experience. Both are well qualified in their fields, but neither has been able to find a job in the areas for which they are qualified. For Alexandra the path to qualifications has, on the other hand, been led by the jobs that she is doing. From getting basic qualifications in administration, she moved into doing community development work. Only after becoming a community development worker has she explicitly sought qualifications in that field. At the time of the study she was undertaking a Foundation Degree in Community Development. Subsequently she has moved on to study at level 7 (MA) while working as a community development officer for a local housing association.

7.4.2 Occupational identity

Set against the number of occupations and the precarity of some of the jobs held by the participants, an over-riding sentiment, as expressed by Sandra, was the aim that work be somehow important and meaningful:

I mean I still had ambitions, I still wanted to get a job and I eventually wanted to get a job that I would enjoy doing, I didn't want to get a job just so I could pay my bills.

(2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

For all the participants in the study, occupational identity was an important feature of their stories.

For Alexandra, the identity of *someone-with-a-job* was crucial. Initially the drive simply to have a job drove her to struggle to attain skills and qualifications. However having gotten several low-level office jobs the nature of the job became more important. It was not enough to simply be employed for the sake of it. She continued to strive for meaningful work, eventually becoming an outreach worker at the community IT centre. When this job came to an end, she continued working for the county at another location outside the community, in a not very different role but at a city-wide level at the library (see Ch 6, section 6.4.6). There she found that the supportive environment of the community IT centre was missing and that even more deeply, the role did not really connect with any sense of community that she felt. For Alexandra the identity of working in the community doing community development work was more important than the exact role that she had. She realised that she might have to trade one element of her identity for another. She went to work for a housing association:

If I want to do community development work in Bluefield Lanes, I need to work for the landlords. (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

I used to squat. Now I work for the landlords. (researchDiary09 1 May 2008)

For Philippe, his paid employment has always been something aside from his occupational identity. Throughout his education he worked as a cleaner and hospital porter. Even after attaining a BA, Scottish MA and subsequently MSc in Energy Economics and Policy he was unable to find employment either in this country or in his home country in the field. He earns a living:

... working by the counter at the local Post Office, that was another means of surviving

But what I'm currently doing is getting... putting together the materials every day, you know I've really got that. I'm organising myself to run workshops in community centres, primary schools, talking about the use of energy resources, I would say mis-use

of energy resources and environmental impact, you know. I mean it's in a nutshell talking about carbon footprints and I've always believed that you have to start from the younger generation, you know at least if we manage to not change but influence the consumption pattern from what do you call, energy intensive goods to lesser energy intensive goods you know. The demand for less energy intensive goods will rise and therefore the supply side has to meet because all these multi-national adjust themselves to the demand. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

He is transforming his interest in global energy policy into a local, transformational education project with young people, bringing a sophisticated awareness of energy economics down to the most local and developmental level possible. Although he does not earn his money through his primary occupational identity as an energy economist, he realises this through other forms of community engagement, which are much more significant than the job he does. It is stories like this which so strongly challenge workforce attachment as the primary means of social inclusion.

Robert does not put great store on how he earns his living, it is his identity as a writer that he cares about:

Oh yeah, I've done all sorts of things, I've worked in insurance, I've worked in journalism, I've worked in publishing, been a book packer, I think I've had about nine jobs over the years. I'm a film extra now, 'cos it's a job where they ring you and if you don't want to do it, you don't have to do it (laughs)... I can live on that more or less and so that I can devote my time to editing or writing or whatever in my spare time. (2008-11-10Robert-transcript)

Haidar finds meaning in volunteering as a classroom assistant but does not want the bureaucratic and social headaches of being employed in the school system, despite encouragement of colleagues to pursue such a path.

In contrast, Marie has “downshifted” and is moving away from a central focus on occupational identity, though she has a job as an occupational counsellor with a large employer, for which she is qualified, it is through her association with community arts projects and other community-based activities that she is finding most satisfying.

So I've been involved in that for about 3½ years and we're kind of a social business too, we do some... we fund raise and do some paid work so we sort of have a bit of an

income from us sort of doing it for the love of the community and our own enjoyment so that's kind of another...it's been another really interesting development. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

Similarly Patricia works as a tutor – a role which she does find satisfying – but this sits alongside her principal occupational identity as an artist:

So that was my background in teaching. Yeah, when I say all this I realise how sort of bitty my career is. There's been another side of my career working as an artist as well. (2008-07-29Patricia-transcript)

Angela, too, has downshifted. After working for ten years as a nurse and reaching a high level in the field, for personal and family reasons, she no longer wanted to pursue this occupation. This was despite the success that it tokened in her family background as the first person with a professional qualification. At the time of the study she was working at a community advice centre, still in a way in a caring role, but working with the living, not the dying. For Angela, working with the living was an important part of her coming to terms with an immediate family tragedy.

7.4.3 Community support for creative occupations

As well as in the individual life stories, we also find wider community support for the creative aspects of employment and for the transformative potential of working together, whether or not money is involved. This value pervades the stories of work. No where in the stories do we hear that earning a living is the primary reason for work. What is important is co-operation, creativity, and being true to your values (see Ch 8, section 8.2).

About a year and a half before she went to university, Sandra was the weekend manager of a local pub. Some mates of her's ran it. And, what struck me was she had creative freedom. They basically just let her do what she thought was a good idea. So, she was responsible but also had this creative freedom. (2008-08-01FG1Part1transcript)

And in another example:

The most exciting time for Alan was when he was actually within a group of 17 to 18 year olds touring Europe and doing break dancing and actually making money from break dancing. He'd met a lot of foreign students here that he was actually teaching, ...

So, all the students they met, either German, France, Italy, ... when they went to those countries their family actually put them up. And, they were travelling by train. I thought that was .. he was very responsible Going around Europe making money break dancing. (2008-08-01FG1Part1transcript)

Matt looks back at a time when he was organising unemployed people to take charge of their own lives and to transform themselves from victims of a system to self-effective agents of their own lives. This was achieved through working together:

We could do this. We could do that. Doesn't matter, we can do it. I felt with a good team of people you can do anything. There's literally nothing you can't do with a good team of people. It's extraordinary. A dozen human beings coming together can transform things incredibly. It lasts for three or four years. It doesn't matter. When I am old and gasping my last, I'll still think back and think, we did some really good things then. (2008-08-01FG1Part1transcript)

7.5 Other institutions: religion, politics, sex

While not principally for discussion here, we might want to reflect briefly on institutions that are conspicuous by their relative absence. Embodied and transcendent institutions are not foregrounded in this study: religion, military, sex. Party politics is also tacit. As we asked at the beginning, at what point does revelation become transgression and/or complicity? Sex and sexuality is almost entirely absent from the narratives. There are no flirtations mentioned. No one mentioned on-line dating services. There was one case of regular, alcohol-fuelled domestic violence, healing. Relationships are either broken, non-existent or backgrounded as safe (heterosexual) monogamy. In part I encouraged the occlusion of this dimension by emphasising the parental aspect of my life as a solidarity strategy, talking about my own child, who was born during the project.

Religion has a minor presence in this study. There are mentions of people doing the "Theology Course". Catherine refers to it in her story and Angela and one other participant mention it in the second focus group. This course was put on by Matthew, who appeared in the first focus group. His interest in theology is known to Patricia who mentions it in her story. But, only Jamie actually asserts (witnesses?) that religion has a role in his life. There is military violence in the background to Philippe's story. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is only in Jamie's account that any institutionalised violence appears.

I was coming out the window and the Police caught me and they really mistreated me which is understandable given the sort of crime that I was doing, you know the way in which the officer's smashing bottles in me arms and you know, holding me down, it was quite a shock to be treated like that by an authority. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

Philippe mentions politics on a local (West African) scale and also globally, but this is almost in passing as part of his personal narrative. He doesn't raise the institutions of polity for the purpose of entering into a discussion of polity, but for explaining the particularities of his situation. Again only Jamie introduces an explicit political discourse to his narrative.

I was aware that the impact of theft on the shoplifter from the shops is that consumers would pay a higher price, well politics dictate and stock markets dictate what price we pay for our goods. You know although I suppose you know I found that it could be made accountable to shoplifters, I think that the profits that these corporations make in these businesses is not viable... you know it's not viable to use a shoplifter to say that the price... that's why the prices have gone up. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

Later, he expands on the political context of his life with an anger and frustration that is difficult to focus, but available to be channelled in a reactionary direction, despite other progressive understandings that he has shown.

My vote is going to be BNP this year. Definitely. Not in a racist way. I'm not racist. I've got Asian and black friends who would vote BNP, too. Given the state of terrorism, you know, our country needs to be not more cameras put up on surveillance. We don't need that. ... I am very angered by the way that us poor communities are treated. Not so much as poor but I am not a victim of anything I am just saying that I was treated by the police, and the last few times that I've been treated by the police - you know, criminal first, questions next. I see it a lot, on telly, I can see a lot of civil unrest between people. It is going to come to a point where police won't be able to come onto certain parts of the estate because if they are treating us like that then they deserve to be treated like that, too. If they treat us as if we are criminals then they should be treated as criminals, too. (2009-06-02JamieRnd2)

7.6 Reading the rules

A Third Space reading of the influence of the institutions of cultural reproduction sees them balancing between on the one hand imposing and inscribing normal behaviour: normal

parenting, normal learning, normal working, and on the other defining the opposition and charting a course between the inscriptions. These tensions arise because, as Parnham observes:

... the categories of the powerful of each generation are always experienced as partially oppressive and self-seeking by individuals and cultural minorities within a given culture, and often by a majority outside, it is likely that experience-based challenging of old representations and inventing of more appropriate ones via autobiography and the biographical movement can never be suppressed. The quantifications of power will always meet with qualitative resistance and questioning. (Parnham 2001, p.57)

And more than simply influencing, the operation of institutional factors occurs across the boundaries of consciousness, across the boundaries of the Cartesian self and, intersubjectively, across the boundary between ourselves and others; the institutions of society write the rules of engagement and shape our identity as social actors. We begin to see that many aspects of our identity: our domestic self, our self in education, our self in the world of work and community engagement are underwritten by a network of wider institutionalised social actors. And we begin to see that as much as defining the spaces within which we may act, the institutions of society also define the spaces between, the Third Spaces, which we must also navigate.

7.7 Summary

In this chapter I have expanded on the idea of institutions and moved beyond the institution of the self. I have discovered in detail how three great institutions of society: the family, education (school) and work are highly productive factors in shaping people's engagement with the community IT centre (CITC). In particular, I have contributed to the knowledge of how lone parenthood, within the institution of the family, has a profound impact on people and how parenthood in general contributes to shaping people's use of the CITC. I have further contributed to the knowledge that lone parenthood can be a positive choice for people leading to a fulfilled sense of self and strong bond with the child (see particularly Marie's and Haidar's stories). I have discovered – perhaps unsurprisingly – that parental expectation is a powerful motivating factor for the participants in this study and that their expectations for their children might be expected to shape the next generation. An interesting contribution to knowledge, supporting the findings of the Internet in Britain survey (Dutton *et al.* 2009) has been that some participants in this study do not want the Internet in their homes, even though they are perfectly competent users of computers. This leads me to question whether the state should shape its main point of contact with people through the private domestic space (see Ch 9, section 9.5.3)?

I have discovered – also perhaps not surprisingly – that education exerts an explicit mediating influence on people’s use of the CITC. But, we also see that education is tightly woven into the domestic field as well as into people’s affective response to computers and the CITC. This leads to an important contribution to knowledge, which is that at this community IT centre – and probably others – the participants have a very rich conceptualisation of learning, education and qualifications, including clear understandings of the differences between formal and informal learning as well as the multiply inscribed role of qualifications in social inclusion.

Finally, we see that the institution of work is a complex and problematic mediator of people’s relationship with the CITC. At the local and particular level I have found that the participants in this study have done a wide range of jobs and none has been continuously unemployed. The relationship between qualifications and work is ambiguous. My findings support the observation that while sometimes qualifications may be necessary, they are far from sufficient. For all the participants in the study, occupational identity was an important feature of their stories, and in an important contribution to knowledge, we see that there is wide community support for creative aspects of employment and for the transformative potential of working together, whether or not money is involved. This value pervades the stories of work and is an important contribution to the findings of the subsequent chapter (see Ch 8, section 8.2).

Chapter 8 Community and identity values: positive change

8.1 Introduction

In chapter five I presented a collection of stories from the community IT centre. In chapter six I dealt with factors that are very strongly held to be properties of the individual: a commonsense of self: *I did this; this happened to me; this is how I felt; its my life and my feelings*. I considered the evidence for what people say they do with the community IT centre and for their personal IT practices (RQ2). In chapter seven I turned from this common-sense self to address questions of social action and the individual: what factors shape people's use of and engagement with the community IT centre (RQ3)? I discussed three important dimensions of influence on social action, which amount to three great institutions of society: domestic, education, employment. In this chapter (Ch 8) we see the interplay of **values** through personal and social **identity** in the **community** (figure 8.1). I will now strive for some synthesis of identity, community and values, and seek to address (RQ4) what constitutes positive change for people.

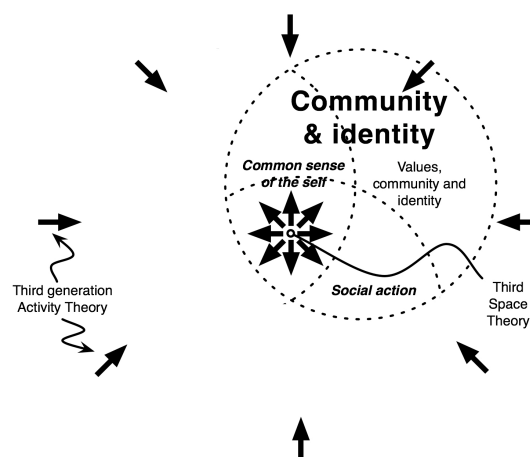


Figure 8.1 Sphere of community and identity

In the final chapter (Ch 9), which follows, I will address my primary question, How do people, who associate themselves with the community IT centre, use that association to make positive changes in their selves and their community (RQ1)? I will also consider the policy implications for Community IT centres (RQ5).

8.1.1 Structure of this chapter

I start by focusing first on values particularly as they are evidenced in the narratives. I am looking for what constitutes *positive* change for people and how, then, people might use their association with the community IT centre to make positive changes in their lives. In order to

consider the value proposition, “positive change”, it is necessary also to consider the wider value systems people hold. Through the biographical narratives, focus groups and follow-up interviews, a number of broad areas emerged as having some resonance between and among the participants. This leads me to suggest an emergent shared instrumental and moral value system, with which something like positive change might be effected and understood. From a discussion of values, then I turn to community. As we must be becoming aware, it cuts both ways: the terms are in tension. Understanding community is essential for coming to an understanding of values; and it is through value statements that we might begin to understand community and identity.

8.2 Positive change through instrumental, interpersonal values

From an Activity-Theoretical perspective, values might be argued to be among the “rules”. However, as I locate affective factors in a common-sense of the self – a self in tension with its components and with the institutional “rules” – values, too, appear to be located problematically in a Third Space between identity (self/actor), community and rules. In coding for values I have drawn out six items from the findings (Ch 3, sections 3.9.6 and figure 3.5). These are **compassion, determination, professionalism, resourcefulness, respect** and **solidarity**.

I have ordered these terms alphabetically. To do otherwise would require ranking and hierarchising according to other criteria, which I am reluctant to impose. I suggest that in this respect the data are not conclusive. There is considerable overlap in these categories as well. Different people prioritise and manifest different values. As with the term “community” many of these value terms are incomplete signifiers. My ranking would not be appropriate to this discussion. Note, however, that this value system is made of instrumental values with an interpersonal (moral) focus rather than self-directed concerns for end-states (terminal values) (Rokeach 1973, p.8).

8.2.1 Compassion

I have used the term “compassion” to take in a number of related concepts: caring, challenging wrongs, concern, empathy, humanity, tolerance. Compassion can be manifested through – and is closely related to – the affective dimension: a *feeling* of compassion. Compassion, acceptance and inclusion appear to be closely related in the narratives. A reading around the educational and community development research literature provides confidence for this construction. Bottery relates compassion to care and notes the tension between a “set of values founded on

care and compassion” and the dominant mode of managerial corporatist culture which determines the development of “... a more marketised, privatised, and deregulated educational sector.” (Bottery 2003, p.196) Welch and Panelli note similarly that affect is politically manipulated and ask that we consider “‘affective display’, ‘friendship’ and ‘compassion’” (2007, p.354) in our theorising of community. For Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006), compassion is one of the key skills that educators need to deploy. Reed and Acquino (2003) relate compassion to love and forgiveness and include it in their “Moral Identity Measure” (pp.1282, 1286). For Brookfield, compassion and fairness are at the core of a participatory democracy (2005a, p.49). For Henderson and McEwan, compassion is a value at the heart of national identity projects in Canada and the UK (2005, pp.179, 185). Windham conflates global citizenship and community service under the heading, compassion (Windham 2005, p.53).

Jamie is discovering compassion through unconditional love for his father, who had a hard life, exacerbated by drink:

I started off life being raised by a single parent father on the estate. He had 3 children, my mum shot off when I was 18 months and on [the estate] at the time it was... my father's an Irish man and they were seen as immigrants at the time so it was a difficult time for him growing up.

... I found it very difficult living with an alcoholic father who had no respect towards his children because he couldn't find the respect towards, he did show... he did show love but not in the way that, you know, in society as unconditional love which I understand now, we have an unconditional love me and my father. ...

... yeah me and my big brother, best relationship now, because through all them times, you know he had to see me doing the drugs and he had to, you know watch his son destroying his whole life and everything around him and through it all even though he was mad, you know like his love was unconditional and only as a parent now do I understand that. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

He expands on this in his second-round interview, showing a deep compassion for his father, who, though:

on one side he showed me consideration and on the other he was beating me up before school.

Nonetheless he understands that his father had his own struggles:

He was from a large family of 11 kids. An Irish family they came over way back in the 50s. Wasn't much money about. Being Irish there was quite a struggle. Dad was an odd job man. He was bullied at school for being an Irishman. He had an Irish accent. He was more a victim of bullying than of the education system. (2009-06-02JamieRnd2)

Alexandra shows a similar compassion for her mother:

In growing up there was a lot of negativity in the home and my mum had a really really hard life. Its taught her things aren't possible. Its taught her negativity. My mum's drowned in her experiences more than I have. I have been a lot luckier. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt2)

And, she is explicit about her love for the IT centre itself:

I did used to love what happened in the IT Hub around that .. the basis for that was ... that um it was ok .. it was an ok space for people to hang out in because of the excuse of the computers. You know? (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

And, as this passage continues we see the wider and deeper reach of the compassionate, affective dimension into the community IT centre. It is compassion that enables respect for diversity. People are valued for their oddity, their non-conformity, their diversity, their shared sense of pleasure and their ability to have fun:

So much more things happened there. We had a quiz team for the community challenge that I got together and it was you know .. I just look back and it was so much fun working there. Every day I laughed. Every person that came in was my friend. Every conversation .. everything that somebody came in to do on the computers was interesting you know and I ... made this team up 'cause ... I thought wouldn't it be good to get to be on this team. So the community challenge was you had to get a quiz team and then there would be a quiz on the Internet and you had to find the answers on the Internet. And we won! ... It was just a complete odd collection of people really... And the photograph .. we also took a photograph and one of the team members had his head in his jumper [laughs] and he was at the front. And there was [name] with no hair

*on top and all this long hair down here and it was just a bit odd. Um. Hang on. It was so much fun doing that. And we were ever so loud and in the next room was a **meeting** with all those .. you know .. **people** involved in the partnership that run the [centre].* (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript; her emphasis)

Compassionate statements can be found throughout the transcripts and recordings. Philippe expresses a compassionate understanding for the people who work (paid and voluntary) at the centre:

Yes, you have ups, you have downs sometimes, I mean they are human beings, sometimes someone might have a fiery day, so you could recall that on their behaviour. Sometimes they might have a bad day, and we all do, but I think they had a way of... they had a good way of pushing that to the side and remain themselves at work and that's what I found. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

Marie is not over quick to condemn heroin users:

I've never been around heroin addicts before but well, yeah kind of gatherings of them sometimes, I'm not sure if I can make any judgement about that other than just sometimes there's quite a lot of twitchiness I suppose just suddenly brews up for one reason or another that I'm kind of aware of that I probably haven't experienced before but you know generally I think it's kind of a nice sort of family/settled sort of area and I've just definitely developed different relationships with people. (2008-11-24Marie-transcript)

She reflects with more sensitivity than is sometimes the case, as Jamie's story has shown. But, in contrast, Alexandra exhibits limits of compassion for drug use, taking a non-judgemental approach to people's actions while still deploring the consequences of those actions:

If people go on a picnic and smoke dope, that's fine. If people go to a festival and smoke dope, that's fine. But, if people do it openly in front of a community building, the message is people round here don't care. If the message is people round here don't care, that means people round here aren't worth anything. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt1)

Jamie, himself, confronted with a sex-offender in a parole hostel struggles towards compassion for him. He cannot condone the mistreatment of this person by the staff, and worse the suggestion of bad boundary keeping by staff colluding with the tenant. But, he believes that everyone can change for the better.

Whereas you know, we all have our personal feelings about particular people but I don't fully understand that. I can't you know, turn one cheek when somebody could feel the same way about a junkie as they do as a sex offender and it doesn't matter what you've done in life, if that person there is going to put a block on, you know because it would be easy for me to say okay now you know I'm a drug user, this person here is stopping me from going forward. You know all that same sex offender he might want to change so this person, no one should stop anybody trying to progress in their lives.

Taking this position led to conflict with the staff and management of the hostel.

You know and the worker that he was working with, the worker who was spending the amount of time with him was also writing his mentor reports for the courts so the worker relationship had gone beyond the point of worker, it was more of a friendship, they were spending time outside of the project together. So when I challenged all of this in my Housing Association I was made to be like they give me a letter saying "if you're a nuisance or violent we will evict you from the property." (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

But, for Angela, living with immediate experience of domestic child abuse does put – not unsurprisingly or unreasonably – clear limits on her compassion. For Sandra, understanding is key to the successful functioning of a community: compassion and respect are intimately related:

... it's just nice that a group of women can get together and in that time that they're sharing together they're kind of understanding different cultures,. Their lifestyles, and I think by learning and understanding them you can gain a respect for them and to gain that kind of respect helps you to live together. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

8.2.2 Determination

Under the heading of determination, I have brought together related notions of autonomy, confidence (and self-confidence), motivation and self-discipline. The literature on community

education, skills, returning to learn, adult learning and related fields makes frequent reference to a problematic lack of self confidence in participants (e.g. Alford 1995, pp.196, 308; Denner *et al.* 2005, p.91; DfES 2003a, pp.4, 10, 13; DfES 2005, pp.28, 31, 51; Ecclestone 2004, p.114; Gewirtz 2001, p.371); and to the reflexive self-consciousness of the researcher (McAndrew 2008, p.34). Ecclestone (2000) relates autonomy to motivation. But, Robert's story might show, one could have a reasonably autonomous (achieved) self-concept but also self-identify as not being particularly strongly motivated. Similarly, we might also question the notion of an achieved identity leading to a stronger orientation towards the future (Ch 4, section 4.2.3).

Philippe demonstrates a real determination to succeed:

The reason why I say I've done quite well is simply because when it comes to giving myself, you know disciplining myself and working hard to achieve that, I would do anything, you know to achieve. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

He illustrates his doggedness:

Very tired so I said to myself "get yourself organised here, this is the wrong time and the wrong place to be tired and to think about something ... getting this done. So I did, I was coming here every morning, you know, typing, yes here in that room or over there. From time to time we happened to be shifted from one room to the other when they were having lectures. So I just sat there and just process, process, process, put things together, process, printing. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

Sandra doesn't just want a job to pay the bills

I still had ambitions, I still wanted to get a job and I eventually wanted to get a job that I would enjoy doing, I didn't want to get a job just so I could pay my bills.

This is a value she had handed down from her mother and which she is keen to pass on to her son:

My mum had struggled, my mum had three kids under the age of one and she was 17 when that happened so she had struggled and she was always telling us "Don't do what I've done, take the opportunities that are available", and the one thing my mum always

said, my mum was a champion of education and bettering yourself. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

Haidar is looking for work but isn't going to be set back if he doesn't succeed at first; he exhibits a try-try-again determination:

Engineering, more than likely I would love to go into computer maintenance...but I am, I am going to go for a qualification in computer maintenance, if I don't get a job this is my next step...it's got to be motivation. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

He explicitly links this determination to his participation in the life of the community IT centre:

... the more I come here, the more relationships I build, the more confidence and self-esteem I'm building myself also. (2008-11-21Haidar-transcript)

Confidence, or self-efficacy continues to be valued; as much in its absence in one's self as its presence in others. Shona draws strength from, and sheds a burden onto, the community around the IT centre:

I feel quite confident. At the moment I'm trying to support [my child]. She's got a little group of young girls. And, its kind of like trying to teach her. The thing is she's just a different mind-set to me, even at her age. Me and her are two different people so it's hard in that sense But there's people willing to soak it up. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

Jamie can see himself growing and managing a charitable foundation where he is not a stranger, where he is a beneficent employer, and where friends can come.

I have an ideological project which I might already... it might already be established and I work with or have I got the energy to you know, start as a registered charity, you know we go out, we'll take on volunteers you know and fund raise for an office to work from and then you know put policies and that together so that, you know, will protect my workers and you know ideally have a place where I'm not a stranger, friends can come. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

8.2.3 Professionalism

Professionalism is concerned with effectively applied knowledge, skills and a service ethos of helpfulness. Philippe found the staff at the centre professional. Jamie regrets counter examples at other work places. He is developing a new identity as a recognised care worker with professional skills:

I'm finding myself sitting on Board meetings with you know, people who make the decisions about the money and where the money funding to support people services, where they're putting money out in the area and how my input as an associate can have an impact on that. And I'm starting to find that I'm getting paid good money for the good work that I'm doing.

He is developing a sophisticated awareness of the nature of boundaries around professional identities:

Yes, yes. I think I'm learning if it's slowly to become a professional. I did say that I needed to work in the fields ... work as a professional in the field a bit more to be able to put these boundaries in place, it's hard to do it from home. You know and I need the supervision there as well so that you know, I can be... and I need good workers around me to be able to set them boundaries in place with me. But you know boundaries and you know what boundaries are what given the clientele that you're working with so you know, if I've got a young lad in front of me who's you know chaotic for using heroin and crack, do I lower the boundary and say "you know I used to use heroin and crack" in that environment and then given that I've got a homeless person with poor hygiene, you know do I lower my boundary, you know to say "well you know I was in the same situation there too". So do I adapt my boundaries for a particular kind of group or do I want that level? (2008-11-06 Jamie-transcript)

8.2.4 Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness takes in making-do-with-what-you-got and doing-a-lot-with-a-little. This is a traditional working-class value that seems to persist from an earlier age (Hoggart 1958, p.43), and may be pragmatically valued by people who have to do with relatively little compared to the better-off echelons of society. For Rouillard and Giroux, resourcefulness is an aspect of professional as much as working-class values (2005, p.347). Here, I argue that it has dimensions that justify separating it out. Actors can demonstrate resourcefulness in many spheres.

Philippe observes that the CITC does a lot with a little:

There's not much in here but the amount of benefit that people gets out of this little, little Hub it's huge, I mean who would believe that I would be able to complete this over here.

And he extrapolates this to something he values in himself:

Because I believe that even if they had just one computer I would still make the best of that computer.

He measures the credit of the centre with credit for himself; the resourcefulness with which the community IT centre makes use of what it has reflects a value which he holds for himself.

... it means what that these facilities can change people's lives because I can testify for that. If I did not have these facilities well I wouldn't say that I would not have achieved this but how can I tell? Because I did not fail so how could I tell? If I did not have these facilities and I failed I would conclude, well because I didn't have the facilities then I fail. But I had the facilities and I made the best out of the facilities and I achieved this. (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

There are many examples of thrift in Philippe's story, from repairing a used laptop to eking an existence on student hardship grants to working several jobs at night.

Robert is thrilled with his new computer, not least because of its price, and the open source word processing package. For Robert, even a £300 computer is beyond reach. The community IT centre has enabled him to participate, as a writer, in an extended community of writers in a world where to be a writer is to be on the Internet.

I actually bought a computer, the first time, a computer of my own (laughs). It's the cheapest thing I could find, it's actually a Minibook, it's about the size of a paperback, about a 7" screen. It's very nice, it's very user-friendly and it's got Microsoft on it, it's got something called AbiWord, which is some sort of community, free sort of word processing system, which sounds, according to the copyrighters, as if it's a charity or something. But it's compatible with Microsoft anyway, with Word, so I can use the memory stick at home on the Minibook and then bring it in here and it works, that's

readable. 'Cos I did think I'd bought a pig in a poke, obviously, so that's really...it was £139 actually, it was a discount on £170 initially, but it's great, you can actually carry it about, it's just like a little book. And so it does everything the computer here does and also it's got...I haven't figured out how to (laughs) get it to work yet because you've got to link into the network, radio you know, Wi-Fi network, but it's got e-mail and the Internet access as well. But ... at some stage I'll figure it out and so I will have, at home, the Internet, so I'll be able to surf the net and also e-mail. I've been coming in here for years to check my e-mail and to send e-mail, I've never had e-mail at home because I'd never really been able to afford a computer because they've all been in the £300, £270 bracket, unless of course, you go second hand. I didn't really want to get a second hand one just in case it went wrong, so I'm delighted with this little thing. (2008-11-10Robert-transcript)

For Sandra, educational resources always have a characteristic scarcity and, those there are, need to be made the best of.

... and it was education was so important because it was a luxury to them, I mean we got it free here, but yeah, you should make the most of it because it's free, some people don't have that opportunity and in order to get that job that you want, in order to move in certain circles and not just be another stat in Bluefield Lanes that will amount to nothing, it all boils down to you making the most of the education system I guess.

Similarly, for Sandra, time is a resource:

I still have a certain routine and it was all about making the best of the time that you have... (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

A community computer facility, free at the point of use can help people stretch their communication budgets. As Alexandra notes in places where services are provided for those with little money, “there is emotion around asking for money, even a little bit.” (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt2) A community IT centre can help people make what little they have go further:

... so with that anybody that I got up there that I would try and engage them in this project... in this IT hub even if was only the games workshop or to set up Hotmail or email which could be a viable source of contact for you know, some people because

you know, mobile phone, you know some people don't have contract phones so they go in on the computer either if it's making contacts with families, you know they've been uprooted, moved to the city and then get in contact with their family. So I bring them to the centre and just, you know just help them try and set up emails. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

8.2.5 Respect

Respect takes in the reciprocal notions of respectfulness and integrity or self respect. It also brings in notions of authenticity, reliability, pride and the problematic truth-to-self. Respect manifests itself in relations between people and can be seen as particularly important in learning, and other developmental relationships, such as caring (Jones, K. 2006, p.219) and teaching in adult community education contexts (Sanguinetti *et al.* 2005, p.280). Rodgers and Raider-Roth elaborate on the nature of integrity and presence for teachers:

When a teacher acts solely from an artificially constructed notion of who she should be, she becomes remote from herself and presence becomes difficult. There is a disconnection, a disintegration of self, that precludes bringing focused attention to bear. With this disintegration, there is a subsequent lack of what Parker Palmer ... called integrity. By integrity he means an integration of the self and the subsequent strength that results. A building has integrity when its elements fit together in a way that each part of the structure supports and reinforces the other parts, such that the building is sound, safe and can be trusted to sustain itself and those within it. Integration, wholeness, reliability and groundedness in a person all speak to what is required for a teacher to be able to trust herself and the actions which are an extension of that self. (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, p.272)

Integrity even gets incorporated into official lists of national character traits (Henderson & McEwen 2005, p.179) For participants in this study, respect is a reciprocal relationship with others. As Sandra puts it:

You know, you had middle aged people that hung around at the shops that didn't work and people looked down on them and that, and it was "I don't want to be like that, I don't want to be looked down on", you know what I mean, I give respect I expect to be respected. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

For Alexandra being true to herself is important.

... in the Library I felt threatened. I could survive in it but it felt like an act. It felt like a false way to be. There are acceptable behaviours in a lot of these educational environments if they are run by these type of people, certain behaviours are not acceptable. But they aren't meaning anything by it. It's just the way they are. I've seen people when they first come into the IT Hub they put on an act. They try to be all formal like in these official places. And I've seen the relief in their faces when they realise that it is not necessary. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt1)

But there is still a sense of conflict. In a note I made of a conversation outside the formal interview process, she said, "I used to squat. Now I work for the landlords." (researchDiary09 01 May 2008) Alexandra sees disrespect institutionalised in aspects of government services:

A lot of people from deprived communities have had bad services: look at the quality of the schools: deprived schools, lowered expectations, they've been deprived educationally. People talk a lot about the apathy that people feel on the estates. The term estate culture is used to describe this apathy and negativity. It is all about what you have learned. What you've learned about the services that are there to support you through your life, like education and health. If all your services have been bad services... you learn that people who provide these services are not really there to help you; that they don't really care about you; that they think they are superior to you. What do people learn? They learn that those services are not for them. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt2)

For Jamie, respect and integrity are intimately bound up with confidence, motivation and self-esteem.

I've got a sister on the estate down the road as well who never really used computers, you know like from seeing me coming here she's started accessing this computer hub too. Eventually given my brother sorts himself out, you know, get him maybe on a couple of short courses here just to give him that self esteem, you know and... you know it's just that 'access to' I think that the principle of that is the most important and it's giving someone the confidence to be able to know that they can beat them barriers and it can be one or two days in this centre and for a person it can be "well actually I've got the motivation now and I can't see as many barriers" so in peoples lives it can make a massive impact because just from the little things that I was doing like the funding

applications, it give me the self esteem to think well you know if I can start doing this, you know what else can I do. And eventually I'd look at... I was running my own project management.

And there is a growing self-awareness:

You have to remember that, you know, I've been in jail and I've been attached to drugs and you know I have got nieces and nephews, they live in Kent so my involvement with them is minimal, maybe once a year, twice a year. So I have to understand again that you know, to be able to work with an 8 year old child, my development as a human, you know and my receptiveness to an 8 year old needs has to be tuned. I can't just go in there and say I'm going to take my daughter on and everything's going to be fine because I know realistically it's not going to be. (2008-11-06Jamie-transcript)

Similarly we see respect as well as self-respect. Philippe, despite difficulties in translating his academic achievements into related employment, can cut himself some slack and reflect with pride on what he has achieved:

When it comes to academic achievement, when I look at my financial background, current financial background, sometimes I say to myself "you've done quite well, you have..." (2008-07-05Philippe-transcript)

Alexandra has felt disrespected by school administrators for her single-parent status (Ch 7, section 7.2.1). Respect and acceptance go together for her:

In the IT Hub we had a really welcoming respect. That made me feel accepted. I've had experiences where I've not been accepted. It felt safe. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt1)

And she has learned to be on guard for the possible conflicts that pride might generate:

I became really aware of other people's pride and learned to really respect people's pride. You know, because of the pride, certain behaviours would happen and having an understanding about that pride was very helpful. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt2)

8.2.6 Solidarity: learning together

Solidarity is concerned with the participatory values of learning and doing together, for and with one another. In an early research diary I was talking with Sandra:

When I first came here it was because I had no computer at home. Was at uni, came and went when work was done. Met [name] and [name]. They were not like teachers. It was like we were learning together. At college it was "they knew and you didn't". Here it was different. (researchDiary09 28 April 2008)

Alexandra valued the Women's training scheme for the way the tutors and students mixed as equals and the way previous participants came back to the course to share their experiences with the current cohort. The scheme also blurred boundaries between personal and professional support and development. This programme was, to some extent, a model, or a reinforcement for a model, of learning together that was valued.

I just decided to go to the women's training scheme and just do one of their women-only courses, and well I really needed that. And they were so friendly there .. what was really good about that place is they .. it wasn't like a college where you go there you go in through an anonymous building into a classroom. The students and the tutors would have lunch together I just tried to share what I had with the others and try and be helpful but I got so much out of it they were really great. I had crises in my life and time and they were supportive. (2008-05-16Alexandra-transcript)

These values of doing **with**, not **to** persist. In a later interview, she talks about the problems with community development education funding and the way that participants are, to some extent, exploited by the system:

What I can think of is about exploitation. This is about people being exploited because of ignorance ... if we go back to poor services and facilities and estates culture through not having an awareness of things, people can be exploited. So, I would say that there was money involved in education targets from the county council's point of view: getting people through qualifications getting paperwork signed; there was an element of exploitation there. People didn't always want a qualification. It was something I tried with others to try and not do. Also the difficult situation with the other county council departments where this is the way that education services work. They were so used to exploiting people that they didn't even see it any more. And the fact that we were trying

*to work **for** people rather than **to** people. We were trying **not** to exploit people but in a way we kind of had to. It wasn't always about exploitation because sometimes people who really didn't want a qualification in the first place ended up using it on their CV and I saw that happen. And, I have heard that argument from Adult Learning professionals saying people would want it in the end: that they would end up using it in the end. It totally comes from that place where we know what's good for you. And there **is** something wrong with that. And it **is** linked to exploitation. Exploitation is a very strong word. I think people felt exploited some times when they were made to jump through hoops. There were other elements in their life where they were definitely being exploited. I can see many of these initiatives that have gone into communities like this one where people have not necessarily been interested in the individuals and working with them. It is all a target thing, and its a we-know-what's-good-for-people thing. (2009-03-19AlexandraRnd2pt2)*

Like Alexandra, Shona brought experience of participatory community development education practices and expectations from her past to bear on her experience of the community IT centre. These also valued collaborative learning with people, but brought certain norms as well:

I mean there's probably a core group of learning champions who have all worked with each other previously in the past. ... and we've all gained participatory skills ... because we got trained by [programme name] they put on their own course, which various people of us took parts in kind of like leading that training or even taking part in that training in terms of being the facilitator for it, so we've all kind of had a participatory way of working and it's all been kind of development work as well, so I think for us it might have been a bit easier in terms of trying to get our heads around what the learning champions thing was all about. As where, other people, for example, like [name], who hasn't done any kind of volunteering or community work before, has come along trying to find out what's going on to get involved in and stuff. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

Sandra observes the value of learning together informally in groups like lunch clubs and even bingo. For Sandra learning and respect underpin community solidarity

I mean there's so many different types of people in Bluefield Lanes and some areas you've got clashes between neighbours and whatever else but then in another area, again, so diverse, but everyone gets on, everyone looks after each other and stands up

for each other and I think that's because of the learning that they've done together helps them to understand them and kind of have a respect for them and understand where they're coming from and that's the kind of learning I like, and I think that learning eventually help to strengthen, build bridges and strengthen the community and make a community stronger. (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

I do not want to suggest that having any shared value system (or even this value system) is wholly sufficient to indicate community. However, I do want to suggest that guiding systems of belief or “moral thought” (Kang & Glassman 2010, p.22) are important pieces of symbolic (social, cultural and economic) capital and that symbolic capital – particularly social and cultural capital – is at least related to, if not actually synonymous with, community. And, that seen in this light, the Third Space is the instantiation of symbolic capital, which is to say further that, ultimately at some level, the terms Third Space and Community may themselves be interchangeable.

8.3 Community and identity

What is this thing called “a community”? As I suggested in chapter one, Community is a difficult term used in many different ways to mean many different things (Ch. 1 section 1.4.1). It is not my intention to imply that there is, or to impose, an ideal or definition of “community” that is persistent. There are too many arguments made about whether some group or other is a real community or just a group or is it a network or some sub variety of community (see for example Cormier 2010; Downes 2010; Siemens 2005b; White 2005; Wilson 2006)? For Bhabha:

Community is the antagonist supplement of modernity: in the metropolitan space it is the territory of the minority, threatening the claims of civility; in the transnational world, it becomes the border-problem of the diasporic, the migrant, the refugee. (Bhabha 2004, p.330)

8.3.1 Identity and community are reflections

Identity and community are reflections of one another. Unity factors: categorical typologies (such as community or gender or race, etc) and identity factors: individuating characteristics are the fundamental components of any ontology. Unity (or community) and identity are always in dialog (Guarino 2000). One's identity is composed, in part, of community (unity) factors: I am who I am, uniquely (identity) because of my membership in these communities (unity) and not

others; and one's community is composed of multiple identities – people (or other actors, possibly) – particular to that community.

In some popular uses, the term “community” even is **not** the community but the reflection of the “other”.

Even the collective and shared unity of opposition to the development attributed to most British British and most British Asians did not provoke a wider use of the term ‘community’ that embraced both broad groups. The British Asians were the community and the British British were themselves; though we live cheek by jowl.
(researchDiary11, 16/01/2010)

A similar othering, exclusive, use of community comes out in Shona's account:

I mean like even down to the Asian community and stuff, they've got more things set up for themselves they seem more together as a community in terms of wanting to make changes and do things, but it is just a shame that whatever it is that they hold that makes them do that can't be picked out and shared with everybody else. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

Or as Jamie has come to feel:

We need to recognise the community that we've got and engage more with the people around us instead of bypassing strangers on a rotational system so that we got strangers passing through our communities that we no longer know. (2009-06-02JamieRnd2)

8.3.2 Community is a strategic concept

Despite such problematics, community persists as a strategic concept, brought into play at many levels. This study is set in a *community IT* centre, serving the needs of a local *community*, through which and in which many *communities* move. From the beginning, the foundation of this community IT centre appeared to have features that differentiated it from other similar ventures. In the first focus group, Matt observed:

I thought the resource was really quite good. I thought it was good to see a state of the art IT suite in an area like this. ...I thought it had a real kind of community focus and feel to it and sort of ah, that was very good. Very impressive. And unusual to me. I

mean I've seen other IT hubs that were much more kind of like going to an old fashioned library, you know what I mean, you kind of like it was just there was just an openness to it and it was unusual it struck me. Yeah. (2008-08-01FG1Part2transcript)

The term “community” is used here in its positive affective context and is associated with outreach and openness. It is contrasted with what is presented as a more usual scenario: *kind of like going to an old fashioned library*.

8.3.3 Other community factors

There are many more factors that can be brought to an understanding of community: bonding factors, cultural factors diversity factors, similarity/familiarity factors, factors of the locale (neighbourhood, area, region) and of the wider economy:

I've enjoyed seeing the variety of people getting involved down here as well, I mean the 50th anniversary of Bluefield Lanes definitely got a lot of people involved young and old. That exhibition was good as well. Kind of relaying the story of the whole estate back to the community, um. So, yeah I just hope it really doesn't stop. I hope it continues, really. (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

Issues arising from the neighbourhood/locale might extend to a concept of something like an estate culture that reproduces through the generations. This culture might have factors of geography and space-based diversity and inclusion (Taylor, M. 1998).

Marie is an active participant in the local community arts group, with studio space located near the community IT centre in an annex to the community centre building. In her story we see aspects of solidarity as well as neighbourhood or locale aspects of community.

8.3.4 Diversity and bonding

Diversity features include all the claimed identities for which there is an available public discourse in the dimension of identity pragmatics or even politics. This is, on one dimension the array of recorded ethnicities and other identity markers in British census data. However, there are hints that some of the category assignments are problematic:

There's the black issue. The black issue's always been an issue anywhere. I even remember when I was like twenty or twenty one there were a lot of West Indians here

and stuff so it's kind of like they never really had a high opinion of Africans then. Do you know what I mean, then it was all kind of like, "I'm African. I'm African [quickly] da da da." And if you try to say anything about the African ancestry, you know, it's like, "I'm Jamaican! I'm Jamaican! de de de!" So you know... (2008-07-04Shona-transcript)

Bonding features are those instances of collective identities: groups of distinct individuals come to embrace a common answer, in part, to the question: "who am I?". That common answer might, in part, comprise transpersonal psychological factors, factors of distributed cognition (Salomon 1993; Salomon 1997), or the appearance of such factors as might manifest in faith communities or some accounts of nationalist communities.

8.4 Identity projects

Community centres provide invaluable loci for the formation of self-effective identities (see Neimeyer & Rareshide 1991, p.562) by providing opportunities for volunteering, community activism, social and civic engagement as well as formal and informal learning. This is not only noticed here on the Lanes. Darcy has noted it in Western Sidney, Australia (Darcy 2007, p.355). Identity projects do not just take place in the individual. National identity projects are entered into regularly in response to immigration, social order and other cultural entitlements (Ch 8, section 8.2.1). Groups at a more local level may enter into identity projects. Agencies and institutions have identities as well.

In looking at identity this way, we might speak of "projects" in the personal development sense of a career, or an education, or a move to another place. Harré argues identity projects may "... involve efforts to acquire the attributes of an existing social identity..." Such an identity may be "real or mythical". Or, conversely "There might very well be cases where an individual's problem is to retain a given social identity against various destructive influences." (Harré 1983, pp.46-47) As Black says, "a project is, roughly, a programme of actions with a purpose." (Black 2006, p.281) It would not be right to impute a teleological impetus to everything that is or could be done at the community IT centre. But, at the same time there is evidence that at the community IT centre some people may be seeking to develop and to change or, conversely, even to engage in a programme of activity in order to maintain a particular life course (to stay the same).

8.4.1 The self as an activity system

In identity projects, the subject, the object and the outcome subsist in the same person: I work on myself to change myself. The tools I use may well also consist of my faculties and while I will exist in several communities and may have several roles, I may not reveal the project to others, or possibly even to myself. Taking an identity-project perspective reveals each person individually to be a whole activity system in themselves. At this scale, Activity Theory may be an aid to understanding in that it provides a consistent framework for interpretation, but as a guide to social action it becomes too complex. People have multiple objects and take multiple roles in their own lives. As each individual activity system engages with others, the space between is exposed at every point of contact: for every point at which we are alike, we are also seen to be different.

8.4.2 Goals are often unstated

It is a commonplace in the literature of personal development planning that people set goals for themselves and can then make plans to achieve those goals (Hulme & Lisewski 2010, pp.141, 143-144). However, I have not observed this to be the case, universally. In situations where previous experience of goal setting has resulted in failure to achieve there may be reluctance to set further goals in that area. In my experience of tutoring in adult community return-to-learn contexts participants can be extremely reluctant to talk about looking beyond the present moment. Often that moment itself is a significant achievement: overcoming the anxieties or straight-out fear of re-entering a classroom. While funding regimes and institutional success criteria may push tutors to push learners to declare plans for further “progression” early, this fails to take into account the person and where they are, and risks repeating the cycle of failure to achieve that has been established. People often do not declare goals until after they have achieved them. This relieves them of the need to admit failure. A person might enter an exam for various reasons: I did it as a bit of fun, my tutor said I should give it a go. Then depending on the result the person might say, I always wanted to do that: I knew I could. Or, conversely, I never wanted that qualification, it wouldn’t help me any way. As Sandra said:

... then within weeks of being at college my tutor had said “Apply for university”, and blah de blah and I was just like “No, university’s not for me, no one in my family’s ever been to university, no, I don’t think I will”, and she kind of said “Just apply for it, just for the sake of applying for it”, so I thought “Do you know what, there’s no harm in applying for university, I’ll just do it just for the sake of doing it” (2008-07-24Sandra-transcript)

Whether they remain tacit, as Sandra's did, or are made explicit, personal identity projects do appear to be important for participants in this study. Alexandra is explicit about not only her goals but that they are directly related to her identity. She has been on a long journey towards achieving an identity as "somebody that does jobs and works and stuff" and, "...having some amazing job one day." There are many other related projects or activity networks along her way: overcoming the stigma of single parenthood, working in the community, achieving higher level qualifications. The real pleasure she felt when got a job that began to match her expectations and the equal measures of fear and satisfaction she experienced when she sat as an equal around a table with a former employer, by whom she had felt treated as a relatively insignificant subordinate ("the girl who does our typing"), is testament to the importance of this identity project in her life.

Angela has experienced severe domestic trauma which, in part, led her to give up a very successful nursing career to embark on a difficult journey of overcoming the consequences of the abuse of her brother and her son by her father and his subsequent suicide.

All the bad's gone and the good's in, but hence why my brain got exploded from being quite doing one thing to completely changing directions: not nursing any more. (2009-06-03AngelaRnd2)

The community IT centre has played two parts in this journey. First by providing a place for Angela to associate with other adults outside the domestic environment, and second by providing the Internet as a social utility so that she does not need to let it into her home.

8.4.3 Common-sense self development

For Haidar, his journey is not expressed in terms of an identity project as such. He has developed a sense of himself as a parent, as a single parent, as an eldest son in a high-achieving family, and as a professional whose domestic choices have seen his field of work rapidly move past him as he has been raising his daughter. He observes, for example, that his mother is more recently and more highly qualified in his own field than he is and that his two younger brothers are both highly successful on international stages. He is playing a kind of a catch-up game in which the community IT centre provides a resource for information seeking in respect of a common-sense as well as institutionalised domesticity. The community IT centre also provides a learning space within which to catch up with electronic engineering and computer technology. It also provides a space wherein he can model desirable personal and social behaviours to his daughter.

8.4.4 Identity development as modelling

Jamie's identity projects have several dimensions. He speaks explicitly of "being modelled" and of "modelling" himself. He judged people on their qualification to model him. People who were not strong models were not credible to him. He found a path to modelling himself off heroin through a mix of traditional interventions and holistic therapies: head massage. It would not be too much of a stretch to suggest that the core of his project is to become a model member of society, perhaps as a professional care worker, but crucially without surrendering those parts of his identity that he values: his insight into the personal and political dimensions of social problems, his wit and humour, his sense of a unique personal perspective, his knowledge and understanding of the difficulties that love brings, his sympathy for the "deprived", and his critical stance towards hierarchical authority. The IT centre provides a facility where he can find support for many parts of his multi-faceted journey: information seeking in respect of formalised domestic institutions (housing and access to children), production of leaflets to support a small business, and the continuous need to correspond, to be in touch with family, friends, support workers and other associates.

8.4.5 Downshifting and downshifted

Marie, also, is explicit about several activities and networks, which might be characterised as identity projects. She is "downshifting" out of the rat race, becoming a single parent out of choice, and developing as a community artist and member of a co-operative social enterprise. Patricia is also an artist. While perhaps not best characterised as an identity project – the sense of movement is not explicit – she gains greatly by being able to teach in an environment where she is valued for her particular set of strengths and abilities.

For Philippe the nature of his identity project is not necessarily explicit. The explicit aspects of his journey relate to educational goals, which are supposed, presumed or expected to lead to employment in a role matching the level of education. But, perhaps more deeply, there is a project of extended emergence from the long shadow of parental expectation formed in a very rich and similarly extended traumatic context of post colonialism: a context which casts its own long shadows. Philippe's father was educated in France in one of the great schools of public administration and rose to be minister of finance in his own country. Higher education for the purpose of high public service was what one did. Moreover, Philippe sees his father as "one of the good guys" in a clash of value systems sometimes characterised as anti-corruption. Philippe's father is, for him, a hero on a big stage who has served his country with honour but not amassed a personal fortune because of his values. Moreover he has endangered his family

and sent his son into exile because of positions he took in respect to colleagues who did use position as a means of gaining wealth and granting favours. Philippe's journey has been in many ways harder than that of his father. He has had to support himself through a protracted educational journey doing menial jobs and has had no employment outcome as a result of very real educational success. But, he shows he has, perhaps, inherited his father's integrity, as, after studying petroleum economics, he has come to aspire not to gain access to the various apparatus of energy ministries or exploitation but to advise on the reduction of dependence on carbon-based resources.

8.5 The constructed community and identity

In this study I have become aware of emergent urges in two directions. The first is to characterise the community IT centre **as a community in its own right**, consisting of the people who use it. The second is to characterise the community IT centre **as a third space in its own right**. Neither urge is justified by the evidence. The first requires a stretching and generalising of the notion of community past what would be useful. The second arises from a flawed reading of Third Space Theory, whereby the direction of the spatial metaphor is reversed and the metafield (physical space) is confused with the metaphrand (the conceptual space). That there are many readings (see Ch. 4 section 4.4), which do this is not helpful.

8.5.1 Community constructed in response to singularity

Panelli and Welch explain the urge towards community, not only in policy but in popular understanding, in ontological and eschatological terms based in the fundamental awareness of both the mystery of our origin and of our death. They refer to the finitude of our experience as our "singularity". Because we find our singularity challenging we, "...construct ideas about the world including constructions of community in unchallenging terms while having some awareness of the shortcomings of such unifying formulations." Even though we know that "community" is a difficult term to define, we redirect, "...the dissonance and uncertainty this process generates ... into perspectives on constructed community." (Panelli & Welch 2005, p.1596) Grattan has observed, along similar lines, that there are characteristics of the contemporary "fast changing world" which heighten, "...'existential anxiety' at both the individual and communal level." (Grattan 2007, p.93) and which produce a range of responses which may well be ultimately exclusive, or variably disempowering, supportive of unequal power relations, normalising, etc. But, when they become problematic we adapt our constructions, enabling much more contingent communities, "... where individuals can be 'known', can 'slot in', can 'belong', can be 'accepted, but can also 'opt out'." (Panelli & Welch

2005, p.1609) Kennedy (2008) produces such a positive reading of social identity and identity politics. In the life stories, Alexandra reinforces the value of being made welcome through friendliness:

This place has a positive feel it is friendly and welcoming. It has an extended family feel. It is all right not to know everything. You are not expected to. (2009-06-03AngelaRnd2)

8.5.2 Community and identity as co-contingent constructions

While the common-sense of self, identified in chapter six, can be recognised as a contingent construction, this recognition, itself, is not practically productive of easy or even appropriate (value constrained) social activity. Similarly, common-sense views of community are contingent constructions and if carried beyond an easy sociality could become communitarian identity politics: an authoritarian means of subordination, normalisation and control. This synthesis of constructed identity and constructed community is the moment, the symptom, the collapse, if you will, of its thesis/antitheses dialectic. The Third Space is not a new synthesis but the emergent contradictory, hybridised point within and between not only community and identity but all their contingent co-constructions.

8.6 Summary

In this chapter I have made two important original contributions to knowledge. Among the participants at this community IT centre (CITC), there appears to be a genuinely emergent instrumental and interpersonal value system consisting of compassion, determination, professionalism, resourcefulness, respect and solidarity. This value system appears to emerge in a Third Space between community and identity. It is also an important contribution to knowledge, as well as to policy, that CITCs provide invaluable spaces within which identity projects may be pursued and the formation of self-effective identities supported. CITCs are places where people may engage in informal and formal programmes of activity leading to positive change in their lives. In a related discovery we see that while some people do make their goals explicit (e.g. Alexandra) others often leave them unstated for strategic reasons (e.g. Sandra). Finally it is important to note two points which contribute to knowledge about this CITC – and possibly others. The CITC is neither a community in its own right, nor can it be described as a Third Space. The CITC is a node in many networks, some of which might be called – or constructed as – communities for many reasons. And, the CITC is a space – both literal and figurative – within or through which people might gain access to a Third Space.

Chapter 9 What do you do with your community IT centre?

9.1 Introduction

By bringing life stories from this community IT centre into the research literature and representing people in their own voices as complex and unique individuals, not as problematic and abstract others, I hope to have contributed to a better understanding of the impact of IT-related community-development and educational initiatives on people and their communities. But, in trying to avoid cultural relativism and prescription I also brought myself into an ambivalent Third Space where reflexivity and exposure is enunciated through language, which can at best re-present a perspective on reality, framed, mediated and interpreted by relationships of affection, affiliation and power.

Community IT centres (CITCs) are places where people may engage in informal and formal programmes of learning activity leading to and supporting positive change in their lives. CITCs provide invaluable spaces within which identity projects may be pursued and the formation of self-effective identities and communities supported. However, the CITC is neither a community in its own right, nor can it be described as a Third Space. The CITC is a node in many networks, some of which might be called – or constructed as – communities for many reasons. And, the CITC is a space – both literal and figurative – within or through which people might gain access to their Third Space, where their unique and continuously hybridising self might find its agency for inclusion, participation and presence. I suggest that there is no reason to suppose that the participants in this study should be significantly different as a group than users of similar centres in other areas. Nor is there reason to suppose that this CITC is unique, however these are assertions that should be tested.

9.1.1 The research questions and approach

In chapter one, I set out my rationale and identified five questions. The key question was, how do people use their association with the community IT centre to make positive changes in their lives (RQ1)? In order to address this question I had to address three underlying questions. What do people actually do at the community IT centre (RQ2)? What factors governed or shaped their use of the centre (RQ3)? And, what constitutes positive change for people (RQ4)? Finally, I wanted to ask what the implications might be for policy (RQ5)?

In order to investigate these questions, I took a multimodal qualitative approach to the study, described in chapter three. I drew on Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for the collection of data through interviews and focus groups, and I

kept a researcher's journal. I used Grounded Theory (GT) informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for the preliminary coding of the interview and focus group data before developing and applying a conceptual framework (Ch 4) based on Third Space Theory and third generation Activity Theory in order to explain the findings. There are three broad aspects to the framework, which were explored in the three subsequent chapters: a commonsense of the self (Ch 6), social action (Ch 7), and community and identity (Ch 8).

9.1.2 The findings and contributions to knowledge summarised

This thesis has shown that the CITC is a place where people engage in informal and formal programmes of activity leading to positive change in their lives (RQ1). Positive change is manifested in an emergent instrumental and interpersonal value system consisting of compassion, determination, professionalism, resourcefulness, respect and solidarity (Ch 8, section 8.2). I have shown that CITCs provide invaluable spaces within which identity projects may be pursued and the formation of self-effective identities and communities supported (Ch 8, section 8.4). Through association with the CITC people can be enabled to be more effective managers (and self-managers) of the institutions of society (Ch 7). Engagement with the CITC also appears to be associated with critical reflexivity concerning presence and participation in society (Ch 9, section 9.2.4). As well as adding to the provision of access to IT, CITCs can be seen to add significant value to IT, education, the community and the person in the process.

In addressing the subordinate research questions, many other discoveries have also been made. I have discovered that people have many different reasons for using the CITC (Ch 6, section 6.2.1) and do many different things with computers (Ch 6, section 6.2.2). They express a broad and not necessarily consistent range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for using the centre and their assertions about why they use the CITC do not always clearly align with their actions while they are there (Ch 6, sections 6.2.4 & 6.2.5). I have discovered that affective factors are extremely significant in determining people's engagement with the CITC and their use of computers generally (Ch 6, section 6.4). Although they do engender a strong feelings in some participants (Ch 6, section 6.4.5 and the stories of Robert and Angela), people's relationship with computers is not particularly strong. Computers are not fetishised nor do they form a particularly important aspect of participants' identity (Ch 6, section 6.2.3). Despite assertions in policy about the importance of computers (see Ch 1 section 1.2.1 & 1.2.4), further to OfCom (2010), Seale (2009a), Selwyn (2003) and Webb (2006) this thesis shows that IT is not the magnet that draws people into uncomfortable spaces; comfortable spaces draw people into IT use and comfort is a factor of community. This thesis has shown that the community IT centre (CITC) is a complex activity system diffused through participants' lives in many different ways (Ch 6, section 6.2.6).

Throughout, three great institutions of society (the family, education and work) are seen to be highly productive factors in shaping people's engagement with the CITC (Ch 7, section 7.1 & ff). The family, domestic circumstances and parenthood contribute significantly to shaping people's use of the centre. Parental expectation is a powerful motivating factor for the participants in this study and their expectations for their children will shape the next generation (Ch 7, section 7.2.3). In particular, lone parenthood, has a profound impact on people but can be a very positive choice leading to a fulfilled sense of self and strong bond with the child, which can be facilitated by the CITC, despite continuing misplaced approbation by society (Ch 7, section 7.2.1 and the stories of Marie, Sandra, Shona, Alexandra and Haidar). An important finding, is that some participants in this study do not want the Internet in their homes, even though they are perfectly competent users of computers. They resent its intrusion for strongly held reasons which need not be subject of argument or coercion (Ch 7, section 7.2.4). Education, of course is found to exert an explicit mediating influence on people's use of the CITC (Ch 7, section 7.3). But, we also see that education is tightly woven into the domestic field as well as into people's affective response to computers and the centre. The institution of work is a complex and problematic mediator of people's relationship with the CITC. Participants in this study have done a wide range of jobs and none has been continuously unemployed (Ch 7, section 7.4).

The thesis shows that participants in this study have a rich conceptualisation of learning, education, IT and qualifications (Ch 7, section 7.3.3), and clear understandings of the differences between formal and informal learning (Ch 7, section 7.3.4) as well as an understanding of the multiply inscribed role of qualifications in social inclusion (Ch 6, section 6.2.7 & 6.2.8). The relationship between qualifications and work is ambiguous (Shona, Philippe). While some people do make life goals explicit others often leave them unstated for strategic reasons (Ch 8, section 8.4.2, and contrast, in particular the stories of Alexandra and Sandra). The thesis provides specific local evidence for the OfCom (2010) findings discussed in Chapter two (Ch 2, section 2.5.1) about people's preference for informal learning about information and communication technologies.

A common sense of the self as the subject of a personal activity system is a productive and useful unit of analysis, however, this personal institution of the individual is a complex notion (Ch 6, section 6.3). The different stories and perspectives of the participants in this study reveal extensive hybridisation in respect of many factors including: nationality (see particularly Shona's, Philippe's and Jamie's life stories and Jean in the first focus group), occupation, domesticity (Jamie), social class (particularly, Marie, Shona and Philippe),

locale/neighbourhood identity (Sandra), and expectations of outcomes in their life course. Occupational identity: I am what I do – broadly conceived – is an important feature of participants' stories (Ch 7, section 7.4.2) and there is wide community support for creative aspects of employment (Ch 7, section 7.4.3 and the stories of Sandra and Marie particularly attest to this) and for the transformative potential for individuals and communities of working together, whether or not money is involved.

9.1.3 The wider context of community IT centres

In the UK and elsewhere, there is a relationship asserted between social inclusion and access to IT. The dominant route to social inclusion – in policy – is presumed to be employment for which ICT skills are needed. But, these concepts: social inclusion/exclusion, workforce attachment and access to IT are complex and contested fields (Ch 1, section 1.4.2; Ch 2, sections 2.2.1 & 2.9.3). Community IT centres themselves are a complex, contingent world. Technologies are not the panacea for regeneration and neither are decontextualised skills in the operation of technology or decoding of its messages (Southern 2002, p.697). People and communities progress together. It is through making connections between learners' real-life practices (i.e. vernacular ICT literacy, Ch 2, section 2.10.1) and, for example, the abstractions of formalised education that we can begin to explore the values and identities of people and communities. We also see that the use of tools outside formal education cannot be presumed to be connected with the use of tools inside formal education even if practices might be generalised across different domains. There may even be a perceived benefit for local individuals and communities in resisting the formalising of informal learning in order to defend a local identity. Community development, individual development, and labour market development should be seen as a complex and integrated whole (Ch 2, section 2.11).

9.1.4 Structure of this chapter

Here, in chapter nine, I am concerned with the intersections of the spheres (figure 9.1): the spaces between. In each individual, and in the community IT centre itself (as an actor in the network), a common-sense of the self (Ch 6), institutionally mediated social action (Ch 7), and constructed community and identity (Ch 8) are all, always at work. In this model the three spheres are pressed on from without by an Activity-Theoretical urge to structure and contain within known and predictable parameters. And, from within, Third Space readings resist synthesis, simultaneously containing the whole and forcing it apart.

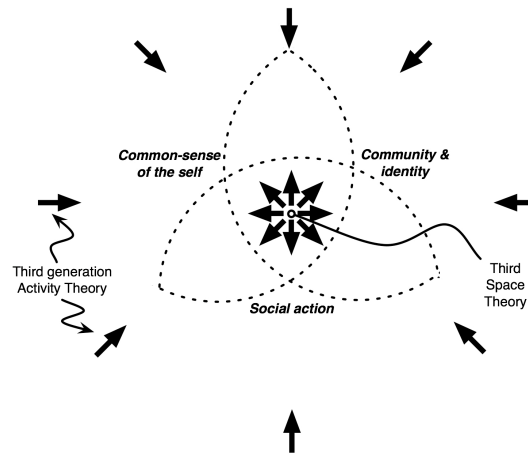


Figure 9.1 The intersections of the spheres

In this final chapter, I address research questions one and five. How do people use their association with the community IT centre to make positive changes in their lives (RQ1) and what might be the implications for policy (RQ5). In the conclusion of this chapter I will make some recommendations of where the work might go next.

9.2 Four ways to positive change

People used (and continue to use) their association with the community IT centre to make positive changes in their lives in four main ways. These four ways are related and seeing them as categorically separate would be a mistake:

1. People may use their association to further the achievement of personal identity projects. There is a corollary to this; groups, agencies, institutions and firms also undertake identity projects. Constructed communities and constructed identities can be developed in community IT centres.
2. People may become more effective managers of social institutions at both an abstract and concrete level.
3. The association with the community centre appears to be correlated with the development of a moral (intra-personal) instrumental value system, which in itself may be a positive criterion.
4. And, finally, people appear to have critical reflexivity concerning their presence and participation in social activity.

9.2.1 Identity projects

For the participants in this study we see that the achievement of identity projects may align with employability, but also may not. For people, achievement is not only about work. Alexandra explicitly and Sandra tacitly both set out to realise a part of their selves that valued working in the community. Their backgrounds, paths and outcomes were very different, but they both, now do work in the community. Angela's new career path, working in an advice centre, and Catherine's work with Kids on Wheels have different origins but share similar features to those of Alexandra and Sandra. Philippe and Shona, perhaps, represent an antithesis, where despite many qualifications, the realisation of that part of their identity which might be achieved through work has not yet come into being. Philippe has a job in the community but wishes he did not, while Shona is still seeking meaningful, engaged employment. Philippe conceives of himself in a global context and wants to work on a global scale in the energy industry for his developing country. But, he is also interested in the impact of the energy industry on the earth and on local communities. He experiences the tensions between the global and the local in a personal way. Other people's identity projects have little, if anything to do with work, or else, as with Jamie, work is just one of very many parts to an identity project that takes in a myriad of domestic, educational and community factors. Even Sandra acknowledges that she would do what she does whether or not she gets paid for it. Through this study we just do not see a lot of emphasis on workforce attachment as a means of social integration. But we do get a strong sense that growing into one's self is important.

The question of the ownership of the facilities, premises, computers, and connectivity has been uncertainly located with the County Council. A number of agencies have had charge of the running of the community IT centre. The centre has spun out its own agency, for the moment, a social enterprise company run by a volunteer. BITZ has an identity of its own. It has a bit of institutional history. Some of it has rubbed off on a number of people. It has alumni/ae. What kind of foundation might give such a place a sufficiently stable platform to continue providing services to a small but needed group?

9.2.2 More effective managers of social institutions

Becoming more effective managers of social institutions at both an abstract and concrete level may have a work-related aspect to it in some instances. At a concrete level all the participants in this study, Alexandra, Angela, Catherine, Haidar, Jamie, Marie, Patricia, Philippe, Robert, Sandra and Shona engage, at least part-time, in money-earning ways with concrete institutions of society: housing associations, advice centres, child-care services, schools, rehab services, social

enterprises, community education, institutions of culture, and economic development agencies. There is some evidence that for all these people the association with the community IT centre has made some contribution. But, many institutions do not have concrete manifestations through which to become employed, and much of the engagement observed has not been to do with employment. The family is one great institution whose concrete instances may create the need to work, but often do not pay you. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of the family and domestic circumstances that are concretised in ways that need to be managed. Family courts function as formalised reflections of troubled domestic relationships. Jamie, Haidar and Alexandra all have used their association with the community IT centre to become better managers of their relations with this dimension of the institution of the family. The dimension of shelter, an important aspect of the domestic institution, needs managing in many sophisticated ways when the dominant cultural form of mortgage or private sector rent is not accessible or desirable. Again, we have seen the community IT centre providing support in housing matters to Robert and Alexandra. Shona and Jamie both have to manage the impacts of crime and the criminal justice system. The collocation of the community IT centre with a credit union suggests a micro-payments partnership should be possible.

It is towards the management of the relationship between the common-sense of one's self and the institutions of society that the community IT centre has so much to offer, but which is so hard to measure solely in terms of attachment to the institutions of work and employment. Employment alone does not make people better at dealing with the world, but dealing better with the world may make a person better able to deal with employment.

9.2.3 Values

A value system may be simply an indicator for other social goods and a way for measuring preference. On the other hand, having a particular value orientation may possibly be a positive thing in itself. The inter-personal and instrumental value system, evidenced here, may be correlated with the achievement of personal identity projects and the more effective management of the institutions of society. Association with others, who share such a system, might reinforce it. Might there be a virtuous cycle whereby the more a person's values are oriented toward others rather than towards one's self, and the more a person's values are oriented towards means rather than ends in themselves, the more positive changes might we see in respect both to the achievement of personal goals and to the management of the institutions of society? A community IT centre might well be one place such a value system is continuously being formed and reinforced. Such a value system would be useful in developing agency.

9.2.4 Reflexivity in presence and participation

Finally, I turn to the question of reflexivity in presence and participation. The participants in this study are reflexively aware of their presence and participation in the world. To some extent this could be a result of being asked, explicitly to look back at a life story and to relate it to the current situation. Alexandra and Sandra, whom I met in my first year as a volunteer at the centre, were both open and willing to talk about the events and behaviours of their lives and how they had responded to them – how they had turned them to some advantage, or, conversely, how they had chosen to reject other events and behaviours as inappropriate or inadequate. For one group, Alexandra, Robert and Sandra computers were part of them and part of their lives: deeply embedded and used not only as a tool or means for interacting with and shaping the outer world but as a tool and means of self reflection. For another group, Angela, Jamie, Patricia and Shona, IT had a part to play. They thought about its use in their lives. However, unlike Alexandra, Robert and Sandra I wouldn't venture to say that IT was a "part" of them. It was not such an obvious presence, in itself, through which their inner lives could be reflected upon. For another group, Catherine, Marie and Philippe, computers were not a part of their expressed identity. They were tools to be used. They were neither a means of self reflection or actualisation. They may have been very important, as for Philippe when they broke and were no longer available, but he did not see them as either instruments for self reflection or as agents of others. They were simply tools. For Haidar, as an IT professional, the use of computers as both tools and objects on which to act with tools was clearly important, but as means of reflection they did not appear significant – not mirrors on the developing self – in the way other aspects of his life did, such as his family, his dogs or the events of his life.

9.3 Policy matters

9.3.1 Vernacular social capital

One place where vernacular literacy practices and especially vernacular IT literacy practices involving "digital and new technology" are developed, exercised and valued, and where they benefit from and contribute to the development of social capital is the community IT centre. Social capital, "Unlike other forms of capital, it is not possessed by individuals but exists in the relationships between individuals and it is characterised by mutual trust and an expectation of reciprocity." (McClenaghan 2000, pp.568-569) Social capital can be seen as "... a necessary precondition for economic development and effective government." (McClenaghan 2000, p.569) However, Pastor *et al* observe, that, "...social capital is generally on the decline..., with job-getting social networks likely to be collateral damage." (Pastor *et al.* 2003, p.9) There has been a shift from production modes of identity formation based on the relational practices of trade or profession in a community to consumption modes of identity formation based on

branded simulacra of relationships. Through this shift, social capital development has been subordinated in policy to both human capital and labour market development. (McClenaghan 2000, p.577)

9.3.2 Social capital and community

Putnam (2000) associates community with social capital. The acquisition of social and cultural capital by which to overcome social exclusion is often held out as one of the wider aims of community education. Like “community”, social capital is, according to Gewirtz *et al*, “a promiscuous concept”; it is “... a concept that has been understood in many different, and sometimes conflicting, ways both by academic sociologists and policy makers.” (2005, pp.651, 653). Like community, Gewirtz *et al* (2005) associate social capital with third way thinking: “Within third way discourses, social capital is presented as an antidote to both the socially destructive nature of rampant neoliberalism and the ‘dependency culture’ produced by excessive collectivism.” (2005, p.653). As, for example, Ditton puts it, “At the group organization and community level, social capital is one of the most powerful determinants of wellbeing.” (Ditton 2009, p.160) However Gewirtz *et al* also note that the application of social capital theory to the remediation of problems of educational and wider social exclusion in the UK proved othering, insufficient and ultimately less effective than hoped: “...there is a failure ... to recognise the forms of social capital that such parents already possess and routinely access.” (Gewirtz *et al* 2005, pp.652-653)

Putnam (2000), like Fendler (2006), is alert to the problematic othering potential inherent in any systematically differential distribution of (social) goods: “...it is important to ask how the positive consequences of social capital – mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness – can be maximised and the negative manifestations – sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption – minimised. (Putnam 2000, pp.21-22)

9.3.3 Cultural and symbolic capital

Carrington and Luke (1997) synthesise and unpick Bourdieu’s Social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital is only one of four forms of capital, which interact and reinforce one another in complex ways. Economic capital is the most familiar. Along side economic and social capital there is the notion of cultural capital. Cultural capital has embodied, objectified and institutional aspects, combining: “Knowledges, skills, dispositions, linguistic practices and representational resources of the bodily habitus; cultural goods, ...; academic qualifications, ... certificates and credentials.” (Carrington & Luke 1997, p.102) That is to say, physiognomy, accent, abilities, qualifications and the content of one’s library (iPod, shopping bag, wardrobe,

etc), all may mediate the deployment of social or even economic capital. Finally, set about all forms of social, cultural and economic capital, is symbolic capital: "... the social phenomenon of prestige, status and reputation which accompanies the accumulation and recognition of other forms of capital." According to Carrington and Luke, "Its realisation becomes a necessary condition for the deployment and exchange of other forms of capital." (Carrington & Luke 1997, p.103)

Symbolic capital can be seen as way of framing the Third Space. Shona experienced the problem of convertibility, when she attained qualifications in her field yet still was unable to "convert" them to employment. The "whole friends thing" as she put it points to her suspicion that there is symbolic capital she does not share. Despite possession of academic awards, qualifications and credentials, for some reason, she cannot convert them. Arguably, social capital development is to some great extent facilitated, or channeled by the possession of cultural and/or economic capital in a space where these are valued. It is not likely that third-way, middle class social capital will be developed without access to third-way, middle class cultural and economic capital or a third-way, middle class symbolic in which these are valued and can be exchanged.

9.3.4 Values as cultural capital

Kang and Glassman, interestingly, relate moral thought and moral action to cultural and social capital, respectively:

We suggest what is usually referred to as moral thought (as expressed in judgements of guiding belief systems) is part of what Bourdieu ... referred to as cultural capital—stable, internalised signs showing that an individual is (or should be) considered a member of a given social group. Moral action is related to social capital, based in levels of trust and reciprocity in carrying out community-oriented goals. (Kang & Glassman 2010, p.22)

The sharing (i.e. exchanging) of a value system: a system of "moral thought" can be seen as another liminal act, an opening onto a Third Space. There is a congruence between social capital and community (Putnam 2000). Training the individual to meet the demands of a job market may not succeed without the simultaneous development of the community's and the individual's social capital (McClenaghan 2000; McClenaghan 2003). There is a congruence between cultural capital and value systems. Guiding systems of belief – values – are important pieces of cultural capital. There is not an easy one-to-one mapping of social capital onto community or cultural capital onto values. But, it appears to be accepted in policy and

evidenced in the life stories, particularly in respect of Philippe's and Shona's stories, that neither social capital nor cultural capital, alone or together, are sufficient to overcome social exclusion: something else is also necessary. Cultural capital and social capital are continuously being exchanged on the symbolic level. This locus of exchange, symbolic capital, may well be congruent with a Third Space. Without a shared Third Space as the instantiation of the place of exchange in a wider symbolic, no capital has value.

9.3.5 Kin and class-based capital

The way that kin systems function as so-called "poverty traps" in developing countries has been modeled by Hoff and Sen (2005). The model is predicated on assumptions about the relative value of "modern" markets and external investment against the value of traditional societies. Similar systems in modern societies can be observed, too, based on other bonds of affinity than kinship: geography (neighbourhood, estate, etc), class (e.g. working class values, Hoggart 1958), or national origin. On a global scale, Žižek observes the emergence of :

...a mixture of improvised modes of social life, from criminal gangs and religious "fundamentalist" groups held together by a charismatic leader up to and including seeds of new forms of "socialist" solidarity... We should be looking for signs of the new forms of social awareness that will emerge from the slum collectives: they will be the germs of the future. (Žižek 2009b, pp.425-426)

Such systems may well mitigate and delay certain kinds of development. The fact that the use of certain tools in one context may appear similar to the outside observer to the use of similar tools in a different context does not mean that the individual acknowledges that similarity, or even – perhaps more importantly – wishes to acknowledge that similarity. In fact, there may be a greater perceived benefit to the person in resisting what could be seen as the colonisation of vernacular higher-order thinking practices by a distant power, denying the similarities in practice in order to defend a local identity. The cost of re-engaging with formal learning is greater – or is perceived to be greater – than the benefit to the individual (Livingston *et al.* 2004, p.73). We might even say that they preserve not only local (vernacular) social and cultural capital but also the symbolic capital whereby such local capitals can be exchanged for the material and cultural goods, which make life possible. The community IT centre may be such a place where vernacular cultural and social capital is convertible.

The cultural and social capital of such vernacular systems remains convertible until such time as the structures within which it can be converted are so eroded that there is no longer any place

for the exchange. The so-called “poverty trap” may well have been far richer for far more people than the “escape” provided for those who are willing to risk its loss. But the real utilitarian benefit of such capitals is often ignored because the measures of social inclusion are based on narrow criteria such as workforce attachment and contribution to GDP. The measures of vernacular value are subordinated.

9.3.6 Social and human capital

As Hodgson *et al* observe: “... successive policy documents have employed narrower and more politically nuanced constructs of learner identity, justifying policy by stressing human capital, while underplaying the role of social capital and the wider benefits of learning.” (Hodgson *et al.* 2007, p.317) As Gouthro observes, the forms of lifelong learning and lifelong education that have received government and corporate support are: “... linked with a marketplace orientation that centres on learning primarily as a means to upgrade vocational and professional skills.” (Gouthro 2002, p.334)

This can be seen in the recent British Government document, “World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England”, where we read: “Treating employers and individual learners as the customers of the skills system is central to the idea of a demand-led approach”, in which the employer will have “real leverage”, “confidence” and “satisfaction” (DIUS 2007, p.11). There is no mention of the individual learner beyond their appearance as a customer. Will the individual learner have similar leverage, confidence and satisfaction as the corporate employer? As Coffield and colleagues note:

... the phrase ‘Adult Education’ has now disappeared from the vocabulary of the DfES and has been replaced by the term ‘Adult Skills’; ... ‘greater choice’ for adult learners now means being invited to choose any course they like, provided it is an officially approved course which trains them in employability skills. Traditional classes in adult education are closing down throughout the country, despite what we know about the contribution of adult learning to health and social capital. (Coffield *et al.* 2007, pp.736-737)

And, this is in the face of good evidence, uncovered by Livingston *et al* (2004) on behalf of the Learning and Skills Research Centre that there is synergy between two conceptions of learning: “... individual learning, emphasising the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills as transferable commodities ... [and] the socio-cultural conception of learning as a collective participatory process of active knowledge construction, emphasising context, interaction and

situatedness”; this synergy can lead to positive changes in individuals and in the “collective” (Livingston *et al.* 2004, p.78).

What Livingston *et al.* (2004) explain is that the “collective” can be understood on many levels, where collectives of policy makers on one hand and, say, adult learners on the other operate together within a wider collective of society, or the nation or even the globe. Coffield *et al.* observe, further, that there is little evidence that policy translates directly into its intended outcomes: “We have found, for example, little evidence that ‘a policy lever pulled’ by the LSC in Coventry produces a simple and predictable outcome in the learning sites ... [W]e have not found evidence of the direct or simple transmission of policy into teaching practices. (Coffield *et al.* 2007, pp.735-736)

9.3.7 Colonising the relational and subjective

“The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a vision that by 2010, young people and adults in England will have the knowledge and productive skills to match the ‘best in the world’.” (Frontier Economics 2005, p.1). The funding for the provision of adult continuing education is being ever more closely linked to employability: “Skills Accounts, Jobcentre Plus and the new adult careers service will come together to provide customers with the seamless service they need to identify and access the right training and skills opportunities, at the right time.” (DIUS 2007, p.11) “There will be a single customer journey, from poor skills or worklessness to sustainable employment and the skills to progress.” (DIUS 2007, p.25) The penetration of culture by the word “customer” is one example of acceptance being won for a representation of change. Fairclough, argues that, “...the more or less self-conscious application of social scientific knowledge for the purposes of bureaucratic control,” (Fairclough 2001, p.175 ff) are increasingly colonising and manipulating the relational and subjective aspects of society in much the same way as commercial organisations adopt a synthetic personality and seek to manufacture corresponding synthetic personalities in their customers, whereby “we” can provide “you” with a more personal shopping experience. Or, more relevant to this study, perhaps: a personal learning experience with an approved provider of employability skills.

Personal and community development learning (PCDL) and the demand-led funding model for employment skills development are among many tools being brought to bear in pursuit of economic competitiveness. However in a context where discourses of social exclusion are applied there are complexities. “Customers” of the employment and skills service have few other places to shop. The employment and skills service is the labour-market mediator of last resort, and one which some are coerced to use. For the poor, the unemployed, the ex-offender,

the economic migrant and anyone from “the community” the concept of an eportfolio for lifelong learning is again being conflated into Skills Accounts: smart-card managed systems for recording and funding training from “high-quality providers”. (DIUS 2007, p.27)

9.3.8 Coloniser and colonised

But, there are several discontinuities here. What learners? Aren't we all learners? Is it really universal? Will I have a Skills account? Will I care? Will an engineer or an accountant with a multi-national corporation have one? Will the CEO? Will s/he care? Will Members of Parliament have a skills account? Or senior civil servants? As Coffield wryly observes, the Learning and Skills Sector is, “... a world which remains invisible to most politicians, academics and commentators because, with very few exceptions, neither they nor their children have ever passed through it.” (Coffield 2006, p.2) But, this is the world largely inhabited by users of the community IT centre. The Learner Registration Service (LRS) gives some hints as to who the sector is for.

The Learner Registration Service (LRS) is an Internet based facility capable of providing a Unique Learner Number every to person in education and training aged 14 and over. This will allow people to build a lifelong record of their learning participation and achievements (their learner record), which they can access and can choose to share. (MIAP 2008)

It appears likely that the Unique Learner Number and Common Data Definitions under the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) Model, will further develop sub/superordinate relationships between institutions and individuals (MIAP 2008). In fact the service is only indirectly aimed at “people” as common-sense of the self. While it may be “capable of providing a Unique Learner Number to every person...”, it is directly aimed at corporate persons known as “prescribed persons” (MIAP 2008 ..services/lrs/LRS_Prescribed_Organisations_List.htm) such as OFSTED, UCAS, the QCA and institutional providers of education. Common-sense selves – people – are entered into the system through “Learner Registration Bodies”, where only designated “superusers” are given access to the LRS. The itemisation of benefits of MIAP leads with the “learner”. But does it really put the learner first or anywhere near the centre of its purpose? The main benefit to learners is described as being able access to the Register of Learning Providers (RLP): “Learners will be able to access the UKRLP to become better informed about learning opportunities for better decision making.” (MIAP 2008 ..benefits/) But, this is precisely the kind of service that Pastor *et al* characterise as weak/weak: weakly connected to both job-seeker

and employer. The kind of organisations described as strong/strong are the, “Intensive community based organizations that have employer commitments.” (Pastor *et al.* 2003, p.10) But, the role of community-based organisations is being diminished. The importance to a community of using employment and labour market development to secure its own development (Pastor *et al.* 2003, p.11) is not acknowledged. The home page of the Register of Learning Providers (RLP) clearly identifies the RLP’s stakeholders: learners come third (RLP 2008). This mirrors community economic development (CED) approaches advocated by, among others, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (Mathie & Cunningham 2003, p.481) CED, like policy with respect to personal and community development learning (PCDL), is enacted hierarchically, top down. First the infrastructure of administration and control is reformed. Then concentration is turned to the remediation of the individual to fit into the economic system. Community development is expected to follow.

“The individual capacity-building perspective sees CED as the by-product of the economic success of individuals. ‘Community’ tends to refer more to a ‘target group’ of individuals (usually those economically marginalised) rather than to a geographic locality...” (Mathie & Cunningham 2003, p.481).

Community education initiatives, and particularly community IT initiatives, may be understood as locations of imperial and post-imperial contest where the dynamics of colonialism, neo- and post-colonialism can be seen. The policy utterances around personal and community development learning (PCDL) and the demand-led funding model for employment skills development read as though they could have been issued by a “government of recordation” for whom writing itself is a strategy of self- and other- regulation, “underwritten by the practice of utilitarian reforms” (Bhabha 2004, p.133) in a “nationalist, authoritarian tone” (p. 134) where events experienced are inscribed to be read elsewhere. Bhabha is writing of the colonial administration of India where the “space of interpretation and misappropriation”, which creates ambivalence at the heart of authority, is the physical and temporal distance between the governing and the governed. Similar urges to utilitarianism, even colonialism, are inscribed on community IT centres and PCDL practices through the partly-well-meant policies of detached politicians with little personal experience of the sector. I have seen the well-paid consultants come and go. (In a different place and time, I was one.) I have heard the resigned cynicism of the people as yet another transforming initiative dries up. And, I have seen the rich life that persists in, around and through centres that have at least something to do with the community use of ICT.

Further to Bourdieu, the discourses of the education system can be understood, “... as a field of competition for the legitimate exercise of symbolic violence,” that is a locus of conflict between rival principles of legitimacy and competition for the power to grant cultural consecration (Bourdieu 1993, p.121). It is also a system for reproducing actors who are both producers of certain cultural goods as well consumers of those goods.

9.3.9 Third Space is not the Third Way

Third Space Theory arguably is the other path but it is not to be seen as a “middle way”, a compromise between polarities. The Third Space is not the Third Way. When Bhabha asked in 1994:

Must we always polarise in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representations of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? (Bhabha 2004, pp.28-29)

I see the mirrored reflection of Giddens, who, writing in the same year from a different perspective, says:

Centre-left parties across the world have revised their doctrines in the light of social and economic changes: the disappearance of socialist utopias, globalisation, the development of a service economy and ageing populations. In the face of these, the First Way - classical social democracy, based on Keynesianism and traditional statism - has become largely obsolete. The Second Way - Thatcherism or free-market fundamentalism - proved a disastrous alternative. The aim of Third Way thinking - revisionist social democracy - is to create policies for the centre left that respond to these changes. (Giddens 2004)

But, for Giddens, sociology is concerned only with “...the advanced’ or modern societies” (Giddens 1984, p.xvii). For Giddens, structuration is concerned with analysing the evolution of society. Theories – that is to say, abstractions – as part of a system are related and relationships are discernable; these bodies of thought are structuring (Karsten 1983, p.189). We can discern in our thoughts, expressed in language and the artefacts of culture, the power to transform the world. If this theory of sociology only applies to the “modern” world then the third world’s thoughts are denied the power to transform the world. Structuration becomes structuring and has self regulation, maintenance and closure: not so much analysing evolution as directing it.

Through structuration there is an opening move away from the analysis of evolution toward the management of change.

Fendler (2006) identifies, "... three discursive strands in educational literature that support the appeal of community and make community seem like a good thing." She identifies these as 1) the "third way appeal" of communities which places them between two "unsatisfactory" politics, identified as "state control (communitarianism) and free-market individualism (liberalism)." 2) A "trope of solidarity. Based in the assumptions of labor union activism". And, 3) "an appeal to emotion ... Community is advocated on the grounds that it makes people feel welcome and comfortable." (2006, p.305) Fendler goes on to identify the notion of community of practice with third way thinking, arguing that communities of practice, "... constitute a third way between collectivism and individualism." (2006, p.307) In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that contemporary learning technology literature is laden with a discourse of communities of practice (see, e.g. Barah *et al.* 2004; Conole *et al.* 2003; Hammersley 2005; Oliver 2003). But, ultimately, for Fendler, third way notions of community resolve to normative, top down "disciplinary mechanisms": "Third-way thinking paves the way for community to be instantiated as a new site for government, while appearing to operate outside the structures of government" (2006, p.309)

9.4 Policy direction

Responsibility needs to be devolved and there will be consequences for control, co-ordination and accountability. At any local setting with people: co-practitioners acting together with shared understandings and shared aims, co-present and co-participating may lead to positive change for individuals and communities: achieving goals, managing social enterprises, sharing instrumental-interpersonal values and being reflective individually, professional and collectively.

9.4.1 CITCs supply *critically* more IT access

Most public ICT sites, it could be argued, do little to widen access, simply supplying more access to those who already have it. But, I suggest community IT centres supply *critically* more and to those who don't have it. As well as adding to the provision of access to IT, CITCs can be seen to add significant value to IT, education, the community and the person in the process. For some such as Philippe or Sandra, CITCs are IT access centres of last resort, without which the pursuit of education would be made yet more difficult. For many CITCs provide ancillary IT services supplementing basic domestic provision. This may consist of printing services or

connectivity as has been seen in the stories of Shona, Sandra, Angela, Haidar, Marie and Robert. For some people the CITC is the only place they have – or can afford – to access computers and the Internet at all (Robert, Jamie). For some people the critical aspect of provision is the individual support provided by centre workers or volunteers. For Robert and Philippe this has been significant in enabling them to complete their projects. For others the critical aspect has been the community of support enabled by the CITC. We have seen that for Haidar, Sandra, Alexandra, Shona and Jamie, the ability to turn to others for support, or for a sense of shared “civilised” values has enabled them to achieve far more on the Internet than they ever could have done alone. For Robert and Marie it is conducive to write in public spaces but the ambiance of the library is inhibiting.

9.4.2 An integrated approach to development

Community development, individual development, and labour market development needs to be seen as an integrated whole. Training the individual to meet the demands of a job market may not succeed without the simultaneous development of the community’s social capital to support the individual in other dimensions of life. Similarly community development without regard for the real labour market challenges faced by firms and employees alike is equally short-sighted. Any labour market intermediary, private sector temporary agency or public sector skill provider will be more successful “to the extent that they serve multiple interests.” (Pastor *et al.* 2003, pp.12-12)

The Internet presumes a broad industrial infrastructure: energy, raw materials for the wires and fibre optics, sophisticated manufacturing facilities for microchips, transport networks. The Internet presumes a broad financial services infrastructure, not just for the venture capitalists and stock market flotations but for the domestic household to pay land-line, mobile phone and ISP bills. The breadth of this industrial and financial infrastructure and the urgency with which it was recently rescued suggests that it and its agents will not be going away of their own accord soon.

Communities need to turn their back on the state, or at least to assert equality side-on in respect to the wider polity. Wilson and Summers, in Ireland, came to a similar conclusion. They recount a radical rejection of state agency funding for community education. In 2003 the Dingle Community Learning Project decided to stop seeking grant funding for its operations.

According to Wilson and Summers:

- The money has had minimal positive impact on opportunities and capacity in the community;
- On the contrary: it has been divisive, benefiting external agencies but making the community worse off and co-opting, marginalising and sometimes damaging those involved. 'It brought the parasites. There are plenty of people who've been convinced to do what's not right';
- External funding is not about what the community wants and accepting it means distorting the vision of learning which they have created.

Alan at DCLP says: 'The spirit started leaving when the money started coming in. I can't wait for the money to end ... We have the independence to say things how we see them and call people to account.' (Wilson & Summers 2006, pp.22-23)

9.4.3 The limits of the state

This may become a forced issue if the “Big Society” is given full rein. The state can no longer be relied on to be the repository of our better halves or to fund our better intentions like open access to learning, knowledge, education, recreation, sport, art and ICT: the valued aspects of our culture. Business is open access for those so minded and occasionally ruthless. Social enterprise depends on there be an accumulator and balancing resource which provides for long term security. Call it sustainable development, social banking or a solution to the pensions problem. Our urge towards equality, tolerance, diversity, care for others and the environment has, with defence, health sanitation services and policing, for a long time been vested in the state. It can be argued that the state has not made as good a job of it as some would have wished. Even defence is in some real ways private enterprise, now, with firms providing security to peace-keeping missions between warring factions: the drones and clones march on. If communities are going to resist the offered learning model, fit-for-business purpose, there needs to be a way of sustaining enterprises in a fit-for-social model.

9.4.4 An agency to develop agency

This might be put as the next research question: how can a community Internet agency be resourced to provide access-development connectivity to those who want and need it in a multi-agency environment? Is it useful to support an agency which facilitates the development of agency itself (Ch 1, section 1.4.6; Ch 9, section 9.2.3) in itself and its agents? With the demise of Becta in mind, at what scale do we need our agency to be resilient? Can we think of ourselves as our agency? Must we? For community tutors, the course organisers are the agency. Such an agency needs a room full of computers and other forms of access (wifi) to function. The agency mediates access to the Internet but needs a light touch and self policing, with clear

rules. But, what should the rules be? One can see an activity system developing. The challenge is to mediate that activity system at the local level in order to allow individuals to be the subjects of their own systems.

9.5 Recommendations

Further to the policy context and the findings of this thesis (set out and cross referenced in section 9.1.2), I make 15 specific recommendations.

This thesis has shown the community IT centre is a place where people engage in informal and formal programmes of activity leading to positive change in their lives. Communities should, like Dutton's networked elites (Dutton 2007), feel proud to provide IT-connected social learning spaces in their midst in order to supply critical additionality to domestic and other public commercial and non-commercial IT provision. Most public IT sites do little to widen access, simply supplying more access to those who already have it but CITCs supply critically more and to those who don't have it. As well as adding to the provision of access to IT, CITCs can be seen to add value to IT, education, the community and the person in the process. In addition, a proportion of users of CITCs do not want the Internet in their homes, even though they are perfectly competent users of computers. They resent its intrusion for reasons which need not be subject of argument or coercion. If agencies of government wish the principal channel of client engagement to be via the Internet, then some form of provision outside the domestic home must be available. It appears, therefore to me, axiomatic that all communities should have a CIRC.

- 1. Communities must take it upon themselves, with encouragement and support, to provide community IT facilities.**

Education exerts an explicit mediating influence on people's use of the CIRC. We also see that education is tightly woven into the domestic field as well as into people's affective response to computers and the CIRC. People prefer informal learning about information and communication technologies. Formal qualifications should be provided elsewhere. The CIRC should not compete with or be confused with sites of formal education. However along with other information, the CIRC must provide access to information about educational opportunities.

- 2. What ever other ancillary activities are undertaken, the core activity should be easy, open, drop-in provision of the Internet, with the availability of informal peer-to-peer or coaching support, perhaps enhanced by a programme of access-level training.**

- 3. The CITC must provide access to information about educational opportunities, but is not, itself an education institution nor must it compete with colleges or libraries.**

It is not within the scope of this thesis to consider what particular political-economic model might best encourage and support the provision of a CITC. Neither is it within the scope of this thesis to perform a cost-benefit analysis. It should, however be clear that, whatever the model and at what ever scale it is implemented there would need to be subsidies provided. Although not all participants would have been unable to afford to use an Internet cafe, many did choose to use the CITC because it was free, and some could not have afforded any but the smallest, uneconomic charge. But, it should also be clear that the costs would not be exorbitant and there may be many different ways of securing provision: a couple hundred square metres, 10 - 20 Internet connected computers, an open wireless (wifi) access point, comfortable seating, tea and coffee, a lavatory or two.

- 4. Whatever model, the provision would have to be on the basis that the CITC were a public good; there would need to be subsidies provided.**

People have many different reasons for using the CITC and do many different things with computers. As well as the Internet, a basic suite of applications should be provided including photo, audio and video editing as well as a standard office suite, however, given the rise of web services it may not be necessary to specify which one. Many people have “smart phones”, netbooks, and tablet devices (iPads and ebook readers). Books are becoming digitised. Public learning spaces should be offering e-book readers through Kindle, Nook and iPad emulators on screen as well as opportunity for people to plug in (charge) and connect their own portable devices. Eventually we might imagine a public space with a number of tablet devices in it, free for use. Chairs, coffee; there’s an iPad to hand as a newspaper.

- 5. As well as the Internet, a basic suite of applications should be provided on the CITC’s computers including photo, audio and video editing as well as a standard office suite.**
- 6. The CITC should provide wireless connectivity for users’ own devices.**

Positive change is manifested in an emergent instrumental and interpersonal value system. Through association with the CITC people can be enabled to be more effective managers (and self-managers) of the institutions of society. Engagement with the CITC also appears to be associated with critical reflexivity concerning presence and participation in society and with the formation of self-effective identities and communities. All this suggests that there should be a strong user-centred culture of governance and management of the CITC. Extrapolating from this I might propose a co-operative model of organisation, but there may be many other ways of managing a CITC.

7. There should be a strong user-centred culture of governance and management of the CITC.

More importantly, people express a broad range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for using the centre and their assertions about why they use the CITC do not always clearly align with their actions while they are there. Norms will need to be established by the community, but a too-narrow scoping of appropriate use should be avoided. People should be encouraged to play, socialise and experiment with IT and the other facilities on offer as much as to work and study. The atmosphere should not be that of a library.

8. A too-narrow scoping of appropriate use should be avoided. People should be encouraged to play, socialise and experiment with IT and the other facilities on offer as much as to work and study.

Given that affective factors are extremely significant in determining people's engagement with the CITC and their use of computers generally (Ch 6, section 6.4) and given that some participants may have complicated lives, staff and volunteers will need some basic training in counselling intervention techniques. Information about community support services should be to hand. There will need to be staff and at least one should be a professional on a payroll, but extensive use can be made of volunteers. For the same reasons, there should also be a private meeting space for confidential conversations.

9. At least one staff member should be a professional on a payroll, but extensive use can be made of volunteers.

10. Staff and volunteers will need basic training in counselling intervention techniques.

11. There should be a private meeting space for confidential conversations.

12. Information about community support services must be readily available.

As well as providing basic connectivity and ancillary IT services such as printers and scanners, CITCs can provide connections to things like coffee, social banking (the credit union), child care (Sure Start, Kids on Wheels), family centres, universities, colleges, schools, arts groups, music groups and professional bodies. This thesis has shown that IT is not the magnet that draws people into uncomfortable spaces; comfortable spaces draw people into IT use and comfort is a factor of community. The BITZ CITC at Bluefield Lanes is collocated with a Community Arts space, a music studio, a credit union, a play centre and other community development organisations. Such collections of agencies are common in local government owned community centres, but, again, other collections and other ownership models can be envisaged. There could be an opportunity for a commercial cafe operation.

13. The CITC should be collocated with other community facilities.

Given that domestic circumstances and parenthood contribute significantly to shaping people's use of the centre, family and child-friendly policies and facilities should be in place and resources to support lone parenthood should be accessible through or at the CITC.

14. Family and child-friendly policies and facilities should be in place and resources to support lone parenthood should be accessible through or at the CITC.

Community IT centres could be a part of federated open access schemes, possibly in association with local universities and colleges, providing for access to open on-line cultural resources: journals, images, courses, film, news. As a corollary to federated access schemes, Community IT centres could become online identity providers (e.g. e-mail addresses name@local-citc.net.uk) probably in association with organisations like Google running the infrastructure and Nominet or even Janet registering the domain names.

Abstracting an Internet in the long term from the commercial economic sector might require the co-operation of many different perspectives. Abstracting a local Internet “mesh” can be in many interests (Motorola 2009). There was interest recently in Swindon (Morris 2009) and Brighton (Pier to pier 2008) in setting up wide scale municipal networks. At what scale do we need our telecommunication network to be resilient? A community centre could be a node on a local Internet. Propose a pilot trial. A community centre could be an ISP connecting on to an Internet backbone via education institutions. How far does the community want to go with pooling its labour and providing the skills widely enough to do so? Maybe we should rejoice in the relative harmlessness of the circuses of the age played out on screen?

15. Community IT centres could be a part of federated open access schemes and on-line identity provision, possibly in association with local universities and colleges.

9.6 Future research

This research suggests many directions at the individual, local and wider national and global levels. As I hope I have made clear, these levels all influence one another. Studies at one level must account for the others as well. Research might focus at all levels on the factors of positive change identified here: identity projects, effective management of institutions, shared values, and reflexivity. If it is a constructivist/connectivist (Siemens 2005a) epistemology that has some power to effect positive change in people and societies through locally rooted, affiliative, socially co-constructed, networked knowledge: a connected commons then research into this connected commons is needed. The original plan for this research envisaged developing the instrument used for round two interpretive interviews and trialling it at comparison sites. Glasgow,

Manchester and semi-rural sites near Exeter and Falmouth have been proposed. European comparisons and collaborations would be possible and interesting. What is really happening on the Internet facilitated human migration networks? Scholarship is necessarily political in some areas.

9.6.1 Identity projects

Constructed identity and identity projects can be investigated at the level of the individual, the institution (the firm) and more widely. There is a facile, but influential discourse around branding and brand identity which needs to be brought into this discussion and its relational factors problematised possibly by setting them against an instrumental and interpersonal value system. At the level of the individual, we continue to need rich descriptions of people in all their particularity. We need these on the one hand to balance the tendency to treat groups, especially groups who are perceived as deprived or excluded as homogenous entities. In personal narratives, over time, as a person moves through a cycle of engagement we might expect to see more analysis of personal history, greater attempts to synthesise understandings or explanations of the present in light of the past, and more interest in actively shaping a future rather than being buffeted by forces. Can biography projects be brought into identity projects for individuals or communities?

9.6.2 Intrusion into the domestic sphere

There is a myth of the privacy of the British home (Hoggart 1958, p.34). Intrusion by Internet and the state into the domestic sphere is regarded with suspicion. There is a reciprocal concern for useful positive public provision to serve people who choose or prefer not to interface or are otherwise prevented from interfacing with the state or other agencies of society through their domestic computing environment. The state should be pleased that there are places willing to provide this service on such little state subsidy. It would be useful to tender to cost the provision.

9.6.3 Value systems

It might be a useful direction for future work to focus more sharply on value systems present among users of community IT centres more widely. It would be interesting to know to what extent this focus on the instrumental and inter-personal (moral) rather than the terminal and personal (Rokeach 1973, p.8) might be due to any of: researcher bias, a bias in this particular centre, or amongst these particular people; and, conversely, to what extent this might be a generalisable value system among people who participate in the life of community IT centres or perhaps other community-focused activity systems (art, music, education, etc). This might argue

against what Ecclestone (2004, p.112 ff) refers to as the “demoralisation” of education and society.

9.7 Concluding reflection

What I would do differently? Ideally: have more time to work more diligently, volunteer more. Or, choose a smaller study or a bigger team. I should have done one more full cycle of interpretation with the edited story. But that would not have been possible with 13, or even 11 stories.

Community is a consistent “intersubjective network” (Žižek 2008, p.12), which, as for Bhabha, “... enables a division between the private and the public, the civil and the familial.” But, community also, “... enacts the impossibility of drawing an objective line between the two.” (Bhabha 2004, p.330). I have learned a lot about participatory community development education from the stories here. I did not implement it as well as I might. I still have aims to do better next time. I’ll know better next time, too. In any study of this sort we have to ask how else might it have been framed. Would it have been possible to frame it differently? This study was framed by a PhD in Education. How might the institution of education have appeared if the study could have been framed differently? These days, community needs places. Community needs computers. Community needs computer places. The situation is important and we are launched into life in the middle of a situation: the world is, in part, a computer place.

Conditions and locations of social and cultural exclusion have their reflection in symbolic conditions and locations of cultural exchange. The community IT centre at Bluefield Lanes represents a possible progressive, emancipatory, democratic recentering on this other-space between community and identity, where cultural accounts are balanced and the personal-political imaginary is restructured through a Third Space symbolic of information technology, generating and regenerating tools and knowledge with which to build – in struggle if necessary – the elusive new imaginary of an unenclosed global connected commons.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Briefing for life stories
- Appendix 2 Briefing for focus groups
- Appendix 3 Focus group – extended briefing
- Appendix 4 Consent forms
- Appendix 5 Example transcripts
- Appendix 6 Round 2 Narrative interpretation schedule
- Appendix 7 Case properties
- Appendix 8 Final follow-up letters
- Appendix 9 Ethics protocols
- Appendix 10 Summary table of recommendations
- Appendix 11 Data protection, freedom of information, copyright

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Briefing for life-stories

Thank you for helping with this project.

A Community IT centre may make a big difference in people's lives.

What is the research?

The Oxford Learning Communities Project is working with Oxford Brookes University and the University of Southampton to learn more about what people do with, and want from, their community IT centres. We would like to find out how your life-story relates to BLITZ...

- What you do with your IT centre?
- What you want from your IT centre?
- Has your life changed through your association with your IT centre?

Why have you been asked to take part in the research?

We are using a "snowball" process for selecting people to take part. The first participants will be chosen for their role in the centre: key volunteers and affiliates. Other participants may be identified by the centre manager and key volunteers. In total about 10 people's stories will be collected. We are also conducting focus groups.

What will taking part involve?

There will be two life-story-telling sessions. You are invited to participate in both sessions. The first sessions will take place in early 2008. The second session will follow approximately 4-6 months after the first.

Who will be carrying out the research?

George Roberts is an experienced IT researcher. He is a regular visitor and sometimes tutor at the community IT centre. Your stories will be recorded. Before he makes the recording he will inform you that you are being recorded and ask your permission to type up the recording. On the transcript you will not be identified by name. Your privacy will be preserved at all times. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the recording before it is used. The final results of the research, but not your personal details, will be shared with all the participants.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. We would like to assure you that your decision to participate or not, or to withdraw, will not affect your involvement with the Learning Communities project or Blackbird Leys IT Zone (Blitz; the IT Hub, the Youth Hub, the Multimedia Room).

What will happen to the information you provide?

Your information will only be used for this research and for no other purpose. We will protect your anonymity and confidentiality to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law.

Structure of the first story telling session

The session will last between 60 and 90 minutes. There will be two main parts, each lasting about 30 - 40 minutes. A third part may follow lasting up to another 30 minutes. The session will be recorded. The researcher will take notes as the interview progresses.

Part 1

In the first part of the session the researcher will speak very little. The aim of the process is to allow you to tell your story in your way with little suggestion or direction from outside.

There is just one question:

Please tell me the story of your life, the events and experiences that have been important to you, from wherever you want to begin, up to and including the present time: you as a user/volunteer/worker/tutor/friend of the Blackbird Leys IT Zone (Blitz).

Part 2

During the telling of your story the researcher will take notes. After the narrative has reached its conclusion, the researcher may identify three or four points from the narrative and ask you to continue in greater depth or detail on these points. In all the interviews, the final point will be the same:

Please expand on your time in/at/with/around Blitz.

Part 3

In the third part, the researcher may invite you to comment on or interpret aspects of the interview. You and the researcher may get into discussion about your life path in, through and around the centre. The researcher may ask you about what you do with computers: what programs you use, what web sites you use, etc.

After the interview

The researcher will write up all or part of the session and provide you with a copy of their write-up for checking and correcting.

To thank you for taking part

To thank you for taking part in the life-story session we will give you [vouchers] valued at £25 for participating in the first session. A second, equivalent consideration will be given for participating in the second session

Contact

If you have any questions about this research you can contact:

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What do you do with your community IT centre? Briefing for "Learning Lunches" Focus Groups

Thank you for participating in this research project.

A Community IT centre may make a big difference in people's lives.

The Oxford Learning Communities Project is working with Oxford Brookes University and the University of Southampton to learn more about what people do with, and want from, their community IT centres. We would like to find out...

- What do you do with your IT centre?
- What do you want from your IT centre?
- How has your life changed through your association with your IT centre?

Groups of people who use the Community IT Centre are being invited to "Learning Lunches". There will be different learning lunches with different groups of people:

- course participants on introductory or more advanced courses
- drop-in users of the centre
- tutors and administrators

George Roberts, an experienced IT researcher, regular visitor and sometimes tutor at the community IT centre will help guide the discussion at these sessions.

At the session George will record part of the discussion. Before he makes the recording he will inform you that you are being recorded and ask your permission to type up the recording. On the transcript you will not be identified by name. Your privacy will be preserved at all times. The results of the research will be shared with all the participants.

Voluntary participation

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. We would like to assure you that your decision to participate or not, or to withdraw, will be completely independent of your involvement with the Learning Communities project or Blackbird Leys IT Zone (Blitz; the IT Hub, the Youth Hub, the Multimedia Room).

Confidentiality

We will protect your anonymity and confidentiality of to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. The researchers will keep names and contact details in a, password-protected computer file separate from any data (recordings or transcripts). In the final report, references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity will be removed. The data will be kept securely, initially at the researcher's office and subsequently at the University of Southampton, School of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Structure of the focus group sessions

There will be two main parts to the focus group, each lasting about 45 minutes. The focus group will last about 1½ to 2 hours. After this there will be lunch provided.

Appreciative inquiry

The name of the research method used in this focus group is "Appreciative inquiry". Appreciative inquiry is about making change for the better. Positive questioning is used to find out what works. Rather than focusing on barriers and problems, we devote our attention to what gives life to organizations. We are looking to discover more of the best. You are not required to answer all or any of the questions and if you go off on a side track, that is fine. *The only thing that is not allowed is negative questioning or reporting.* There is plenty of time for that elsewhere. This is about finding what is good. This is two hours when we focus on what we want more of, not what needs to be fixed.

Discovery Stage 1: Warm-up, affective recall

In the first stage of the focus group (30 minutes) you will get into random pairs. You can work with a friend if you wish. In pairs, take turns so that each person tells and each person listens for about 5 minutes each (this is not recorded):

Describe a time and a place in your life before you came to the community IT centre when you felt really energized and creative. Describe that situation to your partner.

After each person has had an opportunity to speak, the researcher will ask you to come up with key words or phrases that describe the experience of the discussion: how the discussion felt. Discuss these as a whole group (this will be recorded).

Discovery Stage 2: Go for it

Back in your pairs, each person is asked to interview the other using the following suggested list of questions. Take about 10 minutes each way:

1. *What was your first experience of Blitz? What were your first impressions?*
2. *What are you enjoying most about your association with Blitz?*
3. *What is helping you to feel like you belong?*
4. *What has been your contribution?*
5. *What do you like most about using the computers?*
6. *What do you value most about being part of this community?*
7. *If you had a magic wand, and could have any three wishes granted to make the health and vitality of this community even better, what would they be?*

After each person has had a turn, you will be brought back into a whole-group discussion. Each person will be asked to report on what the other has said in the interviews (this is recorded). During this session, the researcher will seek to gather specific responses to the questions. These may be written up on a flip chart as well as recorded.

Contact

If you have any questions about this research you can contact:

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What do you do with your community IT centre? "Learning Lunch" Focus Group

Thursday 26 February 2009

Agenda

Approximate timing

1000 -1030	Introductions, briefing, consent forms, questions about the research and process
1030 - 1045	Appreciative inquiry (Ai) & asset-based community development (ABCD) - handout
1045	Focus group part 1 "Affective recall" - in pairs/threes:- Describe a time and a place in your life before you came to the community IT centre when you felt really energized and creative. Describe that situation to your partner.
1100	Feedback and discussion (recorded)
1130	Focus Group part 2 "Discovery" " - in pairs/threes:- Each person interviews the other (10 min each way) using the suggested list of questions (below); you do not have to answer all the questions.
1150	Feedback and discussion (recorded)
1220	Final discussion and questions
1230	Lunch

Discovery questions

1. What was your first experience of Blitz? What were your first impressions?
2. What are you enjoying most/or did you most enjoy/ about your association with Blitz?
3. What is helping you to feel like you belong?
4. What has been your contribution?
5. What do you like most about using the computers?
6. What do you value most about being part of this community?
7. If you had a magic wand, and could have any three wishes granted to make the health and vitality of this community even better, what would they be?

Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

Thursday 26 February 2009

A Community IT centre may make a big difference in people's lives.

"Appreciative inquiry" is the name of a kind of research. It acknowledges that doing research with people can help make things change for the better.

Positive questions are used to find out what works rather than highlighting barriers and problems. Yes, there may be many things wrong with the world, but this is two hours when we try to focus on what we appreciate, what we want more of, not what is broken and needs to be fixed.

Appreciative inquiry was developed as a complement to problem-orientated, needs-based approaches to development.

Participants are not required to answer all of the questions and if they go off the topic that is OK. The only thing that is not allowed is negative questioning or reporting. There is plenty of time for that in other places. This is about finding what is good.

Appreciative inquiry can be part of an integrated approach to community - and particularly community led - development. It is also used in the learner-centred, education movement. Appreciative inquiry explicitly avoids talking about problems. It relies on interviews and storytelling that draw out positive memories, and on a collective analysis of the elements of success. (Mathie, 2003: 478}

According to Luckcock (2007:130), Appreciative Inquiry:
... affirms a sensibility towards the inner dimensions of teaching and practitioner research that would include the imagination, emotion and passion involved in our reflective practice, ... 'passionate enquiry', as well as [things] such as insightfulness, creativity, openness toward experience, meaning and purpose in living.

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- Ludema, J. D., D. L. Cooperrider, *et al.* (2001). *Appreciative Inquiry: the power of the unconditional positive question*. *Handbook of Action Research: participative enquiry and practice*. P. Reason and H. Bradbury, Sage

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Consent to participate in Life-Story telling session

(please tick boxes and sign below)

- ☐ I agree to tell my story in a study of adult users of community information technology (IT) centres conducted by George Roberts of the University of Southampton and Oxford Brookes University.
- ☐ I have been given a copy of the briefing sheet and had an opportunity to discuss this and to raise any questions.
- ☐ I agree that the session may be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that there will be a second session to which I will be invited in about six months. I will have the option at that time of continuing to participate in the study.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be anonymous and my confidentiality will be protected to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law.
- ☐ I acknowledge receipt of vouchers to the value of £25 as a token of thanks for participating in the study.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Consent to participate in research Focus Group

(please boxes and sign below)

- ☐ I agree to participate in a Focus Group in a study of adult users of community information technology (IT) centres conducted by George Roberts of the University of Southampton and Oxford Brookes University.
- ☐ I have been given a copy of the briefing sheet and had an opportunity to discuss this and to raise any questions.
- ☐ I agree that parts of the Focus Group may be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that there will be an interview to which I may be invited in about six months. I will have the option at that time of continuing to participate in the study.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be anonymous and my confidentiality will be protected to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Researcher:

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Consent to participate in Round 2: narrative interpretation

(please tick boxes and sign below)

- ☐ I agree to participate in a second discussion about my life and my use of community information technology (IT) centres conducted by George Roberts of the University of Southampton and Oxford Brookes University.
- ☐ I have been given a copy of the briefing sheet and had an opportunity to discuss this and to raise any questions.
- ☐ I agree that the session may be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that this is the second session further to my original life story session.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be anonymous and my confidentiality will be protected to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law.
- ☐ I acknowledge receipt of vouchers to the value of £25 as a token of thanks for participating in the second round.

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Appendix 5 Example transcript

A note on conventions

When transcribing the recordings I adopted very simple conventions.

junctions

- . full stop sentence
- , minor medial pause
- .. short pause or hesitation < 2 seconds
- longer pause or hesitation > 2 seconds

underscore speaker's emphasis

[laugh] occasional paralinguistic utterance

[00:00] time notation

Transcription conventions

In my earlier transcripts I also indicated some phonological features such as the lost “g” from words such as going (goin’) or contractions such as “innit” for “isn’t it”. This approach captured many of the false starts, umms and ahs, unfinished sentences, elisions for inaudible passages and other linguistic elements.

However when I shared the earlier transcripts with the participants, they expressed some concern about how they “sounded”: *Oh George, I sound terrible!* (Alexandra); *I can’t believe I speak like that!* (Sandra). In reflection about the purpose of the transcripts and of the life stories produced from them I had to decide what sort of verisimilitude I was striving for: to what was I trying to be “true”? I decided that my aim was to be true to the narrative, to the life story, as it was presented, rather than to record some semblance of dialect for study.

2008-07-24Sandra-transcript

So will you be asking me questions or am I just talking?

Pretty much just talking, I need this now, thank you for reminding me, I do need my notebook, 24/07/08 life story, okay we'll just go for it on the record and I'll explain it.. .

Go for it.

.. .anytime, are we recording? Yes, I think we are, at any time you like you can stop me and we'll go back, the session will last between 40 and 60 minutes, for the record this is [name], it's the 24th of July 2008, we've gone through the briefing note and we've gone through the signing of the consent form and we're ready to go, session lasts about 40 to 60 minutes, there really is only one question and during your answer I will take notes and after you run out of some steam, if you stop you know, I'll use those notes to go back and say "Well, that was interesting, could you tell me a little bit more about this or that or the other thing", we might do that sort of three rounds and the last is always going to be tell me about what you do here at [...] IT Zone, the kit you use, the games you play, what you do with the computers on the site, so there is just one question which is please tell me the story of your life, the events and experiences that have been important to you from wherever you want to begin, up to and including the present time, you, as a user, volunteer, worker, tutor, friend, person who is a part of the Blackbird Leys IT Zone.

Well I start with, I'll go back to when I was at school.. I totally loved school.. I had a real fun time at school, I wish I didn't have to leave school to be honest, I was really popular at school, the reason, a lot of that was because we was, I was half of an identical twin so I was quite popular round the school you know, people was confused you know, we used to prank around, swap lessons and that kind of stuff so my overall experience of school was really, really good, stayed on at school for one year but I was also working part-time and while I was in 5th form at school I was working part-time in McDonalds, kind of really enjoyed it and some of the people that I went to school with, some of the guys that I'd hung around with they worked there as well so it was kind of, it was a close knit little family, we knew each other, we all got on and we used to socialise together outside of work, even now there's people that I've formed bonds with back then in the late 80s that I work and am friends with even now, for example [name], I first met her while I was working at McDonald's and we still, I mean are still in contact and are good friends. So I worked at McDonald's for three years, worked my way up to be a floor manager, enjoyed that job immensely and I went to Birmingham to do a course and I was at that time when I done my exam I had the highest score for a female floor manager when I sat my exam, and I was quite proud of that, I'm sure that record must have been beaten since, and through working with my friends and socialising, I kind of got in to the nightclub and pub scene so I left that and started working in pubs and that and done that for quite a few years, even up until now.. and then what happened? A defining moment for me was after I had my son, I'm a single parent, sorry a lone parent, and when you've got to seek a wage, even after working part-time I kind of thought I can't do this forever, what else can I do?", so I decided "I know!", and at that time in like [...] "Oh I don't know a lot about computers and I hopefully will get a computer at some point", I thought "I'll go to college and learn about computers", and I intentionally done it purely for the fact that if I got a computer I wanted to make sure my son was safe using one, so I applied for the Access IT course at Oxford College in the city centre and within a matter of weeks, I didn't know much about the access course and the kind of what you know, it being a step to getting to university for mature students, I kind of done it purely to learn about computers and then within weeks of being at college my tutor had said "Apply for university", and blah de blah and I was just like "No, university's not for me, no one in my family's ever been to university, no, I don't think I will", and she kind of said "Just apply for it, just for the sake of applying for it", so I thought "Do you know what, there's no harm in applying for university, I'll just do it just for the sake of doing it". Enjoyed my access course, my tutor.. and I'll

never forget her, [name] her name was, absolutely brilliant tutor and she was kind of, she's kind of one of my first mentors actually and while I was discussing with her about whether or not to apply for university I remember saying to her at that time and I think it was one of the last times I ever described myself as a single parent, so I said "Oh there's no point in me applying for university, I'm just a single parent", and she kind of said "You're not just a single parent you know, you've got all these skills, all the stuff that you do on a daily basis that you can go and apply to work in a job, managing your money, managing your time, just kind of usual household stuff that you do everyday", I mean they are skills but I kind of saw it in a different light when she kind of explained it to me, and that day I walked away thinking "I'm not just a single parent, and since that day I don't actually class myself as a single parent, I class myself as a lone parent because I think single parent can be quite a negative quote, so I try not to describe myself or my friends as single parents but as lone parents because I think it's a bit more positive. So anyway, I applied for university, had an interview and it all kind of, if I pass the access course I've got a place at university and then it's kind of, but I kind of thought, when I applied for university I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and then the one thing I did know was one day I would like to be my own boss so I decided I'd do a business and marketing degree.. anyway, I done the access course and I can't remember how many passes I needed but I was one short so I didn't technically pass the access course but I contacted the Head of Business at Oxford Brookes University, I explained to them what had happened but they kind of still said "We'll take a chance on you, the place is still there for you"... .

Blagged your way in?

Yes, I got there.. it was kind of, that was a really nice moment for me, it wasn't so much telling my mum but I remember telling my Nan, that's my dad's mum, telling my Nan that I'd got a place at university and she actually cried that day and she was so proud, really proud as punch, like I said I was the first one, the first one in the family to actually go to university.. and even now, the sad bit about it was that within four weeks, within four weeks of starting university my Nan got ill and then she died a few weeks afterwards but it was kind of, it was nice kind of, she actually went to her grave knowing that one of her grandkids had gone to university.. to be honest, I didn't really enjoy university purely a kind of, the reason why I didn't, I had to be really strict with myself, the fact that I was a parent, the fact that I was working and the fact that I was studying you know, I had to manage my time really well but it kind of worked in its benefit because I set a routine for myself even that I do, even now I still have a certain routine and it was all about making the best of the time that you have, for instance because I used to travel to Wheatley to study sometimes you'd get back late so on the days I was getting back late I kind of cooked a stew but I'd cook it before I go, get up at five and cook in the morning and that's the kind of stuff I do now, if I know I've got a busy day I still get up early and kind of manage my time really well so if I know I've got to be out till seven o'clock that day I don't have to go home and cook because I've got in to a routine where I'll cook early on in the day so it's kind of set me up to where I am now. Anyway, I didn't finish my degree course, oh not let me go back, let me go back to the other reason why I didn't enjoy university, because I was quite disciplined with my time and getting my son from A to B, one of the things I didn't like about university was that we had to do, we done quite a lot of group work and |I, we ended up carrying a lot of people, there was the mature students who were there, they were focused and then there was another group of people that kind of had just left home, want to see the world, have as much fun, drink as much as I can and pop in to university now and again, and on the group work which I had issues with it was kind of do you do the bulk of the work and get a good grade and help someone through who kind of hasn't put in as much effort, or do you not do their share and then end up with a bad grade, so it was kind of, I ended up carrying a lot of people and I kind of resented the people because they didn't realise just how hard some of us had to work to be there and get the grades, and for me I just thought from what I saw and from what I experienced, I mean I tried to get involved in as much university life as possible but it's difficult when you've got other responsibilities, but I

always thought universities, they're designed for young people not for mature students, but then talking to my other friends, I had a couple of friends who were in a similar boat to me, maybe a few years ahead of me, they'd gone down the university route but they'd gone slightly differently, one of my friends, [name] she done her first couple of years at Weston College and she had a whale of a time but overall, I mean overall I mean it was a good experience, I would do it again I think, maybe, now that my son's a lot older and I've kind of less responsibilities, but yeah, it was okay, university was okay but then I kind of, after my Nan died in my first year, I kind of messed up my first two terms.. and some of my tutors wasn't supportive, they were just kind of like "You should be over this by now", kind of stuff and it just left a bit of a sour.. .

Pull your socks up?

Yeah, it was, and that just kind of left a sour taste in my mouth about certain tutors and about some of the experiences I had at university. I'm glad I did it, my Nan was proud of me and I think it's had a knock on effect in my family because my twin sister's now at university, she's in Leeds, she's training to be a primary school teacher, I don't want to sound big headed but it's just kind of, would she have done it if I never went to university and though you know "If she can do it why can't I do it", would she have done it or would she, I don't know, but I kind of, sometimes I want to take credit in the fact that it had a knock on effect in my family and even amongst my friends, some of the people I used to hang around with, several of them have gone on to do degree courses at Brookes, yeah, so that was that, so that kind of ties in with the IT hub because in my first year at university I didn't have a computer [..] to access so I was actually using, I was coming, I first started, I was travelling to Wheatley on a daily basis and I was doing a lot of my work there and then I kind of got to hear about this place and I thought "I'll pop in, have a look", and at the time [name] was here and a few others that I knew of personally, they kind of got on really well with people and I thought, it was on my doorstep, I only lived round the corner at the time, so rather than travelling all the way in to Wheatley I could have done a lot my work here, my son was at school so I could come in here use the computers, use the Internet so I could do a lot of my research here rather than go all the way in to Brookes, so for the first year I basically done all my course work, all my projects in this IT hub. Second year, second year I actually got some funding through a bursary at Brookes to get a computer and I can't believe I spent two and a half thousand pounds on a computer, I just find that really incredible, but I spent two and a half grand on a computer but I still didn't have Internet access so I still used the IT hub for research, that kind of stuff but having a computer at home was a lot easier because I could sit up till two o'clock in the morning if I needed to but it was handy having the IT hub on the doorstep so if I needed to do some kind of research, if I needed to email someone that I was doing some group work with or my tutor I didn't have to go all the way to Heddington or all the way to Wheatley, so I still kind of, I was still here hanging around and while I was here if I was using the computer, if I was doing something on the computer and someone next to me was stuck on a problem and the staff were busy with other stuff I kind of would help people out as and when and then helping people here as and when they needed a hand on something simple, something really quick, and also having my computer at home and getting to use the computer and getting to know a computer I kind of thought "This is, I like computers, this could kind of be a way forward for me as in looking for a job once I've finished university or whatever". Anyway, I kind of dropped out of university at the end of second year, it was just too much, I mean it was a real struggle and my Nan dying kind of knocked the wind out of me mainly for my first year really and I just found it really hard to get back in to it and I had a bit of depression as well and I was on medication as well and I just kind of thought, I made the decision and I had to do what made me happy so I kind of dropped out of university but still wanted to, I mean I still had ambitions, I still wanted to get a job and I eventually wanted to get a job that I would enjoy doing, I didn't want to get a job just so I could pay my bills and blah de blah de blah.. and it goes back to something, I remember when I was at school in my last two years of upper school, my mum was actually a parent governor and my mum had struggled, my mum had three kids under the

age of one and she was 17 when that happened so she had struggled and she was always telling us "Don't do what I've done, take the opportunities that are available", and the one thing my mum always said, my mum was a champion of education and bettering yourself, I remember being at school, my mum being a parent governor, she was also at college doing a part-time course, can't remember what it was, and it was always about, you're better off, you're halfway there doing a job that you enjoy waking up and going to as opposed to waking up and dragging yourself out of bed because you need to go to work because you need money to pay your bills.. .. and even that, that's something that I tell my son now who's just done his exams and he's trying to decide what he wants to do, he's not sure what he wants to do and although I can't tell him what to do and sometimes he'll have to make his own mistakes in life, I always encourage him to say "do a job because you want to get out of bed and go to it rather than dragging yourself there because you need money". Yeah, so I dropped out, finished university, so I left university with an HND and did some marketing but I was still here, still using here, the IT hub and spent a lot of time here, made lots of friends, kind of reacquainted myself with the likes of [name] and some other people that I'd known from years ago that I'd never saw for a little while while we was all raising our kids when they were little, and just kind of hung around, use the computers, if someone was there I just kind of volunteered to help people and I kind of made the, how can I say it, kind of made the subconscious decision to, I like working with computers, I like working with people, I like working in my own community but kind of didn't have, had recent qualifications but didn't have any work experience so I kind of just volunteered here to pick up stuff, pick up and learn more stuff, so I kind of basically self-taught myself a lot of stuff I knew on computers but like I knew certain stuff but maybe didn't know the jargon , no didn't know the jargon actually but knew how to do it but if someone said to me "Do you know how to do such and such?", I'd be like "no", but then I'd see them do it and then "Oh yeah, I can do it", but didn't know what they were talking about, so I basically just hung around, stayed here to learn a bit more and kind of see can I see myself doing this, I thought "Yeah, I can see myself doing this", so while I was here I met up with old friends, new friends who were involved in the Learning Champions stuff and met [name] and [name] was like "oh, you might be a good Learning Champion", and kind of just thought "It's a good product to get involved in, might even get", my first idea was "Do you know what, do this and I might even get a reference out of this", and as much as you can have qualifications or you know, I'm aware that most of my job skills were around bars and clubs and that kind of work, and just thought "I kind of need to get my foot in to somewhere, learn some skills that will serve me down the line", Yeah, so I've been a learning Champion for a couple of years, it's served me well and I benefited from being a Learning Champion, I done a presentation back in February and met this guy from Milton Keynes who's from the Business Link Enterprise Gateway and ended up getting a paid job through it so I'm working 16 hours a week for him, that started in April, I initially signed a six month contract to work with him as an outreach worker but that contract looks like it's going to be, I'm kind of 99% that contract'll be extended for another six months so the experience that I've had with Blitz and the bits that are linked to it kind of surpass my expectations, whereas I was hoping that I might get a good reference out of it, I didn't actually think I would get a paid job out of it so you know, I'm still working in the community although I don't actually live locally now, I just live slightly out, I live in [...] now, but [...] has been my home since I was ten, nine or ten and I like to think that this [...] has shaped me in to the person that I ma, I've got a lot of friends in [...] so I enjoy doing the community work, supporting my friends neighbours, that kind of stuff and even though I don't live here I still kind of think I belong here, I spend most of my time here.. .. and the IT hub have kind of, I've seen what it can do because like for instance the pub next door, my uncle is the landlord of the pub next door and he's a real technophobe, it's incredible, but with a bit of persuasion my uncle and one of his bar staff they came and done an IT course about eight months ago and it's quite funny actually, everyone know, my uncle's quite famous for being a technophobe like he'll buy a new phone and he'll have to get someone to set the phone up for him, practically do everything for him, so everyone kind of knew he was a technophobe and then he went out one day and came back with a computer and everyone was just like

"oh my God! What are you doing? You've got a computer in your hand!" so I mean it was a bit of a joke but he went out and bought this computer, I mean he doesn't use it to its full potential but I mean he's a lot more forward than I ever thought he would be, he does some stuff on the computer and for a technophobe in his category that's really amazing that is, really, really, amazing. That's I think right now, I don't know what else to add, ask me a question.

All right, well there's a couple of things that looking back at, there's a lot of high value on education I would say through the whole story, progression, access to a mentor, family pride and so on, I was wondering if I could ask you for a minute to imagine a world without university and only learning?

Right, I mean I talk to a lot of people on a daily basis and like the amount of people that say "I could never go to university" and stuff like that, I don't believe everyone should or could go to university but I like, I mean I do like community learning and the reason why I like community learning, I like it because it's not structured and it fits, it fits round people and whatever that's going on with them, I mean the university from what I've seen personally, it's kind of like universities and colleges are like "This is what we've got to offer, take it or leave it", whereas with the Learning Champion side of stuff we can talk to people like "What do you want?", it can be so varied and some people want to go to university but then there's other people that they want to [...] but I was talking to, a couple of example, I've known of this lady for years, for quite a few years, in a pub environment so it's not a deep meaningful friendship or anything like that, I mean I know her but I don't know her, and I always see her out with her friends in the pub, always looks like she's having a good time, I didn't realise that she didn't have any confidence in herself, kind of thought "I'll never amount to anything, I'm just going to be a bum on Blackbird Leys, I mean that's what she really thought of herself but I didn't know about this until she, well her friend, her friend's got small children, she came to IT hub to learn about computers because she's recently got a computer at home so she kind of came along because her friend came along, she would never have done it off her own back and she's told me that, she would never have done it, and like stuff that she does she'll do it because her friends are doing it, she's a follower rather than a leader, so she came along, done this IT course, thoroughly enjoyed it, anyway six or so weeks afterwards I saw her outside a local shop with like a big bag that you'd take to school or college, whatever, so I said "Oh what are you up to then?", she said "Oh, I'm going over to enrol for a college course", I'm like "oh wow, that's incredible", and she was really fired up so I said to her "Where's your mate then?", she said "Oh, she's not here, she's at home I think", and I said "But I thought you said you only do things with somebody else?" and she was saying that doing the IT course and realising that she could amount to something and she was good at computers, she learnt a heck of a lot and it fired her up and she's just like, totally different outlook on herself, and she's done several short courses since then and for me, looking at it it's not so much about the qualifications that she's gained, it's about the self-confidence and the way she looks at herself now, she's much more positive, she's gained so much self-confidence and self-esteem and that, and that's what sells the type of learning that she's done, I mean it's not university and for me all this community development, local learning it's not just about qualifications, so I think it has a huge knock on effect and the kind of learning that I think gets overlooked which I like to see, even stuff like when they do a local coffee morning in the family centre, recently I went over the family centre and there was a group of women and they've done a course together and it came to the end of the course and they decided they were going to do a little get together and it was kind of a bring and share, everyone brought a dish, and all the different people there, they're from different walks of life, you've got Asians, you've got White, you've got Black, you've got old, you've got young, it's varied amongst that group, and the time that they'd spent together socialising, eating and drinking, that kind of stuff, they're learning about each other and them learning about each other I think has a knock on effect because we can be, people can be, if you don't know something you can be kind of negative about it or, because you don't

understand something you can be ignorant about it and it's just nice that a group of women can get together and in that time that they're sharing together they're kind of understanding different cultures,. Their lifestyles, and I think by learning and understanding them you can gain a respect for them and to gain that kind of respect helps you to live together, I mean there's so many different types of people in Blackbird Leys and some areas you've got clashes between neighbours and whatever else but then in another area, again, so diverse, but everyone gets on, everyone looks after each other and stands up for each other and I think that's because of the learning that they've done together helps them to A) understand them and kind of have a respect for them and understand where they're coming from and that's the kind of learning I like, and I think that learning eventually help to strengthen, build bridges and strengthen the community and make a community stronger.. ..

Community learning?

Hmm.

Yeah.. there's sort of issues about the so called identity of the community and the extent to which people feel that they are identified somehow and that they get strength from that identity with the community.. .. I'm interested in the next sort of direction you might want to go off on for a minute or two, would be this one about education, learning, job, work and another dimension of that which I'll call like civic engagement or something, you said your mother was a school governor I think you said, so this whole, what's the relationship between all that stuff, working, learning, participating in society?

Right I think from, yeah, I can only assume from where my mum's coming from, my mum had a totally different education I mean my mum was born and raised in Jamaica and she came here when she was 13 and I mean, I don't know about now but from the stories my mum's told me about life in Jamaica I mean it wasn't easy and there's kind of, education was a way out of poverty and even now talking to people that have recently come to this country from Jamaica, for some people it was about you've got to stay at home on the farm and help plough the fields, some people just couldn't afford to, couldn't A) get to school and B) there was more important things that going to school and it was kind of if you managed to get an education there was a way out for you, even a legal way of getting out of stuff and I think my mum came here when she was 13 and then got in to the school system here and then my mum always, the education system at the time, what she experienced in Jamaica and then what she experienced here, she was just like, it was on a completely different level and I think of her it was kind of, education in Jamaica for her at that time back in the 60s, was a luxury and if you've got it you kind of, you made the most of it, and you did not, maybe not because that's what you wanted but you knew it was a struggle, your parents would have had to struggle to get you there, so it was kind of a bit of gratitude for being given this luxury, so I think that's why my mum kind of, even when we was at school my mum, I suppose my mum was a learning champion before learning champion ever existed because she was always on at us, we had strict you know, come in from school, do your homework, if there wasn't any homework my mum would find, would give us homework.. .

(Laughter)

.. .and it was education was so important because it was a luxury to them, I mean we got it free here, but yeah, you should make the most of it because it's free, some people don't have that opportunity and in order to get that job that you want, in order to move in certain circles and not just be another stat in Blackbird Leys that will amount to nothing, it all boils down to you making the most of the education system I guess, but I don't know if that ties in with the question you just asked.

Well around that, what you just said at the end there, amount to something, what does it mean to amount to something?

For me personally, I mean it was kind of looking around [the estate] and when I was at school and you had them middle aged fucking, sorry, excuse me!

(Laughter)

Strike it from the record!

You know, you had middle aged people that hung around at the shops that didn't work and people looked down on them and that, and it was "I don't want to be like that, I don't want to be looked down on", you know what I mean, I give respect I expect to be respected.

Just to take a little break, we've going for about 45 minutes.. .

Really? It feels like five!

We're in the zone, what I'm going to do is remind you, and it's on the form, that there's going to be another follow up interview after this, four to six months time, three to six months time, three to four months, sometime after Christmas probably, after I've interviewed and we've gone through the transcripts I'll be looking for sort of common themes and ideas and then I'll come back and interview people sort of around more common themes and ideas, more structured the next time, this has been very unstructured and the same for everybody, and next time will be just a little bit more structured based on what people have said, see if anything makes sense. The last, I said there would sort of be the last question which is to talk about what you as a user do here with the kit, the computer, the toys, the tools, the educational learning objects, the games, the communication devices, what do you do with the stuff here?

What do I do with the stuff here? Do you know, not a lot really, I mean Leys Learning, the stuff I've been doing voluntary, got a laptop through it so I bring my laptop in on a daily basis.. I'll come in and check my emails, that kind of stuff, I might come in, I might have created a flyer for an event, uncle [name] saying "Can you do some flyers? Got an event happening in a couple of weeks", so I might come in and I might do something and then come in and print it, or someone might come in.. .

What would you do, when you say do a flyer, what would you do a flyer in?

Normally, I always used to use Publisher, always used Publisher but [name] she's always been a champion for PhotoDraw and it used to be on the Microsoft Office suite but it's, I don't think they actually.. .

PhotoDraw? Microsoft PhotoDraw?

Yeah, and I love it, she showed me how to use it and ever since then I just love it and I mean I use that quite a lot, and with that, using PhotoDraw someone might come in, a couple of my friends will come and say "Oh, I'm having a birthday party, can you knock me out some invitations?", again I'll use PhotoDraw for that as well, I kind use, I stick to using certain stuff all the time like, I mean I done a course here years ago on Photoshop.. .

You got a style.

.. .don't ask me now how to use Photoshop, I wouldn't have a clue how to use Photoshop, I wouldn't have a clue how to use Photoshop now and it's because I always use PhotoDraw or if not I might use Publisher, I don't even tend to use Word a lot, only if I'm typing, doing a written document, and then some people can add pictures to Word, I wouldn't have a clue how to do that, wouldn't have a clue.

Horrible environment! *(Laughs)*

At the moment I'm using, I use Microsoft quite a lot because at the moment I'm trying to set up a database for the work I'm doing with [name] and the Business Link Enterprise gateway, I mean I've done several courses about databases so I'm kind of going to see if what I can remember will help me.

What about personally, yourself, do you use Facebook or any of that?

Not here, I tend to do that at home, I got involved in Facebook quite recently, it's only in the last eight weeks I think because everyone's like "You should get on Facebook, you should get on Facebook", but the people that said to me "you should get on Facebook", they are addicted to it and they spend hours on it and I'm just like, I'm trying to stop the amount of time I spend on computers, I'm not getting involved in Facebook because people spend a lot of time on there, my computer when I'm at home, I've got a work laptop and then I've got my PC as well and my computer is on all the time, we're playing games, I'm really big on Sims 2, I play that all the time, so me and my son as well we're game freaks, we play a lot of games and I keep setting myself these goals.. .

Does your son live with you still?

Yeah, he's 16.

Okay, I don't, I'm ashamed to admit, I'm not sure I even knew you had a 16 year old son, I might have heard it in the past but it sort of, because I don't think I've ever been introduced.. .

Because he wasn't really here a lot, he's here a lot more now we don't live here but then he's only just finished school.. .

Like yesterday or something?

Well he's just done his exams.. .

GCSEs?

Yeah, so when you've been around he'd have been at school, yeah, so I'm trying not to use the computer as much because once I get on there that's it for me, last night I think I played some game till about twenty past three this morning, because I usually get up at about half five, quarter to six so it's kind of like when you stay up all night playing games, so I try to set myself these little goals like when you come in from work don't put the computer straight on, do some other stuff and then put the computer on at seven o'clock, that never works, never works, yeah, but I do use Facebook but a lot of these I'll use at home rather than use here because my days are like, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are, I limit them two days to the stuff I do with Business Gateway so that leaves, I'm not usually here on a Monday so then that leaves Thursday and Friday and Friday I normally, usually in and around helping, sometimes helping [name] or whatever else, so I try not to, that's the kind of stuff I try to limit at home rather than here, the main thing I will do is check my emails or Hotmail, that's basically what I'll do here but all that kind of stuff I just leave till I get home, so yeah, kind of I use it if I'm doing some research or something or if I'm doing some flyers, it's kind of the only stuff I really use it for, nothing else really, there was a time when I used to, when I first.. .

Wikipedia? Google?

I Google a lot, I think out of all of them I will use Google the most although I did use Wikipedia the other day, [name] came in, she was talking about her boys and the different styles of music that they, I mean they're complete opposites, and then she said "I like Nana Mouskouri", I said "Who's that then?", I'd never heard of her before, so she said "have a look, have a look on the Internet", right, I imagine it's going to be some, I don't know, some kind of hippy, a young women, a bit grungy, a bit hippy, I didn't think she meant a 73 year old woman!

(Laughter)

A Greek torch singer isn't she?

Yeah, and like she got married five years ago and I was like "There's hope for me yet then", it's good to know, but then I'm talking to other people and they've heard of her and I'm like "how come I've never heard of her then?", I suppose I can't know everything but I'd never heard of her before, but it's like when you hear people talking and it's like that's not what I imagined, so not what I imagine, yeah, I used Wikipedia the other day when I was looking about that women but I don't tend, I always Google everything, always do.

I'm going to say thank you very much [name] for the record and I'm going to turn this off now, we've got 54, almost 55 minutes of recording, it's been extremely helpful.

What do you do with your community IT centre?

Round 2: narrative interpretation schedule ("Shona")

1 Pseudonym

In anonymising your story, I have used the name "Shona" is this acceptable to you? Would you like to choose another? Why or why not? Does this name signify anything to you?

2 Check details

May I ask your age?

I have used the British educational stats codes. Can I please check/change these with you:

- Educational level: FD, HND, DipHE
- Ethnic: Black or Black British: African
- Gender: Female
- National Identity: English

Narrative interpretation

In reading all the interviews that I have conducted several things come through very strongly. In making decisions about using the community IT centre the following factors matter to people

- domestic/family circumstances
- community
- learning/education
- work
- feelings/emotions
- personal history
- values
- things you do with computers

I would like to discuss these with you. Note: we do not need to discuss every item.

3 Domestic matters

I have observed that you are a parent with 3 children. Is this correct?

May I ask their gender and age?

In thinking about your own parents

- what was their educational background?
- what kind of expectations did they have for you in your life?
- how did they communicate this to you?

In thinking about yourself as a parent

- what kind of expectation do you have for your children?
- how do you communicate this to them?

How would you describe your domestic circumstances?

Are there any other domestic matters or matters concerning your extended family that you would like to talk about as they relate to the use of the community IT centre?

4 Community matters

There are many aspects of the community and many words that people have used about their community, both positive and negative.

Starting with the positive, how have these or other positive community factors influenced your use of the community IT centre?

- diversity
- familiarity
- friends [note: we do not need to discuss every item]
- global community
- support teams

Turning to the negative, how have these or other negative community factors influenced your use of the community IT centre?

- crime
- disorder [note: we do not need to discuss every item]
- strangers
- personal isolation

Are there any other community matters or matters concerning the local or wider community that you would like to talk about as they relate to the use of the community IT centre?

5 Learning matters

There are many different views on learning, education, training and qualifications. I would like to discuss these with you as they relate to your use of the community IT centre.

- Do you need qualifications/are qualifications important to you? Why?
- In your own mind, what is the difference between formal and informal learning?
- What other things besides formal learning can the community IT centre be used for?
- In your own mind should the community IT centre be used for formal learning, informal learning or other purposes?
- Is education a luxury?

6 Work matters

There are many different views on work, employment, and other forms of public service and caring. I would like to discuss these with you as they relate to your use of the community IT centre.

- Do you work?

- Where do you work?
- Are you paid for your work?
- What work do you do?
- How did you come to do your work? (How did you get your job?)
- People work for many reasons. What is your main reason for working?
- Are you currently looking for (new) work?
- How do you go about looking for work?
- How does the community IT centre relate to your work?

7 Feelings matter

One of the most interesting thing about the interviews is how strongly people's feelings come through as they relate to the use of the community IT centre. Here is a list of words, in alphabetical order, that people have used to describe some of their feelings around computers and the community IT centre. Using this list as a starting point, can you tell me about how your feelings have influenced your use of the community IT centre?

**confusion, envy, fatigue,
fear, gratitude, guilt, happiness,
hate, humour, loneliness, loss,
love, pride, respect, sorrow,
success, unhappiness**

8 Personal history matters

The course of people's lives, and their various stages are important in making decisions about community, family, education, and work.

- What have been the main milestones in your life so far?
- What would you say have been your biggest achievements?
- What do you look forward to?
- How do you decide what to do next?
- "It's a funny old world." What might this mean to you in respect of the community IT centre?
- "Things are hard." What might this mean to you in respect of the community IT centre?

9 Values matter

Like feelings and personal history, people's values appear to be very important in their use of the community IT centre.

Here are some values that have come out of my discussions with people, which seem to be important in respect of computers and the community IT centre. Using this as a starting point, can you tell me about how your values have influenced your use of the community IT centre?

**challenging wrongs, respect, making the best of what you got,
trustworthiness, no harm in trying, do what you love,
integrity, learning together, being popular,
self discipline, determination, organised, professionalism,**

10 Computer matters

Interestingly computer use does not come up very much in peoples discussions about their use of the community IT centre! This could be for several reasons. Here is a list of statements. Are any of these true for you? Why?

- Computers are just a part of life.
- Computers are not that important to me.
- Using computers is fun.
- I need computers to keep up with my friends and family.
- Computers are just about work.
- I hate computers.

11 Finally

Thank you very much for your participation in this research.

Is there anything else you would like to add to this discussion?

What other questions should I be asking?

Appendix 7 Participants' case properties

In the tables that follow I summarise case properties. I have distinguished between the people who gave life stories and those who participated in focus groups (others).

n=24

Gender	Life stories	Others
Female	8	7
Male	5	4

Figure A7.1 Gender

Age decade	Life stories	Others
20 - 29	1	unknown
30 - 39	8	
40 - 49	1	
50 - 59	1	
60 -	2*	

* Both of whom withdrew towards the end of the study

Figure A7.2 Age cohorts

Ethnicity	Life Stories	Others
Asian	1	0
black or black British - African	3	3
black or black British - Caribbean	1	
white	8	8

Figure A7.3 Ethnicity

National identity	Life Stories	Others
African	2	
British	2	
English	8	2
Pakistani	1	
West Indian	0	
unknown	0	9

Figure A7.4 National identity

Education	Life Stories	Others
No qualifications	1	
A-level, HNC GNVQs level 2	1	
FD, HND, DipHE	6	
First degree	3	
Post graduate	2	
Unknown		11

Figure A7.5 Education Level

Parent	Life Stories	Others
0 children	2	
1 child	6	1
2 children	3	
3 children	2	
unknown		10

Figure A7.6 Parent

Appendix 8 Final follow-up letters

George Roberts
22 Percy St
Oxford, OX4 3AA
georgebroberts@gmail.com
07711 698465

20 June 2010

[Name]

[Address]

Dear [name]

Community IT Centre: Life Stories Project

It has been a long time since you contributed your story to this project. At last I have written up the whole study. Now, I am getting ready to turn in the work. Thank you very much for your participation!

I am sending you the final edited version of your story as it will be included in the report. You will see that I have had to shorten it quite a lot. I hope that I have gotten the right essence out of it.

I am also sending you the *Introduction* to the part of the study where the stories are collected. In this *Introduction* I explain how I have edited the stories from the recordings and the transcripts.

You will see that I have used an alias for your name. I have tried not to give away any names of people or places in order to protect your privacy. Of course your friends and colleagues may recognise you from the stories, but you should remain anonymous to the wider world.

If you have any questions about any part of the story please call me, write, or e-mail me. I'd be very happy to speak on the phone or to make an appointment to see you. If you do not have any questions there is no need for you to contact me if you do not want to. If I do not hear from you in the next two weeks (Friday 9 July), that is OK. I will assume that the story is acceptable as it is.

Thank you again for participating in this study.

Best wishes,

George

Appendix 9 Ethics protocols

University of Southampton School of Education

Student Research Project: Ethics Review Checklist

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (with the advice of the research supervisor/tutor) for every research project which involves human participants. Before completing this form, please refer to the Ethical Guidelines in the School's Research Student Handbook and the British Educational Research Association guidelines (<http://www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html>).

Project Title:

Reflection, literacy, authority: the life of community IT centres

Researcher(s):...George Roberts.....

Supervisor:Jane Seale, Martin Dyke.....

Student Research Project: Ethics Review Checklist Part One

	YES	NO
Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (eg children with special difficulties)	X	
Will the study require the co-operation of an advocate for initial access to the groups or individuals? (eg children with disabilities; adults with a dementia)	X	
Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in their normal lifestyles)?	X	
Will deception of participants be necessary during the study? (eg covert observation of people)?		X
Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (eg sexual activity, drug use)?	X	
Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing or physical testing? (eg the use of sport equipment such as a treadmill) and will a health questionnaire be needed?		X
Will the research involve medical procedures? (eg are drugs, placebos or other substances (eg foods, vitamins) to be administered to the participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?)		X
Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X
Will you be able to obtain permission to involve children under sixteen from the school or parents and the children themselves?	n/a	n/a
Will it be possible to anonymise participants and/or ensure information they give is non-identifiable?	X	but
Is the right of participants to freely withdraw from the study at any time made explicit?	X	
Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS?		X
If you are working in a cross-cultural setting do you know enough about the setting to be sensitive to particular issues in that culture (e.g., sexuality, gender role, language use)?	X	
Are you complying with the Data Protection Act?	X	
Have you considered the potential risks to your own health and safety and, if appropriate, completed a risk assessment form?	X	

If you have answered NO to all of the above questions and you have discussed this form with your supervisor and had it signed and dated, you may proceed to develop an ethics protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form which must also be completed. If you have answered YES to any of the questions, please complete PART TWO of this form below and adopt a similar procedure of discussion with supervisor, signing and proceeding to develop an actual ethical protocol with the assistance of the Ethical Protocol Guidance Form. Please keep a copy of both forms and protocol for your records. Only in exceptional circumstances will cases need to be referred to the School's Research Ethics Committee.

Part Two For each item answered 'YES' please give a summary of the issue and action to be taken to address it.

1) Potentially some participants may have substance misuse or other mental health issues, but this will not be known in advance. In the event the researcher does discover that a person appears not to be able to give informed consent, a multi-modal strategy of adaptation will have to be followed. It may not be appropriate to appear to exclude the person immediately from the research (e.g. by ejecting someone from a focus group). The first duty must be to the wider community of the centre. The researcher will at the earliest opportunity discuss the situation with the appropriate agency manager (probably Learning Communities, or Community Development Initiative) and research supervisor and adopt an appropriate response in order to minimise risk to the person, the community and to the research.

2) Agency managers have a beneficial, protective gate-keeping role rather than an explicit advocacy role, except maybe for some user groups (African-Caribbean women, benefits claimants, youth IT users, etc). Research will involve many individuals who may or may not identify themselves with any group for which an agency manager may or may not advocate. However, in order to ensure transparency of purpose and good communication, it will be necessary to obtain the co-operation of key agency managers at the IT centre prior to accessing the centre. Agency managers have a key role in supporting the research and helping the researcher to gain access.

3) For adult returners the formalising of learning can bring back to the surface issues of failing and being failed. which may induce psychological stress for some. Attention needs to be paid to the possible impact on the present psychological state of the subjects when caused, incidentally, to face prior failure through the research. Although the aim of the research is not to address reasons for prior failures, nor expectations or anticipation of potential future success or failure, this tension is inevitable. There is an inevitable conflict between not wanting to guide or steer the interviews and at the same time reassuring the participant that this particular confrontation with education is seeking, in part to mitigate the impacts of the long-term failure of an educational system, not an individual. The research approach of appreciative inquiry and biographic-narrative interpretation should ensure the subjects' voices are allowed to dominate, not the voices of the institutions of society.

5) Potentially. Learning can be a sensitive subject for some. Learning in the context of a community centre on an estate with multiple indices of deprivation may, coincidentally, touch on sexuality, domestic strife, substance misuse, crime or other sensitive areas. These are not the topics of the research, but if education is, in part, about change and control of change, such topics may arise. The researcher must be alert to multiple value systems with respect to some behaviours.

8) Any payment in kind will be in compensation for time. The researcher will need to be attentive to whether payments or other reward change the power relationship? Will payment impose an obligation on the subjects? How will the right-to-withdraw be managed if people have received payment? Right to withdraw does not mean they lose right to payment? There is a need to thank the participants and to recognise that they are providing value to the research. Getting the balance right is important. The research may not have an immediate, direct benefit to the participants but may benefit those they are represent. There are not funds to "pay" participants, however in co-operation with the centre inducements such as free meals, print credits or free colour printing may be offered. I will seek funding for book tokens. Ideally I would like to give about £50 value to participants.

10) Maybe. The nature of the centre and the research means the centre will be at least locally identifiable. It is possible that the proximity to Oxford, as an international educational centre, is significant. I will negotiate that with the gatekeepers and the participants. And, in a case-by-case basis talk participants through whether they wish to use pseudonyms or not. What does this mean in re local people recognising one another? If people waive their right to anonymity this must not allow other people's anonymity to be compromised. This may not be entirely possible, given the small population, participants will, likely, be able to identify one another. It is not finally certain whether anonymisation is appropriate. Participants may actually wish to be identified with the research: to be heard in their own right. Imperative to get them to validate the write-up.

13) I have been volunteering in the centre for a while and have learned that it is a very diverse place. The main issue is culture given the immigrant population. There are many different social backgrounds represented. My social background may be different to those of the participants. The estate is home to a very diverse population: Somali, Timorese, British of all backgrounds, Afghan, Kosovan, etc. Care will need to be taken. The main risk is making assumptions: about myself and the other participants.

14) Safe storage and access to unanonymised information. The researcher has an office at home and at Oxford Brookes University. The primary location for the storage of unanonymised data will be the researchers password protected laptop. Key files that link anonymous with unanonymised data will only be accessible to the researcher. Data is backed-up regularly to removable external hard drives. Transcripts that are printed out will be retained in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. Unanonymised data will be transferred from home to Brookes on the laptop. Unanonymised data should not be sent by e-mail. I will need to be advised about other requirements of the data protection act, but certainly intend to comply.

15) The estate is a place identified with a higher than average incidence of crime, though the bare figures obscure highly contextualised activity. I need to be aware of my self and environment. Participants will be interviewed in the Community Centre, which is a safe place. My itinerary is lodged with my partner and colleagues at Brookes. Having said that, I volunteer regularly on the estate and have been there for over 20 years without incident.

Signed
(Researcher)

Date:

To be completed by the Supervisor (PLEASE TICK ONE)

- ☐ Appropriate action taken to maintain ethical standards – no further action necessary
- ☐ The issues require the guidance of the School of Education's Ethics Committee

COMMENTS:

Signed (supervisor):

Date:

Ethical Protocol Guidance

A ETHICS PROTOCOL GUIDANCE FORM

This guidance has been developed to assist you in drawing up an ethics protocol for a research project or bid for research funding. You are advised to also look at the following materials provided by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, which are available on the School of Education Website:

Student Research: Ethics Review Checklist:

Ethics Review Procedure FlowDiagram

Staff Research: Ethics Review Checklist:

Ethics Reading List

The Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) published by the British Educational Research Association are also useful (available on their website at

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.htm>).

A. CHECKLIST

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT HOW YOU WILL ADDRESS:	YES	NO
your responsibilities to the participants	X	
your responsibilities to the sponsors of the research	X	
your responsibilities to the community of educational researchers	X	

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED HOW YOU WILL:	YES	NO
fully inform participants about the nature of the research;	X	
ensure participants agree to take part freely and voluntarily;	X	
inform participants that they can withdraw freely at any time;	X	
justify deception of participants if this is necessarily involved;	n/a	
offer protection for any vulnerable participants or groups in your study;	X	
manage the differential 'power relationships' in the setting;	X	
avoid any pressure on participants to contribute under duress or against their free will;	X	
guarantee that any research assistants or support staff involved in the project understand and adhere to the ethical guidelines for the project;	X	

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED:	YES	NO
what procedures to set in place to ensure a balance between a participant's right to privacy and access to public knowledge;	X	
how best to provide anonymity and confidentiality and ensure participants are aware of these procedures?	X	
the implications of the Data Protection Act (1998) particularly in respect to the storage and availability of the data.		
disclosure of information to third parties and getting permission from the participants to use data in any reports/books/articles.	X	
how you are going to inform the participants of the outcomes of the research;	X	
how to handle any conflicts of interest arising from sponsorship of the research e.g. a chocolate company sponsoring research into child nutrition, or your own vested interests if any;	X	
how you will protect the integrity and reputation of educational research.	X	

Having considered these questions draw up specific procedures for how you will handle the collection and dissemination of data in your research study.

B. ETHICS PROTOCOL

Title of Project: __ Reflection, literacy and authority: the life of community IT centres

Name of Principal Investigator: __George Roberts_____

What is the research study about?

This is a study of adult users of community information technology (IT) centres and their IT practices. This includes using the Internet for many things, for example: to help make CVs, to collect pictures and music, to share interests with friends, co-workers, teachers.

The study is based on one community IT centre: Blackbird Leys IT Zone (Blitz) on the Blackbird Leys housing estate on the south eastern fringe of Oxford, England¹. I propose to examine the life trajectories and IT practice of people affiliated to Blitz in some detail and gather additional data from 2 - 4 other sites (possibly Brighton, Manchester, Cornwall, Glasgow) for the purpose of being able to make recommendations about the shape and direction of ACE/ICT policy in the context of lifelong learning and skills development agendas.

Responsibilities to the participants

There are two principal responsibilities that I have to the participants - the primary stakeholders - in the research:

to not do harm

and to let their voice be heard.

For adult returners the formalising of learning can bring back to the surface issues of failing and being failed, which may induce psychological stress for some. Attention needs to be paid to the possible impact on the present psychological state of the subjects when caused, incidentally, to face prior failure through the research. Although the aim of the research is not to address reasons for prior failures, nor expectations or anticipation of potential future success or failure, this tension is inevitable. There is an inevitable conflict between not wanting to guide or steer the interviews and at the same time reassuring the participant that this particular confrontation with education is seeking to let their voices be heard, not suppressed. The aim is, in part, to mitigate the impacts of the long-term failure of an educational system, not an individual. The research approach of appreciative inquiry and biographic-narrative interpretation should ensure the subjects' voices are allowed to dominate, not the voices of the institutions of society.

Learning can be a sensitive subject for some. Learning in the context of a community centre on an estate with multiple indices of deprivation may, coincidentally, touch on sexuality, domestic strife, substance misuse, crime or other sensitive areas. These are not the topics of the research, but if education is, in part, about change and control of change, such topics may arise. The researcher must be alert to multiple value systems with respect to some behaviours.

Potentially some participants may have substance misuse or other mental health issues, but this will not be known in advance. In the event the researcher does discover that a person appears not to be able to give informed consent, a multi-modal strategy of adaptation will have to be followed. It may not be appropriate to appear to exclude the person immediately from the research (e.g. by ejecting someone from a focus group). The first duty must be to the wider community of the centre. The researcher will at the earliest opportunity discuss the situation with the appropriate agency manager (probably Learning Communities, or Community Development Initiative) and research supervisor and adopt an appropriate response in order to minimise risk to the person, the community and to the research.

Responsibilities to other stakeholders

In addition to the participants in the research, there are secondary and tertiary stakeholders.

Secondary stakeholders include:

Learning Communities Project

Blackbird Leys IT Zone (Blitz)

Blackbird Leys Community Centre

Oxford Brookes University

¹ history and general background: <http://www.blackbirdleys.co.uk/history.htm>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackbird_Leys;

Tertiary stakeholders include:

University of Southampton

The wider educational research and learning technology communities of practice

The regional development authority: South East England Development Authority (SEEDA)

Secondary stakeholders

The secondary stakeholders are civil-society, institutional actors in the local community within which the research is being conducted. These stakeholders all have a common mission to raise quality of life and the levels of attainment and participation by people in the region in the democratic life of society through education, civic action and employment. To these stakeholders the research must report, honestly, its findings in respect of this mission, and make recommendations, in light of the findings, that might help these stakeholders to better fulfil their mission. For the Learning Communities Project, the research will be a useful part of a comprehensive evaluation strategy. While the aim of this research is not, primarily, the evaluation of Learning Communities, the findings should inform recommendations to the project and its sponsors. For Blitz, the research will “tell the story” of the life of the centre, reinforcing the identity of the community IT centre as an actor in the community, independent of its transitory status as a component of a project. For the Blackbird Leys Community Centre, within which many agencies are housed, the research can inform decisions about the nature of the public-facing activities of the centre. For Oxford Brookes University the research is evidence of Brookes’ active pursuit of its mission to be a university serving its community.

Tertiary stakeholders

The tertiary stakeholders represent wider interests in the region and the research enterprise.

The University of Southampton is a major research university in the South East England Region and an important national centre for educational research. The research will be widely disseminated at the University of Southampton, the School of Education and the Research Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Training . Together with the University of Southampton the research may inform the sector and agencies of government at all levels for the benefit of community education. The research should generally further knowledge of community education practices and their value to communities.

Finally, as a researcher and member of the educational research and learning technology communities I wish to do, and to be known for, good research which enhances the reputation of the research enterprise as social action worthy of pursuit, which contributes overall to the democratisation of education, locally, nationally and internationally.

Inform participants about the nature of the research

Participants will be fully informed by several means: information sheet, briefings, shared discussions with agency managers. I intend to fully inform all participants and gatekeepers of the research.

Free and voluntary participation

It is up to individuals to decide whether or not to take part. If they do decide to take part they will be given an information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If they decide to take part they are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. They may choose to take part in some but not all of the data collection activities. I would like to assure participants that their decision to participate or not, or to withdraw, will be completely independent of their involvement with any courses or other learning programmes that they might be involved with and it will have no effect on any assessment.

Support of other professionals at the centre

I have sought and obtained preliminary support from the Manager of the Learning Communities project. I will be working with other professionals and volunteers at Blitz. I will also have the support of the Oxford Brookes University working group for learning communities.

Refer to other agencies as appropriate

I will have several routes to other agencies should the need arise. The principal route will be

² Oxfordshire County Council, our work with communities, supporting learning: <http://tinyurl.com/26doz2> accessed 06/10/2007

through the Learning Communities Manager, and if necessary the Oxfordshire County Council offices supporting learning communities². The Head of the Oxford Brookes University working group for Learning Communities is also able to provide advice and support in respect of any other agencies to which I may need to refer.

Manage the differential 'power relationships' in the setting

There will be perceived differential power relationships throughout the research: in all directions. I am a visitor on their turf; I represent educational achievement; the field is complex. Throughout I strive to adopt and live through solidarity strategies, concern and respect for individuals, adaptability to situations, and attention to language. The philosophy of the research, based on appreciative inquiry, biographical narrative, critical discourse and actor network theory is intended to provide the best chance that the participants' voices are heard clearly and with as little advanced shaping by the researcher.

I will need to be attentive to whether payments or other rewards change the power relationship. Will payment impose an obligation on the subjects? How will the right-to-withdraw be managed if people have received payment? Right to withdraw does not mean they lose right to payment. There is a need to thank the participants and to recognise that they are providing value to the research. Getting the balance right is important. The research may not have an immediate, direct benefit to the participants but it should benefit those they represent. There are not funds to "pay" participants, however in co-operation with the centre inducements such as free meals, print credits or free colour printing may be offered. I will seek funding from the University of Southampton and Oxford Brookes University to support this aspect of the research. Ideally I would like to give benefits in kind of about £50 value to individual interview participants and about £10 value for participants in focus groups.

Recognition of symptoms of distress

I will need to be alert to symptoms of distress should any arise. I am not, and will not represent myself as a counsellor.

Dealing with distress should it arise

I will not be able to control all aspects of the context within which research is conducted and must be prepared to break off any interview or focus group should I become aware of distress in any participant. Should any interview be terminated because of distress I will immediately inform:

my research supervisor

the Learning Communities Manager

the Oxford Brookes University head of the working group for Learning Communities.

How is the research being done?

The data collection process will be multimodal, beginning with interviews and focus groups, followed by in-depth interviews with selected participants. From the interviews and focus groups a coding system will be developed leading to a wider questionnaire survey with local participants and, for correlation purposes with a small number of comparison sites in different regions.

The interviews will be audio-recorded so that I can ensure that I make an accurate record of what is said. These recordings will not be used for any other purpose than for transcribing comments. Individual interviewees will be provided with a copy of the transcript, so that they can verify that the information is correct and/or request modifications. Focus group participants will receive a summary of the session.

Confidentiality

The nature of the centre and the research means the centre will be at least locally identifiable. It is possible that the proximity to Oxford, as an international educational centre, is significant. Even with pseudonyms it is possible that individuals may recognise one another locally.

I intend to protect participants anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. This may include keeping identities of participants confidential from course tutors and centre managers in so far as possible. This may not be

entirely possible; given the small population, participants will, likely, be able to identify one another. It is not finally certain whether anonymisation is appropriate. As part of the aim of the research is to make people's voices heard, individuals may legitimately wish their names to be associated with the research without compromising its validity. Participants may actually wish to be heard in their own right. It will be necessary to negotiate with gatekeepers and participants and, in a case-by-case basis talk participants through whether they wish to use pseudonyms or not. If people waive their right to anonymity this must not allow other people's anonymity to be compromised. It is consequently imperative to *get all* participants to validate any evidence collected.

To protect anonymity, regardless of the final decision as to whether individuals wish to be associated with the research, the researchers will de-identify data before it is analysed. What this means is that names and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that is supplied. This will only be able to be linked to responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know where interview transcripts should be sent for checking.

In the final report, participants may choose to be referred to by a pseudonym. References to personal information that might allow someone to guess participant's identity will be removed, unless specific permission is given by a participant to allow their name to be used. The data will be kept securely, initially at the researcher's office and subsequently at the University of Southampton, School of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

I will seek to present and publish findings from the research at conferences and in other academic arenas, including journals. I will supply copies of any such publications on request to any participants in the study.

If participants have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, they should contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee. They may contact the appropriate agency manager who may make the approach on their behalf.

Appendix 10 Summary table of recommendations

Further to the policy context and the findings of this thesis (set out and cross referenced in section 9.1.2), I make fifteen recommendations.

- 1. Communities must take it upon themselves, with encouragement and support, to provide community IT facilities.**
- 2. What ever other ancillary activities are undertaken, the core activity should be easy, open, drop-in provision of the Internet, with the availability of informal peer-to-peer or coaching support, perhaps enhanced by a programme of access-level training.**
- 3. The CITC must provide access to information about educational opportunities, but is not, itself an education institution nor must it compete with colleges or libraries.**
- 4. Whatever model, the provision would have to be on the basis that the CITC were a public good; there would need to be subsidies provided.**
- 5. As well as the Internet, a basic suite of applications should be provided on the CITC's computers including photo, audio and video editing as well as a standard office suite.**
- 6. The CITC should provide wireless connectivity for users' own devices.**
- 7. There should be a strong user-centred culture of governance and management of the CITC.**
- 8. A too-narrow scoping of appropriate use should be avoided. People should be encouraged to play, socialise and experiment with IT and the other facilities on offer as much as to work and study.**
- 9. At least one staff member should be a professional on a payroll, but extensive use can be made of volunteers.**
- 10. Staff and volunteers will need basic training in counselling intervention techniques.**
- 11. There should be a private meeting space for confidential conversations.**
- 12. Information about community support services must be readily available.**
- 13. The CITC should be colocated with other community facilities.**
- 14. Family and child-friendly policies and facilities should be in place and resources to support lone parenthood should be accessible through or at the CITC.**
- 15. Community IT centres could be a part of federated open access schemes and on-line identity provision, possibly in association with local universities and colleges.**

Appendix 11 Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Copyright

The project is conducted with funding from Oxford Brookes University (Brookes).

- The equipment has been used and the data has been collected or generated and stored under the Regulation for the use of IT facilities at Oxford Brookes University (http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/cs/about_us/rules.html)
- Information procedures align with Brookes' Information Compliance framework (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/infosec/>!).
- Safe storage is covered under Brookes' Data Protection Policy (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/infosec/dpp.html>!).
- Freedom of Information is covered under Brookes' Freedom of Information framework guidelines (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/about/structure/policies/foi>)
- Data will be protected and eventually disposed according to Brookes' Disposal and Retention Guidelines for Personal Information (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/infosec/pidrg.html>!).

Indicative storage and disposal schedule

- Original interview recordings
- Transcriptions
- Selected printed and annotated transcriptions
- Consent forms
- Correspondence
- Email
- Nvivo project files
- Electronic Research Diaries
- Research Notebook (Chartwell A4 Laboratory Book, 5mm squares), Yellow dated from 07/01/08 to 2010
- Back-up disks
- Memory sticks
- Occasional Brookes Archive
- Google-docs
- Dropbox

I have an office at home and at Oxford Brookes University. The primary location for the storage of unanonymised data will be my password protected laptop. Key files that link

anonymous with unanonymised data should only be accessible to me. However, for security, data is backed-up regularly to removeable external hard drives as well as to network drives at Brookes and on the Internet. Transcript files were transferred via a third party dropbox established by the transcriber for the efficient conduct of her business. Transcripts that are printed out will be retained in a filing box at the researcher's home office. Unanonymised data will be transfered from home to Brookes on the laptop. For the most part, Unanonymised data was not sent by e-mail, but by file transfer to drop-boxes. A drop box has been used by me for back-up purposes.

In the event of a freedom of information request, an exception will be made for anonymised personal information. I will reject all attempts for access to unanonymised data, including all raw transcripts by any third party, state or private.

Otherwise, the work is in the public domain, subject to freedom of Information requests.

Copyright

© George B Roberts, 2011; What do you do with your community IT centre by George Roberts is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](#); stored at, and according to the regulations of, the University of Southampton. I will seek to have an open-access copy deposited on the University's D-Space repository.

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