

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

***‘LEARNING FOR EXCELLENCE’
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT
ASSISTANTS WITHIN FUTURE EDUCATION***

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ABSTRACT

Professional Learning for Supporters of Learning

The 1980s saw an increase in learning support assistants (LSAs') in colleges for further education to support post-sixteen learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). LSAs' were appointed on an ad hoc basis with little or no experience, or relevant qualifications to deliver support in 'inclusive' vocational classrooms. The Workforce Development Plan in 2004 acknowledged this phenomenon and advocated that occupational standards be developed. Two years later, in October 2006, the first National Occupational Standards (NOS) for college LSAs was launched but it did not include an official training framework for their professional learning and although there are some training structures in place, this still remains the case today.

Learners with LDD are, therefore, still supported by untrained LSAs' who are not professionally equipped to deal with the particular challenges they present. Educators like myself who work alongside LSAs' in colleges, must seek to naturalistically explore professional learning opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills. Such professional learning opportunities should reflect the creative and dynamic contribution college LSAs' bring to inclusive classrooms and, thereby, not only improve the quality of the support LSAs' give but the overall integrative, ethical and non-discriminative ethos of a college. With this knowledge, I developed and implemented an Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP) for the professional learning of volunteer LSA participants with the aim of improving their knowledge and skills to deliver a more meaningful education for post-sixteen learners with LDD. For the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, professional learning for LSAs' needs to occur systemically over time and be integrated within the multi-layered context of a college to allow dynamic and reciprocal influences to make transformative connections. Critically, my action research study strengthens the connection between socio-political theory and practice within the sociology of disability education on moral, ethical and human rights grounds.

Key words: inclusive education, further education, learning support assistants, professional learning, action research

For Niel, with love

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

‘TROUBLES AND ISSUES’: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY	1
INTRODUCTION	1
INTRODUCING THE STUDY	2
Contextual Review, Background and Personal Motivation	2
The Intervention	5
Ethical Considerations	8
PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT EMBEDDED IN THEORY	9
Theoretical Framework	9
Conceptual Argument	10
Relationship between Intervention, Theory, Conceptual Framework and Evaluation	13
INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS	14
Setting the Research Field	14
Design	17
Methods	17
Data Collection	18
CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	19
Insufficient Programmes	19
Learning and Development Needs	20
No Training Framework	20
Gap in the Knowledge	21
CONCLUDING COMMENTS	21
STRUCTURE OF THESIS	23

Chapter 2

‘LEARNING FOR EXCELLENCE OR NOT?’ LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS AND CURRENT TRAINING	24
INTRODUCTION	24
PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT	25

Setting up the Sample	24
Contextualisation of Participants within Research	32
CURRENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS IN FURTHER EDUCATION	34
Background Information	34
Day Seminar: with SEN in FE	35
Certificate/Diploma HE in Learning Support	37
Summary of Current Training Provision	39
Analysis of Current Training Provision	41
SYSTEMIC INFLUENCES ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE ENHANCED LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT PROGRAMME'S DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION	43
Introductory Comments	43
Continuous Professional Development	44
Comparing other Relevant Curricula	45
Occupational Standards	45
Exploration versus Evaluation	47
Work-based Learning	47
Integrated Learning	48
THE ENHANCED LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT PROGRAMME (ELSAP)	48
Background Information and Contextualisation	48
Programme Structure	50
CONCLUSION	52

Chapter 3

‘TRICKS OF THE TRADE’: CONCEPTUALISING POLICY, ‘INCLUSIVE’ FURTHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS	54
INTRODUCTION	54
POLICY DEVELOPMENT	56
Introductory Comments	56
Historical Developments	59
Towards Current Developments	63
Policy Reform Implications for Further Education Provision	65
ANALYSIS OF FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY	67
Leadership for Learning	69
14-19 Reform	73
A Skills Delivery Focus	74
Empowering Employers	76

Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)	78
Concluding the Rhetoric on Further Education Policy	79
Conclusive Comments to Policy	80
 COMPLEXITY THEORY WITHIN A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE	 81
Systemic Thinking for Classroom Change	82
Complexity, Chaos and Change	86
 ‘INCLUSIVE’ FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION	 89
Introduction	89
Defining ‘Inclusive’ Education	89
Changes in Approaches	90
‘Inclusive’ Further Education	92
Learning Support within Further Education	94
Post-Sixteen Learners within Further Education	98
Extrinsic Influences on Post-Sixteen Learning	102
Role of Learning Support Assistants within Further Education	104
Effective Communication: Key to Classroom Success	112
 THE CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	 116
Introduction to Adult Learning: Andragogy	118
Perspectives on Professional Learning Processes	120
Psychological Theories on Adult Learning	123
 CONCLUSION	 130

Chapter 4

RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY	132
 INTRODUCTION	 132
 RESEARCH PROCESS	 134
Design	134
Epistemological Grounding	138
Data Analysis	160
 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	 167
 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	 170
 CONCLUSION	 173

Chapter 5

‘OUT OF DEPTH’: FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS	174
THEORETICAL BACKDROP	176
LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS ARE ‘OUT OF DEPTH’	176
No Recruitment and Appointment Strategy	179
Induction Dilemma for New College Learning Support Assistants	183
No Appraisals or Continuous Professional Development	186
Unexpected or Sudden Additional Responsibilities	190
CONCLUSION	194

Chapter 6

‘REALITY CHECK’: INCLUSIVE FURTHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY	196
THEORETICAL BACKDROP	196
‘REALITY CHECK’ ON COLLEGE LEARNING SUPPORT PROVISION	199
College as Complex Work Environment	199
Hindrances in Supporting Learning	220
CONCLUSION	239

Chapter 7

‘EFFICACY OR INEFFICIENCY’: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS IN FURTHER EDUCATION	242
THEORETICAL BACKDROP	242
ESTABLISHING THE ‘EFFICACY OR INEFFICIENCY’ OF LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS	247
Emotional State	247
Professional Competence	256
Need for Future Training	264
CONCLUSION	270

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS 'LEARNING FOR EXCELLENCE'	273
INTRODUCTION	273
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIMITATIONS	275
A MATTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE	278
POLICY DEVELOPMENT INFORMS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE	280
TRAINING NEEDS ADDRESSED TO ENSURE CHANGED INCLUSIVE PRACTICE	282
QUEST FOR MANDATORY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS IN FURTHER EDUCATION	283
OVERALL CONCLUDING COMMENTS	286
FINAL COMMENTS	287
FUTURE RESEARCH	288
POST-STUDY ACTIVITY	289

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 The Individual LSA as Micro System	11
1.2 Potential Meso and Macro Influences on LSAs'	12
3.1 Systemic Influences on Post-Sixteen Learning	103
3.2 Systemic Role of College LSAs'	110
3.3 Schramm's Model of the Communication Process	113
3.4 Fundamental Features of the Communication Process	113
3.5 Professional Learning as Central Systemic Influence within a College Work Context	118
3.6 Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs	128

LIST OF TABLES

2.1 Summary of Current Training Provision	40
3.1 Communication Difficulties in Learners with LDD	114
6.1 LSA scores in 'Knowledge and Understanding' and 'Application of Skill' on Self-Assessment Questionnaires	213
6.2 Total 'Knowledge and Understanding' Scores on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Each LSA	214
6.3 Total 'Application of Skill' Scores on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Each LSA	214
6.4 Overall Total Scores of Knowledge Unit Test Administered Before and After each Unit	218
7.1 Frequencies of Responses on Programme Delivery Evaluation Through-out the Course on Each Question	267
7.2 Overall Percentages of Responses for All Questions on Programme Delivery Evaluation for Each Unit	268

BIBLIOGRAPHY

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Permission from Vice-Principal
Appendix B	Memorandum: Official Notification to LSAs'
Appendix C	Notification about Research Study
Appendix D	Agenda for Meeting
Appendix E	Attendance List
Appendix F	Participant Information
Appendix G	ELSAP Handbook
Appendix H	Scheme of Work (SOW)
Appendix I	Session Plan and Attendance List
Appendix J	ELSAP Content
Appendix K	Knowledge and skills criteria for Domain B
Appendix L	Knowledge and skills criteria for Domain C
Appendix M	Knowledge and skills criteria for Domain D
Appendix N	Knowledge and skills criteria for Domain E
Appendix O	Needs Analysis
Appendix P	Observation
Appendix Q	Written Tutorial
Appendix R	Reflective Diary
Appendix S	Field Note
Appendix T	Pre and Post Self-Assessment Questionnaire
Appendix U	Pre and Post End Knowledge Test
Appendix V	Programme Delivery Evaluation
Appendix W	Consent Form

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BA (Hons)	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
BERA	The British Educational Research Association
CACHE	Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CEF	Colleges Employers Forum
DDA	Disability and Discrimination Act
DES	Department of Science
DfEE	Department of Education and Employment
DfES	Department of Education and Skills
DipHE	Diploma in Higher Education
DRTF	Disability Rights Task Force
ECM	Every Child Matters
ELSAP	Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme
FE	Further Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education and Training Organisation
HE	Higher Education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
ILPs	Individual Learning Plans
INSET	In-Service Education and Training
LD	Learning Difficulty
LDD	Learning Difficulty and Disability

LLUK	Lifelong Learning United Kingdom
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LSC	Learning Skills Council
NCFE	National Curriculum for Further Education
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OCR	Oxford Cambridge and RSA
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	The Office for Standards in Education
PMLD	Profound Multiple Learning Disability
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualification and Curriculum Framework
SEBD	Social and Emotional Behavioural Disorder
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
SENET	Special Educational Needs and Training
SMT	Senior Management Team
SRA	Sociological Research Association
SOW	Schemes of Work
SRHE	Society for Research in Higher Education
TA	Teaching Assistant
TGTC	The General Teaching Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

When a person is able to feel and communicate genuine acceptance of another, he or she possesses a capacity for being a powerful helping agent for the other. It is one of those simple but beautiful paradoxes of life: when a person feels that he or she is truly accepted by another, then they are freed to move from there and begin to think about how they want to change, want to grow, and how he or she can become different and more of what they are capable of being.

(Gordon, 1970)

CHAPTER 1

‘TROUBLES AND ISSUES’: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Wright Mills (1959: 8) argues that in all research the social scientist needs to distinguish between the personal difficulty, the environment in which the difficulty occurs and the concerns of the wider community. According to Wright Mills ‘troubles’ refers to the individual self within his/her ‘immediate milieu’ and as something which usually stimulates ‘willful activity’. In this study ‘troubles’ refers to the practical dilemmas and moral convictions I experienced as a college lecturer of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) and the untrained learning support assistants (LSAs’) who supported them. ‘Issues’, according to Wright Mills (1959: 8), are when these inner difficulties interrelate with the wider social context and the difficulties become ‘public matter’. My experience and inner dissatisfaction with the work, and more specifically, the poor and often non-existent training conditions for LSAs was also a persistent issue amongst my colleagues within the college. The lack of appropriate training for college LSAs’, in turn, fed into a wider public discourse about the ‘equality’ and ‘social rights’ of young people with LDD and led me, in my professional capacity, to take action to intervene.

Given the nature of this naturalistic research (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and my paid employment, that of engaging with learners who have LDD, it made sense to engage with disability research as a contextual base. Quite rightly, Goodley and Van Hove (2005) say that disability

studies are not simply a paradigm used to develop academic competence, but on a larger, global scale, a phenomenon¹ that aims to promote radical knowledge, activism and practice in relation to disability. Barnes *et al.*, (2002) agree that disability studies are worldwide emancipating studies to promote disability research while simultaneously promoting the disabled people's movement².

In line with Goodley and Van Hove (2005) and Barnes *et al.*, (2002) my research aimed to be a two-way promotion. Whilst it increases social theory through new knowledge and understanding in the field of global disability studies, it seeks to promote social change, for example, within practice. In this first chapter I introduce my study, explaining the underpinning philosophical argument and epistemological decisions made and how these influenced the research process. I shall also discuss its intended contribution to knowledge in the field of post-sixteen disability education.

Introducing the Study

Contextual Review, Background and Personal Motivation

This study came about as a result of my work and role as a teacher of learners with LDD in colleges for further education (FE) in East Anglia over the last decade. FE colleges, in line with other educational institutions in England, have embraced an 'inclusive' ethos based on the human rights for all young people, including those with LDD, to be taught and educated

¹ 'Phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; 18-19).

² The disabled people's movement proclaims that when disabled people come together they are stronger. They set out to work together for the same goal. They all want the same things: equality, independence and human rights (Goodley and Van Hove, 2005).

amongst their peers (Barton, 2010b; DfEE, 1997; DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2001; DfES, 2003; DfES 2004; Tomlinson, 1996).

Since the 1980s, FE colleges have seen a broad increase in the number and range of courses developed and delivered to widen learner participation. Some courses were initiated as a result of education policy reform to homogenise the education for learners with LDD alongside their peers (Morgan, 2000). Literature suggests that most young people with learning difficulties now attend FE upon leaving compulsory schooling (MacIntyre, 2008). This, in particular has led to an increase in LSAs' working alongside college lecturers and tutors to support all young people according to their age, needs and abilities (Green and Milbourne, 1998; Farrell and Ainscow, 2003; Hryniewicz, 2007; Fairclough, 2008; Robson and Bailey, 2008).

This educational philosophy of equality³ of opportunity has had challenging implications for its implementation within college settings (in the same way that it has had for other educational settings such as schools and universities) (Allan, 2010; Barton, 2010b; Benjamin, 2002; Jones, 2003; Norwich, 2008; Rogers, 2007; Slee, 2010). However, unlike the occurrence in schools, LSAs' in colleges emerged almost unnoticed (Bailey and Robson, 2004) and their roles and duties vary from supporting small groups of learners who are clustered together on the basis of their learning needs to one-to-one individual support for learners identified as having LDD (Morgan, 2000). For LSAs' to be effective in these roles, they need to have a good underpinning knowledge and understanding on aspects such as: the teaching-learning process; the learning needs of post-sixteen learners and particularly those with LDD; the health and safety needs of learners and their safeguarding; educational policy

³ Equal entitlement for every individual in education 'while acknowledging and respecting individual differences' (Warnock and Norwich, 2010: 1)

development and reform and how these influence everyday non-discriminative and inclusive classroom practice (Armitage *et al.*, 2003; Bailey and Robson, 2004; Bruce *et al.*, 2010; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Skills for Business, 2006).

My teaching responsibilities at the FE college where I worked at the time of my research were, amongst others, to teach post-sixteen learners with LDD on full time programmes such as an Essential Skills programme for MENCAP⁴. LSAs' worked alongside me in the classroom supporting learners with, for example, severe autism, cerebral palsy, Downs Syndrome, hearing and visual impairments, behavioural disorders, to mention only a few conditions. At the same time, I was also teaching LSAs' on part-time evening NCFE (Northern Council for Further Education) and Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) examinations level 2 and 3 programmes for their supporting role in 'inclusive' schools. These work experiences heightened my awareness that there were no formal training programmes for LSAs' working in colleges and supporting our post-sixteen learners with LDD. Although the college embraced diversity and operated within a framework of equal opportunities⁵ (as contextualised above), my experience was that although the legislative system encouraged *all* students on a national, macro level to take part in integrative and 'inclusive' learning, the actual quality of service support learners with LDD received from unqualified TAs', was unsatisfactory. This experience prompted me in 2006 to plan an intervention for the learning and development of untrained LSAs' who volunteered to participate in such training.

⁴ UK's leading learning disability charity.

⁵ Anti-discriminative practices in relation to race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and religion; 'all students regarded as equal – to each other and the lecturers and tutors' (Parrott, 2007: 25).

The Intervention

Planning and development

During the summer term of 2006, I discussed my thoughts and views on the practical dilemmas (and the moral convictions) which I had experienced, with my colleagues (managers, lecturers and tutors) of having untrained LSAs' to perform highly skilled work as part of their role with learners with LDD. (See Appendix O for a colleague's recording of such training needs). I also entered into professional discussion with the LSAs' themselves to gain an inside understanding (Coffey, 1999) on their views and feelings about their professional 'situation'. It became apparent to me that my views on the training needs of LSAs' were widely shared by my colleagues and that the LSAs' themselves were very keen to undergo professional development to enhance their practical skills.

Resulting from this I developed an Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP) to increase personal and professional learning and skills development for untrained LSAs' to subsequently promote positive change to their practice. ELSAP comprised five themed sections: professional role and duties; historical and current legislative framework; classroom support strategies; post-sixteen learners with LDD; and reviewing of own practice.

Implementation and research questions

ELSAP was implemented at the college where I worked, over a fourteen-week period between the autumn of 2006 and the spring of 2007, and formed the vehicle for qualitative⁶

⁶ 'Uses narratives, descriptive approaches to data collection to understand the way things are and what it means (Mills, 2000: 5).

explorative action research⁷ of nine LSAs' who volunteered to participate (Coffey, 1999). In line with Benjamin (2002), we were engaged in active meaning-making, observation, discussion, examination and analysis of LSAs' knowledge and understanding and practice.

My own critical reflexivity⁸ was key to the action research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Robson, 2002) and provided an element of ethnography that supported me to understand the LSAs' attitudes, their feelings about and expectations of their practice and how that could be improved and changed to benefit learners (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). I also needed to consider LSAs' views on the potential future delivery of professional development activities for LSAs'. The following research questions underpinned and framed my reflexivity: How can LSAs' benefit from a professional learning experience? How can a new understanding about their work change their practice? How can LSAs' changed practice make a difference to learners with LDD? What supports/hinders LSAs' professional learning and subsequently, their practice? What needs to happen to improve future professional learning experiences or interventions for LSAs'? Reflexivity (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Robson, 2002) and questioning also supported me in making decisions about epistemology and methodology on how the learning journeys of the LSAs' were to be explored in the most suitable and responsible manner as part of the research process.

Methods for evaluation

The fourteen-week period of time during which ELSAP was implemented (Taylor, 2002), assisted me in using very different types of methods, for example, observation and LSAs' reflective diaries. These in turn, added value to the overall trustworthiness⁹ of my research by

⁷ 'Action research is about finding ways to improve your practice, so it is about creating knowledge [...] of practice' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 7).

⁸ 'Awareness of how one thinks' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 22)

⁹ To make honest and legitimate claims (Mills, 2000).

supporting the means of triangulation¹⁰ (Cohen *et al.* 2011). An introduction to the full range of methods and how they were used are discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Operational monitoring

As a full-time employee who was conducting research at the same time, ELSAP delivery and implementation had to fit my professional busy time-scale. Whilst planning had to be meticulous, the monitoring and reviewing of the overall research process had to be rigorous. Strategies for these contributed to the validity of the research. I monitored ELSAP implementation and the generation of data daily and weekly to ensure that all procedures kept to planned structures and time-frames.

This was achieved by means of a written holistic overall implementation plan covering the fourteen-week period, followed by the use of individual session plans. Both these documents stipulated detail and allowed for consistency of actions to be taken. The schemes of work (SOW) specified the following: intervention title; who the intervention was aimed at; place of implementation; unit modules; date, time and location of delivery; session objectives or aims; detailed description of topic; special notes relevant to each session; detailed description of LSA participant activity; resources and materials required for each session; qualitative methods of data collection and time of the collection. SOW and session plans were kept in my research log (Coffey, 1999; Kolb, 1984; Robson, 2002; Schön, 1989; Stevens and Cooper, 2009). These were working documents used simultaneously for the purpose of structure and guidance, leaving the opportunity for subtle changes as and when required (Merriam, 2002). Rossi *et al.*, (2004) state that monitoring of data requires access to files,

¹⁰ ‘multiple sources of data’ (Mills, 2010: 48).

people and facilities, and stresses how vitally important it is to maintain routines as organisational imperatives when delivering a social programme.

From the above, one can see that the ELSAP intervention played a fundamental role within my research. Although it was by no means a perfect programme, it offered opportunities for teacher-led discussion, professional learning, peer and community learning, reflective and work-based learning, whilst facilitating the exploration and evaluation of the impact thereof on the development and subsequently the practice of LSAs'.

Ethical Considerations

The nine participant LSAs' who were fundamental to this research, are individually introduced at the beginning of Chapter 2. As action researcher, one of my responsibilities was to ensure that LSAs' had confidence in me as researcher and that I would not put them at any risk of being harmed or exploited (Coffey, 1999; Robson, 2002). In order to gain their confidence and willingness to participate, I needed to get signed approval from them. I informed and discussed all aspects of the research, and particularly those that may have influenced their willingness to participate. These included my expectations that a daily reflective diary was kept about their task and duties, as a method to generate information about their practice.

To further comply with ethics and for the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, names of the participants have been changed and pseudonyms are used. The identities of participants and others involved in the appendices have been concealed as well. I also obtained permission to conduct a study of this nature from the vice-principal of the FE College in the East of England where my research was carried out.

Philosophical Argument Embedded in Theory

In this section I shall first introduce the theoretical framework before I briefly explain the conceptual argument for my research. Further to this, I aim to analyse the relationship between the theoretical framework, the conceptual argument, the intervention and the evaluation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study comprises of three main fields or stances. These theories¹¹ underpinned and guided my social research and exploration. Although they are only being introduced here, they will be appraised in my literature review chapter, Chapter 3. I will also weave them into all discussions during analysis, interpretation and reporting on the data.

The first theory explores literature on international and national *educational policy development* over the last three decades and shows how key legislation supported the making of socially more integrative, ‘inclusive’ schools and later colleges for further education (FE) in England (DES, 1978; DfES 1997; DfES, 2003; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Jones, 2003; Morgan, 2000).

The second theory discusses ‘*inclusive*’ *FE education and current provision* for post-sixteen learners with LDD. In doing so, it explores concepts such as: the role and specific skills LSAs’ and learning support plays within a college (Robson and Bailey, 2008); the national

¹¹ ‘[...] gathers together all the isolated bits of empirical data into a coherent conceptual framework of wider applicability. [...] several different types of theory, and each type of theory defines its own kinds of ‘proof’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 9).

occupational standards (NOS) for LSAs in FE (Skills for Business, 2001); the learning needs of post-sixteen learners with LDD (Farrell, 2001).

The third theoretical field focuses on *the professional learning and development for LSAs' within FE*. Work-based learning (Boud and Solomon, 2008) and its sub-components: action, social and reflective learning; dialogue; interaction and communication, all play vital roles for learning and these are discussed (DuFour *et al.*, 2006; McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Schön, 1987). According to theorists, these sub-components form the basic characteristics for work-based learning through which, in this case, college LSAs' who became adult (lifelong) learners, can monitor their practice and make cognitive¹² connections between existing and new knowledge and which can influence and transform their classroom practice (Eraut, 1994; Mezirow, 2000). A final discussion within this field of professional learning and development focusses on psychological influences of adult learning theories on the professional learning and development of LSAs'.

Conceptual Argument

The 'inclusive' educational college environment in which my research was conducted, can be perceived as complex, unpredictable and dynamic (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The term 'complex' refers to the multi-layeredness, uniqueness, instability and often the uncertainty of the environment. The term 'unpredictability' indicates that the environment can be subject to sudden and unforeseen change. The word 'change' here also suggests movement and fluidity. It creates a sense of undertaking and activity which is in compliance with the meaning of 'dynamic'.

¹² Rational and intellectual.

Such change or undertaking can happen in one area (or system) within the college environment and according to the literature of Von Bertalanffy (1933; 1968) and Bronfenbrenner (2005) can, in a reciprocal manner, influence change or undertaking in another. Change can also happen on and between different levels (Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy 1968). For example, in this study, the expertise and knowledge of LSAs' can have a positive or negative effect on the learners with LDD with whom they work. If an LSA supports an individual who is on the autistic spectrum, she ought to have some underpinning understanding about the influence of the intrinsic¹³ disability on the development of the learner and which educational strategies to apply in order for the learner to access the FE curriculum.

In other words, the individual LSAs' learning and development needs and their preferred way of learning are central to my research. These can potentially be understood as a micro system. Figure 1.1 below is a visual interpretation which supports the understanding of this concept.

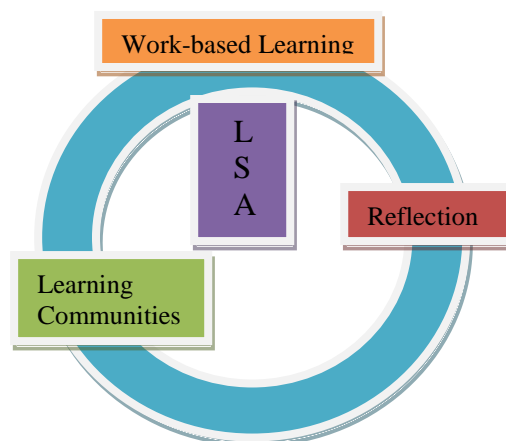


Figure 1.1: The Individual LSA as Micro System¹⁴

¹³ Inherent or internal.

¹⁴ '[...] *Microsystem* as the setting within which the individual is behaving at a given moment in his or her life' (Bronfenbrenner, 2005: xiii).

Meso and wider macro layers, form outer systems, metaphorically, that refer to those areas in the college that influence the professional learning and development of the individual LSA on a micro level. Such areas are, for example, educational policies and procedures, the learning needs of post-sixteen learners with LDD and the role and responsibilities of LSAs' when performing in 'inclusive' classrooms. Figure 1.2 below offers a visual interpretation to support the understanding of the concept of the outer meso and macro systems (or layers). The arrows indicate the reciprocal relationship and influences between these concepts. This also indicates the movement and change discussed above.

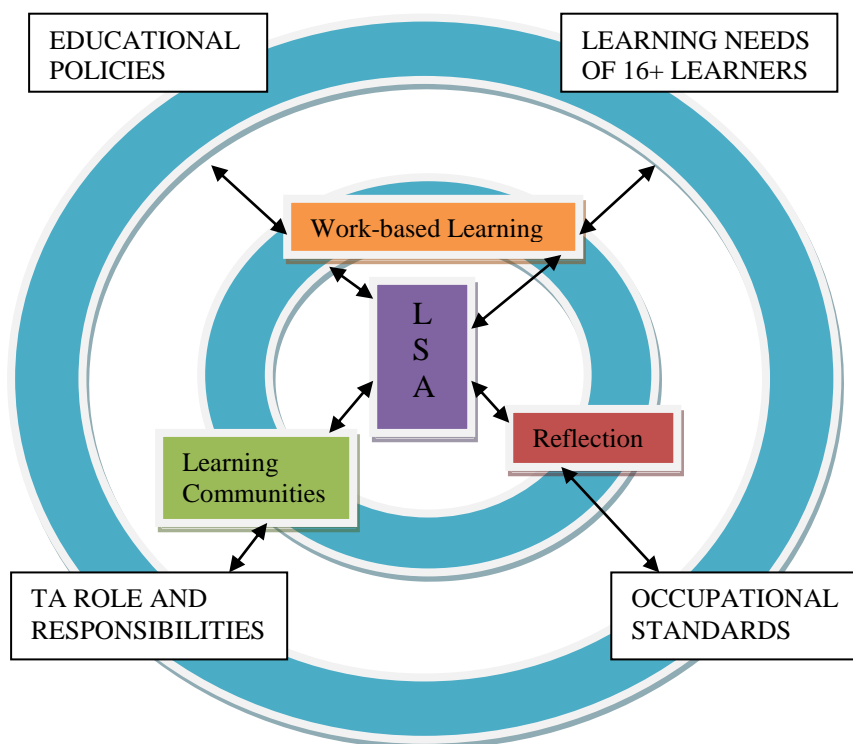


Figure 1.2: Potential Meso and Macro Influences on LSAs'

Diagrams 1 and 2 are simplistic images to explain the systemic approach which is embedded in the concept that the educational system is multi-layered and interconnected and forms the dynamic and complex context within which LSAs' work and train.

To conclude, the above philosophical argument indicates that my research aims to facilitate educational classroom change but that it needs to be understood against the backdrop of systemic complexity. In order for LSAs' to increase their knowledge and understanding about their work and in order for a marked improvement to occur in their practice, the systemic inter-connected fluid (dynamic) layers of their FE work environment needs to be recognised and acknowledged within their professional development activities and experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Schön, 1983; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). This explanation only offers a basic introduction to the underpinning complexity theory within the systems thinking of this research. The theory is fully discussed in the following chapter.

Relationship between Intervention, Theory, Conceptual Framework and Evaluation

My understanding of the relationship between the overarching methodological ethnographic choices (which is introduced in the next main section of this chapter), the ELSAP intervention, the research process and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are as follows. Theoretical concepts were built into the development of the programme, for example, theory on legislation, 'inclusive education' and disability, and formed key components of ELSAPs content. The implementation of ELSAP was based on professional adult learning theories for college LSAs including the transformative theory (Mezirow, 2000), work-based learning (Boud and Solomon, 2008) and reflective learning (Schön, 1987).

The interrelated and connectedness between the above processes (choice of research methodology, ELSAP intervention designed for LSAs' professional learning, adult learning theories employed during intervention to enhance LSAs' learning) sparked the identification (who is the problem?), understanding and recognition (what is the problem and how can it be resolved?) of the ontology of the phenomena of this study, which is the untrained LSAs' supporting learners with LDD in colleges. This interrelated and connectedness also reflected a reciprocal relationship within the wider dynamic and complex educational milieu in which this research was conducted including, for example, historical and current policy development and how this influences current procedures, the professional profile and practice of LSAs' in FE.

All of the above informed my conceptual development and understanding of a 'complexity theory within systems thinking' (Hoban, 2002), and increased my understanding of the LSA and his/her learning needs in terms of a wider totality. This understanding in turn enabled the epistemology of the research process to be qualitative and explorative (Gall *et al*, 2007) to ensure rigorous, inductive processes, including observations, journals and self-assessments. In the following section the methodological framework is explained in more detail as an introduction.

Introduction of the Research Process

Setting the Research Field

My research journey began by exploring different methodological approaches and styles in which to carry out my research. As the aims of my intervention were to provide a programme for 'intended use' (professional learning) by 'intended users' (college LSAs'), my initial

thoughts were that the design should be ‘Utilization Focussed Evaluation’ (Patton, 1997). I identified with the evaluation research writings of authors such as Patton because of their broad references to programme implementation and the measuring of the impact thereof on programme participants (Patton, 1990; Patton, 1997; Patton, 2001; Rossi and Freeman, 1993; Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, 2004). However, although I could clearly understand some similarities between the characteristics of this type of evaluation and my intended research, I felt that important methodological aspects of the explorative and qualitative nature of what I thought was needed to fully understand the work and learning of our college LSAs’, were missing.

In continuing with my exploration I also realised that I would not be able to make a case for full-blown utilization focused evaluation research, because there was no recorded data about the existing level of my LSAs’ knowledge, understanding or skills. To be able to ‘evaluate’ one needs to be able to compare apples with apples but I did not have the first lot of ‘apples’. Instead of abandoning the idea of evaluation all together, my research prompted me to use evaluation as an element in my overall research process. Indeed some of the instruments which I was considering for data collection sought to evaluate LSA participants own views and feelings and their experiences of the ELSAP intervention and how it impacted on their knowledge, understanding and skills and ultimately their practice. I came to the conclusion that by using methods such as self-assessment questionnaires and programme delivery evaluations, together with other explorative methods (reflective diaries), that such a mixed-character-approach may benefit the overall research process by providing interesting data that was being generated from different viewpoints. I felt this mixed character could only add depth to any interpretative design.

Upon further research, I considered a multiple case study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006) design to qualitatively explore my research purpose and evaluate the impact of ELSAP on LSAs' learning. My design was starting to take on a more precise form but although it ticked many of the 'case study design' boxes, it did not feel 'quite right'. At this point I began to realise that my experience and knowledge about the situation and conditions within which LSAs' work and train should perhaps also be a part of the research process. However, it was not until I commenced with ELSAP at the end of 2006 and started to keep my own field notes (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) that I fully realised how my prior knowledge and experience was actually a fundamental element of the research process. Subsequently, I included an element of ethnography as this seemed appropriate to the exploration of the social phenomenon of college LSAs and to my reflecting on my observations about their new understanding and thinking about their role, the problems and dilemmas they experience and the way their various understandings change in response to the intervention and influence their practice (Benjamin, 2002; Coffey, 1999). I decided that rigorous exploration would, apart from including LSAs' stories, opinions and views on their work and training, also include my inner reflexive voice (Rogers, 2003) on their situation.

Finally I came to the conclusion that action research which included aspects of my initial approaches (which involved some elements of a quantitative method, as well as a strongly evaluative attitude to the work and learning of LSAs') combined with aspects of an ethnographic approach (to focus more closely on the LSAs' experiences), would fit the purpose of this educational research best. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2010), action research 'begins with people thinking about what they value, and how they might act in the direction of those values'. Based on initial discussion with the nine LSAs' who volunteered for ELSAP about what their learning goals were and how they thought they could achieve

what was important to them, this approach supported the development of an in-depth and holistic understanding of their attitudes and their dilemmas and their learning and understanding about their work with learners who have disabilities in colleges. I felt that my methodological choice served the overall aim of my research which was to bring educational change and, further to this, also support the design of future professional development interventions.

Design

As explained above, I employed qualitative explorative action research (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010) with elements of ethnography and evaluation for triangulation purposes (when using multiple methods), to generate rich data that reflected the dynamic complexity and interrelated (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Von Bertalanffy, 1933) ‘inclusive’ college context in which the nine participant LSAs’ work, learn and train.

Methods

The action research employed included the following methods: reflective diaries (Stevens and Cooper, 2009); pre and post self-assessment questionnaires (Gall *et al.*, 2007); observations (McMillan, 2008); pre and post knowledge evaluations (Cohen *et al.*, 2011); written tutorials (Seidman, 2006) and field notes (Robson, 2002) from my research log. This enabled a wide range of data to be generated at different intervals during the ELSAP intervention to ensure honest, reliable and systematic measurement and exploration (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

Epistemological decisions were made about methods that would reflect the qualitative and inductive nature of my enquiry in gaining both insiders and outsiders’ stories (Coffey, 1999)

as well as acknowledging the importance of evaluating the impact of ELSAP on LSAs' understanding and knowledge and ultimately their practice. For example, participant LSAs' reflected on their daily role and practice by means of a reflective diary and written tutorials. Pre and post self-assessment questionnaires and pre and post unit knowledge tests were used to evaluate increases in the level of knowledge and understanding of participant LSAs' on their work and duties. Although these methods were employed under constrained conditions, for example limited time-scales, all efforts were made to limit the risk to the quality and richness of data generated from these methods being compromised (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Robson, 2002; Rossi *et al.*, 2004;).

Data Collection

Data collecting processes for the evaluation were conducted over a fourteen-week period (which entailed a total of 28 sessions), in accordance with the time-table for ELSAP intervention's implementation. This started on 14/11/06 and ended on 28/03/07. I used content analysis and analytical induction to identify and locate particular similarities of themes and subjects (conceptual analysis) for the purposes of interpretation (Mertens, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1989). Conceptual analysis was used to decide the level of analysis and the amount of themes to be coded and as a code for the existence of the frequency of a theme. It was also used to distinguish between concepts, rules for coding texts, how to discard irrelevant information, coding texts and analysing results (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

According to Miles and Huberman (1989), this type of pattern finding is extremely productive in making sense of the severe overload of qualitative data that a researcher may experience. By employing this mode of analytical strategy some threats were posed to the

reliability and internal validity¹⁵ of my action research. Being the sole researcher in this study was demanding and stressful and one could easily ‘read’ meaning into responses which may result in misinterpretation. To counteract this, I planned the analysis process in a systematic, methodological order to help me remain sceptical about any confirming data during analysis (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Contribution to Knowledge

Insufficient Programs

As there are currently no mandatory qualification requirements for LSAs’ employed in FE colleges in England, I developed an idea to plan an intervention for reform and social justice (Barton, 2010b). Over the years, I have become aware that most of the mandatory and some of the optional units used for training LSAs’, fail to address the specific training requirements needed for their work with the range of post-sixteen learners they encounter in a vocational learning environment. Prior to ELSAP, College LSAs’ were encouraged by my college managers to attend programmes for LSAs’ in schools and they often expressed their frustration at having to attend and participate in training discussions and lectures on issues which were not relevant to their role and duties. There seemed to be various reasons for this:

- the difference between the underpinning learning theories needed for children and young adults;
- the difference between supporting skills and strategies needed for children and young adults to meet the difference in developmental stages between them;
- the different methods needed to build positive relations and promote positive behaviour with children and young adults;

¹⁵ ‘Fidelity to the approach in which she or he is working’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 180).

- the different strategies used to access post-sixteen vocational curricula (for example, Engineering or Health and Social Care).

LSAs' also need to familiarise themselves with and learn about the college code of practice for the support, monitoring, assessment and overall provision of learners with LDD and how this is imbedded in and influenced by a more modernised legislative discourse instigated by the last Labour government (Jones, 2003). For example, the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and legislation i.e. Special Educational Needs Act (SENDA) 2001 (DfES, 2003; DfES, 2004; Norwich, 2008).

Learning and Development Needs

Literature supports my view that the essence of the LSAs' role is to provide support for *all* post-sixteen learners, including those with LDD in inclusive college classrooms (Robson and Bailey, 2008). For LSAs' to be most effective in their role, they need to demonstrate a range of very specific competencies, knowledge and skills (Fox, 2000; Hryniewicz, 2007). The Workforce Development Plan (WDP) in 2004 acknowledged this situation and asked for occupational standards to be developed (FENTO, 2001). Two years later, in October 2006, the first National Occupational Standards (NOS) for LSAs' who work in FE colleges in England was launched at a day event in London (Skills for Business, 2006).

No Training Framework

Although some official training structures were starting to see the light after 2006, an official professional qualification framework for the professional learning and development of college LSAs' has yet to be put in place. The current British coalition government with their comments on radical reform adds to the uncertainty of the professionalism of LSAs' in FE education. Nick Clegg (deputy prime minister in the UK) delivered a key message in

November 2010 during his Hugo Young Lecture on education reform (*The Guardian*, 23/11/10), insisting that it will encourage social mobility. However, it is of concern that no mention was made about college provision, although schools and universities were being addressed. It remains to be seen if an appropriate framework for the professional development of college LSAs' will be produced in the current political atmosphere of budget cuts.

Gap in the Knowledge

However, learning support practice in FE does not need to be compromised due to the absence of a training framework being in place for these members of the workforce. Educators like myself who work alongside LSAs' in colleges and who are involved in and steer professional learning programmes for learning support workers in other sectors of education (i.e. infants, junior, primary and secondary schools) should seek to explore professional learning opportunities (e.g. ELSAP) to enhance the knowledge and skills of LSAs working in colleges. Such professional learning events should reflect and improve the creative and dynamic attitude and contribution that college LSAs' bring to inclusive college classrooms and should further seek to enhance the overall, integrative and inclusive ethos of a college.

Concluding Comments

I have explained my personal and professional motivation for the research with the intention of contributing to the field of post-sixteen disability education. The ontology of my study was the phenomenon of untrained LSAs' supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD in a college for further education where I worked during 2006/07. Literature outlined political, cultural

and educational ‘troubles’ which, left unresolved, manifested themselves in wider social ‘issues’ within the college community. Ineffective classroom practice resulted from having untrained ‘professionals’ and contradicted the ‘inclusive’ ethos of the college which was based on a moral value that the people who represented the college (governors, staff and learners) celebrated and valued diversity through equality of opportunity. Subject to the failure to demonstrate this value, social injustice occurred with regard to the educational service we, the college, provided to our ‘clients’, the learners with disabilities.

To understand the holistic context of the phenomena three major theoretical fields were introduced. These were educational policy development, ‘inclusive’ disability education and professional learning for college LSAs’. Fields were underpinned by philosophical conceptual reasoning that, to implement an intervention (ELSAP) for the personal and professional development of LSAs’ to become more effective in their roles, the college work environment should be understood as a complex, dynamic, interrelated and multi-layered one. Professional learning should therefore be implemented over a prolonged period of time as part of a system to bring about educational change.

Complexity theory within a systems thinking conceptual framework, influenced the epistemological choices for my research and evaluation process to ensure that LSAs’ stories were being told inductively and rigorously analysed for interpretation. Below follows an outline of the structure of this thesis.

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis contextualises my action research while Chapter 2 explores the training opportunities which were available for LSAs' working in FE at the time of my study. Chapter 3 conceptualises the professional national standards which implies the learning and development needs for these LSAs' in order to provide effective and 'inclusive' educational provision.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, discusses the research process employed. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 report the findings in relation to the three main theoretical fields: FE policy and procedures; disability education and 'inclusive' provision; and LSAs' professional learning and development. Chapter 8 concludes this thesis and also makes some recommendations.

The following chapter, Chapter 2 of this thesis, is two-fold. The first part introduces the participants whose learning and development were fundamental to this research and without whom there would have been no study. They are the nine volunteers who participated on ELSAP in order to enhance their knowledge and skills and who showed boundless enthusiasm, energy and respect for the learners they supported. The second part of Chapter 2 aims to explore existing professional learning opportunities. This is done by discussing two different types of training and how they both fall short of meeting the training needs of college LSAs' indicating, thereby, a vital gap in knowledge within FE disability education for more enhanced training.

CHAPTER 2

‘LEARNING FOR EXCELLENCE OR NOT?’ LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS AND CURRENT TRAINING

Introduction

At this point it is important to contextualise the participants who played a fundamental role in my research. In order to fully understand the context and rationale for my ELSAP intervention, it is also important to focus attention on the types of training opportunities that were available for college LSAs’. Contextualisation of ELSAP forms the third and final section of this chapter.

As contextualised in chapter 1, there are currently no mandatory qualification requirements for LSAs’ employed in colleges in England, including the part of East Anglia where my study was conducted. However, LSAs’ have been employed to work in inclusive classrooms in colleges, for more than two decades, bringing to classrooms a diverse and wide range of qualifications, skills and knowledge. Some LSAs’ are retired teachers, while others simply chose to have a change of career without having any or very little experience of work in a post-sixteen education setting. LSAs’ are not currently required to have any formal vocational qualifications or work-related educational training or experience. They are employed on an ad hoc basis, often with very little or no preparation or induction for their work alongside lecturers and tutors teaching adult learners.

The new draft NOS (Skills for Business, 2006), shows a clear need for LSAs' working in the lifelong sector to show a commitment to professional development in order to be effective in their work in inclusive classrooms. During Bailey and Robson's (2004: 382) survey of five colleges in Northern England, some colleges indicated that they were looking into 'providing a career path' for LSAs', while others provided less opportunities: 'career path progression opportunities somewhat limited overall'. On completion of the survey, Bailey and Robson (2004: 391, 392) reported that there was a need to work towards 'a proper training framework' with national qualifications to ensure a consistent approach to support staff in colleges.

With the above in mind, who were the nine LSAs' who became participants on ELSAP and became part of this action research? I will begin by discussing their individual profiles as support staff members within the college at which I conducted my research. These will provide an overview of their personal, professional and academic make-up and how this helped provide a base that is crucial in arguing the rationale for my research.

Participants and Context

Setting up the Sample

On 14 October 2006, following extensive discussion with members of the Senior Management Team (SMT), I received authorisation by means of a memorandum (see Appendix A) to conduct my proposed research within the college. All LSAs' were sent a memorandum (see Appendix B) by one of the college vice principals notifying them of the proposed research programme and clarifying its key issues. These included a description of its purpose, time-scale and the possible benefits to them.

Selection of LSAs for the programme was to be based on their having an interest in improving the learning support they provided to post-sixteen learners in the college and on their availability to engage in the fourteen-week research programme. I circulated my own notification (see Appendix C) about the research programme to ensure LSAs' working off-site on other campuses were also informed and to confirm that I would be holding a first formal meeting to discuss the programme with LSAs' who were interested in participating. The meeting was scheduled for the 20 October 2006 (see Appendix D for Agenda) during the lunch period to avoid any clashes with individuals work time-tables. The agenda for the meeting included nine items:

- producing an attendance check list (Appendix E) to identify those interested and to obtain their contact details
- determining LSAs' motivation and underlying rationale for participating in ELSAP training
- the wider role of continuous professional development in college
- benefits to participants
- preliminary aims of ELSAP
- summary of ELSAP (i.e. units, titles, contents)
- establishing suitability: LSAs training needs versus ELSAP objectives
- opportunity for questions and LSAs' to sign up
- Announcement on commencement of ELSAP (i.e. dates, time, location)

Of the seventeen LSAs' who attended the meeting and showed an interest in improving their ability to provide learning support in the classroom and benefit from professional development training eleven eventually enrolled on ELSAP. Of these, two subsequently withdrew. One for personal reasons on completion of the second week and the other for

health reasons after completing eight of the fourteen weeks. In the case of the latter it was discussed and agreed that she could return at any time if she felt she could manage a full-time workload and the training programme.

The research would involve the LSAs' participating in a training programme designed to meet their learning needs, with the objective of providing them with professional development in their teaching roles and responsibilities (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011; McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Appendix F offers a summary of the background information on the nine LSA participants who were employed at the college and who took part in the training programme. The following pen-profile descriptions provide detailed and contextual information on each of the participants who engaged in ELSAP. Pseudonyms are used to conceal the real identities of individuals.

Participant 1: Rose

Rose has a background of working in Psychiatric Nursing. Although she had attended all the training for Psychiatric Nursing, she did not take the final examination to gain the actual qualification. She told me that she has always regretted this, and felt that she has a talent for working with vulnerable people, especially in the adult population. She previously worked as an assistant in a school and she is also a parent. Rose started to work as an LSA with post-sixteen learners in the Engineering department of the college where this study was conducted, three months prior to the implementation of ELSAP. As she had not received any formal introduction to her role in the college after three months, she told me she was keen to participate on ELSAP. She wanted to continue to work with older learners with learning needs (LDD) and she wanted to be empowered by participation on ELSAP, knowing that this would enable her to support learners in a more effective way.

Participant 2: Anne

Anne's qualifications vary from a Diploma in Business Administration to a Diploma in Play Work. At the time of this research Anne was working as a play worker and had also started to work at the college on a part-time basis as an LSA. Her role was to support Entry Level learners who presented with LDD. She acknowledged that it was quite a jump in role from supporting pre-school children to supporting young adult learners in a college. Although she was new in her part-time role, working with adult learners seemed rewarding. She said she wanted to participate on ELSAP because she wanted to build her confidence and knowledge base to work efficiently with older learners. As she doubted her own professional capabilities, ELSAP participation would, in her view, give her the underpinning theory for her work in inclusive classrooms. She particularly wanted to learn about adult learning styles, and the influence of legislation on her role in the classroom.

Participant 3: Kelly

When Kelly volunteered to participate on ELSAP she had been working as an LSA in the Painting and Decorating department of the college for two months. She told me that she had previous experience of working in a residential care home for people who are severely autistic. Kelly said that she felt the need to explore alternative options in working with adults and decided to apply for a position in further and adult education. She wanted to increase her level of confidence in her abilities, when working with post-sixteen learners. Kelly also wanted to enhance her LSA skills, by increasing her knowledge and understanding of the role and she wanted to learn how to manage potentially challenging situations within the context of post-sixteen education. At the time of ELSAP implementation, Kelly had not received any form of induction or professional development training with regard to her role as an LSA.

Participant 4: Wilma

Wilma viewed herself as a parent of two young children in her care. She had an interest in pre-schoolers and chaired a local play group. She also showed an interest in health studies, and had achieved a First Aid qualification during the previous year. She was working part-time at the college in the Painting and Decorating department, on a one-to-one basis with a post-sixteen learner who presented with Asperger's Syndrome. She told me that her interest in health, young people, and education, spurred her on to do ELSAP. She said she wanted to improve her skills in working with post-sixteen learners with LDD. She hoped to be in a position one day where she could do research on this topic and perhaps contribute to articles in the field. Wilma was also very eager to encourage others to consider taking up work with vulnerable people.

Participant 5: Mary

Mary had been an LSA at the college for just over a year and supported three named learners on GCSE programmes when ELSAP was introduced. She told me that she had always been involved in volunteer work, e.g. at an infant school, and the St. John's Ambulance Service. She also said that she previously worked at a Chiropody Clinic as an assistant for a seven-year period. Mary was the mother of two young children and viewed herself as a naturally caring person. She was eager to participate on ELSAP as she wanted to increase her knowledge about further and adult education and learn how to deliver the post-sixteen curriculum. She also felt that she wanted to learn how to manage young adult learners who presented with challenging behaviour. She liked the idea that she may be rewarded for participating on a professional development programme, by receiving a Certificate of Attendance. As no appraisal system was in place for LSAs at the college, Mary had not received any guidance in respect of her role and responsibilities since being employed.

Participant 6 Gemma

Gemma had a professional background of working as a District Nurse. She worked at the college for ten months prior to ELSAPs implementation. She told me that she had no relevant knowledge or skills that related to post-sixteen education. According to Gemma, she has a caring nature and enjoyed her role working in the Key Skills department of the college. In this role she supported three different tutors and provided learning support, working with small identified groups of post-sixteen learners with specific learning difficulties. She was keen to participate on ELSAP as she wanted to be more competent in her role when dealing with problems. Gemma said she wanted to increase her knowledge of post-sixteen education to become generally more confident when supporting post-sixteen learners. She understands the importance education plays in an individual's life, and wanted to be able to support learners in her care, so that they could progress and achieve. She did not receive an induction to her role as LSA, nor did she have an appraisal or any form of professional development training. She often experienced feelings of confusion about her role and responsibilities, which resulted in her feeling unsure on how best to deliver learning support.

Participant 7: Moira

Moira had more than five years' experience as an LSA at the college at the time of ELSAP implementation. She told me that she had not had an appraisal, professional development opportunities, or any kind of in-service training with regards to her role. She worked full-time and was eager to improve her existing knowledge and understanding of her role, in order that she could be more efficient when supporting post-sixteen learners. She said she wanted to feel valued by lecturers and tutors and thought participating on ELSAP may contribute toward this. She had a background of working in schools as a volunteer helper, and additionally, she acted as the leader at Sunday school and Girl Guides (Brownies). Moira

worked in various departments of the college, supporting lecturers and tutors on Basic Skills, Information Technology, Childcare, Health and Social Care, and Business Administration programmes. She told me that over the years she was asked, many times, to cover for absent lecturers and tutors. This included having to take full classes in some of the above-mentioned areas, often for lengthy periods of time. She has taught herself the basics of teaching practice with regard to planning and delivering, but was clearly keen to have a proper theoretical foundation for her LSA role.

Participant 8: Emma

Emma had been working at the college for one and a half years, supporting post-sixteen learners in the Business Administration department at the point at which ELSAP was introduced. She has a daughter who is dyslexic and felt this had sensitised her to the specific learning needs others may have. Previous to her role at the college, she had been a TA at a local secondary school, but she had never received any training with regard to that role. Since beginning to work at the college, she had received no introduction to her role, appraisal from a senior member of staff, or any in-service training with regard to her professional development. Emma told me that she was keen to enrol on ELSAP to help her develop her knowledge of how to support post-sixteen learners with LDD in the most effective manner. She enjoyed working as an LSA and wanted learners in her care to progress and achieve. She also wanted to increase her knowledge on inclusive education and the range of LDD with which learners may present. Overall, she wanted to become more confident and in control of what she was doing.

Participant 9: Claire

Although Claire had been an LSA for one year at the college when ELSAP commenced, she told me that she had no previous experience or qualifications in respect of this role. She thought she may benefit from participating on ELSAP by gaining knowledge on how to deliver learning support. Although she was not assigned to any particular area in the college, but covered on an ad-hoc basis as required, she told me that she enjoyed working in the Key Skills and Information Technology departments and wanted to improve her career in further and adult education. Claire indicated that if participation on ELSAP were to be a positive and beneficial experience, she may consider doing further training in education. She had not received any formal induction to her role, nor had she received an appraisal. Claire felt that relevant training may improve her feelings of uncertainty about her role and responsibilities when working with post-sixteen learners.

Contextualisation of Participants within Research

From the above it can be seen that all nine participants worked in existing roles in the college and that none of them had been formally introduced to their roles and responsibilities when working with post-sixteen learners as LSAs'. Based on these pen profiles, LSAs' were eligible for professional development training, as offered in the form of ELSAP. These nine participants presented the sample size and became the individual cases for both ELSAP and my action research. This contextualises the fundamental relationship between the intervention and the participants.

The next section analyses the availability and appropriateness of professional learning programmes, in comparison to ELSAP. ELSAP was fundamental within the action research process of this study. It formed the basis of key aspects to do with adult learning, which are

discussed later in this chapter. Although this study is mostly explorative (not evaluative) in nature I nevertheless want to emphasise that the rationale behind and the design and development of ELSAP was vitally important because it was the ‘vehicle’ for the professional learning of nine LSAs’ who, for reasons explained in Chapters 1 and 3, could not otherwise access appropriate training at the college where they worked at the time of my research. While exploring the learning journeys of the nine LSAs’ who engaged on a professional learning programme (ELSAP) that was especially designed to meet their training needs it seemed logical to explore and evaluate other professional development opportunities that were available to all LSAs’ who support young people with LDD.

At the time of my research, some initiatives were being undertaken to provide LSAs’ with opportunities for professional development. Training opportunities were delivered as well-intended Day Seminars, but these did not cover enough ground to provide sufficient knowledge and understanding for LSAs’ to perform their role and responsibilities effectively nor did they empower LSAs’ for their often demanding and comprehensive task in inclusive classrooms. They offered linear training where existing skills were reinforced but with no new skills being connected (McGill and Brockbank, 2006). Further to this, toward the end of 2006, a handful of universities introduced training programmes, at university level, for LSAs’ who support adult learners with LDD in higher education (HE). To build on this contextualisation and to strengthen the need and rationale for ELSAP, the next section of this chapter focuses on the two different types of professional learning opportunities; Day Seminars and HE training programmes and highlight their shortfalls.

Current Professional Learning Opportunities for Learning Support Assistants in Further Education

Background Information

Day seminars currently feature as an optional training event for college LSAs'. Higher Education Certificates or Diplomas are also currently available at some universities for the training of LSAs' working in HE. *It is important to note that these two types of training were the only training opportunities available to support staff working in colleges for FE at the time of my research.* Although the Day Seminar is not an ideal example to use as it does not present all the features of a full training programme (see below), no other material existed at the time of this study that allowed me to draw parallels between existing training opportunities and the ELSAP programme under investigation. The Day Seminar was, therefore, the best existing literature available for the purpose of this discussion on available training.

I continue by outlining these two programmes and then analysing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to meeting the learning and development needs of college LSAs'. This analysis aims to show how their theoretical content, amongst their other practical aspects, compares. Analysis also allowed me to understand to whom these two types of courses were available and who they were specifically aimed at. The following evaluations supported me in making an informed judgement as to whether ELSAP was a more comprehensive alternative to these two courses.

Day Seminar: with SEN in FE (Wharf, 2005: flyer)

(At the point of this Day Seminar, the term special educational needs (SEN), was still in use to refer to post-sixteen learners with special educational needs in a college. Since this seminar, terminology has changed, and the term, *adult learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD)* has replaced it). A Day Seminar, as described by Wharf (2005: flyer) will now be discussed with regard to the target group, programme objectives, length of programme, programme content, and costs.

Target group

This particular Day Seminar was aimed at LSAs' working in further education colleges with learners who have LDD presenting with challenging behaviour.

Programme objectives

- To explore current issues regarding the education of learners with LDD; when does a learner have LDD and how may LSAs' be used most effectively;
- To define the role of the LSA in supporting learners with LDD;
- To examine the ground rules which need to be established between the lecturer and LSA to ensure clarity and effectiveness;
- To provide information about record keeping;
- To consider the role of the lecturer and LSA in the management of challenging behaviour;
- To explore strategies to de-escalate challenging behaviour; and
- To examine ways of dealing with confrontation.

Length of programme

A one-day seminar commencing at 09:30 and finishing at 16:00.

Programme content

The day starts with registration and is followed by four sessions in which the following content is covered:

SESSION 1: Introductions and defining the role of the LSA, terminology, i.e. LDD, what does it mean? How can LSAs' support learners?

SESSION 2: Examining the ground rules to be established between lecturers and LSAs', LSAs' in assessment, planning and differentiation.

SESSION 3: Identifying and understanding challenging behaviour, establishing boundaries and being prepared.

SESSION 4: Practical sessions; strategies for effective positive change in learners who persistently challenge authority; techniques for managing difficult behaviour by increasing personal assertiveness and enhancing communication skills.

Costs

The fee for the day seminar is £189 and includes course materials (Wharf, 2005: flyer).

A second type of professional training is currently available for LSAs' who work with young adults and mature learners in HE. I continue by outlining and discussing the target group, programme objectives, length of programme, credits, programme content, entry requirements, assessment, costs, and progression/career possibilities, with regard to the Certificate/Diploma HE in Learning Support.

Certificate/Diploma HE in Learning Support

The Certificate/Diploma HE in Learning Support (University of the West of England CPD, 2005-2006: flyer) is an initiative taken by a few universities over the last few years, whereby they have developed programmes for LSAs' working with adult learners in higher education. Although there may be significant differences between the work of LSAs' at university level, and the work of LSAs' in colleges, they deliver learning support to the same age group, i.e., young adult learners.

Target group

According to the information brochure on the Certificate/ Diploma HE in Learning Support, it was designed for anyone who supports learning in a higher educational setting. (University of the West of England CPD, 2005-2006: flyer).

Programme objectives

The programme allows participants to gain knowledge, skills, and understanding about their role, to meet with others working in similar situations, and to gain a higher education qualification.

Length of programme

The programme runs for 10 weeks, with a total of 20 hours contact time.

Credits

Participants can gain a level 1 (120 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points) qualification or then choose to progress to level 2 (accumulating a further 120 credits).

Programme content

Modules, as advertised on a university website for the academic year 2006/07, for the Certificate/Diploma in Learning Support were:

- Adult Basic Skills: Literacy
- Adult Basic Skills: Numeracy
- Cognitive processes: Teaching learners how to think
- Contemporary Issues in post compulsory education and training
- Counselling and related skills for reducing barriers
- Disability equality awareness raising
- Educational approaches
- Social policy and learners
- Special educational needs
- Studying inclusive intervention: English as an additional language
- Inclusion and diversity in the classroom
- Supporting learning in the classroom as a team member
- The voice of the learner
- Thinking and learning

Entry requirements

Participants need to have already been awarded with 240 UCAS¹⁶ points at a level or an equivalent level of study, before embarking upon this programme.

¹⁶ University and colleges tariff points scheme.

Assessment

Assessment requirements vary for each module but generally include a written assignment on a topic negotiated with the module leader. Other approaches include five minute presentations, reflective journals, a portfolio of tasks and poster presentations.

Costs

Potential students were referred to the Fees and Sponsorship flyers available from the Student Administration Teams at the university. Financial support was also available.

Progression/Career possibilities

On completion of the DipHE students have the choice to progress into a BA (Hons) Education in Professional Practice. (University of the West of England CPD, 2005-2006: flyer).

Summary of Current Training Provision

The table below is based on the above-outlined two types of professional learning opportunities available to college LSA. Summarising it in this way provides a brief but accurate manner by which to compare both programmes against a set of programme features.

See Table 2.1 below for a summary of current provision.

Programme Features	Day Seminar	HE Programme
Target group	LSAs' in FE	LSAs' in HE
Programme objectives	7 Aims to do with behaviour management	Knowledge, understanding and skills development in role
Length of programme	1 day	10 weeks
Credits	None	240 UCAS points
Programme content	sessions: introduction; ground rules; identification and assessment; practice	14 separate modules
Entry requirements	None	240 UCAS points
Assessment	None	Written assignments; presentations; reflective journals; presentations
Costs	£189.00	Around £1200.00
Progression/career possibilities	None mentioned	BA (Hons) Education

Table 2.1: Summary of Current Training Provision

In order to understand the rationale behind ELSAP, which is a tailored-made programme in compliance with the NOS (Skills for Business, 2006) for college LSAs', it was important to summarise the above two training events, and to draw comparisons. Part of the rationale for developing ELSAP was that it provided LSAs with a 'reason' to meet and have professional discussions (DuFour, *et al.*, 2006) on a weekly basis and that it 'dictated' topics for discussion and prompted a communal interest about existing and potentially new knowledge in their field of work. Overall, it incorporated the notion of reflective learning (Schön, 1978, Kolb, 1984) and supports and prompts transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), and which, according to literature, is a highly recommended theory for adults' learning. From the above information on the two different type of programmes, limitations in knowledge of appropriate programmes for college LSAs' are clearly highlighted. Differences across all the features of both programmes have been identified and we need to ask why there are these differences. The only commonality from the above summary indicates that, although both programmes are aimed at LSAs' who support young adult learners in post-compulsory education in

general, they are mostly intended for those who work and support learners with LDD. My conclusion from this summary is that the two programmes are intended as completely different types of interventions. The Day Seminar is aimed at a specific audience to do with a specific responsibility within the TA role whereas the HE programme is a comprehensive learning programme for a TA who considers his/her work as a career path within the education route. What is the critical relevance of this information to my research? The next section aims to answer this.

Analysis of Current Training Provision

Although the HE type of training occurs at university level and appears to be far more comprehensive in programme content than the Day Seminar's programme content, there is still an overall shortfall in the provision of professional development training for LSAs' in a college. This is because the entry requirements of 240 UCAS points to be eligible for this training may potentially exclude a large number of LSAs' who do not meet this requirement.

A close scrutiny of both types of training programmes in relation to college LSAs', makes it clear that neither meet the training needs of these LSAs' as outlined in the NOS of 2006 (Skills for Business, 2006:1-9). The typical day seminar, for example, does not offer in-depth knowledge, skill and understanding for LSAs' to support the full spectrum of learning difficulties and disabilities that are present in inclusive college classrooms. On the other hand, the foundation course (Certificate/Diploma HE in Learning Support) at university level is out of reach for all those LSAs' who do not have any formal qualifications and who, therefore, do not meet the entry requirements of either a Level 3 qualification (equivalent to a National Diploma) or 240 credits. Furthermore, it is possible for participants on this course to opt out of vitally important modules such as, Educational Approaches, or Supporting

Learning as these are optional. In my view, although LSAs' can end up with a qualification, they may nevertheless fail to develop the skills, knowledge, or understanding on how to physically provide learning support.

It is not the purpose of this debate to denigrate any of the above-mentioned training programmes, since they are aimed at and suited for a specific target group. It does, however, emphasise the gap in knowledge and the need for specific training for LSAs' who work in colleges. *This conclusive view, underpins the rationale for the design, development and implementation of a training programme to meet the professional needs of LSAs' working in a college.* I developed ELSAP to meet the professional training needs of LSAs' (the majority of whom had no prior educational-related experience or qualifications) and who, in existing roles in a FE college, were delivering learning support to a range of post-sixteen learners with LDD on vocational courses. ELSAP provides a more rounded and comprehensive training programme which is better fitted to the training needs of LSAs'. In my opinion the most fundamental aspects of ELSAP are that it is a complete, but uncomplicated course that does not involve the selection of modules and it takes place in the college where the LSAs' work. The work-based learning of ELSAP, according to authors like Hoban (2002), McGill and Brockbank (2006) and Boud and Solomon (2008) who argue that active participation (action learning) in professional learning *about* work, is more effective, when it occurs *during* work. In addition, ELSAP does not need participating LSAs' to have any previous qualifications as an entry requirement.

The following section takes a critical look at ELSAPs' content development as it embeds itself within reciprocal systemic development aspects, i.e. the purpose of continuous professional development (CPD). The aim is to conceptualise sociology about the relevance

and ethical appropriateness of ELSAP as an integral and fundamental part of this research (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1986; Wright Mills, 1959).

Systemic Influences on the Sociology of the Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme's Design and Implementation

Introductory Comments

Scott (2008: 3) postulated two curriculum models, one of which focuses on *performance* while the other zones in on *competence*. My approach to curriculum development of ELSAP as part of this action research stems from my own contextual experience of working in Further Education (as discussed in Chapter 1) with large cohorts of diverse post-sixteen learners, some with challenging individual learning needs. My practice often involves disentangling comprehensive and complex curricula to enable learners to access vocational curricula effectively, with the support of a helpful, but inappropriately trained LSA. My point is that there is a direct link between the approach that I followed when I developed ELSAP, and the often problematic scenario in which I continue to work as a lecturer (Bloomer, 1997). I was drawn towards adapting an approach in curriculum development that focuses on *competence*. This overarching approach was in line with authors like McKernan (1998: 6) who says that 'the goal of curriculum theory should be to lead to an improved form of human action'. It was my subsequent awareness of the ethical 'equality' culture and ethos of the college in which I worked, that shaped my views in structuring a curriculum that would reflect the social values of the college community and, inherently, the wider social population as well (Neary, 2002: 2).

Further to this, in order to incorporate the five domains (see Chapter 3) of the NOS, which identify and underpin the role and responsibilities of LSAs' (Skills for Business, 2006: 1-9), I needed to design and develop ELSAP within the framework of the research questions to steer accurately and appropriately, the explorative nature of my action research. For example questions such as, how will LSAs' benefit from ELSAP and how can this new knowledge benefit their practice or, will a change in LSA practice benefit the post-sixteen learners with LDD. Essentially, sociological views from the NOS, i.e. the personal values which are required of college LSAs' to develop for their work with disability (Skills for Business, 2006), are being followed through by open and imaginative research questions, which focus on the exploration of 'benefits' and the improvement or enhancement for learners with disability implicated by this. In my view, this sociological approach to ELSAP development added overall trustworthiness to the research. With all the above in mind, I am going to explain three main systemic structures and how they influenced the sociology of ELSAP curriculum development. The first systemic influence was continuous professional development (CPD), an in-service training strategy for the professional development and learning for college LSAs'.

Continuous Professional Development

In 2000 the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) launched a continuous professional development framework for professional development in Britain. Amongst other objectives, they aimed to explore CPD activities within professional bodies (Neary, 2002: 15). The reflective nature of CPD has become the trend by which professionals evaluate and think about their practice (Forlin, 2001; Stevens and Cooper, 2009). In line with the ILT and knowledge that CPD has become a new development and requirement for professional development in education, it systemically influenced my design and development of ELSAP.

As a result of this, I constructed Unit 05, ‘reviewing and developing own professional practice’, to allow naturalistic adult learning processes to be introduced as a strategy for learning and professional identity development for the nine college LSAs’ who participated in ELSAP (Forlin, 2001; Stevens and Cooper, 2009). The next systemic structure that influenced me, was my own professional activities.

Comparing other Relevant Curricula

As I was working within other programmes/curricula (National Diploma in the field of Early Years and Health and Social Care which may be seen as similar within the generic context of social sciences), I compared these programmes with ELSAP in order to validate the scope and range of its knowledge base. According to Neary (2002), syllabi change all the time to offer a broad mix of knowledge in line with changing work environments. This aspect of flexible curricula which allows for extended learning and exploration, together with the ‘cross-examination’ with other relevant programmes, systemically influenced my overall development of ELSAP to be a curriculum that consisted of five units covering a wide range and scope of relevant topics in the field of learning support. ELSAP can be seen as simplistic and uncomplicated but SMART¹⁷ (Burnham, 2007: 136) and reliable. All of the above also occurred in accordance with a predetermined pen-profile for LSAs’ (Skills for Business, 2006).

Occupational Standards

During the winter of 2004, when I was beginning to consider my research, NOS¹⁸ for college LSAs’, was under development at the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) (Neary, 2002: 20). The first draft of the NOS was launched two years later in

¹⁷ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound (Burnham, 2007: 136).

¹⁸ National Occupational Standards /personal and professional criteria for support staff who work in colleges.

October 2006 (Skills for Business, 2006: 1) and it outlines five domains, namely: personal values; supporting learning and teaching; specialist support for learning and teaching; supporting the planning of learning; and supporting assessment for learning (Skills for Business, 2006: 2-9). Parallels can be drawn between, for example, ELSAP Unit 01 and Domain A of the NOS which addresses knowledge on personal values, equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to learners, the workforce, and the community. Unit 01 of ELSAP, 'Exploring the College Environment', which includes codes of conduct, health and safety, anti-discriminative practices and inclusiveness, can also be mapped against Domain A, 'personal values' of the NOS. No framework for the training of college LSAs' existed, and still doesn't at the time of ELSAP development so I was required to use my own moral compass to develop a programme which was not just appropriate and accurate, but also ethical in its correlation with the training needs of the LSAs. The gap in knowledge (no training framework) together with the first domain of the NOS were systemic influences upon which nested my own sociological values and beliefs to act responsibly.

According to Neary (2002: 39), a curriculum can be understood as a 'plan of learning outcomes'. In line with literature, I planned the following five learning outcomes for ELSAP, one for each unit as follows. For LSAs' to: develop professional skills and knowledge; understand legal and national requirements; support post-sixteen learners during learning activities; support learners with LDD; review and develop their own professional practice. These outcomes are in line with the NOS for support staff as published in 2006 (Skills for Business, 2006).

Exploration versus Evaluation

A reason for using a *competence* focused approach to the development of ELSAP was that, according to Stenhouse, the objectives of this approach would enable me to draw summative evaluations (1986: 89). I wanted to increase LSAs' levels of knowledge and understanding of their role and simultaneously enhance their teaching/support skills through participating in an appropriate programme. Therefore, in line with Stenhouse's argument, I chose qualitative methods to explore LSAs' acquisition of new learning and understanding on various aspects of their work, but ELSAP also presented them with opportunities by means of work-based learning to evaluate the deployment of their new skills during natural performance in their 'inclusive' classrooms. Middlewood and Burton (2003: 90) refer to this as 'received curriculum', implying the professional learning that the nine participant LSAs' actually experienced. Methods such as observations, written tutorials and reflective diaries all facilitated inductive exploration whilst the strengths and weaknesses of different methods triangulated the trustworthiness of this social research.

Work-based Learning

I developed ELSAP to have a flexible curriculum structure with a student-centred approach (Nasta, 1994: 54) as LSAs' who became ELSAP participants were working in full-time, existing roles (Boud and Solomon, 2008). The naturalistic setting of the 'inclusive' post-sixteen classroom, in my opinion, formed a reciprocal influence between the transformation (Mezirow, 2000) of the adult learner and the 'received curriculum' (Middlewood and Burton, 2003: 90). As indicated here, and in line with Rogers and Horrocks (2010), ELSAP activities for the professional development and learning of LSAs', were planned and structured around their real and everyday work experiences. For Rogers and Horrocks (2010: 6) this is 'professional development of a new kind'.

Integrated Learning

‘Learning requires activity’ (Minton, 2005: 7). In line with authors, and based on previously discussed work-based learning, real work experiences provided LSA participants engagement with a spectrum of learning-related activities which extended from reading and researching a specific topic, e.g. Wilma’s research on Asperger’s Syndrome, to their actual performance being observed during support delivery, and the active keeping of journals about their practice. Minton (2005) explains that activities which stem from participating on learning programmes should be integrated with the programme itself. In other words, in order to learn and develop competence the activity related to a specific topic should be undertaken very soon after reading or class discussion about that topic. For this reason, I structured LSAs learning activities so that they were integrated with ELSAP content delivery. See Appendix H for the SOW which identified the learning activities for each session.

The Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP)

Background Information and Contextualisation

In Chapter 1, it has been argued that there is a need for a tailor-made professional learning and development programme for college LSAs’. Such a programme should aim to enhance the personal confidence of LSAs’ by developing their professional knowledge, understanding and skills of the important role they play as members of the teaching team (McLachlan, 2004). Also in Chapter 1 I discussed my rationale for the development of ELSAP as an educational intervention for untrained LSAs’ at the college where I worked at the time of my research. Training events for teaching staff should be designed to form an integral part of their continuous professional development, and should be utilized as a springboard for

questions, queries, research, discussion, learning, demonstration, and presentation, to do with the training needs of LSAs'. Literature suggests that most forms of professional development should 'explicitly aim [...] to change practices - to bring about greater efficiency' (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010: 174). It has been argued that changes in practices depend on changes in the attitude and behaviour of participants and authors such as Rogers and Horrocks (2010) also suggest that new learning during programme participation should be undertaken alongside supervision of an experienced practitioner. Based on literature, conditions for ELSAP to be delivered as a professional development and learning activity for college LSAs' who worked in existing roles alongside their class lecturers and tutors seemed favourable. Critically, the way ELSAP was planned for implementation differed from the earlier discussed one-day training event and the university diploma which, in both cases, were removed from the direct supervision of an experienced practitioner whereas ELSAP was designed and delivered as in-service education and training (INSET) for LSAs' professional development.

Whilst delivering ELSAP over a fourteen-week period I used multiple methods which included my own field notes to explore and evaluate the learning journeys of the nine volunteer LSAs'. In agreement with Rogers and Horrocks (2010: 18) who capture the volunteer nature and essence of adult learners by saying that, 'the adult nature of the participants means that they are attending programmes of education because they have decided for one reason or another to be there and not to be elsewhere', LSAs' voluntarily participated in 21 guided learning hours. On completion, they all received a Certificate of Attendance from the college to celebrate their achievements. Below follows a more detailed overview of the structure of ELSAP that comprised five mandatory units: Unit 01: Developing professional skills and knowledge; Unit 02: Understanding legal and national

requirements; Unit 03: Supporting adult learners during learning activities; Unit 04: Supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD; Unit 05: Reviewing and developing own professional practice.

Programme Structure

The ELSAP intervention is in line with McKernan (1998: 6) who said that, ‘the goal of curriculum theory should be to lead to an improved form of human action’. Four of the five units can each be sub-divided into sub-elements that nest within the main unit topic as follows:

Unit 01: Developing professional skills and knowledge

This unit aims to help participants develop an understanding of their professional and important role as LSAs’ in ‘inclusive’ classrooms. They will gain an overall understanding about their role by investigating and assessing their own skills and comparing them to the essential skills required by LSAs’. They will research and discuss terminology and explicitly investigate their classroom duties. Additionally, this unit aims to develop the knowledge and skills required to work professionally and effectively as a member of a team. Unit 01 has two elements: Element 1.1: Exploring the college work environment; and Element 1.2: Exploring the role and responsibilities of the LSA in FE.

Unit 02: Understanding legal and national requirements

This unit will enhance participants’ knowledge of important pieces of legislation relating to working with young people. LSAs’ will research and discuss case-studies to gain an understanding of how laws provide a framework for code of conduct, health and safety, anti-discrimination and ‘inclusion’. The relevance of college policies and guidelines, e.g.

behaviour policy; inclusive policy, will also be explored. Participants will have to demonstrate new skills, e.g. managing challenging behaviour in classrooms where observations will be conducted. Unit 02 comprises only one element: Element 2.1: Investigating the relevance of legislation for our work.

Unit 03: Supporting adult learners during learning activities

This unit aims to foster the transference of teaching skills to LSAs' working with post-sixteen learners. Participants are to increase their knowledge and understanding of learning theories, factors that influence learning, curriculum plans and related terminology, teaching methods, learning styles, barriers to learning and interpersonal and communication skills. At the same time, they will actively implement learning activities while being observed. LSAs' will be asked to keep a reflective diary. This unit consists of three elements: Element 3.1: Increase knowledge and understanding of the adult learning process; Element 3.2: Increase knowledge and understanding of curriculum plans; and Element 3.3: Develop skills to support adult learners during learning activities.

Unit 04: Supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD

Unit 04 aims to increase participants' knowledge and understanding of learners with LDD. Terminology, classification and causative factors are explored through teacher-led discussions, while a range of case-studies help participants learn about the causative factors of learning difficulties and disabilities and the effects these may have on adult learners. The aim is for participants to develop skills, provide effective educational support, and deliver educational intervention strategies to learners with LDD. Such skills are explored and developed through active implementation in classrooms alongside class tutors or lecturers. Participants keep daily diaries to reflect on their practice. They keep a log of their own

development of learning support skills. This unit has two elements: Element 4.1: Increasing knowledge and understanding of learners with LDD; and Element 4.2: Developing skills to provide effective learning support for learners with LDD.

Unit 05: Reviewing and developing own professional practice

Unit 05 sets out to increase knowledge and understanding of how a LSA's professional practice can be developed through review and reflection. Programme delivery involves teacher-led discussion on principles of self-appraisal, college expectations and requirements about the work of LSAs' and ways to measure one's own practice. Participants have to produce and complete action plans to review their own professional practice relating to their individual roles. Additional one-to-one tutorials with myself as programme facilitator will stress the importance of creating opportunities to reflect on the participants' work. This unit comprises two elements: Element 5.1: Reviewing your own professional practices; and Element 5.2: Developing your own professional practice.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to contextualise the LSA participants as an integrated part of the research. It also aimed to analyse, argue and compare the strengths and limitations of two current and very different training opportunities, in order to provide a rationale for the development of ELSAP. In Chapter 1 we have seen that there is no official training framework for these members of the work force in colleges. Analysis of the Day Course and HE foundation degree demonstrated that neither is designed nor sufficiently developed for LSAs in further education. I have given an overview of the content of ELSAP but for a more detailed breakdown of ELSAP content, range and scope, see Appendix J.

In an effort to establish whether they would benefit from ELSAP, the nine LSAs' who became ELSAP participants have been discussed as to their role, experience and existing qualifications. I have presented each LSA individually and on each occasion it has been shown that none of them has previous experience of *teaching* or knowledge of *disability*. This concludes the contextualisation of the nine LSAs' training needs and the reasons why they specifically enrolled on ELSAP to develop their personal, professional and academic learning skills and competencies. In addition to this, discussion and contextualisation about current training activities for college LSAs' as well as discussion on ELSAP which was designed and developed as the intervention in this research, are now completed.

My aim with the following chapter, Chapter 3, is to contextualise the main theoretical fields which guided and informed my research. This includes international, national and local educational policy development; the 'inclusive' college environment, the post-sixteen cohorts and their learning needs, the staff who support these learners and their learning needs. I will also examine national occupational standards for college LSAs' and explore what professional learning should entail for these members of the workforce. The learning support role, knowledge and skills LSAs' should demonstrate to work effectively within a college, will also be addressed. Key conditions i.e. effective communication, the role of dialogue and reflection, learning communities, educational psychological influences on learning processes will also be explained. Throughout, I will draw from the above fields to formulise and discuss the chosen conceptual framework upon which this research rests which involves complexity theory within a systems thinking paradigm and how this theory formed the basis for educational change in the classroom practice of LSAs'.

CHAPTER 3

‘TRICKS OF THE TRADE’: CONCEPTUALISING POLICY, ‘INCLUSIVE’ FURTHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS

Introduction

‘The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multi-layered’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 219). This quote summarises the uncertain and unpredictable college context in which learning support assistants (LSAs’) work, learn and train. Over the last three decades, FE colleges, in line with other educational institutions in England, have embraced ‘inclusive’ practices (Armstrong, 2003; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Farrell and Ainscow, 2003). These are based on a *human rights* discourse and policy reform for all young people and individuals, including those with LDD, to be taught and educated amongst their peers (Barton, 2010b; Dyson, 1999; Jones, 2003; Norwich, 2008; Rioux and Pinto, 2010; Tomlinson, 2010).

This rights discourse prompted an educational philosophy of *social justice* and *equality of opportunity* which has challenging implications for implementation within a college setting (in a similar way that it has had for schools and universities) (Jarvis, 2006; Morgan, 2000; Pring *et al.*, 2009). FE colleges have seen an increase in LSAs’ working in ‘inclusive’ classrooms alongside (and increasingly supporting) college lecturers and tutors, in supporting *all* young people and individuals according to their age, needs and abilities (Bailey and Robson, 2004). However, for these LSAs’ to be effective in their roles, as indicated by the

title of this chapter, ‘Tricks of the Trade’ (Becker, 1998), they need to have a good underpinning knowledge on aspects such as, teaching and learning; the needs of post-sixteen learners with LDD; educational policy and procedures and how these influence their everyday practice (FENTO, 2001; Skills for Business, 2006).

Becker’s (1998) writings suggest that the imagination of the social researcher does not necessarily have to be accurate as the importance for him lies in the fact that the social imagination of the researcher should be checked against a reality (Becker, 1998). In an effort, as social researcher, to check my initial knowledge of and thoughts about the competencies (or lack thereof) of LSAs’ (in other words checking my social imagination) against a reality, this chapter became a critical exploration of the theoretical realities which guided my research. The main section conceptualises ‘inclusive’ education. Discussion on this topic aims to understand current provision within the ‘inclusive’ college environment in which this research was conducted. In order to do this it contextualises the complex systemic factors in which LSAs’ work, their training needs and the professional learning and development of these LSAs (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). However, I shall commence by discussing how global and national legislative frameworks developed and supported reform and modernisation and, subsequently, influenced ‘inclusive’ educational classroom practice.

Policy Development

Introductory Comments

Educational policy provides guidance on teaching and learning within the lifelong sector¹⁹ and ensures that ‘service-users’ rights are being protected (Morgan, 2000). International statements, e.g. 1994 Salamanca World Statement on Special Needs Education (DfEE 1997; Florian, 2007) on ‘inclusive’ education defined the scope of and had an influence on inclusive practice for all education around the world, including England. The Salamanca Statement was proclaimed by delegates representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations in June 1994 at the World Conference of Special Needs Education. It basically consists of five clauses which include: the fundamental right to education; assertion of each child’s uniqueness; education systems to be designed to take the diversity of children’s characteristics and needs into account; children with special educational needs (SEN) to access regular schools; and to provide a rationale for what is meant by the term regular schools (UNESCO, 1994).

This explicit statement heightened an awareness of children’s rights internationally and that if they were to participate most effectively in education it would be by accessing regular education (Cigman, 2007). However, successes and failures in England’s educational policy reform, is linked and affected by global counterparts (Jones, 2003). In England, in response to Salamanca, changes started to take place toward more ‘inclusive’ practice, initially in schools, and later rippling out to reform and generate change in FE colleges and universities (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Morgan, 2000).

¹⁹ Further education colleges form part of the adult learning and skills sector, currently referred to as the lifelong learning sector, in England.

According to Giangreco and Doyle (2007) and OECD (2002), ‘inclusive’ practices and reform in France, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Singapore, Spain and Vietnam, involved the employment of para-professionals, such as, teacher assistants, ‘special’ teachers, ‘special needs’ assistants, teacher aides, consultants, trained general educators and special educators to support learners with LDD. Educational institutions in England have also embraced these inclusive policies which are aimed at enhancing and promoting equality, non-discrimination, and effective education for all learners (DfES, 2001; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Farrell and Ainscow, 2003; Rioux and Pinto, 2010). According to The General Teaching Council for England a new period had begun in which FE colleges were ‘harnessing the contribution of a wide range of people’ and the importance of this contribution is to include ‘other adults’ who were previously excluded from mainstream education to become part of communities for learning (TGTC, 2002: 2).

A decade ago, the FE Sector Workforce Development Plan report of 2001 provided detailed information on staff figures that show a total of 400 000 employees in the United Kingdom college sector, of which 52 000 are ‘essential workers’ who deliver ‘economical alternatives to using lecturers’ and enable learners to be ‘properly supported’ (FENTO, 2001: 19). This report also argued that there was a ‘need for learning support staff to have occupational qualifications’ to meet some form of national occupational standards that would have to be outlined and developed. This argument is a pivotal piece of evidence which supports the need for this study. It represents the first instance of training and qualifications for LSAs’ being mentioned in an official document (against the backdrop of providing more ‘inclusive’ educational provision), and provides an indication that officials were beginning to consider some kind of standardisation²⁰ in relation to LSAs’ working in FE.

²⁰ Regulation.

It was planned that tenders to develop occupational standards for learning support staff in England's learning and skills sector would be announced with work planned to begin in September 2004. This showed on-going national commitment and progress towards an infrastructure for LSAs' as part of the college workforce (FENTO, 2004). Two years later, in 2006, the first draft of 'National Occupational Standards (NOS) for learning support practitioners in the UK lifelong learning sector' was made available at a one-day seminar in London to 'key staff' who oversees the work of LSAs' in colleges (Skills for Business, 2006: 2). These standards named five domains, namely: 'personal values; supporting learning and teaching; specialist support for learning and teaching; supporting the planning of learning; and supporting assessment for learning' (Skills for Business, 2006: 2-9). The Lifelong Learning United Kingdom (LLUK)²¹ (Avis *et al.*, 2010), later replaced FENTO and published in 2007 a role profile for LSAs' who work in higher and further education (Armitage *et al.*, 2007). However, Weaver (2008: 39) argues that this draft profile 'does not encompass the pedagogical skills needed for support in new learning spaces'. Weaver (2008) goes on to say that a lack of literature for post-compulsory education existed. From research and policy a clear need for trustworthy data, further research and an appropriate framework for the training of college LSAs', seems vital. Although the recommendations contained in the above policies and reports make it evident that there is a need for post-sixteen learners with LDD to be more adequately supported, there is currently no framework for training LSAs'. *This view and policy context shaped my intention to develop a vocational training course for LSAs' who work in colleges* and this forms the focus of my research.

²¹ The independent employer-led skills council responsible for the professional development of staff working in further and higher education and libraries.

Historical Developments

Historical policy development included the Warnock Report (DES 1978) which provided an account of how 'special education' had developed from an individual and charitable enterprise to a government effort which supported voluntary efforts. The Warnock Report predicted that once this framework had been implemented, provision in schools would improve and pupils with 'special educational needs' (SEN) would be integrated in ordinary schools. The increased focus on SEN and approaches to manage this, were at the heart of The Warnock Report and formed the first steps towards enhanced 'inclusive' provision (DES 1978). Three years later, the Education Act 1981 made special reference to the identification and assessment of pupils with SEN. The Education Act 1981 promoted special educational needs and stipulated that, should parents so wish, children with special educational needs may be educated in ordinary schools (Florian, 2007).

Additional developments included The 1988 Education Reform Act (Norwich, 2003). For the first time 'a curriculum which constituted an entitlement for all' (Dyson and Slee, 2001: 180) (see also Armstrong, 2003), was introduced. Two further key pieces of legislation for England and Wales have increased the opportunities for the participation of learners with LDD wishing to transfer from school into further education. These are the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the Education Act 1993.

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 was the first to make recommendations for the provision of post-sixteen learners with LDD within further education college settings. Responsibility for implementing these changes lay with the FEFC who specify the duties of FE colleges, to include:

- 'sufficient full-time education for all 16- to 18-year-olds;

- adequate part-time education for students aged 16 years and over; and
- adequate full-time education for students over 18 years' (Morgan 2000: 146).

According to Morgan (2000: 146) the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) only funded courses that resulted in a qualification and fell into the category of 'adequate part-time education for students aged 16 years and over'.

The subsequent Education Act 1993 supplied a Code of Practice (Morgan, 2000) that stipulated and outlined a transition period for school children aged 14. During this transition period it was specified that all children with 'special educational needs' (SEN) should have an annually reviewed transition plan. This transition plan was aimed to help children with SEN progress to further education in the same way as other young people. Furthermore, the Plan stressed the underlying principles of equality and non-discrimination against children with SEN and this resulted in an increased college intake of young adult learners with LDD (Morgan, 2000).

The Colleges Employers Forum (CEF) provides advice and guidance to principals and chairs of corporations and thus advises and guides the majority of colleges in England. CEF Bulletin no. 137 contains the transcript of a speech made in 1994 by the Minister of State Tim Boswell. Here Boswell (cited in Bailey & Robson, 2004) argues that newly incorporated colleges had the opportunity to redefine jobs, '....so that administrative work is delegated to support staff and increased use is made of instructor and demonstrator posts' (Bailey & Robson, 2004: 375). *This message was the harbinger for vital change in college provision and set in motion the trend for employing LSAs' to work in inclusive classrooms in FE colleges.*

Further to this, the Disability and Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (Norwich, 2003) was published and although it covered a range of disability services, a section on education was not included. It was not until November 1999 (and after the Tomlinson Report 1996, see below) that the Disability Rights Task Force (DRTF) advised the labour government on how it might extend the DDA (which previously excluded education) to include educational rights for people with disabilities. This resulted in the significant shaping of the disability sections of the DDA as recommended by the DRTF. 'The Act is designed to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as others to access employment, buildings, goods and services. It outlines the responsibilities placed on employers...schools, colleges and universities' (Taylor *et al.*, 2001: 11) and strongly supported reform towards 'inclusive' provision. Part Four of the DDA 1995 applied particularly to student services. More specifically, it refers to teaching, optional study provision, learning facilities, outdoor education, curriculum design and examinations. According to the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, education providers have the duty to make *reasonable adjustments* to ensure that all learners, including those with LDD, are being treated in an equally favourable manner (Skill: 2004; Avis *et al.*, 2010).

The Tomlinson Report: Inclusive Learning: The Report of the learning difficulties and/or disabilities committee, 1996, spoke of the immediate changes to radicalise educational opportunities for learners with LDD in order to include the thousands of them who had still not been included. This report's significant contributions marked a specific change in college provision for learners with LDD (Tomlinson, 1996), (also see Morgan, 2000; Thomas *et al.*, 1998). At the core of the report stands a notion towards a more social model²² and approach (Oliver and Barnes, 2010: 552) with regard to 'inclusive' learning, which places

²² 'the key to understanding and explaining the economic, political and social barriers encountered by disabled people' (Oliver and Barnes, 2010: 552).

responsibility for providing appropriate education with teachers, managers and the system (and, ultimately, with society), rather than labelling students as being deficient and problematic in respect of learning. The report argues that an effective and non-discriminative education system is not just about offering access to what is available, but also about making what needs to be available accessible (potentially referring to the vital role LSAs' play when supporting learners with LDD in FE).

The Tomlinson Report further concentrates on a theory for 'inclusive' learning and how this affects the education of learners with LDD (Tomlinson, 1996). It represents a step towards *embracing* learners with LDD within the general approach to learning. Recommendations made by The Tomlinson Report 1996 to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), teachers, managers, voluntary organizations and the government are to improve educational opportunities radically (Tomlinson, 1996). Moreover, Gibbs (2005) amongst others (Florian, 2007; Hick *et al.*, 2009) suggest that to improve the quality of learning for all individuals provision must adopt a more learner-centred approach in which *all* learners are taught to learn. This indicates that teaching approaches need to continue to develop more appropriate, inclusive types of teaching practices, i.e. learner-centred methods that focus on self-awareness and the purpose of tasks. In other words, project based learning, rather than the more conventional teaching practices that focus on teaching-input (Gibbs, 2005). In this respect LSAs' play an important role by supporting the implementation of these methods of inclusive and student-centred learning. The role LSAs' play and responsibilities they have within inclusive classrooms have accentuated the need for the development of a professional training course for LSAs' who are currently working in colleges and who do not have prior vocational training.

Towards Current Developments

Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to necessarily focus on legislative developments to do with reform in the school sector, it is however important, to highlight those who instigated key changes which rippled down to bring change in the FE sector. This was the case with The SEN Green Paper, Excellence for All Children (DfEE, 1997) which had ‘inclusive’ education as a main theme. According to the paper, in order to continue to raise standards there needs to be a shift in resources towards more practical support. This continued to increase the likelihood of inclusion and extended provision and acknowledged the importance of *all* learners to be taught and educated amongst their peers.

The Green Paper (DfEE, 1997) was, therefore, accentuating an educational intervention which aims to move learners from segregated schooling towards more integrative approaches where learners with LDD can be taught in ‘inclusive’ mainstream schools (DfEE 1997: 51). This report resulted in a 1998 programme for action. ‘Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme for Action’. This made a proposal during a March 2000 consultation for educational disability legislation reform which resulted in the Special Educational Needs Act (SENDA) being passed in 2001 (EDG, 2002). Anti-discriminative duties with regard to provision for pupils with LDD were then being extended to all aspects of education (Oliver and Barnes, 2010). A new Code of Practice (Jones, 2003) came into effect on January 2002 and replaced the earlier Code of 1994. The new Code of Practice streamlined the assessment processes for pupils with LDD in schools through the implementation of a new four-stage statement approach in which parents also became partners with their wishes being taken into account (DfES, 2001; Ramjhun, 2002).

Similarly, a more recent development is the *Every Child Matters (ECM)* (DfES, 2003) approach, which aimed to improve the well-being of children and young people from birth to nineteen years (Pring *et al.*, 2009). The implication for a college is that all young learners, including those with LDD, have the right to be healthy and safe. Young learners need to enjoy and be able to make positive contributions and achieve (Florian, 2007). In line with this, *Removing Barriers to Achievement* reinforced inclusion as a model and approach to meeting special needs in education (DfES, 2004).

As papers and reports continued to refine and extend earlier international and national legislation to reform ‘inclusive’ disability provision in England’s education sector, it critically seems, according to authors such as Gathorne-Hardy (2001) and Ollerton (2001) that economics are a key influence on educational policy and practice. More explicitly Tomlinson (2001: 192) wrote, ‘much of the political focus on those labelled disabled or special continues to be linked to old economical questions about what to do with citizens who cannot be economically productive’. This seems to imply that individuals with disabilities are lower-class citizens who do not justify the expenditure that goes with ‘inclusive’ education (Benjamin, 2002). A more recent paper by Barton (2010b: 281), indicates that ‘economy’ still remains central in the struggle for ‘inclusive’ education and that ‘policy and practice in education is fundamentally based upon the rationale in which economy priorities are central’.

It is interesting, despite the overwhelming conceptualisation in literature that legislative frameworks aim to safeguard the social, human and ethical rights of learners with disabilities and ensure they are treated fairly and non-discriminatively (Barton, 2010a; Dyson, 1999; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Giangreco, 2007; Rioux and Pinto, 2010) (to name only a few), that further public troubles (Wright Mills, 1959) continue to exist within ‘the field of the

sociology of disability’ (Allan, 2010: 610). These impacted on the research and discourse in the development of new knowledge to improve frameworks (i.e. policy) within disability education. A significant example of this is from Allan (2010) who argues her disappointment over disputing academics. She argues they are not fulfilling their social obligations to those individuals with disabilities and that they are compromising a transformation towards greater ‘inclusive’ political and social theory. Allan (2010: 210) suggests that ‘new forms of engagement’ need to be sought that are less debilitating on the acquisition of new knowledge to achieve the objectives of ‘inclusive’ education. From the above we can conclude that a ‘sociology of education’, with cornerstones of ‘social justice’ and ‘progress’ are critical in the on-going quest for political legislation to support the regulation of the social, human and ethical rights of learners with disabilities within post-sixteen education (Arnot *et al.*, 2010). Whilst the above discusses the theoretic²³ of disability education policy the following aims to conceptualise how legislative frameworks have affected and impacted on ‘inclusive’ FE provision and practice.

Policy Reform Implications for Further Education Provision

On a national level in England, educational policy reform and modernisation includes the employment of ‘support workers’ to support and co-teach alongside qualified teachers in primary and secondary schools and this was accompanied by active financial support from the government (Thomas *et al.*, 1998). Whilst this research is about FE we can draw parallels to the provision of TAs’ (as they are named in schools) and those pertaining to LSAs’ in FE. These parallels need to be continuously drawn to emphasise the lack of a policy context for

²³ Academic or hypothetical.

FE and to highlight the dichotomy in provision for learners and LSAs' in colleges²⁴ (Barton, 2010a; Slee, 2010; Weaver, 2008).

In schools, as part of the strategy for change, the government provided funding for the employment and training of 20 000 full-time teaching assistants (TAs') by 2004 (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2001). The National Union of Teachers (NUT) supported the majority of teachers who opposed these developments on the grounds that they were 'providing education on the cheap' (Bailey & Robson, 2004: 374). Conversely the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) emphasised that TAs' in schools would raise standards and the achievements of children (HMI/OFSTED, 2002). In contrast to what was happening in schools, provision for disabled post-sixteen learners in colleges was slow in reforming to support these much needed changes. Bailey and Robson (2004) argue that the arrival of LSAs' in co-teaching or support staff posts in colleges went relatively unnoticed.

Bailey and Robson (2004) state that LSAs' were introduced as employed support staff in FE in April 1993, when local education authorities ceased to be in control of the management of FE colleges. The introduction of corporate status for colleges allowed them to manage and employ all their own staff (FEFC, 2000; LSC, 2004a). Since then colleges in England have predominantly been funded by national funding bodies such as the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and, since April 2001, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). These developments are of significance to this study because, according to Bailey and Robson (2004: 373), the decision to make use of LSAs' in college settings was driven by two key factors: 'economy' and 'efficiency'. Crucially, this implies that the effectiveness of college provision was heavily reliant on funding. In line with this, Green and Milbourne

²⁴ 'Historically, the question of disability has been a seriously neglected topic of sociological investigation' (Barton, 2010a: 643). Slee refers to the lack of policy support in terms of 'the disability movement's political struggle' (2010: 562).

(1998: 9) argue that learning support was directly influenced by the new funding methodology of the FEFC and the ‘pressure on colleges to grow’. At the same time, Clare (2005) states that colleges were under increasing pressure to deliver ‘excellent’ provision at all levels of teaching, learning, assessment, support and guidance across the learning and skills sector in England. In my experience, prospective post-sixteen learners with LDD could only be accommodated by the appointment of LSAs’ in supporting roles alongside lecturers and tutors, to teach, supervise and mentor them. However, no thought was given to the professional status of these LSAs or to whether they had any relevant or compatible skills to do this work. The next section offers a detailed analysis on FE policy.

Analysis of Further Education Policy

We have seen how policy developed and acted as a springboard for change and reform in educational institutions, such as colleges, in Britain. In June 2006 the government published ‘The UK Government’s Approach to Public Service Reform – A Discussion Paper’ in which they announced their model for public service reform (Coffield *et al.*, 2007: 2). The aim of this section is to provide analysis and discussion on how educational policy reform affects further education, especially in regard to the challenges and opportunities it creates on the various systemic levels which influence the functioning of colleges and their support of societal change (Coffield *et al.*, 2007). Reference is made to educators such as LSAs’ and their work and training conditions and how policy reform may provide opportunities to improve their teaching and learning experiences. Analysis will also highlight social mobility issues in education by showing how existing FE policy impacts upon and challenges employability and social inclusion and provides new scope for innovation.

Sir Andrew Foster, who in 2005 carried out ‘Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges in the UK’, wrote the following about the people who work in colleges for further education:

Almost a quarter of a million people are currently employed in FE colleges across England. They are the most vital resource that FE colleges have. In the course of the review it was clear that focused, committed and professional lecturers, support staff and leaders have transformed individual lives and make a real difference to local businesses (Foster, 2005:73).

To stumble across this positive piece of writing which emphasises the level of professionalism, attitude and skill that exists amongst college staff, was heart-warming. It not only filled me, as an FE educator, with a sense of pride, but what was most catching was the inclusion and mention of *support staff* at a time when writer’s like Coffield (in Avis *et al.*, 2007: xiii) wrote how ‘notoriously under-researched’ teaching and learning ‘FE in the UK’ is. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, an important focus of my research is to explore LSAs’ working conditions and training experiences to make sense of why they are ‘allowed’ to work and support learners with disabilities without serious attention being given to their own professional development needs. From experience I consider that very little is being done institutionally to secure the best possible learning experiences for post-sixteen learners with LDD.

Although Foster’s writing is good for educators’ professional morale, it contradicts most other theoretical claims that paint a very solemn picture of a strained and complex relationship between the government’s reform policies and the realities of practice. In an abstract from a book in which editors Avis *et al* (2011) explain the link between theory and practice they use words such as ‘well-rehearsed’. This leaves the reader with a feeling that policy influencing practice and reform is superficial and that the true essence of what policy

sets out to do is somewhat lost; ‘consider any college mission statement, or policy addressing teaching and learning and we encounter well-rehearsed phrases that place the learner at the centre of educational processes’. Upon reading this the logical step, for educator researchers like myself, is to ask rhetorical questions to generate discussion and reasoning. Questions such as: why does there seem to be such a divide between government policy and the realism of practice?; why do local institutions (in this case, colleges) tick boxes mechanically?; why does college leadership not seem to take a genuine interest in the people who work in their institutions but above all, why do the government and government bodies, college leadership and educators not *care* about the genuine well-being and development of the young people who attend colleges?

Leadership for Learning

In 2001, Gleeson made strong theoretical claims about the insufficient levels of educational performance due to the market-driven and charismatic corporate leadership reforms in the FE sector. In his paper Gleeson (2001: 182) examined how changing policy strategies in this sector, which was still salvaging itself from severe ‘financial crisis’ and ‘industrial action’, as he put it, continued to impact on what was already low staff morale. More specifically, his paper analysed the shifting discourse in managerial styles and the implications of a self-surveillance institutional leadership culture and how this contributed to the forming of learning cultures.

According to Coffield *et al* (2007) the government’s reform model mentioned in the previous section, combined four pressure-types which are experienced in the conventional top-down

management used in the running of public service institutions, e.g. FE colleges, since 1997. The amalgamating of top-down management, pressures from market incentives, improvement of public servants' capabilities and capacities and the utilising of service-users voices, were aimed to balance out the strengths and weakness of one another in order to improve services. This type of management is now being referred to and seen as self-improvement (self-surveillance) management. However, we need to understand these conceptual changes within the social context and culture of the institutional structure of colleges. James *et al* (2007:4) argue that learning cultures in colleges are complex and multi-layered and Coffield (in James *et al.*, 2007: xiii) defines it as 'the social practices through which people learn.

This social scenario on learning implies that educators can influence and shape a learning culture in a particular way. James *et al* (2007: 5) hint that educators should take responsibility and focus their efforts on the provision of learning opportunities. 'Opportunities for learning' may mean many things: access to education; interesting and relevant curriculums or the quality of the overall learning experiences and activities educators design for post-sixteen learners. The emphasis however, should be to constantly improve what it is we do socially. This notion is of particular interest to this study which focuses on the professional development and improvement of the professional capabilities of support staff in colleges (James *et al.*, 2007). Coffield *et al* (2007: 16) argues that 'capabilities and capacity focus on ensuring that the public service workforce is equipped to deliver improved public services'. A further quote from Coffield *et al* (2007: 65) reads:

[...]the government is acutely aware that it must now harness the commitment of the professionals, and it has made substantial and welcome investments in all levels of the workforce from initial training through in-service training to leadership. If staff are to be treated as essential partners in the process of reform, however, the government will have to share power with the professionals [...] creating feedback loops which enable

professionals to explain the strengths and weaknesses of policy in practice and to be engaged in redesigning policy.

Although some changes have occurred in colleges over the last decade, with various qualifications relating to initial teacher training (James *et al.*, 2007), it is unfortunate that no national or local training framework for college support staff members has materialised. In my view, the absence of such a framework for improving LSAs' professional capabilities remains due to inadequacies in government policy.

Furthermore, according to Coffield (2000: 57), challenges still exist as important government reports continue to lack key theory which is vital in the social context to learn and achieve.

He wrote:

in all plans to put learners first, to invest in learning, to widen participation, to set targets, to develop skills, to open access, to raise standards, and to develop a national framework of qualifications, there is no mention of theory (theories) of learning to achieve a whole project.

This is in line with James *et al* (2007: 44) who says that there exists a 'lack of clear and shared ideas about learning'.

How does this all connect with college leadership? Reform in college management style can positively or negatively influence how colleges function. It can influence educators (lecturers, tutors and LSAs') and their capabilities and thereby influence the learning culture and determine the quality of the learning experiences of all learners. A positive management style is crucial to deliver meaningful post-sixteen education. Coffield (in James *et al.*, 2007) emphasises the need to have a better understanding of and support for excellent pedagogy. College leadership may continue to face great challenges while battling constant change, but surely it can be argued that this should open up new avenues for institutional growth and

development in which innovative management can inspire and empower others who work in colleges.

A significant recommendation from the Transforming Learning Culture (TLC) in FE project Gleeson (2005: 245) ran in 2005, in which he investigated learning in HE/FE sectors, argues that a ‘process managing approach’ (although this may implicate challenging and new innovative practices for quality assurance purposes) ‘is a more effective way of bringing about improvements’ in the skills sector. This type of managing approach, in contrast to the current objectives model of management and curriculum change, is a more flexible process that recognises the complex, cultural and relation aspect of learning (Gleeson, 2005). Since colleges were incorporated in 1993 (Avis *et al.*, 2011), reform agendas by government departments, exam bodies and organisations such as OFSTED, LSC, FENTO and the QCA’s, paved the way for reform and impacted on leadership and management. My experience in the college where I conducted my study was that leadership was rather formal, closed and rather secretive, and that this un-collaborative approach to management (which I have touched on through-out my thesis but specifically explain in Chapter 8), hindered the social mobility and what happened in the teaching-learning process. LSAs’, whose ‘appearance’ in colleges was a direct result of FE policy reform, and who are the main focus of my study, seemed to be the lowest on the pecking-order of human resources within an old school top-down management system. As they were appointed as part of the implementation of newly adopted equal opportunities and inclusive policies, LSAs’ were central to the positive changes that were taking place, but shockingly, very little managerial interest was shown in these ‘good Samaritans’, in the college where I conducted my study.

14-19 Reform

According to Ainley and Allen (2007) the 14-19 curriculum was restructured to offer greater choice and diversity to learners based on the recommendations of the 2004 Tomlinson Report: *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*. This shift in 14-19 policy resulted in more specialist diplomas and pathways which demanded significant interaction and collaboration between schools and colleges which strained working relationships. Rifts began to appear due to weak collaboration and this resulted in the ineffectiveness of programmes when they were implemented (James *et al.*, 2007). James *et al* (2007: 57) refer to these rifts as a ‘deep division’. According to James *et al* (2007: 57), these divisions could not be over-looked and were labelled as ‘positioning’ or the ineffective ‘relationship between institutions’ when collaboration was crucial for positive interaction.

In 2005, the ‘Realising the Potential’ report, compiled by Sir Andrew Foster in which the future role of FE colleges was reviewed (Foster, 2005), explicitly argued that 14-19 reform should closely link training with the National Skills Strategy (DfES, 2006). Specific strategies were recommended as FE was lacking ‘a consequential core focus on skills and employability (Foster, 2005: 6). In March 2006, a White Paper: *Further Education: Raising Skills, improving life chances* (DfES, 2006: Executive Summary par. 3) was issued with strategies for self-improvement. Its core message was that the ‘FE system must be the powerhouse for delivering the skills at all levels that are needed to sustain an advanced, competitive economy and make us a fairer society while offering equal opportunities based on talent and effort’. Although the White Paper was written for a broader range and scope and in essence appeared ‘inclusive’ of the entire college learner population, a lot of ‘hype’

and focus has been, and still is, on the 16-19 reform and the ‘vocationalism’ (Avis *et al.*, 2011: 112) of this particular group as they make up the largest cohort of learners within FE.

Political frameworks like these impact on what happens within the lifelong learning sector and, therefore, colleges. They shape qualification structures, curriculums and the models colleges use to assess learners’ progress and achievements. According to Avis *et al* (2011: 9) ‘general FE colleges are complex organisations, serving fragmented and diverse interests’ and reform is not a straightforward process, but rather one that should stress the differences in institutions and their need to diversify to meet learners’ needs individually.

A Skills Delivery Focus

To fully understand the above 14-19 scenario, we need to backtrack a little. The New Quality Improvement Agency (Foster, 2005), emphasised *skills delivery*, and promised to support college educators with new resources and materials. In part this resulted in the 2004 introduction of qualifications for college teachers. In Chapters 1 and 2 I discussed the essential knowledge and skills LSAs must have if a meaningful (and ethical) learning experience for, in particular, learners with LDD in colleges, is to be ensured. It was fascinating that as this measure for qualified college teachers appeared (with promises of on-going continuous professional development), there was still an absence of any specific reference to the education of college LSAs’ or the support staff who play a vital role in college teaching teams.

Theory analysis fails to identify or acknowledge the importance of having LSAs' in colleges. It also fails to recognise the need for these LSAs' to have or to learn professional skills and have continuous professional development in order to be excellent support staff members who provide excellent learning experiences for all learners and particularly for those with LDD. This situation remains a challenge while untrained LSAs continue to support learners as a result of a failure of government to design a policy which successfully influences colleges to contribute to a more inclusive systemic context for all learners, including those with LDD. However, this existing situation leaves itself open for innovative opportunities and practice with regard to the professional development of support staff and, as discussed in Chapter 1, my study includes an ELSAP intervention which was designed to be an innovative solution to overcome the moral and practical dilemmas of having untrained LSAs' working in college classrooms.

Coffield (in James *et al.*, 2007) expresses his disappointment about the 2006 White Paper's lack of detail on how to 'drive up quality' (James *et al.*, 2007: 59) while it focuses mainly on 'agencies, frameworks and mechanisms'. The failure to acknowledge the specific role of LSAs in important policy documents about improving learning quality sits well with the words of James *et al* (2007: 59), 'the silence has not been broken', which implies that although efforts have been made to improve the quality of learning and skills development in colleges, the White Paper of 2006, failed to be specific or address the real issues about FE quality improvement.

An interesting point made by Ainley and Allen (2010:4) is that the nature of how we define 'skills' for the purpose of skills training and development, has change beyond recognition

since the information and computer technology ‘explosion’, over the last two decades. This adds to the complexity of *skills* delivery and *skills* curriculum development. Further to their discourse on skills, Ainley and Allen (2010) raised an interesting debate, which focusses attention on the fact that a move towards more ‘skills’ and ‘employability’ delivery focus in FE, could result in individuals being ‘overqualified and underemployed’ (Ainley and Allen, 2010: 4). This is a circumstance which I come back to and explain in more depth later.

Empowering Employers

FE runs on the belief that employers expect the delivery of a more skilled and qualified workforce as set out in government policy:

The aim of this National Skills Strategy is to ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled (DfES, 2003b: 11)

However, over the last decade, this has been strongly contested. According to Gleeson and Keep (2004) (and in line with earlier arguments), employers and a market-driven economy have impacted on vocational education policy and this in particular influenced a problematic power and responsibility relationship between employers, the state and education partnerships.

Gleeson and Keep (2004) argue that there are potentially, five major areas of tension in the interaction between employers and education due to them both operating from different structural frameworks and from different sets of goals. These are: the notion that education functions dismissively in its relationship with employers and the state; education trains and teaches predispositions, attitudes and behaviours; employers’ clever manoeuvring of budgets

and costs to shift responsibility of skills training on to HE and FE systems and thereby create further financial difficulties and the issue of vague and ill-articulated communication on the part of employers of what they require and by when. Other factors, like the changes in ecology, i.e. increased emphasis of the rhetoric and policy discourse, and the 14-19 policy reforms which fall within the remit of this study also influence the exchange between employers and education. The overall mood of Gleeson and Keep's paper is not a happy one. It showcases colleges as complex systems in which social interactions can be misguided and strained and in which power imbalances may exist in which stakeholders continuously shifts responsibilities.

Analysis of FE policy on practice continues to show potential pitfalls for interaction as demands on education to 'produce' a skilled workforce continue within a climate of vagueness when it comes to the distribution of monies and interaction amongst partners. Although analysis acknowledges the challenges in interaction the intention is not to ignore a growing importance for generic and specific skills training and the role that FE education has to play in it. The challenge is to move beyond this rhetoric and re-focus on the educational aims for individual groups, for example, as in the case of this study, LSAs', who work and train in colleges, and who need to demonstrate very specific skills in order to be effective in FE classrooms supporting learners with LDD. This does not demean the complexity in the interaction relationships for power, demand and monies amongst employers, the state and education (Avis *et al.*, 2011), and in this particular study, the college itself who should provide work and education for LSAs' by seeking workable solutions and interventions that bridge any barriers in interaction and improve overall social inclusion.

Although the socio-political-education-employer picture continues to look bleak whilst responsibilities and accountabilities are continuously being shifted, perhaps the time has come for all partners to consider a willingness to re-enter this debate as equals. Until then, Gleeson and Keep (2004:57) argue that ‘education will continue to be locked in a deficit discourse failing to deliver the right skills at the right time and the right price’. In 2007 a new White Paper ‘Opportunity, Employment and Progression’, raised many key issues with opportunities to move the skills discourse forward, ‘*Skills, are now a key driver to achieving economic success and social justice in the new global economy*’ (DUIS/DWP 2007: 30). These words portray the last visions and hope of the last Labour government’s efforts to renew further education through social mobility by creating economic opportunities.

Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

The current recession has seen an increase in the unemployment of 16 to 24 year olds which at the time of the publication of Ainley and Allen’s book ‘Lost Generation’ in 2010 was already close to one million, 17% applying to this population of young adults. In the face of an on-going recession this is now likely to be a much higher figure. The term ‘lost generation’ was branded by the media and implied ‘graduates without jobs’ (Ainley and Allen, 2010: 5). The term graduates in this context also includes and refers to young people qualifying with vocational education and training but who cannot access employment due to the current economic climate with its lack of employment opportunities.

This raises serious challenges for FE and demands a close look at the skills curriculums and training we deliver and what is on offer and whether it fits employee requirements. At the

same time it provides opportunities for new learning programmes to be designed and developed that promote innovative thinking and entrepreneurial and entrepreneurial-related skills. Ainley and Allen (2010: 11) say that in order to improve services we need to develop an holistic understanding of it, 'understanding its workings in totality'. In my experience, and based on the theory discussed, there has perhaps not been a more challenging and interesting time to be part of and to engage in education.

Concluding the Rhetoric on Further Education Policy

Almost two decades ago, Avis *et al* (1996: 165 and 166) described the mood in public service sectors (which includes educational institutions such as colleges), brought about by state and political influences, as follows:

[...] to blame teachers, parents and young people for wider failures within education the economy and the criminal justice system. This is exactly what has happened with the school and post-compulsory education agendas: the proliferation of centrally imposed policies and initiatives has been powerful and coercive in its impact on the minds of practitioners and students at all levels as the scope for thought, action and employment has been progressively narrowed.

The irony is, that although some agendas for change have seen the light, it appears that an overall patchy and fragmented FE policy still continues to feed, two decades later, into a broken, ineffective and unfair further education system in which untrained LSAs' are being allowed to support learners with LDD. In turn this feeds into institutional complexities which ultimately hinder the social mobility of post-sixteen learners (including those with disabilities) who come to college with the aim of leaving with personal and professional skills and knowledge in order to enter employment and be fulfilled in adult life (Avis *et al.*, 2007).

It has become vital for stakeholders in FE, to ask themselves what their respective individual and/or team involvement and accountability is in relation to the central theme of systemic failure that shines through the theoretical claims made here. They need to begin to understand how to bring problematic policy in line with the realities and complexities of delivering meaningful practice for a fairer and socially more just society with greater economic prosperity. According to Ainley and Bailey (1997: 2) ‘the basic work of the colleges has always been the teaching of theory and practice of the skills used in everyday occupations’ and in the words of Avis *et al* (2007: 249), ‘this is still true today’. The time has come to end the blaming game and to start acting to radicalise public services such as colleges to deliver a more ethical, just, meaningful and life-changing opportunities-led education for *all*.

Conclusive Comments to Policy

Although discussions like these continue to stimulate policy development, the process of reform is not always without its pitfalls. From the above we can see that, although national government funding supports some opportunities for LSAs’ to become part of the college workforce (as part of a global movement towards social ‘inclusion’ and equality of opportunity for people with disabilities and their families), literature on clear and specific requirements of what is personally, professionally and academically expected of these LSAs’, is still very much needed. Florian (2007) agrees that much depth is needed in appropriate educational research on learning support within ‘inclusive’ education. Existing literature on learning support and ‘inclusive’ education seems to be patchy and haphazard and does not address vital topics such as the training of LSAs’ and the impact thereof on professional classroom practice (Florian, 2007; Miller, 2003).

My research into how policy reform influenced a policy context that influenced the work of colleges highlights the gap in knowledge with regard to a national mandatory training framework or information of this kind, for LSAs' in FE. Critically, this situation has become a socio-political issue within FE provision for learners with LDD and their families and raises doubts about just how meaningful and ethical the education for these individuals is. The mere existence of these socio-political issues conflicts with what the historical and current policy developments set out to do, which is their suggestions for 'inclusiveness' and non-discriminative practice. Unless a training framework for LSAs' becomes mandatory, doubts from learners with LDD and their families on how meaningful their post-sixteen education is will continue to exist. The above analysis contributes within the research study to the sociology of education discourse by highlighting and strengthening the connection between political social theory and practice on the grounds of human rights, social values and morals.

To fully understand the context and role which policy reform plays philosophically within the FE context for practitioners including LSAs' and the learners with LDD, it is appropriate that I pave the way in respect of the conceptual framework for this research. The next section discusses my philosophical argument for this research with its aims to facilitate educational classroom change. I based my conceptual argument for such change on complexity theory and systemic thinking.

Complexity Theory within a Systems Thinking Approach for Educational Change

I shall begin by explaining how the idea of systemic thinking originates as a key philosophical concept that grounded my research. I shall draw on theory and continue by explaining how this systemic reasoning formed an integral part in how I further understand

professional development for educational change within the complexity of a multi-dimensional college environment.

Systemic Thinking for Classroom Change

Disability studies aim to interrogate – and change – elements of the disabling world, including the political, economic, social, cultural, interpersonal, relational and discursive. It is therefore an inherently interdisciplinary paradigm (Goodley and Van Hove, 2005).

Goodley and Van Hove's (2005) statement, beautifully explains the backdrop of inter-linked policy, information, people and practice, all occurring on different levels, within my research 'ecology' (or sphere). My research focuses on 'inclusive' practice within FE provision, with particular reference to the professional learning and development of untrained college LSAs' who support learners with LDD.

Critically, LSAs', within my research, can be seen as a micro system of college educators who operate within a wider college community or environment. This wider college community, in turn, can be seen as a meso system, and this meso system exists within an even broader local education system. Together, the micro and meso systems exist in relation to an outer and much wider, macro system, which in this case, forms national governmental structures and procedures in Britain. This is a systemic way of understanding and reasoning about the different groups that exist within a college. Groups form different layers that interrelate and interject with each other. This view is based on Von Bertalanffy's (1933) earlier writings about a General Systems Theory and acknowledges the multi-faceted branching and how what happens in one group or system can have a reciprocal effect on another. As discussed in the introduction in Chapter 1, it is the effect these various systems can have one upon the other, that caused the dilemmas felt by both myself and my teaching

colleagues. We felt they were having a detrimental effect on the quality of the teaching being provided for post-sixteen learners with LDD and that this should be openly addressed as a public issue (Wright Mills, 1959).

LSAs' can be seen as a micro system of individuals who operate within their immediate classroom environment, drawing from their own views, knowledge, cognitions and skills in their work with post-sixteen learners with LDD. The knowledge, cognitions and skills of LSAs' inform their work and influence the effectiveness of their practice. According to the General Systems Theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1933), the views, knowledge, cognitions and skills of LSAs' can be influenced (enhanced or hindered) by other systemic factors within their immediate classroom environment. This can include more experienced LSAs' or maybe a classroom lecturer or tutor, the level of support LSAs' received from more experienced colleagues, e.g. appraisals; opportunities to reflect and learn; and access to professional development opportunities. Difficulties may occur within this micro level, for example, when lecturers and tutors' own busy time-tables do not allow for professional discussions or constructive feedback with individual LSAs' about their practice. This in turn, may indirectly affect the learning experiences of learners with LDD who are being supported by these LSAs'. The learners' learning may become less meaningful. This reasoning fits Bronfenbrenner's (2005) argument that a meso system is the set of micro systems constituting the individual's 'development niche within a given period of development' (2005: xiv) and, the complex interrelations 'amongst major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life' (2005: xiv). Others, such as Dyson, Howes and Roberts (2002), have similar viewpoints. (Also see Jenson and Fraser, 2006.) They explain that systems are 'multi-dimensional' and provide social contexts which are dynamic, fluid and interconnected.

Hoban (2002) takes this understanding of systemic influences further and describes the interplay within systemic thinking as conditional with specific reference to connectedness as a requisite for discrimination. This view of Hoban (2002) stresses the reality that within my 'naturalistic' research environment some kind of commonality must exist between systems in order to discriminate and make sense of the chaos within a busy college. The commonality connecting all groups or systems within my college was *education*. How education was perceived, understood or even implemented varied hugely. What was important though for the purpose of this research was that each individual, including LSAs', understood their professional selves, their role and duties in relation to the learners with disability they support within the influences of the wider meso (professional learning activities) and outside macro systems (legislative frameworks). In other words, conceptualisation here indicates an understanding of chaos which is often a result of complexity.

In line with the above, Cobb (1994) states that cognitive construction between complexity and chaos can happen by means of self-reflection. Schön's (1987) idea to re-construct chaos is to do so by means of self-reflection. From literature we can see that self-reflection involves cognitive processes, for example, thinking (Von Glaserfeld, 1989) about action (Kolb, 1984) for change. Hoban's (2002) interplay in this sense, critically indicates what happens within my research.

LSAs' (who individually form a micro system) work within the complexity of a meso college environment and the majority of them seem to have little or no experience of teaching and learning within disability education at a micro level. Without professional development prospects, they are crucially, not as effective as they could be within their roles. Systemic

thinking becomes a condition that is needed to nurture a connected interplay over time and upon which LSAs' can reflect to make cognitive connections to transform (Mezirow, 2000) their practice. From the above, the importance of (micro) systemic thinking as a condition for professional learning and development (a theoretical field in this research) for educational change can be seen. Hoban (2002) states that if educators think systemically, their understanding about what happens on a micro level (in this case, LSAs') in education will enhance an understanding of the dynamics of change at classroom practice level. Although this research focusses on micro change, it is important to identify and acknowledge outside systemic factors and conditions that influence what happens on a micro level. In their own way meso-systems form part of an even larger macro-system which involves cultural and public policy and refer to the organisation of social environments such as colleges, and how teachers of educators are influenced by policy and legislative decisions on a national level in respect of professional learning provision.

To summarise, Kuijpers *et al.*, (2010: 1687) state the 'use of a systematic cyclic approach to improvement' that includes biological factors, cognitive factors and social and environmental factors. Biological and cognitive factors indicate LSAs' micro systemic intrinsic factors or needs for training, while extrinsic social and environmental factors refer to what occurs within the meso system to support or hinder the training or professional learning of LSAs'. The next section now embeds Complexity Theory within systems thinking for educational change, which is the overarching aim of this research.

Complexity, Chaos and Change

Donmoyer (2006: 11) regards theory ‘as a set of concepts and propositions that pertain to some actual phenomena’²⁵. Theory, as part of the philosophical underpinning of this research, is best described by Bronfenbrenner (2005: xiv) who argues that a micro system can extend into a meso system, to ‘embrace informal and formal social structures’. This emphasises the importance and complexity of external variables and influences and their interrelatedness. Complexity Theory in this case is two-fold. It underpins the interrelatedness²⁶ and the dynamic complexity of my role as both practitioner and researcher on ‘teaching about teaching’. I discussed my personal motivation for doing this research in Chapter 1. I became a naturalistic researcher who explores and evaluates while teaching LSAs’ to ‘teach’. On a secondary level and within the wider teaching-learning-scenario, that is on a meta-cognitive level, knowledge of teaching about teaching (that plans educational change) can only result from interrelated and interconnected elements including policies and frameworks that support ‘inclusive’, non-discriminative practice.

Complexity, as discussed above, is embedded within the systemic ‘chaos’ of different groups or systems existing in a reciprocal relationship to each other on different levels. According to Jenson and Fraser (2006), systemic thinking refers to the reciprocal dynamic interaction of sub-systems on each other and how these influence each other. Balgopal and Vassil (1983: 21) state that this ecological viewpoint should be regarded as ‘an orientation emphasising relationships among persons and their physical and social environment’. In this research this refers to the individual college LSA who educates, and as part of the classroom, forms an integral part of the social classroom environment for the purpose of providing support.

²⁵ Occurrence or observable fact.

²⁶ ‘multi-faceted’ (Freebody, 2003: 1).

Although the systemic concept indicates complexity and that there are neither inadequate persons nor inadequate social environments, but rather that a ‘fit between person and environment may be in relative accord or discord’ (Balgopal and Vassil, 1983: 21), this indicates that every effort needs to be made to ensure the ‘adequateness’ of both the person and the environment. In this case, it stresses the fact that learners with LDD are entitled to a fair and meaningful education through the support of well trained and educated LSAs’ to provide an adequate ‘fit’. So how does this concept link with the next level which is the interrelatedness between systemic thinking and complexity theory within my research?

Critically, the implication for teachers of teaching²⁷, or people like myself who wish to facilitate professional learning for LSAs by means of an intervention, is that they need to facilitate the planned educational change as a prolonged *process* for learning (Hoban, 2002). In other words, the systemic thinking here refers to complex contexts or systems which are directly or indirectly involved with the developing person as, for example, the influences of national legislative frameworks on the policy and procedures followed by the college for the professional development of their LSAs. LSAs’ learning is indirectly influenced by this and other systemic factors within the research (college) environment could be for example, access to training, opportunities for reflective and community learning, insufficient time to make cognitive connections and to think about practice. These systemic factors can thus be seen as conditions that either hinder or enhance the systemic research environment which adds further complexity to the overall research.

To summarise, Hoban (2002) states that several key assumptions underpin the above-discussed complexity theory within a systems thinking model, i.e. the individual needs to be

²⁷Loughran (2006), states that teaching is a complex system. For him it is differentiating between control and management of the inter-personal relationships involved within the andragogy situation of skill, knowledge, ability and professional autonomy.

the primary focus of intervention for change; change must be an intense personal process; a comprehensive description of the full intervention is needed; the intervention needs to occur in stages and levels; and the facilitator needs to work in an adaptive/systematic manner. These assumptions are in accord with discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 on the LSAs who became participants, their training needs and the implementation of ELSAP to enhance LSAs' professional knowledge and skills for their role in supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD.

The above points towards an emergent and dynamic paradigm for educational change based upon complexity theory. This indicates social systems, population dynamics, social niches, body functions and social interactions in which the self-knowledge of the individual LSA supports the ability to self-organise and to distinguish complexity from chaos (Wright Mills, 1959; Hoban, 2002). From the above we can ultimately argue that the ecology²⁸ of a college for further education can affect how these systems impact on individual LSA personnel and their professional development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and thereby determine the quality of the education they deliver in the classroom. These philosophical concepts are vital to the research process. Reasoning about these will determine whether post-sixteen learners with LDD receive a meaningful education or not, and in turn, determine their future development.

The following section discusses the second main theoretical field of 'inclusive' college provision, within the uncertain and unpredictable social context of a complex college environment. What is meant by 'inclusiveness'? Who are the post-sixteen learners and what are their learning needs? What is meant by learning support and what is the role of college LSAs'?

²⁸ Systemic environment.

‘Inclusive’ Further Education Provision

Introduction

Over the last thirty years the issue of integration and ‘inclusive’ education has become a focus point of debates and discourses on the development of education, particularly in relation to the provision for those learners with additional learning needs who had previously been placed in ‘special schools’. According to Rogers (2007: 30), ‘inclusion within mainstream education’ was implemented by the previous government and ‘promoted as an anti-exclusionary policy’. However literature shows that in many cases for parents and families of children and young people with disabilities, the opposite was experienced and that equal accessing of services and information was and remains a struggle of ‘power and privilege’ (Benjamin, 2002: 2; Rogers, 2007). I shall now continue to discuss concepts, developments and approaches of ‘inclusive’ education in order to understand the work and training needs of LSAs’ who provide disability support in ‘inclusive colleges’.

Defining ‘Inclusive’ Education

‘Inclusive’ education is a model that developed over time during processes of integration, mainstreaming and inclusion with the aims of total integration of learners with LDD in mainstream classrooms and that they be educated amongst their peers (Farrell and Ainscow, 2003). In other words, a change from mainstream schools provision towards the integration of learners with SEN, rather than social segregation at special schools (Armstrong, 2003). In line with this, Booth and Ainscow define educational inclusion in terms of ‘education of *all* children and young people’ (2002: 34). We have understood from the earlier discussion on education and social policy development that ‘inclusive’ educational provision is about the participation of all individuals and the removal of all forms of exclusionary, non-

discriminative practice. Valle and Conner (2011) describe ‘inclusive education’ as a matter of social justice. Critically, this rights approach (Barton, 2010b; Dyson, 1999) and educational philosophy of equality of opportunity, however plausible, has challenging implications for its implementation within a college setting (in the same way that it has had for other educational settings such as schools and universities) (Morgan, 2000).

‘Inclusive’ learning in the lifelong sector is about recognising that each individual learner that we teach is different from their fellow learners in many ways. However, learners should not be excluded from any activities or opportunities for any lawful reason (Avis, *et al.*, 2010). According to Gravells and Simpson (2008: 128) ‘inclusive learning should ensure a match between the individual learner’s requirements and the provision that is made for them’ We need to ask ourselves, how have educational approaches in the lifelong learning sector changed to match the requirements of a learner with a disability?

Changes in Approaches

As discussed earlier in this chapter, policy development such as the Warnock Report 1978 (Dyson and Slee, 2001) and Education Act 1981 (Florian, 2007), underpinned modernisation and promoted new procedures and practice in education. It also provided an organisational structure to replace that which had had a detrimental impact on provision for learners with LDD in colleges. According to Bailey and Robson (2004), modernisation points towards enhanced provision to better service delivery for public sector clients, i.e. college learners. More specifically, this means an increase in college support staff to provide more effective learning support for post-sixteen learners during the teaching-learning-process.

The above reform implies the development of educational pedagogy²⁹ and andragogy³⁰ which results in changes to approaches for teaching and learning. According to research, a new approach in schools meant a move away from traditional ‘remedial’ teaching approaches in which all learners attended mixed ability classes towards a social model for learning which focuses on what learners can do (Allan, 2010; Bines, 1986; Thomas, *et al.*, 1998). It was only later when children with LDD made the transition from schools to colleges for further education that the college sector ‘inherited’ the procedures and practices of schools.

Initially new ‘inclusive’ educational approaches included ‘withdrawal’, the provision of extra support and approaches to modify material to suit the learning needs of children with special needs more appropriately (Morgan, 2000: 47). Further developments included specialist support teachers to be part of the teaching team as advisers and, sharing knowledge on a specific area of teaching such as the use of Braille when working with visually impaired learners. This brought about positive changes which benefited learners with disabilities.

New definitions steered away from discriminative language and tried to recognise what learners can do, instead of what they cannot do (Balshaw and Farrell, 2003; Hryniewicz, 2007). Broader collaboration from organisations and a more social, whole-school-approach, where provision for learners was planned holistically and across the curriculum in which all teachers took responsibility for the learning of all learners (not just the support teacher), brought fundamental changes in practice that aimed to advantage all learners (Bines, 1986; Carson, 2009; Thomas, *et al.*, 1998). From this we can conclude that changed approaches in schools subsequently paved the way for similar changes in approaches in lifelong learning.

²⁹ The science of teaching children (Hoban, 2002).

³⁰ The science of teaching adults (Hoban, 2002).

‘Inclusive’ Further Education

One of the main aims of FE is to train and qualify individuals for employment. According to Hughson and Uditsky (2007) one of the important manifestations of an ‘inclusive’ life is the opportunity to develop a career identity and be meaningfully employed. For young adults with disabilities and their families, this progression towards self-actualisation can be difficult (Rogers, 2007). Colleges have a moral and legal social responsibility to support this particular group of learners and their families to ensure ethical and meaningful education which may lead to greater independence, self-actualisation and hopefully employment.

Lifelong learning in England is taking place in accord with global trends in educational and skills provision on the basis of equality of opportunity or inclusiveness (Fejes and Nicoll, 2008). *From Exclusion to Inclusion*, the report of the DRTF (DRTF, 1999) shows that over a decade ago 8.5 million people met the then DDA 1995 definition of disability. The DDA 1995 (Gravells and Simpson, 2008), (which has been replaced recently with ‘Disability and the Equality Act 2010) claimed that disabled people are twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people (Skill, 2004). More recent investigations in 2007 indicate that approximately only 30% of individuals with LDD engage in employment. As mentioned above, a meaningful participation in colleges for further education and training can be seen as a significant stepping-stone towards employment in the current climate in which young adults with LDD are currently under-represented in employment (Barnes *et al.*, 1998).

According to Hoult (2006) adequate and accessible training should provide these learners with the knowledge, skills and improved self-esteem, to enter employment. Unequal access to training and inadequate training provision can hinder learners with LDD to participate, learn

and achieve. The Disability Rights Commission states, as a key objective in 2007, the encouragement of people with disabilities to engage in skills training (Fumagalli, 2009).

Recent studies, completed in 2011, show that college learners with LDD constitute between 9 to 11% of all college learners (Valle and Conner, 2011). This steep rise (from 2.6% since three decades ago) emphasises the improvements in provision by further education and training. It points towards the consistency of *systemic factors* (i.e. support from families, accommodating transportation, access, one-to-one flexible learning support, suitability of learning materials), which may contribute significantly to positive learning and training and eventually to successful employment outcomes. These systemic factors form multi-layers of social, physical and andragogic conditions demonstrating the complex, integrative and multidimensional features of an ‘inclusive’ college learning environment which can either hinder or enhance the learning experience of learners with LDD (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998: 5).

Colleges have become ‘inclusive’ (Morgan, 2000; Van Kraayenoord, 2007) because of the systemic efforts of parents and advocates who created continuing and sustainable ‘inclusive’ post-secondary educational opportunities (Hughson and Uditsky, 2007). ‘Inclusive’ colleges are a major step towards demonstrating an institution’s ability to respond *to* learner needs or demands instead of focussing on learner’s disabilities (Avis *et al.*, 2010; Nicoll, 2006). Student support is managed and funded in a variety of ways in different college settings. The provision of arrangements should be established onsite and be available as part of the college organisational capacity to support the social inclusion and integration of learners with LDD.

To summarise, learners with LDD can be included in further educational colleges in various ways. Colleges should be flexible and have a learner entitlement statement which reflects the individual learning needs and circumstances of learners (Gravells and Simpson, 2008). Most colleges have a special education programme for learners with LDD and support staff to facilitate the inclusion of post-sixteen learners with developmental difficulties. College LSAs play an enormous role with each learner and their family to enable inclusion (Al-Ghani, 2011; Hughson and Uditsky, 2007).

At this point we need to have a closer look on what is meant by learning support within ‘inclusive’ provision. The next section explores learning support provision within FE. Effective learning support is a key systemic factor in a meaningful education for post-sixteen learners with LDD which is why the work and professional development of LSAs’ who supported these learners is fundamental to this research.

Learning Support within Further Education

We have seen earlier that according to Bines (1986: 40), new approaches to remedial teaching brought structural changes which meant the implementation of (then) a newly redefined ‘support for learning’. She argues that new approaches ‘avoid making distinctions between learners on the grounds of imputed ability’ (1986: 22). Although Bines’ historical writings mainly refer to teaching and support in schools, her work signified the change in terminology and marked the beginning of ‘learning support’ as it is understood today.

‘Learning’ and ‘support’ involves personal coalition and engagement from both the teacher (and LSA) as well as from the learner and activities should, therefore, take the form of teacher-led discussions (Nind, 2007). A Further Education Development Agency (FEDA)

report, written by Green and Milbourne (1998: 9) summarised the results of a study carried out by the managers of eight colleges on their different approaches to learning support. This report defined learning support as, ‘any activity beyond a college program’s prescribed content that should contribute to individual students’ attendance, retention, learning, and achievement’.

Further to this Benjamin (2002: 93) argued that, when working amongst older children on the brink of young adulthood (year 11), the academic support role has taken a backseat to a more pastoral ‘caring’ role during which workers needed to be seen as actively caring for the needy. In 2004, a national, large-scale learner survey in colleges completed by the LSC, offered an insider’s view about the significance of the LSAs’ role. ‘The role of the learning support assistant was deemed to be a critical factor in helping students to achieve. Many said that without this support, they could not have coped with college’ (LSC, 2004: 1). The role of learning support in colleges had become vital for learner achievement and success.

From literature, the diversity in meaning as well as the development of the concept of learning support becomes apparent. As seen above, the term ‘learning support practitioners’ describes the roles and duties of the support staff within the context of a college who may be, for example, learning support assistants, learning support workers or learning mentors. As Green and Milbourne (1998: 7) describe,

Learning support encompasses any activity, beyond the prescribed ‘content’ of the college programme, which will contribute to an individual student’s attendance, retention, learning, and achievement. Learning support must involve a college, meeting all the learning needs identified both through initial assessment processes and from continuous review of student progress.

Skills for Business (Skills for Business, 2006) define learning support on a more personal and emotional level in relation to how colleges, within the lifelong education learning sector,

should value all learners as individuals and equals. Equality is the cornerstone of educational practice in all sectors in England, and it is therefore important for all practitioners to foster the same moral principles.

Student surveys showed that colleges have specific strengths in the area of *guidance*. The term ‘guidance’ referred to ‘small seminar groups’, ‘close contact with staff’ and ‘good quality counselling’. It did not refer to ‘learning support’ in the conventional way of learning support delivered by support staff in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, Sutherland (1997) argues that teachers (and by implication their supporters) of post-sixteen learners, must understand the emotional aspect of learning and, therefore, agree to provide pastoral support when and how it is needed.

Bailey and Robson (2004) show that the UK government has failed to put policies in place which would provide a framework for LSAs’ working in colleges. In the course of their research it became apparent that there is insufficient data on LSAs’ in colleges. LSAs’ are not identified or acknowledged as members of staff, nor are their roles in colleges properly identified. In 1994 although ‘learning support’ as a critical role was posited and recommended by Brownlow (1994: 35), there remains a gap in research which exposes the lack of government outlines (Slee, 2010). Little social and academic research has been done that covers this particular category of staff and the roles and work they carry out in colleges in the UK (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Barton, 2010b). There are some fragmented pieces of reporting that refer to learning support and ‘specialist staff’. For example, in 1994, consultations steered jointly by the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and The Staff College in Bristol investigated key issues in post-compulsory (in this case college) education.

This research identified learning support in colleges as a ‘key element’ of inclusive provision (Brownlow, 1994: 29). Furthermore, a survey completed in 2005 by the Learning and Skills Council highlights that individuals with learning difficulties are still underrepresented in college education and that inequality in participation exists (SENET, 2005). The survey also highlighted that continuing education was not making sufficient or effective provisions for people with learning difficulties. These inefficiencies heighten the differences between what is said about ensuring ‘inclusive’ education and what is actually happening at a practical day to day level.

It is important for the purpose of this literature review to fully understand the concept of learning support within inclusive further education by establishing who the learners are that may benefit from support, what are their needs and how support impacts on (i) overall college provision (ii) learner attendance (iii) learner retention (iv) learner achievement (v) potential barriers to learning (and learning support), to name only a few. A statement by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) emphasised that colleges need to take effective action to widen participation and that they should promote equality of opportunity and provide support for individual learners, particularly those with disabilities (SENET, 2005).

Provision in the above sense may refer in part to adequately trained support staff. However, the lack of research in this particular field of education should help to put an end to speculative views (Barton, 2010a). The following two sections explore, firstly, the different cohorts of post-sixteen learners who populate FE colleges and secondly, the role and responsibilities of LSAs’ who support learners with specific learning needs.

Post-Sixteen Learners within Further Education

According to Minton (2005), the emphasis in post-sixteen education is on individualised learning and the support of learners in their learning process. But who are the learners being referred to? Figures published from the LSC show a 13.6 percent decrease in learner numbers in Further Education, between 2004/5 and 2005/6. This means 786 000 fewer learners in adult education (Flint, 2007). Minton continues by saying that, although the ‘cohort of mature students is blurred’ (2005: 214), it is not the distinction between full-time or part-time learners that is important but rather the identification of the major groups within our learner community. According to Flint (2007) the largest group in FE colleges are currently learners on Level 2 full time programmes because these are the main subsidised programmes.

Based on my research it seems that there are three main clusters or groups of learners in FE colleges in the UK. The first are 14/15 year old learners who still attend secondary school. They have been identified by teachers as suitable to embark on a ‘pathway’ transition programme between high school and FE. They are currently enrolled on vocationally related programmes, e.g. early years, health and social care, and will gain a first certificate on completion of programme participation. These young adult learners attend school and follow their high school curriculum. In addition they attend an FE college one day per week. These learners may progress to higher qualifications such as vocational diplomas and national diplomas in the same vocational areas (QCA, 2005).

A second cohort consists of 16 – 19 year old learners who populate the majority of the FE college community, and figures are even higher than in secondary schools (Gray *et al.*, 2000). Learners enrol on various vocational courses such as media studies, information technology, performing arts, motor vehicle maintenance, hairdressing and beauty, early years,

bricklaying, health and social care and electrical engineering. The main focus of these studies is to enhance a learner's practical and basic skills and knowledge in a particular field of interest (Rogers, 1998a).

A final cohort comprises learners who generally enrol in part-time twilight and evening courses or attend college once a week. A more recent approach to meeting the learning needs of this group is to incorporate distance learning or e-learning techniques into their learning, which enhances self-directed study and gives mature or older learners an opportunity to work at their own pace. Courses include the above-mentioned vocational areas such as health and social care, or early years, electrical engineering, and teaching assistant training, and often comprise a national vocational qualification (NVQ) route, rather than the slightly more academic and theory based curriculum, found in full-time taught courses.

Rogers (1998a) states that knowledge about groups is important to ensure that learning goals or aims (objectives that the lecturer plans and sets out to achieve during each lesson), are compatible with those of the group's characteristics. According to Rogers (1998a) the following characteristics define post-sixteen learners. They are adults by definition who are engaged in a continuing process of growth and who come with a package of prior experience and values. They all have fixed ideas and attitudes. If we, as educators, ignore or undermine these, we demonstrate rejection of the person. Inclusive educational contexts should provide integrative provision where a programme's aims and objectives enhance the holistic development of all post-sixteen learners (Minton, 2005).

Rogers (1998a) further argues that college learners come to education with set intentions and expectations as well as set patterns of learning. Whilst some will be interested and actively

take charge of their own learning, others may show less interest and motivation to do so. These general characteristics are very important for educators of college learners (Reece and Walker, 2006). College tutors and teaching assistants need to fully understand the holistic learning needs of post-sixteen learners in order to plan accordingly.

Research indicates that self-perceptions of older learners on their age, dominant concerns, tensions, time perspectives, class and social factors, roles and crisis points play a vital role in the actual achievement of post-sixteen learners. Post-sixteen college learners may further present with intrinsic factors which may influence their learning.

The term Learning Difficulty (LD), first proposed by the Warnock Committee, is a much broader category than learning disability. This is the term used in the UK education system. LD includes speech and language impairments, learning problems arising from sensory impairments, physical disabilities, medical problems or behaviour difficulties, and specific learning problems such as dyslexia. LD is associated with global impairment of intellectual and adaptive functioning e.g. memory recall, reading, number and problem solving. (Bhaumik and Branford, 2005: no page).

Although the terms ‘disability’ and ‘difficulty’ have been linked in discussions about learning, the meanings are very different (LSC, 2005: 2). The term disability refers to a physical, sensory, communication or cognitive impairment, a medical model perspective on the needs college learners may present and which may hinder the individual’s learning. These needs are usually explained in relation to a continuum or spectrum as to how it occurs or manifests itself within the individual, i.e. mild, moderate, severe or profound (Farrell, 2001). Difficulties on the other hand, refer to a wider range of specific learning needs learners may experience as part of the learning process, for example, dyslexia or dyspraxia.

A social model as intervention may be deemed more suitable in the latter to bring much needed changes to the learning environment upon identification and acknowledgement of conditions for learning, for example, the preferred learning styles of such learners (Oliver and

Barnes, 2010). At the time of my research and in line with the college mission on *equality*, learners with LDD had been fully included and they had the option to participate on vocational training courses alongside their colleagues. Below is an outline of LDs which college learners may present with:

- mild learning difficulties usually relating to literacy and numeracy;
- moderate learning difficulties such as physical or sensory impairments, difficulties resulting from being socially or educationally impoverished ;
- specific learning difficulties i.e. dyslexia or dyspraxia;
- severe learning difficulties such as poor literacy and numeracy skills in co-morbidity with a severe hearing, visual, physical or intellectual impairment;
- profound or multiple learning difficulties, i.e. students with limited understanding of language and little or no speech. Communication is often difficult;
- physical impairment, i.e. Cerebral palsy;
- sensory impairments such as visual or hearing impairments;
- language impairment: difficulties in receptive (understanding) or expressive language
- communication impairments i.e. Autism and Asperger's Syndrome; and
- emotional and behavioural difficulties i.e. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADHD (APA, 1994; Farrell, 2002; Gulliford and Upton, 1994; Hughson and Uditsky, 2007; Lynn and Lynn, 2007).

As seen from the above, learner profiles may vary between younger adult learners and more mature adult learners (Estyn, 2004; Sutherland, 1997) and learners with or without learning difficulties and disability (Farrell, 2002; Florian, 2007; Gulliford and Upton, 1992). Whichever the case, the above outline the learner cohorts in colleges who may need the support of LSAs' as part of 'inclusive' provision. Literature so far directly and indirectly,

supports my personal view that LSAs' should be adequately trained to empower them personally and professionally to work as 'teachers' of learning as well as to show an increase in their knowledge of the diverse needs of learners and how to accommodate these. Apart from having adequately trained LSAs' as a condition for learning (and success), additional external factors may also play a key role in either enhancing or inhibiting learning.

Extrinsic Influences on Post-Sixteen Learning

Systemic factors can also influence learning (Reece and Walker, 2005). The social model of disability (Artiles *et al.*, 2006; Carson, 2009; Dyson, 1999) highlighted social barriers that disabled individuals faced. Post-sixteen college learners are often individuals who have failed to achieve in mainstream secondary education and have consequently left school or been excluded from school without gaining any formal qualifications³¹ (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2005). Mackenzie (2006) and Nind (2007) show learning for this group does not necessarily need to lead to employment. Economic factors should not be the predominant drive behind post-sixteen learning. Arguably education needs to aspire towards lifelong learning, and define it as an 'on-going and continuous process' (Kraseman, 2006: 30).

It is from this point of view that it is important for all adult learners to have equal and continuous access to educational provision throughout their lives. According to Mackenzie post-sixteen learners are 'influenced by factors such as where their learning takes place, the communities in which they live, the local and national policies which affect individual's opportunities' (2006: 5). See Figure 3.1 for a visual presentation of how local and national systems may affect an individual accessing education.

³¹ No General Certificate Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications or 'achieved very low levels in the academic curriculum' (Attwood, Croll and Hamilton, 2005: 152).

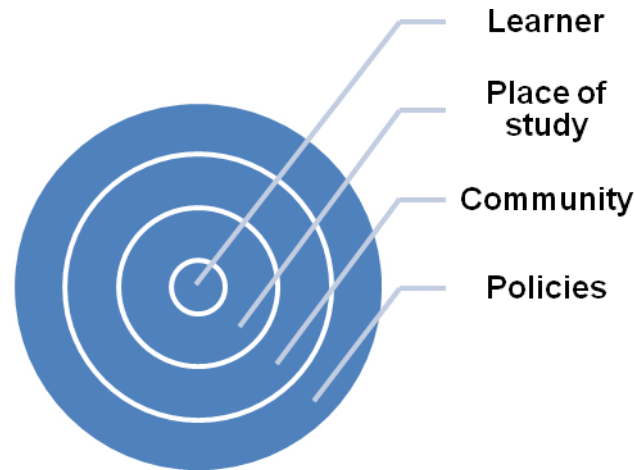


Figure 3.1: Systemic Influences on Post-sixteen Learning

For example, a seventeen year old individual with dyslexia and a statement of special educational needs from school who may have experienced difficulty in achieving GCSE grades, may find it extremely hard to seek ways back into education. Reasons for this may vary, e.g. low academic self-esteem which has led to a low self-esteem, ignorance on how or where to find advice and support, or by being surrounded by friends, peers or family members who do not value education (Rogers, 1998a).

In the case of an individual with profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) in post-sixteen education, the educator needs to foster learning that is meaningful and transformative by being active and interactive (Mezirow, 2000). He or she needs to enable creativity, encourage dialogue through good communication, and foster emotional engagement by being warm and nurturing. In other words, for post-sixteen learners to learn and achieve, educators need to understand adult learners in the context of a greater totality and interrelation of systems and foster transformative learning. Nind argues that lifelong learning involves a 'coalition' between the lecturer, learner and learning situation. (2007: 113).

According to Duncan and Duncan, studies show that ‘the breakdown of the traditional family model contributes to the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) of many British youngsters today’ (2007: 23). Duncan and Duncan argue that it is the ‘resistance of staff to give up’ (2007: 25) and perseverance on their part, that has brought real change to the lives of socially and emotionally challenged young people when attending vocational skills training at colleges.

The above-discussed theory highlights key aspects of or conditions for ‘inclusive’ colleges and a focus on learning provision and the post-sixteen college learners. The next section explores LSAs’ and the role they play within inclusive FE college provision.

Role of Learning Support Assistants within Further Education

Support staff members are given different names in different colleges according to the role and duties they fulfil. Titles, from the literature, include, learning support workers, learning support mentors, special needs assistants and sometimes learning coaches (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010). ‘Learning support practitioners’ is the terminology generically used in the first draft of the NOS and it refers to ‘all practitioners involved with providing learning support within a learning context and directed by a teacher’ (Skills for Business, 2006: 2). Where I worked and conducted my research, the term learning support assistants or the abbreviation, LSAs’, was used to identify this group of support workers. According to Hryniewicz (2007), LSAs’ work with lecturers/tutors in inclusive college classrooms to support the teaching and learning of post-sixteen learners, including those with LDD.

A debate currently exists in the literature over whether one-to-one LSA support actually makes a difference to learners with LDD. For example, Liberman (2008: 37) comments on

‘supported education’ in terms of college learners with psychiatric disabilities being fully integrated with non-disabled learners. According to Liberman (2008), LSAs’ should support learners with mental health needs together with a small number of other learners. Support should include assistance with: developing educational goals and plans; college applications; registration; taking notes in class; developing participation in class; requests for time with tutor; developing good study habits; obtaining extra time during examinations; trouble shooting and liaison with other college staff (Liberman, 2008). (See also, Weaver, 2008).

Critically, Cigman, (2007) suggests that one-to-one untrained LSA provision is usually of no help at all to learners with Autism. She argues that for learners with Autism to actually make educational progress, highly organised classrooms with skilled and experienced educators to provide adequate one-to-one teaching are needed. The same argument is true for LSAs’ who support learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and Asperger Syndrome.

Designate staff who know their role in the process and are trained in the procedures used to manage rage events, to assist the classroom teacher in implementing the behaviour management plan in order to maintain safety and de-escalate form crisis situations (Lynn and Lynn, 2007: 317).

Lynn and Lynn (2007) emphatically advocate the training of educators who support and teach students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and Asperger Syndrome.

Research stresses the fact that ‘well-trained, committed staff’ (Cigman, 2007: 58) are needed and Cigman further argues that it is the government’s responsibility to invest in proper professional development by significantly increasing the amount of training on offer. Descriptions of support staff roles in education echoes the following: ‘Para-professionals such as teacher-aides [...] provide support to all the students in the classroom [...] and ought to be a feature of inclusive education’ (Giangreco, 2007: 46) or as Evans (2003: 32) proposes ‘to create an inclusive society’. Some research acknowledges that learning support in colleges

may promote teaching and learning. However, until now it has failed to produce substantial outlines of the duties and responsibilities of LSAs' in classrooms ('lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities') (Russell *et al.*, 2005: 176).

Giangreco and Doyle (2007) published a chapter in Sage's Special Education Handbook which includes a discussion on appropriate roles for supporters of the learning of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Although this refers to staff in schools, we can draw correlations between how the role of the TA in schools has developed in a similar way to LSAs' in colleges. According to their research, school classroom assistants were initially employed in a capacity in which they did not provide any direct support or instruction with learners.

Clayton had a strong opinion on the potential 'teaching' of unqualified people (Clayton, 1993: 2). Due to the steady increase of learners with difficulties and disabilities in 'inclusive' settings, it was inevitable that the initial role of classroom assistants would change from 'a pair of extra hands' who supervised areas and helped with materials, to instructing students. This shift resulted in dilemmas for untrained support staff and a new focus arose 'on better training and supervision' (Giangreco and Boyles in Florian, 2007: 434). Roles for LSAs in colleges currently focus more on the personal care and supervision of students during lunch times in cafeterias. The underpinning theory was that a shift in learning support roles would improve conditions for teaching staff.

However, as explained previously there is currently no framework for the employment of college LSAs'. They are still appointed on an ad-hoc basis. In 2006 the NOS outlined the knowledge and understanding college LSAs' ('learning support practitioners in the UK

lifelong sector') (Skills for Business, 2006: 4), must have to be effective practitioners. The launch of the NOS was a welcome move at the time as it shone light on the role and duties of the college LSA and provided a clear description of the specific knowledge and understanding that they must have. This specific knowledge and understanding relates to five domains or areas within LSAs' professional practice: professional values; supporting learning and teaching; specialist support for learning; supporting the planning of learning; and supporting assessment for learning. Below follows, an exploration of these five domains.

Domain A: Professional values

The NOS acknowledges that LSAs' must possess a good set of principles and values to underpin their practice. According to LLUK (Skills for Business, 2006) LSAs must value:

- the progress, development, learning goals and aspirations of all adult learners as well as the experience they bring to learning situations
- learning in the context of its potential to benefit people emotionally, intellectually, socially and economically, and its contribution to communities;
- equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to learners, the workforce, and the community;
- their own practice and their continuing professional development, and demonstrate this by means of reflection and evaluation;
- constructive working relationships with other individuals, groups and/or organisations to promote progress and development; and
- improving the quality of their practice

Domain B: Supporting learning and teaching

LLUK (Skills for Business, 2006) continue to say that the quality of learning support happens in a wider teaching and learning context, including: the programme of learning; the teaching teams; learning resources available. See Appendix K for a visual presentation of knowledge and skills criteria for Domain B.

Domain C: Specialist support for learning

This third domain outlines the role and responsibilities of college LSAs' when providing specialist support. See Appendix L for an outline of knowledge and skills criteria for Domain C.

Domain D: Supporting the planning of learning

LSAs' need to show knowledge and understanding of professional practice. See Appendix M for knowledge and skills criteria on Domain D.

Domain E: Supporting assessment for learning

This domain relates to monitoring and assessment of learner progress and achievement. See Appendix N for knowledge and skills criteria on Domain E.

These five domains entail the professional role and duties of the FE college LSA and form an integral part of the intervention of this research. ELSAP, the professional learning and development programme which I designed for the training of the LSAs' at the college where I worked had these five mandatory units embedded within its content. (See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on ELSAP). However, to fully understand the specific roles outlined in the Appendices and the specific duties and knowledge which college LSAs' should

demonstrate one needs to understand the teaching-learning process within the systemic context of a college for further education.

According to Curzon (2004) the formalization of the teaching-learning process in England's educational culture is based on the understanding that knowledge and understanding are not inherited by each and every individual and therefore need to be acquired and learned. Learning and the process of how new knowledge and skills are internalised and developed can be influenced by various factors including, for example, disability. Teaching on the other hand refers to the facilitation of provision and conditions, with the aim of enhancing efficiency in the 'learning' process. Extrinsic factors, e.g. inadequate provision for learners (e.g. having untrained LSAs') can become a barrier in the teaching process. Educators, including LSAs' in further education colleges, take on the role of educators and facilitators of learning experiences, educational activities and 'formal education' and seek to involve institutions, staff, curricula, programmes, aims/objectives and techniques (Curzon, 2004). According to Balshaw and Farrell (2003), LSAs' work as educators, alongside lecturers and tutors, to facilitate the teaching-learning process.

In addition, Woolfson and Trussel (2005) conducted three studies in Scotland in 2002 to look at the potential effect of TAs' in inclusive schools. The generic nature of their inquiry allows me to draw parallels between educational settings and, from discussion with colleagues, college LSAs' may well have the same or similar effects on the teaching-learning situation. This may include, for example, a positive effect on learner attainment and retention; improvement in learners learning experiences; an increase in the range of activities available to learners and wider participation; contributing to transformative learning by boosting

motivation, a rise in confidence and academic self-esteem; fostering excellent relationships with learners; instilling appropriate behaviour (Woolfson and Trussel, 2005).

In light of all of the above, the term LSA refers to support for the post-sixteen learner, support for the lecturer, support for the curriculum and support for the College. The supportive roles of college LSAs', are interconnected with, for example, biological genetics/maturation and/or environmental factors (lack of policy development, quality of teaching/learning support) within the educational college context, which is reflected in the systemic thinking framework of my social research study. See Figure 3.2 below for my interpretation of the systemic, interrelated role of the college LSA.

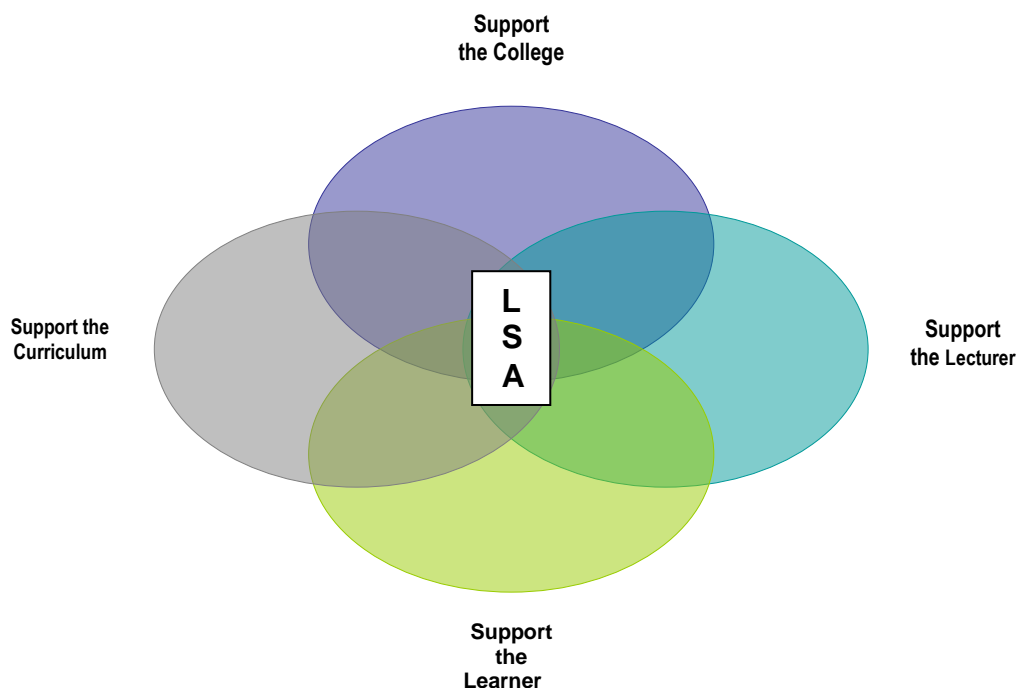


Figure 3.2: Systemic Role of the College LSA

College LSAs' become a vital part of the classroom teaching team that observes, teaches, instructs, demonstrates, assesses, reports and monitors the progress of learners (McLachlan,

2004). The work of LSAs' is usually guided by an inner spirit of helpfulness, kindness, and support and can be mapped against the first NOS domain which is personal values. For most of them, this is a new work experience, and the role, which involves teaching and caring in a professional way, provides them with new challenges.

During April 2004, a survey report on social inclusion by Estyn (2004) emerged in Wales. Core values for social inclusion were set out by the Welsh Assembly, against a backdrop of equality of opportunity, promotion of a tolerant society and valuing diversity. The Estyn report stresses that, in order for Wales to become 'truly inclusive, all young people and adults must be helped to make the transition to work, training or education, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities' (Estyn, 2004: 1). Although the majority of Estyn's survey focuses on the transition process for learners from schools to further education, its main findings emphasise the vital role appropriate learning support plays in enhancing teaching and learning in colleges:

much of the special educational needs provision is on providing learners with the support they need; lecturers, tutors and LSAs set high expectations and take a 'can do' approach that inspires learners to be positive; use of learning support plans³² to help learners focus (Estyn, 2004: 6) (see also, Pring, *et al.* 2009).

From the above, it is possible to conclude that to perform their roles college LSAs' must demonstrate a wide range of underpinning personal and professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities. This highlights the need for adequate and appropriate training for college LSAs' 'to carry out their role confidently and effectively' (Hawthorn and Alloway, 2009). Additionally their performance will be dependent on how they communicate. The following section considers this key aspect of learning support delivery: the role of effective communication.

³² Individual Learning Plans (ILPs') which contains targets (Estyn 2004).

Effective Communication: Key to Classroom Success

Communication plays an integral, vital role during formal teaching situations and is interwoven in all we do and say during the teaching-learning process (Curzon, 2004; Minton, 2005). Fromkin and Rodman state that, in order to make meaning, ‘...when we speak we usually have a certain message to convey and at some stage in the act of producing speech we must organise our thoughts into strings of words’ (1993: 12-13). In other words, communication is the process of an ‘exchange of meanings’ between the teaching and support staff and the post-sixteen learner (Curzon, 2004; Snyman and Engelbrecht, 1996). This concept forms the cornerstone of the teaching-learning process. Poor or miscommunication in the classroom may result in non-achievement for learners, especially for groups at risk such as those with LDD. Light and Cox (2002: 33) argue that ‘learning mainly consists in the ability of the student to decode’ information. They continue to argue that poor decoding³³ on the part of learners may come from poor encoding³⁴ by teaching staff (including LSAs). Schramm’s model (Curzon, 2004) of the communication process (Figure 3.3 below) illustrates that, in order that students may attain ‘top efficiency’, teaching staff need to optimise the shared fields of experience when sending or receiving messages during instruction (Curzon, 2004: 129).

³³ Analysing information received auditorily to understand and make meaning of what has been said.

³⁴ A message ‘put together’ or constructed before being expressed through speech.

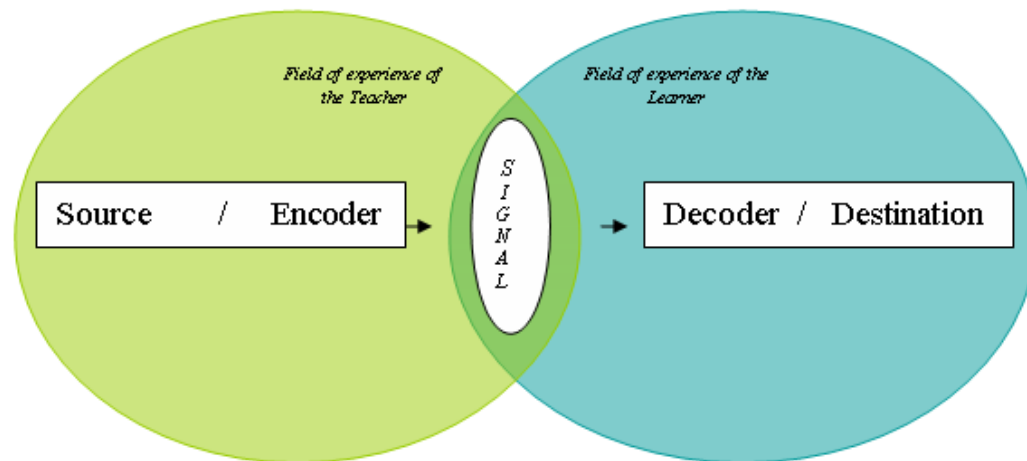


Figure 3.3: Schramm's Model of the Communication Process

Curzon (2004) refers to fundamental key features of the communication process, from the onset of thoughts and ideas, the start of the communication process, to the actual action taken in response to the interpretation of meaning. See figure 3.4 for detail.

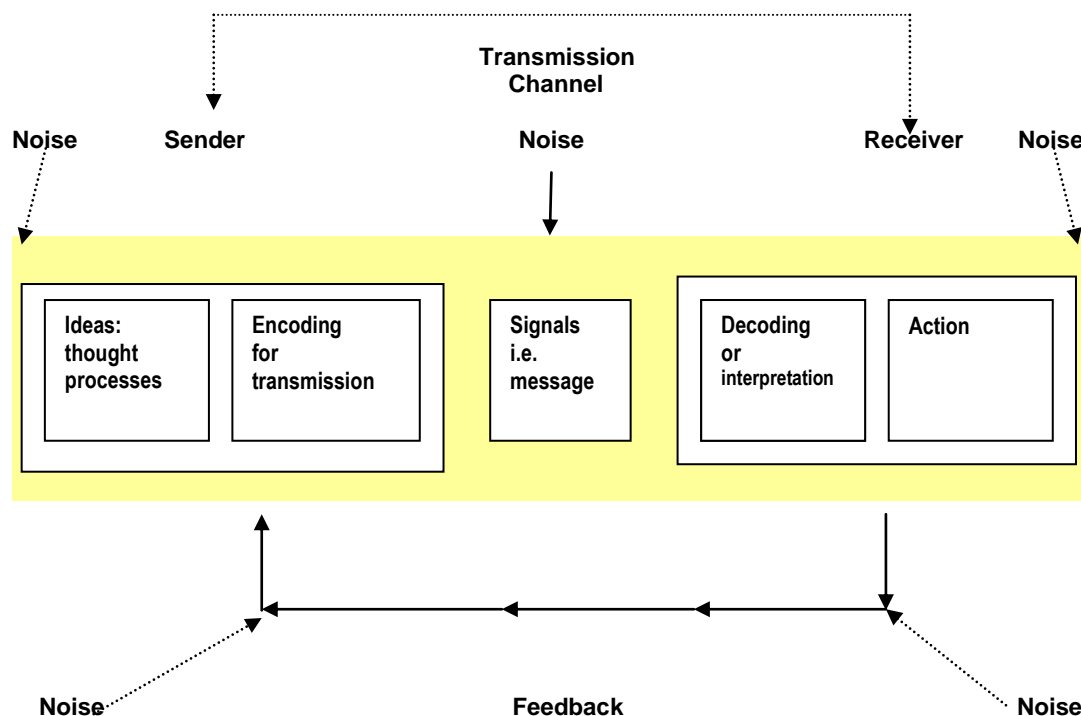


Figure 3.4: Fundamental Features of the Communication Process

From the above it is apparent that an understanding of communication processes in the inclusive classroom situation (how messages are constructed by teaching staff and how they will be interpreted by adult learners including those with LDD) is essential to providing all the elements required to enhance effective teaching and learning. A major challenge is the elimination of noise distortions, such as distractions inside and outside the classroom environment that can hinder the reception of messages for interpretation by learners. Other barriers such as the level of effectiveness and problems of semantics and technique also pose threats to the efficacy of the communication process. Paralanguage or non-verbal communication, i.e. facial expression, posture and gestures, either support or contradict our spoken words (Curzon, 2004; Minton, 2005). See Table 3.1 for an outline of communication problems and ways in which they may arise.

Adult Learner with LDD			
Difficulties caused by: Nervous System	Difficulties caused by: Developmental History	Difficulties caused by: Language	
Brain	Motor dev.	Basic Linguistics	
Senses	Psychosocial dev.	Language (speech)	
	Listening skills dev.	Receptive:	Expressive:
	Language dev.	Hear	Talk
	Speech dev.	See	Sign
		Listen	Write
		Read	Braille

Table 3.1: Communication Difficulties in Learners with LDD

For example, an adult learner with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) may have a communication difficulty due to a neurological difficulty where the blood supply to the

frontal inhibitory system around the third ventricle of the brain is insufficient, causing the hypothalamus to become overactive, causing ADD (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 1996).

An example (from the second column) of difficulties that may arise from the developmental history of an adult learner is the ability to listen. Good listening skills are the basis of learning³⁵, and achievement is dependent on these listening skills. Misunderstandings caused by a learner's poor listening skills can prevent him or her from making progress. Poor listening skills can be the result of a variety of factors, e.g. aggression, obstinacy and attention deficiency. Learning support by LSAs' should entail the learner being made aware of his or her listening problem so that various strategies can be used, e.g. identifying general sounds, associating concepts, and developing strategies for remembering, in order to enhance the learner's ability to listen.

Furthermore, post-sixteen learners who are learning in a second or other language may have difficulty with receptive³⁶ as well as expressive³⁷ language that hinders their ability to learn. Bloom and Lahey (1978: 4) argue that, 'a language is a code whereby ideas about the world are represented through a conventional system of arbitrary signals and communication'. A person can easily take these key concepts i.e. code³⁸, ideas³⁹, system⁴⁰ for granted in relation to communication when we are able to speak a language. LSAs' need to be extra vigilant when preparing lessons and materials for learners who are speakers of other languages. Teaching and instruction will have to be very descriptive and stimulating, emphasising new vocabulary and basic knowledge, using simple sentences and explaining language rules.

³⁵ Listening skills are also important for good speech and reading, in other words, basic skills for learning.

³⁶ Refer to the form or language, vocabulary that makes up meaning or semantics.

³⁷ Refers to ability to speak, pronounce and articulate words and sentences to hold a conversation.

³⁸ A code represents something i.e. BOOK.

³⁹ Meaning of a word needs to be established, experience of the relationship between words are important e.g. BOOKS ARE IN A LIBRARY.

⁴⁰ Language is a system governed by rules, i.e. rules on word order: subject, verb, object (for a simple sentence).

LSAs' would probably benefit significantly from receiving training in effective communication.

In summary, teaching and learning is virtually impossible without effective communication in the classroom, and the effect learners and those with LDD may suffer as a result of ineffective communication in the classroom is potentially catastrophic. Getzel and Wehman (2005: 209) state that training events in colleges are the most common method for delivering information and training to teaching staff. Accordingly, in this study I developed ELSAP (and specifically Unit 03) as an intervention for college LSAs' to meet the particular training need of communication.

As part of the theoretical fields that underpin this research, the next section focusses on the professional learning and development for college LSAs'. What does it mean? How is this important? How does it happen or not happen? What can be done?

The Concept of Professional Learning

Education sees professional learning as a way to keep up with the demands of a rapidly changing world. Educational professionals, in this case LSAs' who work alongside their tutors and lecturers, should therefore demonstrate integrated professional learning activities. These should be embedded in a work-based context and aimed towards these trends in adult or lifelong learning. Professional learning can, therefore, be described as focussed and integrative action learning for professional growth and development with an emphasis on the processes of learning (actions) being equally important to the content of the course. Conditions for learning are vital as they can hinder or enhance the individual's growth and

development (Boud and Solomon, 2008; Gravani, 2007; Hoban 2002; Kuijpers *et al.*, 2010; Stark, 2006). McNally and Menter (2009) say that teachers (and by implication LSAs') should undertake learning opportunities which are 'reflective, collaborative, classroom-focussed and inquiring in order to develop a well-informed approach to their own learning'. LSAs' at the college where I conducted my research were not invited to engage or included in professional learning events.

Disability studies show that where staff are well informed, learners with LDD have better and more positive learning experiences. According to Seale (2006), where staff lacked awareness of specific knowledge of the disability and support needed, students reported adverse experiences. Professional learning and development would raise staff's awareness of disabilities and how to support the individual learning needs of such learners (Fairclough, 2008). Seale argues that the way we understand disability will define our support for learners with LDD in post-sixteen education and may have a significant impact on the learning experiences of such learners (Seale, 2006).

To discuss the concept of professional learning for college educators, I need to discuss the meaning of the term andragogy within teacher education with specific relevance to teachers of educators. This will be followed by discussion on a complexity theory for educational change within a systems thinking⁴¹, constructivist⁴² paradigm. Implications of the complexity theory and how it promotes forms of work-based learning as a tool to increase the understanding of learning processes together with knowledge and skills for educator LSAs' will also form part of the discussion in this section. Figure 3.5 below shows the systemic

⁴¹ Considering a range influences and factors on teaching and learning.

⁴² Learning support assistants are practitioners who, through work-based learning, form and construct their own perspectives and views on situations about their practice (the reality of inclusive college classrooms) (McGill and Brockbank, 2006).

influences within an inclusive college, with professional learning at the centre as a tool for educational change.

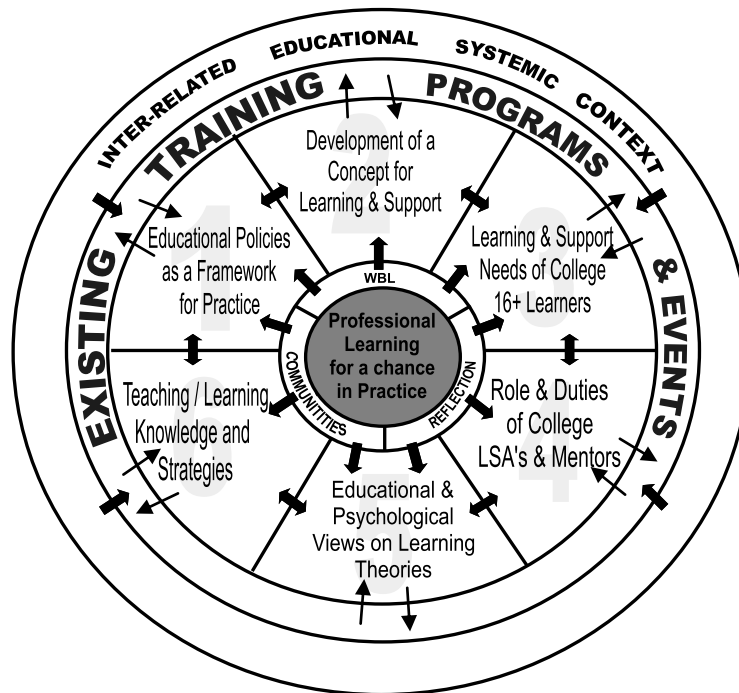


Figure 3.5: Professional Learning as Central Systemic Influence within a College Work Context

Introduction to Adult Learning: Andragogy

Andragogy (as opposed to pedagogy which refers to children's learning) is a term which refers to the art and science of facilitating adult learning (Reece and Walker, 2005). The focus here is on adults who are independent learners, who make their own choices about their learning and who are, therefore, self-directed learners. Through maturity and over time, a human being becomes more self-engaged and this increases the individual's concept of him/herself. This development towards greater independent thinking about one's personality increases an internal locus of control which in turn results in a greater internal motivation and brings about a readiness and aptitude for learning (Hoban, 2002). In line with the theory about andragogy, further personality characteristics such as cognitive abilities to 'construct'

learning through reflection upon action and socialisation, provides a further springboard to launch adult learning (Bruce, *et al.*, 2010). According to Hoban (2002), this view on cognitive development and ability further stresses the importance of favourable personal conditions and situations for learning as well as the acknowledgement of any prior learning which may have occurred. College LSAs' need to undergo continuous professional development events as part of their duties.

Significant developments in the field of adult andragogy, from a simplistic, one-step-approach towards teacher training in the 1960s and 70s to a multi-faceted approach during the 80s which recognises changes when working with adults as a process (Hoban, 2002) posed challenging but interesting demands for the teachers of such adults. Research focussing on why traditional linear approaches in staff development failed to bring about the anticipated change, found that two critical aspects were missing. These were firstly, knowledge of *what motivates* educators to take part in staff development and secondly, knowledge of the *process* by which change in the training of educators usually takes place.

Fullan (1982) came up with a four-stage process which basically identified, as the name indicates, four key phases to bring change to the process of educational learning. These are initiation⁴³, implementation⁴⁴, continuation and outcome. Although the relationship between these phases does not always happen one in accord with the other to produce the same result, it could be argued that change in one area influences change in another. In contrast to earlier linear approaches this acknowledges and explains the holistic factors which facilitate adults learning. This concurs with Hoban (2002) who states that more research has to be done to make significant assumptions on successful efforts for planned change. This is due to not all

⁴³ Also referred to as the adoption phase with factors: quality of innovation, teacher support and government funding influencing this phase.

⁴⁴ Characteristics influencing this stage are: need for, organisation, predictability and practicality of the change.

skills being easily transferable due to the complex and unique nature of adult education environments. Andragogy and the changing processes in relation to teaching and educator learning (in this case LSAs') should therefore, be understood within a wider holistic context.

Perspectives on Professional Learning Processes

Work-based learning has become popular over the last decade as an alternative way of learning (Boud and Solomon, 2008; Stark, 2006) taking adult learners' experiential learning into account (Sutherland, 1997). Enforced by global social changes⁴⁵, underlying traditional educational missions have, in order to acknowledge a more diverse range of modern educational practices, moved towards more liberal views with a need for newer approaches to and methods for continual personal and professional development. New theories have begun to develop (Slee, 2010), such as theories which recognise the individual's professional needs and inspire pragmatic engagement (Steward, 2009). For example, new theories on work-based learning that seek to identify and create new learning opportunities in the workplace for adult learners who have enrolled on educational partnership programmes within institutions (Kwakman, 2003). Boud and Solomon (2008: 47) describe 'key learning themes': in which learning should be identified, added, recognised, and have equivalence to prior learning experiences, in order to be at the centre of this type of approach to learning.

In line with earlier discussion in Chapter 2, work-based learning processes aim to facilitate and promote active engagement with and about learning (Solomon and Boud, 2008). Representative characteristics of work-based learning programmes imply a learner-centred approach at the heart of the work-based learning process through: partnerships between external organisations and an educational institution to launch and foster learning; learners

⁴⁵ Four major forms of social change: 'globalization, informationalism, emergent network' and 'managerialism society' (Bradbury *et al.*, 2010: 15-20).

who are involved are contracted by external organisations as employers; work forms the programme curriculum (also referred to as the ‘received curriculum’ (Middlewood and Burton, 2003: 90). The educational starting point for learners is established when they acknowledge their existing competencies and capabilities and identify further learning they wish to engage in. Learning projects have to be undertaken in the workplace while the assessment of programme learning outcomes will be in accord with national guidelines, in this case, the NOS and levels of LSAs’ working in colleges (Boud and Solomon: 2008).

Steward (2009) is in accord with Boud and Solomon (2008), in arguing that three key elements, build, create and interpret, fit the approach for the professional learning of individuals in lifelong learning. In Steward’s (2009: 4) view, this is a constructive approach for personal and professional development that not only benefits the individual but is also ‘productive and practical’ in the workplace.

From the above, the holistic culture of learning, in which learners, educational institutions, employers and national bodies all share in the curriculum, skills and capabilities, planning and assessment of the planned learning outcomes is apparent. This trans-disciplinary culture demonstrates social collaboration and interrelatedness which is the type of systemic thinking that formed the backdrop against which this study was conducted (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) and within which learners construct knowledge of themselves into an ‘integrated and holistic understanding’ (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003; McNally and Menter, 2009:942). Boud argues the importance of a heightened awareness toward change in order to focus on a change in professional practice, and this too underpins the focus of this study (Bradbury *et al.*, 2010). From the literature, we can conclude that work-based learning dictates a *complex process* of

interconnectivity and a multi-conditional learning situation for educational change, rather than a simplistic set of learning criteria (Hoban, 2002).

Socialisation, dialogue and interaction are requirements or conditions to establish and facilitate a work-based learning culture (McGill and Brockbank, 2006). These terms imply a form of social collaboration and engagement through which learners actively engage and collaborate during the learning process. Characteristics of a social form of learning should include: discussion, reflection, the giving of support, sharing of knowledge, solving of problems, empathy and the offering of feedback (Kwakman, 2003; McNally and Menter, 2009).

According to the literature, social learning is interwoven with action learning which forms part of work-based learning (Fitchman and Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Stark, 2006). Social contexts provide opportunities for face-to-face contact and support the establishment and building of positive peer relations which in turn ensure the forming of a forum for reflection (Boud and Solomon, 2008; Gravani, 2007). McGill and Brockbank argue that members of social, action learning sets, ‘collectively share their concerns, issues and proposed action working that is designed to be collective as well as reflecting upon practice’ (2006: 13). In the following statement, reflection refers to action, which is a key condition for the effective implementation of the action learning process: ‘reflection on practice ensures that the learning is made explicit – the practice is sensed, articulated, and incorporated into the set member’s repertoire of behaviour’ (2006: 13). The humanistic values of action learning promote reflective learning which includes the belief that people are pre-determined to grow and develop; are whole people, good natured and have spiritual dimensions (McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Wald and Castleberry, 2000).

In my research, LSAs' who became adult learners formed a professional learning community (DuFour *et al.*, 2006; Vescio *et al.*, 2008) to engage in different forms of reflection during knowledge and understanding sessions, before 'emergent practice' (McGill and Brockbank, 2006:95; Tummons, 2007). Accumulative meaning about practice, before, during and after practice, is being constructed through the vehicle of action, thinking and being. According to Tummons (2007) it is the relationship between reflection and the construction of professional knowledge which is vital for learning. These conditions promote staff educational development, in this case LSAs', to open themselves up to transformation (McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Mezirow, 2000; Schön, 1983) to construct new knowledge that may bring about a change to their practice. The following section describes theoretical influences on professional learning for adult LSAs'.

Psychological Theories on Adult Learning

How do people learn? We all learn in different way with some having a preference for a particular style of learning and teaching (Scales, 2008). Over time educational psychological developments have influenced the teaching and learning processes for adult learners. They have also influenced the ways in which we think about adult learning. *Behaviourism* is based on experiments that were initially conducted on small animals. These showed that learning can occur at an unconscious level without explanation, prediction or control (Curzon, 2004; Sutherland, 1997). The idea that the acquisition of new behaviour can gradually take place in a routine way, and that we can learn 'by receiving stimuli from our environment that provoke a response' (Rogers, 1998a) ignited a debate about its possible use for classrooms.

Behavioural approaches to learning are still common today and are referred to as 'instrumental teaching', whereby adults should be able to demonstrate what they can do at the end of a module or programme (Sutherland, 1997: 71). In this case behavioural outcomes are

highly measurable, and are targeted towards results (Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003). A behavioural concept also underpins the effective practice of LSA practitioners through facilitating work-based learning for the construction of new knowledge, skills and capabilities. Neo-behaviourism further demonstrates that motivation is the vital element in encouraging learners to act or behave in accordance with their own expectations (Curzon, 2004) and to achieve specific goals. Skinner believed that behaviour is largely controlled by the environment. For example, ‘systematically designed instruction’ and ‘positive reinforcement’ are still being used in lectures to feed into positive learner behaviour (Curzon, 2004). The influences these neo-behaviourist approaches had on teaching practice were positive in the way that teaching staff need to be organised and in that they systematically provide predictable learning experiences. For example, teaching staff, regardless of which section of education they are working in, have to produce schemes of work and lesson plans with clear objectives on how they intend to meet the needs of their learners.

Cognitivism according to the Gestalt theory is the ‘emergence of insight’ (Curzon, 2004: 83) in a learner’s mind. In the case of mature learners, ‘insight’ can be either a sudden arrival as smaller integrative parts are instantaneously understood in relation to a greater totality, or it can be that first indication that the ‘penny is dropping’ in relation to a longer term development such as the development of a point of view. Features of the Gestalt theory according to Curzon (2004) are that the solution to a problem comes suddenly, it can be repeated subsequently, and it can be retained for long periods of time and be transported to problems with similar basic features, hence generalized insight which is equal to understanding.

In line with Curzon, Entwistle and Entwistle in Light and Cox (2002: 51) agree that 'understanding is best seen as more of a cognitive process' in mature learners (in an effort to move away from traditional behaviourist approaches). They identify five forms of conceptualisation that build on each other hierarchically, starting with A, 'limited to grasping material presented directly by lecturer or through required reading', to E 'where the student independently and actively develops his or her own structures and extends the breadth of their material across topic, course and discipline' (Light and Cox, 2002: 51-52). For this understanding to materialise, 'conceptions of learning' as described in Light and Cox (2002: 52), indicates a clear distinction between concepts being reproduced and concepts being transformed at a later stage.

Transformation indicates a deeper approach to learning which may even go beyond the cognitive, entailing a 'developing as a person' and embracing personal characteristics. It refers to problem-solving and thinking skills. Learning as transformation is a cognitive adult learning theory (Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003) currently still under development by Jack Mezirow:

Transformation Theory shares the normative goals of the enlightenment of self-emancipation through self-understanding, the overcoming of systematically distorted communication, and the strengthening of the capacity for self-determination through rational discourse (Mezirow, 2000: xiv).

Transformational Theory makes meaning out of the learning process. It creates a structure of meaning (educators have to support learners in the provision of a frame of reference for gathering a clear perspective of the context and nature of information during the teaching-learning process) and learning may occur 'by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind' (Mezirow, 2000: 19).

Learning for transformation involves weaving together ‘sources, nature, consequences of taken-for-granted assumptions into critical awareness’ for the adult learner (Mezirow, 2000: 195) to construct new knowledge. It refers to a *cognitive phenomenon* which occurs when learners restructure perceptions and formulations in relation to problem solving. Feelings, cognitions and attitudes will enter these perceptions which can result in sudden solutions that will show how learners understand issues. The significance of this theory to adult learners’ learning and thinking can be summarized as follows:

- problems may encourage learners to become productive thinkers, to apply existing problem solving skills in order to deal with a problem;
- confronting learners with new problems enables them to apply more specific solutions through the process of thinking; and
- to think requires learners to ‘reorganise’ their perceptions to fill in potential gaps that may exist when applying solutions to problems.

The significance of the cognitive theory for learning is that it considers learners to be actively or pragmatically developing knowledge while applying information. Learners can therefore never be seen as passive in their own learning experience for they are continuously constructing and applying their mental skills. This cognitive approach to learning echoes the key characteristics of work-based learning which underpins this study.

Social Learning Theory originates in research undertaken by Albert Bandura (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). He began by drawing on both cognitive and behaviour perspectives; for example, another person’s behaviour can act as a stimulus for learning; and then moved on to wider issues such as personal factors that may influence learning and performance, model effectiveness, reward of the model and reward of the observer (in this case, the adult learner). These issues mostly applied to vicarious learning in which a learner observes someone else

without their overt participation and enactive learning where a learner learns from the consequences of their behaviour. Both modes of learning draw on the cognitive capabilities of learners, for example, the ability to symbolise (this process helps adult learners to form internal cognitive codes from experiences), and the capacity for forethought (where adult learners anticipate the future, set goals, plan and carry out intentions). Other important capabilities include techniques like self-regulation (adult learners behave in a way that pleases them to the point where they self-reinforce) and self-reflection (this leads to self-knowledge where adult learners have knowledge about their own effectiveness in certain circumstances) (Jarvis *et al.* 2003; McCown *et al.*, 1996).

The influence of social learning on adult education poses additional questions about the cognitive processes and the ability to construct new knowledge from them. For example, roles such as attention, retention, production, and motivation play an important role during observational learning. This is the way in which knowledge is constructed from this type of learning. According to Jarvis *et al.*, (2003) this type of learning is liberating. The above literature demonstrates that for the professional development of adult learners social learning principles are clearly embedded in work-based learning theory. Social learning emphasises the ways in which adult learners constructively generate or construct knowledge for themselves in an integrative way for a deeper, holistic understanding of their world (Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003).

The humanist approach within learning focuses on learners as human beings with feelings and emotions such as dignity and self-worth that may influence the way they learn and eventually realise their full potential, or reach a state of self-actualisation as described by Abraham Maslow (See Figure 3.6 below). Maslow's hierarchy of human needs helps us to

develop a holistic understanding of ‘the adult learner’ as a whole person (Skinner, 1948 in Sutherland, 1997). At the base of the pyramid are the learner’s basic physiological needs, i.e. the need for food and shelter must be satisfied to be able to move on to the next level of the pyramid. This level is the one at which safety needs such as protection and security are met. The third level entails social needs and the importance for all learners to belong and be part of a group. The fourth level in Maslow’s pyramid shows the need for self-esteem, a need to feel worthy, recognised and to have a sense of prestige. This leads to the top level when a learner may potentially realise his or her full potential and self-actualisation may be reached.



Figure 3.6: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs

According to Maslow, it is the role and responsibility of all teaching staff to ensure that learners (including adult learners) are exposed to a range of experiences that promote internal cognitive growth and development to enable self-fulfilment or self-actualisation at the top level (McCown *et al.*, 1996). Maslow continues by emphasising the significance of intrinsic learning. Trainers need to utilise the given curriculum and plan their schemes of work for adult learners to gain new knowledge through insight rather than repetitive learning of facts. Adult lecturers become facilitators of their self-initiated learning by encouraging

independence, creativity, self-reliance and participation. Adult learners must know that the aim or goal of their lessons is their learning. They need to have their attention aroused by what they are about to learn, and they must have a clear and verbal explanation of the teaching and learning process to help them feel part of the process and be fully motivated.

Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is a learning theory that highlights areas of opportunity between students' actual development and potential development. Actual development refers to learning that a student can gain unaided and in an independent manner in contrast to potential development where learning and problem-solving is maximized through the help and support of a learning mentor who provides guidance (McCown *et al.*, 1996). LSAs' who become adult learners should seek guidance from their learning mentors and peers to enhance their learning experience.

Educators working with adult learners have a vital role to play in supporting the development of processing information during the teaching-learning process, for example: to support the increase of attention; to support the acquisition of knowledge through increasing learners ability to solve complex problems; to enhance short-term memory until automaticity of retrieving such information is achieved and to monitor cognitive processes (learners ability to think, plan, attain automaticity and problem solving strategies) (McCown *et al.*, 1996).

The above concludes a discussion about the development of theories that influence adult learning and also our 'inclusive' practice within andragogy. The following concludes this chapter on the main theoretical fields which provided the knowledge, information and insight which underpinned my research on disability education.

Conclusion

I have broadly discussed theoretical fields which underpinned and guided this research. The first major field, educational policy development, resulted in LSAs' being recruited to work in colleges to support learners with LDD who were previously excluded from mainstream education. We have seen how a move from a linear (medical model) remedial approach to teaching and learning changed over time towards a more inductive social model which celebrated diversity in learners and focussed on what learners can do (Bines, 1986; Carson, 2009; Dyson, 1999).

This knowledge heightened conditions for learning, which is a focus of this research: that is the role learning support plays in 'inclusive' college settings and the key role LSAs' play to widen participation to provide equality for all (Booth and Ainscow, 2001; DES 1978; DfES, 2001; DfES, 2004). From this we have seen that theoretical fields overlap with each other, that they are embedded within micro, meso and macro layers and that they interact in a reciprocal and dynamic manner. This manifestation reflects the 'messy' (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011) nature caused by the uncertain and unpredictable environment of the college context in which LSAs' work and train. For example, some policy development refers to the NOS for LSAs' (micro level) and the five required domains outline the essential knowledge and skills LSAs' (personal and professional characteristics on a micro level) must demonstrate in their work. Critically, I found that no training framework (on national macro level) is in place for the professional learning and development of LSAs' to develop their own knowledge and skills. I have argued that for LSAs' to be efficient in their practice, they need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding (in accord with the NOS) about the needs of the post-sixteen

learner with LDD that they support in order to be aware of effective ways to communicate and support them.

In summary, this chapter has highlighted the limitations which ‘slow-to-emerge’ policy development had on the professional development and training of college LSAs’ who often work in challenging inclusive college scenarios with no or little relevant experience, knowledge or training. A professional development intervention, in accordance with NOS, implemented as work-based action and reflective learning over a prolonged period of time to allow systemic interaction and influences, should increase the personal, professional and academic knowledge and skills of LSAs’ to ensure educational change within their classroom practice (Hoban, 2002).

Chapters 2 and 3 both help to inform epistemological decision-making about the research process: design, methodology, methods and data analysis for interpretation. In Chapter 4 these research processes will be fully investigated and discussed. The sequence of chapters in this thesis does not necessarily reflect how processes occurred. The research process did not happen after everything else, but in parallel with the development of ELSAP and the review of the literature. It was a cross-insemination of information and actions. This research was conducted in ‘real world’ conditions, prone to constant change and needing flexibility to accommodate constant uncertainty and unpredictability (Cohen *et al.* 2011). I will explain more about *change* and how it influenced decision making about the research process at the introduction to Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research arose as an educational intervention in a genuine effort to provide specific and relevant professional training for Learning Support Assistants (LSAs') to improve their knowledge and skills in order to change and improve their practice. Prichard and Trowler (2003: xv) argue that 'the best research comes from practitioners who are 'close to the action'. Their research often arises organically from their work and is also more likely to make an impact.

At the time of the study, none of the LSAs' who worked alongside me (and later became the ELSAP and research participants), had relevant teaching-related experience or qualifications. McMillan (2008), Cohen *et al.*, (2011), Rossi and Freeman (1993) and Wright Mills (1959), argue that social and educational research often derives from a need or expectation on the part of the investigator to bring about positive change or correction. My experience and knowledge from working in colleges over the last decade prompted me, as discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 to develop and implement a professional development training programme as an intervention for untrained LSAs'. This aimed to enhance and benefit their practice by increasing their knowledge and understanding of their role and their responsibilities and duties in the classroom to bring a change to their classroom practice.

Nine LSAs' who wished to become more effective in their role, enrolled voluntarily to participate on ELSAP. All ELSAP participants worked as LSAs' in the college and felt a need to develop their understanding, knowledge, and skills, specifically in regard to their classroom role as supporters of post-sixteen learners with a range of needs. Although it was reassuring that LSAs' were keen to participate in this research, the process was at times difficult and challenging. Bailey and Robson (2004) also experienced practical difficulties during their 2004 survey on FE college LSAs in Northern England. The lack of sufficient knowledge on LSAs', their qualifications, relevant experience, role and duties, a college policy outlining their operations, all confronts any potential researcher within this chosen area with challenges and demands with regard to the research process.

The development of the research process began in 2005/06, when I felt there was a need to produce an Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP) as a systemic intervention to improve the development and practice of LSAs' who support post-sixteen learners in 'inclusive' classrooms in a FE college. Development and implementation of ELSAP took place during a financial climate of overall budget constraints in the college so time and money were of the essence. I therefore had to develop an intervention to run over the shortest possible period of time. Volunteer LSAs' were not going to receive any extra compensation, or permission to attend ELSAP classes at times when they were time-tabled to be working in college. This resulted in ELSAP being implemented over two evenings a week (Mondays and Tuesdays), and delivered over a fourteen-week period between October 2006 and March 2007 (See Appendix H for Scheme of Work (SOW)). The aim of this chapter is to explain the research design and methodology of this intervention as they manifested themselves as tools within the research process.

Research Process

Design

The term ‘research design’ describes the plan or the operation for ‘generating empirical evidence that will be used to answer the research questions’ (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006:22, 117; McMillan, 2008; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). It describes how the study was conducted, what procedures and processes were used with the intention of generating the most credible and trustworthy conclusions (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995; Mouton, 2001). Yin describes research design as ‘an action plan for getting from here to there’ (1984: 28). Moreover, Cohen *et al.*, (2003: 73) suggest that research design is ‘governed by the notion of fitness for purpose’. The above authors, in line with others, such as Scott and Usher (1999), state that research is designed to provide knowledge about the social processes and should be an organised plan to explain or explore a specific problem or situation. Results from these explorations should contribute knowledge to support a better understanding of the nature of a specific problem or situation, so that we may create a better and more controlled social environment (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Denzin *et al.*, 2008).

Taylor (2002:1) describes the characteristics of qualitative research as ‘wide ranging’ within different cultures, traditions and disciplines. According to Taylor (2002), Coffey (1999) and Cohen *et al.*, (2011) explorative research should provide rich text about the social lives and aspects of people. Key features include observing people’s lives and human experience. This type of research should be inductive and aim to bring change to processes (Coffey, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Taylor, 2002). Taylor’s (2002) debate reflects the situation as it occurred in the college where my research was conducted. That is the social systemic college context within which untrained LSAs’ work, train and learn.

Further to this, Cohen *et al.*, (2011) states that action research within an educational context can concern itself with the continuous professional development (CPD) of teaching staff. As explained in Chapter 1, I decided that an action research design was the most suitable choice for my research which aimed to unpack and explore the practical, social and moral dilemma and experience of these ‘quasi’ professionals who received limited help and support from their class teachers due to time-tabling constraints.

As a result, classroom situations (critical incidences) developed which hindered the teaching-learning process for learners, especially those with LDD. Importantly for my research Robson (2002), Creswell (2007), and Yin (1993), say that social research should aim to find out what is happening with regard to a central phenomenon, in order to address questions and generate ideas for future research. Moreover, with regard to the social phenomenon the design of a study should seek new insights, and assess the phenomenon in a new light and within its real-life context. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) and Mills (2000) both emphasise that research in the field of education, especially at classroom level, is best conducted where the researcher can observe and record facts in a relatively uncomplicated way (Benjamin, 2002; Willis, 1978).

It was important to me, as the researcher, that the mode of investigation was compatible with key features of an explorative action research design. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2010: 1) action researchers ‘are competent to offer their own cogent explanations for practice’. As noted above, this research was practice-based and involved itself with learning and the improvement of practice. It combined ‘action’ and ‘research’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). LSAs’ collaborated through participation in ELSAP to increase their understanding and knowledge in order to improve and transform their practice.

Importantly, and in line with the characteristics for this type of design, action research emphasises the values base of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for LSAs' in FE stresses, in their first domain, the importance of bringing personal values to their classroom and practice (Skills for Business, 2006). Choosing action research, was essential to this research as it recognises the importance of educators (LSAs') working from a moral compass or set of principles and what is valuable and important in their practice, (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). For me, this notion links the essence of my research with my choice of design. I felt strongly that it was not right that untrained LSAs were supporting vulnerable learners with disabilities and I questioned the meaningfulness of the education this was providing for these learners. Action research allowed me to deliver a professional development programme (ELSAP) for college LSAs' and investigate their attitudes, learning and practice by applying a range of instruments which included combined elements of ethnography and evaluation.

This mixed research framework permitted me to explore new processes which were not fully understood (Taylor, 2002). In doing so, it 'improves the congruence between practical theories and practices (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 346). It also focussed on the evaluation of the work of LSAs'. Exploration involved reflection, description and the making of meaning of the uniqueness of each of the nine individual participant LSAs' through, amongst others, analysis of their individual responses and accounts⁴⁶ of their classroom role (DLeCompte, Millroy and Preissle, 1992; Coffey, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2003, 2011). Combined with this element of ethnography, evaluative activities focussed on evaluating the practice of LSAs, and allowed me to use a wide range of methods (i.e. self-assessment questionnaires and

⁴⁶ 'holistic use of personal contact and insight, focus on specific context and participants perspective' DLeCompte, *et al.*, 1992: 736).

knowledge tests) for the holistic benefit of the research process of inductive⁴⁷ enquiry and to enhance the constructivist⁴⁸ nature of this research study (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Meyer, 2001; Robson, 2002; Taylor, 2002).

Thus, the interpretive design followed a hermeneutic⁴⁹ cycle whereby what was learned was informed by LSAs' experiences in the field (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Action research, in turn, for all the above reasons, enhanced the validity (legitimacy) of my study (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

In summary, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this study was a result of my experiences of working in an educational setting for adults, and encountering problems related to my role and responsibilities as a full-time lecturer. As part of their role, all educators work towards improving the learning experiences of learners, and aim, with their contributions, to enhance the knowledge and skills of their learners. I developed ELSAP in response to an observed need at the time of this study which was to have qualified LSAs' work alongside college lecturers and tutors to implement 'inclusive' education in a college. Exploratory research questions were developed to generate deeper insight and knowledge of the conditions and situations about the phenomenon or reality (Wright Mills, 1959; Meyer, 2001) that existed in the college in a rural part of England where I was employed.

The phenomenological approach in this educational study therefore emphasises the constructed realities (or ontology⁵⁰) of untrained, unqualified people who acted as learning

⁴⁷ Explorative, 'interpretive approach' (Merriam, 2002: 37) (in this case, referring to the lived experiences of LSA participants).

⁴⁸ Reality is being socially constructed within a positivist paradigm (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995) and the interpretations of the reality can change over time (Merriam, 2002).

⁴⁹ Process 'in understanding others' perspectives and views' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 36).

⁵⁰ 'The nature of reality of a phenomenon' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 33).

support assistants on a daily basis (Denzin, *et.al.*, 2008; Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). LSAs are quasi-professionals⁵¹ who teach, instruct, monitor, observe, and assess, without any formal training and/or relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil these duties (Barton, 2010b; McLachlan, 2004; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Slee, 2010). Robson (2002) describes the responsibility of the researcher in the following way. In order to make the most appropriate suggestions on how desirable change⁵² may take place and for the benefit of the study, the researcher must use their understanding of the phenomenon when considering all aspects of the research process. My knowledge of untrained LSAs', led me to identify the target problem (Rossi and Freeman, 1993), and this supported me in developing an intervention (ELSAP) to enhance and change the practice of LSAs' systemically. The following section discusses the research methodology and methods employed in this research study.

Epistemological Grounding

Mertens (2005) argues that the choice and plan of methodology depends on the nature of the research study, and must take costs, sample size, and key characteristics into account. Methodology refers to the research approach used to employ relevant and trustworthy instruments, i.e. quantitative and qualitative methods with which to explore the research questions (Jones *et al.*, 2006). I decided to select mostly qualitative methods, with a component of evaluation, to explore deeper meaning of processes and change using 'how' and 'why' research questions. Gradamar in Jones, *et al.*, (2006: 2) states that 'the path to all knowledge leads through the questions'.

⁵¹ So-called professionals working as support staff in classrooms alongside college lecturers and tutors.

⁵² 'a constructivist paradigm purports the reality is created as a result of a process of social construction' (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995: 49).

Qualitative methods prompted and enabled me to identify themes, ideas, perspectives and beliefs about the learning processes and practice of LSAs' through explorative, inductive evaluation (Mertens, 1998; Mouton, 2001; Patton, 2001; Taylor, 2002). According to Mouton, data can be collected by a range of methods, and accurate planning and detailed documentation of the process is of utmost importance for the following reasons: to act as a historical record (in the case of this study: sample design, field notes, authority protocols, developed instruments) for the researcher and other potential researchers; and to act as a form of quality assurance (in the case of this study: scheme of work, session plans, attendance lists, key correspondence underpinning decisions made in relation to the ELSAP intervention, participant information, time-line of when and how events occurred during the research process, notes on variables influencing the research process, notes on absences and problematic issues concerning data collection) (Mouton, 2001).

Cohen *et al.* (2011) agree that the generation of qualitative data needs to fit the purpose of exploring meaning. It is also important to consider what type of data is required; from whom it is required; how it will be processed and analysed and how it will be verified and validated prior to interpretation. For the purpose of evaluation (and also to enhance 'reflexivity'⁵³) (McMillan, 2008; McMillan and Schumacher, 2006; Taylor, 2002) I employed the following qualitative methods of data collection as part of the research process.

Observations on the practice and performance of LSAs' were conducted while they carried out their everyday roles in regular classroom settings. Self-perceptions were derived from participant's *written tutorials* which were conducted during the first and last sessions of programme delivery and participation. *Pre and post self-assessment questionnaires* were

⁵³ 'Qualitative researchers combine any of seven possible strategies to monitor and evaluate the impact of their subjectivity' (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006: 328).

completed by LSAs' who became participants on ELSAP. LSAs' had the opportunity to evaluate their own understanding, knowledge, and skills relevant to their role on a numerical scale, before and on completion of programme participation.

Further methods include *end of unit knowledge tests* (or end tests as I refer them in my field notes) which were completed at the end of each programme unit. However, participants also completed one at the start of each unit to provide a baseline of the level of their knowledge in each specific area/topic. End of unit knowledge tests were used as a tool to measure the totality of new knowledge and understanding acquired by programme participants.

Programme Delivery Evaluations were conducted on completion of each programme unit to monitor facilitation of ELSAP. Participants rated programme delivery on a numerical scale. In addition to scoring, participants could also write a comment on how they experienced the programme delivery and their content was interpreted qualitatively.

These methods were used to explore the research questions which were fundamental to the research process. I used research questioning as a lens to achieve a deeper understanding of the conditions and situations beyond the learning processes of LSAs' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), that is conditions that potentially determine professional learning and educational classroom change. The research questions were as follows:

- How can LSAs' benefit from a professional learning experience?
- How can a new understanding about their work change their practice?
- How can LSAs' changed practice make a difference to post-sixteen learners with LDD?
- What supports/hinders LSAs' professional learning and subsequently, their practice?

- What needs to happen to improve future professional learning experiences or interventions for LSAs'?

According to McMillan (2008: 166), research in dynamic educational settings 'is too complex to be narrowly evaluated by one set of measures'. (Also see Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Together, these qualitative methods defined a rigorous interactive process (Mertens, 1998; Robson, 2002) between me, assessors (lecturers and tutors) and participants. I shall now continue by discussing each of the above-mentioned qualitative methods and how they were employed against the explorative nature of the research questioning during the research process. This will be followed by an example from data on each evaluation.

Observations

I conducted observations on the nine participant LSAs' while they were supporting post-sixteen learners in 'inclusive' classrooms as part of their LSA role. Observational methods were used weekly as a form of unobtrusive, formative assessment over a fourteen-week period to monitor and assess post-sixteen learners' progress (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Observation proformas were used to allow key information to be gathered. This included the name of the LSA participant; the date on which the observation took place; task(s) performed by the LSA and the observation comments. Further detailed information as part of the observations included: the delivering of the task; learning support strategies; teaching approaches and methods; as well as information about the use or adaptation of learning materials. The observations (see Appendix P for an example) were scheduled at regular weekly intervals, providing vitally important information on the day-to-day work and practice of LSAs'.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 359) write ‘qualitative field observations are detailed descriptive recordings, presented as field notes of events, people, actions, and objects in setting’. Taylor (2002) says that observational studies in which peoples’ lives are being studied is a common feature of an empirical study. In line with Taylor (2002: 3) my aim in carrying out observations as part of my research process, was to maximise the accuracy of information on the performance of the skills and competence of the nine LSA participants, and by doing this, ‘reduce distortion and bias to a minimum’ (Also see Robson, 2002). During observations I noted post-sixteen learners’ responsive behaviour during a learning support activity and aimed to describe a proper beginning, middle and end as to how effectively learning support was being delivered. In other words, I gathered descriptive information from social interactions and classroom activities while being conscious that learning may still occur in unstructured moments. I also noted the language used by the LSA, and whether it conformed to the language of the intervention programme. Non-verbal communication cues in LSAs’ under observation were also noted: e.g. dress, expression of affection, physical spacing, fidgeting and how they were moving about to get comfortable. These cues were indicative of LSAs’ level of professionalism and skill. I also observed what ‘did not’ happen. If the overall aim of the activity and implementation design suggested that something ought to happen, it was important that the observer should not interfere if these did not occur.

McMillan (2008: 284) explains that the most common way to organise data is to read through the narrative and to look for words, phrases or events that ‘stand out and then create codes for these topics and patterns’. In accord with authors such as McMillan (2008) I based my analysis on scanning for themes, patterns and characteristics of similarity in order to code them for interpretation, across all completed observations.

The risk of my acting as the sole researcher who also conducted the classroom observations on LSAs' added to the potential of being subjective or biased during observations. This is in accord with Mertens and McLaughlin (1995) who argue that a threat to validity in observational studies is one in which the researcher serves as the data collection instrument. I can also argue that for the same reasons, the opposite can be true and because of my specific knowledge of the field of learning support and disability with 'inclusive' further education, data from observations were specific and accurate. However, to overcome the threat of researcher's bias (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995), I can declare that I followed three main strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of my research.

The first is that I based my interpretations of data against the backdrop of a theoretical framework within the area of learning support in FE. Knowledge from data is checked and cross-checked against the knowledge of related theoretical fields. Taylor (2002: 5) refers to this as 'theoretically informed' research. Some direct quotes from LSAs' reflective diaries and tutorials are their exact words. They describe and explain their experiences, behaviour, feelings and attitudes, and these are used as evidence in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, to show that I have accurately interpreted this meaning. I can also dispute claims of biased interpretation on the grounds that I made ample reference to informal and formal discussions that I had with my colleagues about issues related to this research. I made field notes of this input and use some as evidence in this thesis. These were the main strategies I used to enhance the reliability of myself as the sole researcher and also as the observer of participants. These strategies provide hard core evidence of the *real* work and training experiences of LSAs' at the college where I worked at the time of my research and therefore safeguard my overall data from subjective interpretation and meaning. In addition to this I also established 'ground rules' for myself under which conditions for observations were pre-determined. I used

general protocols, for example, the use of an observation proforma to ensure that all observations were recorded in exactly the same manner (Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2004). I also conducted observations within a 20 minute ‘window’ from beginning to end. This ensured that all LSAs were given the same length of time to demonstrate their skill and competence.

The benefit of using observations, in contrast to tests and questionnaires, was that this method does not rely on self-reporting (of LSAs’) and thereby ruled out a subject participant bias (McMillian, 2008; Silverman, 2006). A further benefit was that observations are a narrative account of what took place in a ‘natural’ classroom environment and that LSAs’ practice was observed as it naturally occurred in a meaningful relation with the classroom students involved (Robson, 2002). Additionally, the observations provided a triangulation to back up data and a cross-check on other results and findings, for example through narrative accounts qualitatively reinforcing evaluations completed through, for example, pre and post unit knowledge tests. In this case, knowledge derived from narrative observational accounts, are weighed against the outcomes from other methods used. In using multiple methods, I actively ‘seek to recognize and discount all biases’ (Robson, 2002: 205). An extract follows from a classroom observation on Moira:

Learning outcomes assessed:

Supporting a small group of learners developing Key Skills

Task:

Literacy: writing to inform, explain and describe

Comments on performance:

Moira is new to the group and puts much effort into understanding and learning all the students’ names and individual needs. She assists in handing out learning materials needed for the lesson and speaks to any student not sure of what to do. She positions herself within good reach of all students, making sure they can all reach her or get her attention. She circulated and monitored learning by asking questions. She provides particular assistance with punctuation and grammar, continuously giving help to individuals. Gemma encourages and praises learners and supports their positive social

and emotional development. She seems professional and role-model appropriate behaviour and communication. She speaks clearly and accurately and performs active listening. She applies a range of teaching and support strategies, instruction, explanation, demonstration, prompting and questioning (Classroom observation).

The importance of this example is that it shows what I meant with the earlier descriptions of ‘direct observations’ on LSAs’ work (Taylor, 2002: 238). It also indicates accuracy and to-the-point writing with regard to one LSAs’ performance in a classroom. It shows how I applied my skill as observer to write what I witnessed and how I brought my experience and skill as a trained NVQ assessor to the research process to benefit this study.

Written Tutorials

The tutorials were developed to meet the same function as verbal interviews would have for an evaluator, i.e. as a qualitative method of collecting extensive information about the views of participants on a subject of mutual interest (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Mertens, 2004). However, in this study, they were conducted in a *written* format rather than verbally. The motivation behind choosing to develop the instrument in this way was two-fold: written tutorials are more flexible and adaptable (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006; Silverman, 2006) in that they are less time constraining and do not require additional scheduling and they were, therefore, less of an imposition on the LSA volunteers who had given up their own time with no financial incentive.

Written tutorials (see Appendix Q) as a form of a qualitative method were conducted in the following manner: concise written tutorials were conducted with participants (in the form of a group tutorial) during the first and last sessions of programme delivery and participation. In the first session participants were asked to reflect and write about their expectations of the course/programme. Information from these written tutorials added value to ELSAP, firstly by

ensuring that participants' expectations and course/programme outcomes were in line with each other and secondly for participants to voice their views on their training needs. During the last session participants were asked to reflect extensively on and descriptively write down their views. For example, whether or not they felt they had benefited from taking part in ELSAP, and to make suggestions/changes for future programme delivery. Analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data that was generated from the written tutorials before and after the programme, informed my judgements on the programme design, its content and its implementation for future usage (Seidman, 2006).

The flexible and adaptable manner in which I used written tutorials benefited the data collection process in the following ways. The format lent itself to pre-development. I constructed these written formats prior to the research process which allowed me to carefully consider what information I wanted to extract from LSAs'. I could change and adapt the written formats prior to the research process if needed. The concept and use of written tutorials was pragmatic⁵⁴ and simple, as it was applied at the beginning and the end of ELSAP implementation. It could be conducted in the form of a group tutorial rather than having to schedule individual meetings. I could re-read the information in the written formats during data analysis. Written tutorials conducted as an integral part of ELSAP delivery, enhanced the trustworthiness of information gathered. They were not used as a stand-alone method but formed part of a dynamic research process.

Written tutorials were a method adapted and used in a similar way to other social researchers, e.g. Plummer (2001) who adapted methods to fit an explorative research process in which he, in the same way as myself was the sole researcher. I had concerns about the validity of using

⁵⁴ Practical and realistic.

such a concept. However, these concerns motivated an in-depth research of educational methodology literature, which in time provided me with evidence that although the concept was ‘new’, written tutorials as a method were still within the boundaries of real-world research (Robson, 2002). This led me to feel more confident about employing this method.

A potential weakness of using written tutorials was that they were completed on the first and last evenings of ELSAP implementation. Some LSA participants, who became slightly exhausted by the implementation and research process, posed the risk of having negative views or perceptions due to tiredness. An extraction for Kelly diary on 22nd January 2007, reads as follows:

I feel exhausted today. There’s too much work and studying going on and I think this makes me less tolerant in the classroom I think. Today Stuart is doing a painting and decorating assignment on scaffolding. As he is a mature student, he sometimes thinks he knows better and can be difficult to deal with. If I offer him advice he usually argues the point and tries to tell you you’re wrong. I found the only way around this is to let him do it his own way and then get told by his class tutor that it is WRONG. This makes more work for him but it’s the only way he will learn. Today, feeling rough myself, I just ignored Stuart (Kelly).

This example shows a LSAs’ levels of physical tiredness have resulted in her being less than constructive in her views and perceptions. Kelly’s narrations were usually more constructive compared to the example above in which she explicitly mentions her being emotionally less capable than usual. I could not control this behavioural threat, but hoped that the flexible manner in which I employed written tutorials actively minimized some of this risk. Seidman (1998: 3) states that the researcher can make meaning of participants’ behaviour (in this case, negative views and perceptions) by making sense of the ‘subjective understanding’ which influences these actions.

I applied written tutorials to generate information about participants’ understanding of their experiences. For Seidman (1998: 4) tutorials are ‘the way to meaning’. Below are full

extracts from two written tutorials, the first completed before the LSA commenced on ELSAP and the second, on completion of ELSAP:

BEFORE

This is my expectations on the course:

Hope to gain knowledge to enable me to do my job better and to develop my role. Possibly also to challenge myself to undertake more courses/training to develop my future career.

ON COMPLETION

How has participating on this programme benefited you?

As I have no formal qualifications in this area, it has been valuable to learn new information, particularly about teaching styles, which will benefit me in my job. I have also gained a lot more knowledge about anything I think. This course has given me a lot more confidence and I already feel that this has made a positive difference to my work. It has really made me stop and think about what I do and how I do it e.g. writing the reflective diary.

What changes/suggestions would you make to the programme, if any?

It would have been nice to have had even more time to go into some of the subjects in greater detail, particularly teaching methods and adaptations for supporting learners with disability. (Rose).

In my view, this narrative before and on completion of ELSAP, shows the explicit benefits of using this qualitative method. It is short but descriptive, informative without being long-winded, accurate and subject-related with very specific suggestions on how the programme could be improved. There was very little chance for me as researcher to read subjective meaning or interpretation into these words and sentences and this enhances the validity of using written tutorials and contributes to the overall trustworthiness of this research.

Reflective diaries

Reflective diaries are ethnographic accounts of 'autobiographical experiences' (Coffey, 1999: 127). ELSAP participants were asked to keep descriptive daily diaries (see Appendix R) on their daily practice. They had to reflect in an autobiographical style on their role and responsibilities, how they had conducted their duties, record any problems they encountered

and in contrast, what aspects of their practice went well. The LSAs' reflections provided qualitative data on their experiences and perspectives (Alaszewski, 2006; Mertens, 2004). These diaries were completed over the fourteen-week duration of the ELSAP intervention and were handed in for analysis and interpretation at the end of the fourteen-week ELSAP implementation period. The reason for using reflective diaries as a tool for evaluation was that LSAs', by self-evaluating and reviewing their classroom work and achievements, not only provided qualitative data for analysis in the research process, but additionally that by learning from the process had the potential of improving their professional skills and abilities (Mertens, 2004; Pollard, 2005; Stevens and Cooper, 2009).

The strengths of using LSAs' diary entries was that they were personal accounts; a sequence of regular entries of events; contemporaneous entries close in time to when the events took place which reflected relevant and important events, activities, interactions, impressions and feelings (Alaszewski, 2006). A disadvantage of using LSA diary entries was that it sometimes provided me with too much data and information for analysis. Some LSAs' wrote long, emotional descriptions, with little reference to what the real reasons were behind the problems or difficulties they had experienced. In these cases, entries also lacked a reflective insight as to how a situation could be changed for the better. However, it still remained an excellent source for gathering qualitative information on the real lives and work of LSAs' as part of this research. My challenge was to minimize the risk that diaries could become a tool to show dissatisfaction, and so I often initiated brief two-minute discussions at the end of a session to reinforce the aims of daily entries to generate constructive views (Alaszewski, 2006). It was important that I did not attempt to control how they narrated their views but I needed to minimize general restrictions on journal keeping (Stevens and Cooper, 2009: 5), and in this case, prevent LSAs' writing about other aspects, attitudes or beliefs that did not

necessarily relate to their work in classrooms. There was little more that I could do to ensure that LSAs' took my guidance and stick to the overall aim for writing their narratives, and so this continued to be a minor risk. I found that some LSAs' would be bold and write detailed information, whereas others chose to write very little, almost to the point where their diary entries became insufficient for me to analyse. I could only hope for the best while continuing to encourage them to participate using this method of data collection.

The above is in line with authors Stevens and Cooper (2009) who state that critical thinking through reflective writing, contributes to adult development and transformational learning. (See also Light and Cox, 2002; Mezirow, 2000). Reflective diaries which explored LSAs' individual views on their thinking, learning and practice in the classroom were also used. Below are extracts from a participant's diary to illustrate how LSAs' used this method as a tool for self-reflection.

17th November 2006

The students worked on their IT projects. I moved around the room and helped any students that needed any help. I do feel a bit awkward as I feel that I am not really needed. I come in halfway through the day, so I do not really get to know the students and I don't follow the students through their work, I feel as though I am a new person coming into the classroom each week. I'll probably feel better once I've worked a few more weeks. (Claire).

12th December 2006

I worked with one student with LDD today who has also injured his hand and cannot write or use the computer very well. We had a list of shop items e.g. customer, till, counter, shop assistant, etc. and we had to find out the meaning of each word. The student had not used a dictionary before, so I explained what a dictionary was and how to use it. I found the first word for him to show him how to find a word. The student finds it difficult to read and spell, so I gave him a lot of support i.e. like what order the letters go and sounding out words. Towards the end of the activity the student worked quite well. We constantly spoke about what letters come after and before letters etc. (Claire).

19th January 2007

Today we went into the computer room and used some software. The class tutor explained to the whole class about this new programme that has a picture of a keyboard on the screen. You put our hands on the 'home keys' on your keyboard and copy the screen. It shows you what letters to press. This was a very good programme

and all the students liked it. I had to keep reminding 3 students to keep their fingers on the home keys and not type with 1 finger. One particular student who normally finds it hard to concentrate and doesn't seem to have much confidence did very well. I kept praising him and he was so pleased with his achievements. (Claire).

These examples from Claire's diaries were selected to provide evidence of reflective accounts of her work as it occurred over a prolonged period of time and at regular intervals. In my view, these examples from Claire's reflective diary effectively show the subtle improvement in her performance, skill and level of professional confidence, but most of all, it demonstrates the effectiveness of using this method as an explorative tool (Coffey, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Taylor, 2002).

Field notes

I kept field notes (see Appendix S for an example) in the form of written descriptions and reflections on my insider's perceptions of LSAs', details of the contact and discussions we had, and how I observed them during the research process (Coffey, 1999). These notes were in line with the views of authors such as McMillan (2008: 279) who states that field notes 'constitute raw data'. As sole-researcher I formed an integral part of the research process in this study (Coffey, 1999) so my field notes were organised formal and informal documentations which I kept in a field log, together with all other important data and documentation about the research process. Below is an example of a reflection I noted down after I had an informal conversation with one of my colleagues on the potential training needs of LSAs' and which highlights the importance of my insider's view on the subject under investigation.

I read the written tutorials tonight and realised the needs for LSAs' to do training for their own professional learning and development are even greater. I am not a middle manager in the college structure and did not realise before tonight that LSAs' are not subject to appraisals to review their performance. I did notice that LSAs' were not mentioned on our (tutors and lecturers) training day schemes for CPD days and

always assumed that they had separate events scheduled for them, for CPD. Shockingly, it appears not to be the case (Field notes).

The advantages of using field notes were that they provided additional data on the views and perceptions of LSA participants as and how they occurred. They also provided an opportunity for reflexivity and emotional responses to the research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Robson, 2002). My criteria for documenting field notes were that they were; informal face-to-face conversations where any aspect of ELSAP impact might be mentioned, discussed or questions asked; telephone conversations with LSAs' about their thinking, learning and practice during ELSAP participation; written notes from LSAs' about their thinking, learning and practice during ELSAP participation; written notes from LSAs' on any aspect of ELSAP; and informal discussions with lecturers and tutors of LSAs' on LSAs' changed practice.

I enjoyed the continuous formal and informal opportunities for discussion provided by my research. However, the only disadvantage was that the logging of field notes, despite their usefulness during analysis, was an extremely time-consuming activity (Stevens and Cooper, 2009). To minimise the constraints that this activity required I kept a small pocket diary, in which I noted down any relevant information as it occurred. This reduced the time used to keep notes and of having to re-think what had been discussed at a later stage with the risks of 'losing' or 'changing' relevant information (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995; Stevens and Cooper, 2009).

Pre and post self-assessment questionnaires

I developed and used pre and post self-assessment questionnaires for the purpose of generating data in relation to specific aims (see Appendix T) to measure professional knowledge, understanding and the application of skill of LSAs' before and on completion of

ELSAP participation. I hoped to find a change in LSAs' knowledge and understanding of their role and duties which would be reflected in changes to their practice in classrooms.

The lay-out of the questions is related to the programme's content and coheres with the programme implementation. For example, the order of the questions reflects the order in which the topics were delivered:

- the role and responsibilities of LSAs' (delivered on 21/11/05; 22/11/05; 28/11/05; 29/11/05)
- key principles of education legislation and policies (delivered on 5/12/05; 6/12/05; 12/12/05; 13/12/05)
- barriers to learning/factors that influence learning (delivered on 9/01/06; 10/01/06)

The rationale for having the questions in the same order as the topics was simply that it systematically covered all topic areas which comprised ELSAP content. The specific aims incorporated eight questions each. These questions were aimed to measure participants' professional development.

Questionnaires in this study were therefore written documents, for the purpose of obtaining information (McMillan, 2008). I used questionnaires with rating scales because they were a quick, easy, and reliable way of measuring the views of the participant LSAs' (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). I used a Likert-type rating scale as it is the most commonly used with the benefit of reflecting positives and negatives (McMillan, 2008). LSAs were asked to identify themselves by writing their names and the date at the top of the questionnaires. Identification in this way allowed me to follow and track the learning experiences of each LSA as part of the research process. The disadvantage of this method was that I knew which LSAs' questionnaire I was analysing and this posed a risk of my being biased. However, questionnaires can be used with

success in action research. Robson (2002) provides useful information on the coding of responses during analysis to minimise the possible risks of using questionnaires.

In my research, participants were asked to complete one questionnaire on the first and another on the last night of the programme. Rating scales were coded from one to five (McMillan, 2008: 169) as below, and participants were asked to draw a circle around the most applicable rating:

- 1 Needs improvement
- 2 Satisfactory
- 3 Good
- 4 Very good
- 5 Excellent

The rating scale questionnaire was designed to be quick and easy to complete, while allowing for flexible responses from participants. It also allowed me to draw qualitative meanings from quantitative values between pre and post programme measures (Cohen et al. 2003). Below is an extract of a pre and post self-assessment questionnaire completed by an LSA participant.

PRE

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

regarding my role and responsibilities	1	2	×	4	5
on college policies and procedures	×	2	3	4	5
on theories of learning/curriculum/terminology	×	2	3	4	5
on barriers to learning	1	×	3	4	5
on learning styles	×	2	3	4	5
regarding LDD/classification/terminology	×	2	3	4	5
on educational interventions to support LDD	×	2	3	4	5
on ways to review and develop own practice	1	×	3	4	5

APPLICATION OF SKILL

supporting a 16+ learner	1	2	×	4	5
supporting a small group of identified learners	1	2	×	4	5
link between policies and how I apply my skills	×	2	3	4	5
basic teaching skills	×	2	3	4	5
accessing the curriculum	×	2	3	4	5
using verbal, non-verbal & listening skills	1	×	3	4	5

supporting a learner with LDD	1	×	3	4	5
reviewing and developing own practice	1	×	3	4	5

*POST**KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING*

regarding my role and responsibilities	1	2	3	4	×
on college policies and procedures	1	2	3	×	5
on theories of learning/curriculum/terminology	1	2	3	×	5
on barriers to learning	1	2	3	×	5
on learning styles	1	2	3	×	5
regarding LDD/classification/terminology	1	2	3	4	×
on educational interventions to support LDD	1	2	3	4	×
on ways to review and develop own practice	1	2	3	×	5

APPLICATION OF SKILL

supporting a 16+ learner	1	2	3	4	×
supporting a small group of identified learners	1	2	3	4	×
link between policies and how I apply my skills	1	2	3	×	5
basic teaching skills	1	2	3	4	×
accessing the curriculum	1	2	3	×	5
using verbal, non-verbal & listening skills	1	2	3	4	×
supporting a learner with LDD	1	2	3	4	×
reviewing and developing own practice	1	2	3	×	5

End knowledge tests

End of unit knowledge tests (see Appendix U) are criterion-referenced tests (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Mertens, 1998), which I designed to establish the amount of knowledge learned and retained by ELSAP participants. Short group tests were administered on a pre and post basis (before and after completion of each ELSAP unit) with no change to the tests in order to increase the reliability in this study (Mertens and McLaughlin, 1995). This had a particular benefit in that it shielded the validity of my study from internal threats, i.e. modified construction or conditions associated with the person taking the test.

Each test comprised seven standard questions which covered the subject material of each respective unit. Although college officials were not involved, tests were conducted under the same examination conditions employed at the college, i.e. notes or textbooks were not

allowed in the room and participants sat at individual tables. All participants were allowed the same amount of time (20 minutes) to complete the tests. The majority of questions requested key word or short one/two sentence answers, e.g. ‘name two types of factors that influence learning’ (Unit 03). However, some required more detailed explanations including the use of specific subject terminology and phrases and links to practice, e.g. ‘how do you promote equal opportunities in your daily work?’ (Unit 03) A combination of open and closed questions seemed suitable to measure how much subject knowledge participants had gained in respect of professional practice application in the classroom. I carried out the role of evaluator and, using a pre-determined marking scheme, marked each of the tests which were scored out of seven.

The main advantage of the use of end of unit knowledge tests was that it generated clear and specific scores on highly measurable programme outcomes (Patton, 1997). A weakness of conducting tests of this kind is usually the emotional component of fear of failure. Although this fear of sitting a test, regardless of how brief the tests were, may have posed a threat to the research process there was little I could do to minimise LSAs’ feelings of fear. I encouraged the LSAs’ to have a positive approach to the tests and to have faith in their abilities and knowledge. Below is an example of how one LSA participant answered this test in relation to Unit 04 of ELSAP which related to supporting learners with LDD.

BEFORE

1. *What is Maslow’s famous research theory called?*
Hierarchy?
2. *What does ADHD stand for?*
-
3. *Is Downs Syndrome a physical or cognitive barrier?*
-
4. *Name any two learning needs that learners with Dyslexia will have?*

-

5. *Name any form of alternative communication.*
Sign Language

6. *What does ILP or IEP stand for?*

7. *What is the purpose of an ILP or IEP?*

AFTER

1. *What is Maslow's famous research theory called?*
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

2. *What does ADHD stand for?*
Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder

3. *Is Downs Syndrome a physical or cognitive barrier?*
Cognitive learning need, but can be a bit of both

4. *Name any two learning needs that learners with Dyslexia will have?*
May need some time to write notes, need to have support with writing and reading

5. *Name any form of alternative communication.*
Makaton as a form of British sign language, Braille (Moon)

6. *What does ILP or IEP stand for?*
Individual Learning Plan

7. *What is the purpose of an ILP or IEP?*
An holistic tailored plan to meet individual learners needs. Show adaptations of materials, specialist equipment needs, targets for achievements. Clear about how these outcomes can be achieved. Review date stated as well.

Examples here show the exact amount of knowledge an LSA had before and after she participated on Unit 04 of the ELSAP. Questions were derived from topics which had been discussed as part of a unit which focussed on learners with LDD. In the first test, the LSA achieved 1 out of a potential 7 marks. This indicates that she had very little basic knowledge on the main topics to do with learners with disabilities and this indicates that she could benefit from participating in learning activities to do with ELSAP Unit 04. The second example, which tested her knowledge after she participated, demonstrated a major

improvement in her knowledge in this particular field of learners with LDD. Evidence shows that she achieved 7 out of a potential 7 marks.

Programme delivery evaluations

By completing programme delivery evaluations (see Appendix V) the ELSAP participants were given the opportunity to voice their views about the programme's implementation and about the particular role played by myself as the facilitator delivering ELSAP. LSAs' completed an evaluation on the last session of each of the five module units (see Chapter 5 on ELSAP). The evaluations for each unit were completed on the following dates:

Unit 01	-	28/11/06 and 29/11/06
Unit 02	-	12/12/06 and 13/12/06
Unit 03	-	23/01/07 and 24/01/07
Unit 04	-	20/02/07 and 21/02/07
Unit 05	-	27/03/07 and 28/03/07

Participants had to express their views on programme delivery by answering the following six questions which were aimed to gather information on ELSAP implementation and its delivery in order to determine whether changes were needed for future use of the programme:

- (i) Were the objectives of the training clear?
- (ii) How easy were the training sessions to understand?
- (iii) Did the sessions meet your needs?
- (iv) How useful will the learning/training be in your job?
- (v) Was the trainer helpful?
- (vi) Were the hand-outs/visual aids clear?

Participants were required to tick the most appropriate number on a scale from 1 to 4. Number 1 refers to "most appropriate", i.e. clear, very easy, met needs, very useful, very

helpful, and very clear, whereas number 4 refers to “most inappropriate”, i.e. unclear, very difficult, did not meet needs, not very useful, not very helpful, and not very clear. For the purpose of this study, I again selected and developed a Likert-type rating scale, as it is commonly used with the benefit of reflecting positives and negatives (McMillan, 2008).

Data derived from analysis and interpretation supported the systemic evaluation and was to the benefit of the research process. I did not anticipate any obvious threat to data analysis using Programme Delivery Evaluations, in fact, LSAs’ appeared to be content that I valued their perspectives on how ELSAP was developed and conducted and they seemed keen to participate using this method. Below is an example of a participant’s scores and views on Unit 04 (supporting learners with LDD) as extracted from a programme delivery evaluation.

<i>Were objectives of the training clear?</i>	<i>Clear</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>Unclear</i>
<i>How easy was the training to understand?</i>	<i>Easy</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>Difficult</i>
<i>Did the session meet your needs?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>No</i>
<i>How useful will the learning be in your job?</i>	<i>Very</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>Not very</i>
<i>Was the trainer helpful?</i>	<i>Very</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>Not very</i>
<i>Were the hand-outs/visual aids Clear?</i>	<i>Very</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>Not very</i>
<i>Would you find further training useful?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	×	2	3	4	<i>No</i>
<i>Any further comments?</i>						
Very interesting, useful and relevant.						

The significance illustrated by this data from this type of quantitative method is that it is less complicated and potentially more replicable. It complements the qualitative data accrued in descriptive narratives via observations and field notes (Coffey, 1999). In my view, if this is

used in alignment with the ethnographic narrations described earlier, strengths and weakness of all methods are being balanced out, to provide clear themes and patterns, underpinned by evaluations (as above) for non-biased interpretation.

To summarise, in order to develop all the above-discussed mixed methods of data collection in my research, I followed the guidance of Mertens, (2005: 377-385) by: defining the object and specific purpose of my instrument; identifying the intended respondents; carefully reviewing existing measures; developing purposeful items and revising the measurements.

The above contributed significantly to the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of all methods used for this study. I shall now continue to discuss the procedure and analysis of the raw data generated from the above-explained methods, for interpretation of meaning about the learning experiences, processes and practices of LSAs'.

Data Analysis

According to Gall *et al.*, (2007) and Straus and Corbin (1998), various approaches to analyse data derived from existing studies. These approaches can be sorted into three main categories: interpretive or conceptual, structural and reflective analysis. Choosing the most efficient approach depends on the methods used for data collection, for example in this study, the use of word or written documentation (e.g. tutors written observations, participants' written tutorials and diaries).

During the preliminary stages of ELSAP development, information and data collected from lecturers and tutors was analysed to establish the training needs of LSAs' working in a particular college in England. Implementation of ELSAP commenced on 14 November 2006

and finished on 28 March 2007 (see SOW in Appendix H), covering a fourteen-week period during the 2006/07 college academic time table. A session was held each week on a Monday with the same session being repeated on a Tuesday to allow the participants the flexibility of two evenings on which they could attend. A total of 28 sessions were held, commencing at 17h00 and finishing at 18h30. (See Appendix I for example of Session Plan).

Quantitative and qualitative data was constructively collected, through a range of integrative methods and at regular premeditated intervals (Mertens, 1998). Procedures included the exploration of the impact of ELSAP on nine LSA participants' learning and thinking processes (Yin, 1984). The general aim of data analysis was to gain an in-depth understanding of the information gathered (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, data analysis in this study aimed, through linking data derived from instruments, at showing the *learning* processes that had occurred and how practice was influenced.

Cagne in Curzon (2004: 11) defines learning as a 'change in human disposition or capability, which persists over a period of time, and which is not simply ascribable to the process of growth'. Saunders and Walstad in Curzon (2004: 12) describe learning as 'the acquisition and retention of knowledge and habits of thought in a way that permits them to be employed in a useful way after the initial exposure has been terminated'. With regard to these definitions of learning, the process of analysis in this study was to assess if LSAs' learned from taking part in the intervention and whether new knowledge resulted in a change in their practice.

According to Yin, analysis of qualitative evidence is the most difficult aspect of conducting research because it is not very well developed yet (1984). Other authors', such as Mouton (2001), explain data analysis as the process where data is broken down into manageable

themes, and patterns. According to Cohen *et al.*, (2003: 82), the choice of data analysis, has to be suitable for the ‘purpose’ and ‘legitimacy’ (nature of the data) of the intended use.

In line with the above I applied creative thinking in combination with alternative interpretations and fixed formulas, for example by using quantitative pre and post-tests to compare the amount of new knowledge learned and attained during programme participation. This adheres to Cohen *et al.*, (2003) who debate that data analysis needs to serve the overall purpose of the research process, and thereby promote the validity and trustworthiness of the study. With regard to qualitative data analysis, Babbie and Mouton (2001: 490) argue that there is ‘no one neat and tidy approach’.

I mostly followed a constructivist approach which allowed me to explore (through data analysis) the nature of the reality of this study (ontology/basic belief), i.e. multiple, socially constructed realities shaped by social, political and disability values (LSAs with certain kinds of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, working in ‘inclusive’ classrooms to support learners who presented with LDD). The epistemology in this study, that is how the ‘nature of the knowledge describes the relation between the knower’ (researcher) and ‘would-be known’ (ELSAP participants), underpinned the constructive, transparent and pragmatic approach to data analysis. This included the collection of data in which participants’ descriptive qualitative contributions were expressed and valued, to ensure accuracy and reliable analysis (Mertens, 1998). According to Wiersma, qualitative data analysis is a ‘process of categorization, description, and synthesis where data reduction is needed for the description and interpretation of the phenomena under study’ (2000: 204).

Qualitative data was analysed through ‘content analysis’ and ‘analytical induction’ where meaning was determined by the following: ‘noting patterns; noting plausibility; clustering; making metaphors; counting; making contrasts and comparisons; partitioning variables; factoring; noting relations between variables; building a logic chain of events; in order to give conceptual coherence’ (Merriam, 1998; Robson, 2002). The following explains how I analysed.

I started by reading and re-reading the data, by making comments in the margin, and by carrying comments over to a separate memo. I then reflected on themes, hunches, and ideas. I also noted items that I wanted to look for in a second data collecting activity which involved the same method of analysis. On completion of the second activity, I compared this data with data from the first activity. Later, when I started to analyse all data collected (Miles and Huberman, 1989), I applied a general strategy relying on the ‘theoretical proposition that change may occur’ in the subjects (LSAs’) of the ethnography during and after programme implementation. This proposition acted as a theoretical guide that allowed me to focus on certain data and ignore other (Yin, 1984). The methods used were:

- (i) *pattern-matching* in which a pattern is logically compared to another predictable one, (which also enhances the internal validity of the case study), and
- (ii) *explanation building*, where separate attention was needed to explain the phenomenon because precise measurement was problematic (Yin, 1984).

This explanation building occurred in narrative description in which words and phrases were examined within wider texts (McMillan and Schumacher 2006; Patton, 1997; Yin, 1984). In this study examples of qualitative methods of data collection were lecturer and tutor observations, written tutorials, and reflective diaries. I applied inferences (objective

judgements drawn through systematic identification of specific characteristics of the underlying message) about judgements of the texts' author, (e.g. lecturers and tutors), the written piece (e.g. observation), the culture and time in which the text was written (e.g. inclusive classroom) and the written piece's target audience (e.g. LSAs' requiring feedback on their practice).

The above processes of content analysis and analytical induction resulted in identifying and locating particular similarities of themes and subjects (conceptual analysis) for the purpose of interpretation (Mertens, 1997; Miles and Huberman, 1989). Conceptual analysis was used in this study, employing the following key steps:

the level of analysis; amount of concept to be coded; a code for the existence of frequency of a concept; how to distinguish between concepts; rules for coding texts; how to discard irrelevant information; coding texts; analysing results
(Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 492)

According to Miles and Huberman (1989: 216), this type of pattern finding is extremely productive as a way of making sense of the 'severe overload' of qualitative data that a researcher may experience. Although I employed this mode of analytical strategy, it posed some threat to the reliability and internal validity of the case study. According to McMillan (2008) there is always the potential for error.

Being the sole researcher in this study was demanding and stressful and one can easily 'read' meaning into responses which may result in misinterpretation (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). To counteract this, I planned the analysis process in a systematic, methodological order. I also adopted a position in which I was sceptical about any confirming data during analysis (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). This echoes McMillan's explanation, 'Good qualitative researchers acknowledge how their expectations and preconceived ideas affect what they observe, interpret and conclude' (2008: 298). I think it is fair to say that although

McMillan used this explanation with regard to Observation as a method for data collection, parallels can also be drawn to the analysis and interpretation of other qualitative methods.

In respect of conceptual analysis, I shall now describe in more depth the key steps which I followed during this form of analysis, for example, raw data collected during class room observations. On reading the observations, I selected themes and sub-themes and applied corresponding colour coding. This enabled me to distinguish between concepts, themes, and patterns, and helped to establish the number and frequency of the themes and sub-themes that emerged. For example, LSAs' role during whole class support: (theme);

- 'she circulated around the classroom unobtrusively and quickly recognised students that required her attention' (sub-theme: positioning)
- 'she assisted in handing out materials...spoke to any student not sure of what to do' (positioning)

During my documentation, I transferred information gathered from data and my field notes to a 'matrix' to create a more systematic analysis. This was done by 'clustering' data into a category e.g. class management. Other categories were also identified and named on the matrix (Merriam, 1998). This technique helped me to gather scientific evidence and not just rely on personal intuition about 'what feels right' or 'fits' (Miles and Huberman, 1989). It supported me in the overall sorting of data and in a content-analytical manner (coding, categorizing, clustering), thereby strengthening the validity of analysis.

On the other hand, quantitative data was collected by means of: pre and post self-assessment questionnaires (completed by participants on the first and last sessions of ELSAP); pre and post end tests (given to participants before and on completion of each programme unit); and

programme delivery evaluation questionnaires (completed by participants on completion of each programme unit). Quantitative values were given to rating scales allowing for the numerical interpretation of results (McMillan, 2008). The motivation for using different instruments was to triangulate biases during the process of analysis. The strengths of one instrument should balance out the weakness of another. In other words, quantitative values were put on the numerical scores from the above methods (e.g. end knowledge test) to support the analysis and interpretation of data from another method (classroom observation). For example, an end knowledge test score which indicated a high retention of knowledge on different teaching strategies for support could also be interpreted alongside a class room observation when support strategies were being employed by participant LSAs'. Analysis for interpretation occurred as follows: during an end of knowledge test scored a high 6 out of a potential 7 correct answers about teaching/support techniques or strategies which included knowledge on giving instructions and explanations, checking through questioning and demonstration. During a class room observation, I wrote that Anne 'explained to the learner what he needs to do. She checked his understanding by asking questions. She then demonstrated to him how he should use the right click function of the mouse.'

I have defined and discussed how I employed strategies for the analysis of my raw data from qualitative and quantitative methods generated which were to explore ELSAP's impact on the nine participant LSAs' learning and development processes, and the conditions and situations for a change in their practice. As indicated by literature, I used content analysis and analytical induction to identify and describe themes for interpretation and analysis. I have also discussed specific pitfalls during analysis and interpretation and strategies that I used to counteract these. Analysis of the methods employed corresponded in a reciprocal way with the theoretical framework, ontology and epistemology of my research study. The following

section focuses on important issues around strengthening the validity and trustworthiness of data and its analysis within my research.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Research being conducted in ‘real world’ conditions is never completely free of threats. In an effort to produce and achieve ‘trustworthy’ findings, I incorporated measures to counteract and minimise potential threats. My own position and the multiple roles I undertook posed a general threat to the overall trustworthiness of my research. It was reassuring to know that, according to the literature, threats induced by multiple roles, are present in all research involving people (Robson, 2002: 172). My multiple roles were necessary due to having to work within the financial and time constraints of a busy college which imposed limits on the time and resources at my disposal at the time of my study.

The implication of the above is that I was the sole researcher and a colleague working alongside LSAs’ in the classroom, while at the same time, acting as the instigator of the ELSAP training programme with sole responsibility for its development, facilitation, and implementation over a fourteen-week period. I was only partially responsible for the evaluation process as class lecturers and tutors assisted in conducting real-life observations of participants’ interactions in ‘inclusive’ classrooms. I was aware of the threat my various roles could pose to the trustworthiness of my research if I did not keep them separate from one another (Jones, *et al.*, 2006). In combination they could possibly sap my energy levels, cloud my judgement, and result in my developing poor working methods and habits (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

These multiple roles (Merriam, 2002) meant that I was in power relations throughout the duration of the research with the threat that I could have developed and demonstrated a bias when I needed to be impartial, fair and just (Miles and Huberman, 1989; Patton, 1990). Being the implementer and evaluator of my own intervention, posed risks for data analysis and interpretation. My evaluation of various research studies and their views on the analysis of data and its interpretation made me very aware of the potential for bias when engaging with and interpreting data (Benjamin, 2002; Coffey 1999; Taylor, 2002). My cognitive awareness remained raised at a meta-cognitive level during my thinking about my analysis, and this supported me in treating data fairly and impartially.

I distinguished between my multiple roles by applying certain tactics (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Rogers, 2003). These tactics and their outcomes were: while simultaneously demonstrating genuine and sincere encouragement and interest, I needed to maintain a professional stance throughout all stages of the research; discussing with college managers and participants at the beginning of my research study my own personal beliefs and values on educational philosophy and discussing the focus and aim of the research. Open discussions helped me to evaluate my different roles and simultaneously helped to raise my levels of confidence and trustworthiness in my intentions to carry out good and quality research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Jones, *et al.*, 2006). They also helped me to continuously critically weigh and analyse my own emotional state to help me remain neutral and impartial (Robson, 2002) and by empowering me to not let feelings of anxiety or anticipation take over during data analysis. Working in accordance with an organised time management schedule also helped me stay calm and focussed.

Not rushing in order to keep the research process at a steady pace created the necessary physical and mental space between my different research roles and activities. This tactic also allowed for new or unexpected data to be acknowledged, properly considered, and assimilated; providing accurate analytical descriptions of what I read, observed and heard. In some cases this was difficult as the qualitative data which was to be read had not been fully transcribed. I therefore used triangulation to reduce the level of threat with regard to description and by checking and double-checking results using multiple methods of evidence (Robson, 2002). However, multiple roles can also do the opposite by supporting the researcher in making assumptions about the research process, the contexts, the participants and the data. According to Merriam this 'is at least a starting point for conducting an ethical study' (2002: 30).

Through on-going verification, the strengths and weaknesses of a range of mixed methods, such as end tests versus reflective dairies, compensated for the qualitative data which could not be fully interpreted due to its incompleteness. According to authors, rather than a single method approach, triangulation minimizes the weaknesses of any single approach (Patton, 1990) and triangular techniques therefore assisted me in providing good, 'trustworthy' research (Cohen and Manion, 1995; McMillan and Schumacher, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Robson, 2002).

By sharing this role as evaluator my workload was reduced giving me more time and energy to concentrate on other areas of the research. To adhere to the above, I needed to:

- avoid becoming over-familiar with the participants;
- note at the beginning my personal values with managers and participants;

- note who was to be responsible and accountable for the different processes during the research, and who may benefit from these processes;
- continuously critically weigh and analyse my own biases;
- force myself to stand back and not be overwhelmed by data;
- take time over analysis

In the following section I shall discuss the parameters which I put in place to ensure ethics prevailed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics underpin all aspects of research (Wright Mills, 1958). Merriam (2004) and Rogers and Ludhra (2011) argue that ethics must be of major concern to secure the validity, trustworthiness and authenticity of research and that the best way to address issues concerning ethics is to address them once you are involved with your research. Ethical considerations therefore became an integral part of the planning and implementation of my research process in order to minimize the risks to participants ('human beings' involved) (Mertens, 1998: 23; Wiersma, 2000).

According to Merriam (2002: 30), there are no straight forward answers to what makes a 'good' study or, as in this case, 'good' action research. I needed to ensure that this study was valid and conducted in an ethical manner. In order to promote all of these fundamental considerations I was conscious of the ethics concerning the following key principles: 'Beneficence' which refers to the optimising of positive outcomes for the purpose of science, humanity, and the individual participants involved, by minimizing risks, harm, or wrongdoing (Mertens, 1997: 24). 'Respect' which implies valuing all people with courtesy

and embracing diversity through positive role modelling and by treating all individuals in a group as equals. ‘Justice’ which means being fair and careful with regard to the administration of the intervention and its evaluation (Mertens, 1998: 24). To adhere to the above I was transparent about my research, its aims and evaluations with all the individuals involved, including my managers at the college as well as the LSAs’ who showed a willingness to participate. We had open discussions on my own personal and professional aims for conducting such a major research project and we agreed and negotiated the research processes as they were going to occur. Participants were told that they could ‘censor’ data that I used and that they would not be identifiable due to the use of pseudonyms. This knowledge empowered all of us to participate in cooperative naturalistic research, which was built on mutual trust and respect (Taylor, 2002). Benjamin (2002: 25) asked rhetorically about this type of cooperative ethnography, ‘partners in research?’ I can conclude that we openly and professionally worked alongside each other to give the utmost meaning to a real-life experience.

In line with the above and in order to minimize the risk of harming or wrongdoing the participants involved, ethical considerations were, from the outset, an integral part of my planning and implementation of the research process (Mertens, 1998; Wiersma, 2000). I also acknowledged the fact that my personality could potentially play a critical role internally by portraying my own social values and beliefs and externally by mirroring, for example, my education and/or generation (Jones *et al.*, 2006). My considerations therefore included: treating participants with respect and courtesy and in a fair and equal manner and by encouraging the diversity of the group through applying an overall learner-centred approach to ELSAP implementation in which the learning needs of all individuals were met.

This included strategies that ensure that all participants learning styles were met and ensuring that all the information about the research study was at all times transparent⁵⁵ and predictable by scheduling and conducting an Information Meeting and producing course material in the form of a Course Handbook. I strived to ensure that procedures were fairly administered, carefully considered, non-exploitable, reasonable and in line with the literature (Mertens, 1998). As an example of this I delivered ELSAP on both Monday and Tuesday evenings of each week giving participants the choice to attend on the evening of their convenience or preference. I administered ELSAP in a carefully planned and fair manner and took into consideration the wishes and needs of all the participants.

Being conscious of ethical considerations, I also sought and gained permission to conduct a study of this nature from the following people:

- The Vice-Principal of the FE college in the East of England where the evaluation research was conducted (see Appendix A); and
- Consent from each of the individual participants (see Appendix W).

Furthermore, for the purposes of confidentiality and being autonomous, real names of the participants have been changed. The identities of participants and others involved have been concealed in the Appendices (Wiersma, 2000). Overall, this research adhered to the guidelines for the British Education Research Association (BERA) (BERA, 2011), the British Sociological Association (BSA) (BSA, 2003) as well as Anglia Ruskin's ethical procedures.

⁵⁵ 'openness is a necessary condition for the long term conduct of research, since it provides the basis for public accountability, methodology and outcomes' (Schostak, 2002: 175).

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the action research process and explained the epistemological foundation in relation to the ELSAP intervention. It has also discussed, using a wide range of research literature, data for interpretation and analysis and the potential threats to this and the approaches used to reduce the impact of these threats on the trustworthiness of this study. Ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure that all aspects of the research were carried out within a morally fit and principled code of conduct have also been explained. We have seen that conducting qualitative research can be a personal and intrusive process (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and that it was therefore important for me to prove that the methodology chosen and research processes used as part of the evaluation, adhered to the ethics for carrying out action research. The epistemology of this study exhibits the reciprocal relationship⁵⁶ between myself, the LSA participants, and the ELSAP intervention, and the participant LSAs' practice.

Finally, it can be said that discussion in this chapter, corresponds with the theoretical framework of complexity theory, showing an understanding of the dynamic, inter-related and complex nature of the attitudes and values within the educational systemic sphere in which the research for a change in process was conducted (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Cohen, *et al.*, 2011; Hoban, 2002, Von Bertalanffy, 1933). The next Chapters Five, Six and Seven will present and discuss the research findings in relation to the mixed methods used.

⁵⁶ 'assist in making changes for completion' (Spradley, 1980:754).

CHAPTER 5

‘OUT OF DEPTH’: FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS

Theoretical Backdrop

Reform, according to The General Teaching Council for England, launched a new era to include post-sixteen learners with LDD who were previously excluded from mainstream education (TGTC, 2002:2). Following a social model of support (Allan, 2010; Barton 2010; Bines, 1986), colleges began to employ LSAs’ to support the individual learning needs of these learners. National Occupational Standards for college LSAs’ were launched in October 2006 (Skills for Business, 2006) and was followed by the LLUK 2006 publication of a professional profile for college LSAs’, alongside professional standards for college tutors and trainers (Armitage *et al.*, 2007; Pring *et al.*, 2009). However, these documents did not include a training framework and, therefore, there are no particular training requirements for LSAs’ who support young disabled people in colleges. This situation heightens the importance of the need for professional learning and development for LSAs’ within the college itself if the intentions of reform are to be achieved.

The research aim was to explore the professional learning and development of further education (FE) college learning support assistants (LSAs’) of whom nine voluntarily participated in the Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP). ELSAP acted as a catalyst to facilitate a range of learning opportunities for LSAs’ who, at the time of my research, did not have the necessary qualifications to work as educators of young people with

disabilities. ELSAP therefore formed an integral part of my research and LSAs' learning experiences were critically explored through key research questions. Several questions reflected the complex dynamics and multi-layered-ness of the college working environment in which LSAs' work and train. Others aimed to enhance an understanding and knowledge of LSAs' professional learning and how this affects their practice while others explored the conditions of that learning and ways in which LSAs' practice could be changed, to rightfully bring about a more rigorous and meaningful teaching input for learners with disabilities.

Educational policy frameworks have developed, reformed and intensified internationally, nationally and locally over the last three to four decades (Barton, 2010b; DfEE 1997; Jones, 2003; Morgan, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2008; UNESCO, 1994). These policy developments became the springboard for reform and modernisation in classroom practice which strives towards equality and non-discrimination, advantaging *all* learners on the grounds of social justice (Benjamin, 2002; Bines, 1986; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Farrell and Ainscow, 2003; Hryniewicz, 2007; Fairclough, 2008; Warnock, 2005). The college in England where I conducted my research prided itself on how socially 'inclusive' they had become in following equal opportunity policies based on their global and national policy reform (DfES, 2001; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Farrell, 2003; Rioux and Pinto, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 3, policies, procedures and codes of conduct are key to effective practice because they inform colleges of the purpose, methods and opportunities in which staff, including support staff e.g. LSAs', work and train.

In this chapter, I critically present findings from the data generated by the explorative action research process over the fourteen-week period of ELSAP implementation and my continuous participant observation. Narrative themes provided rich, descriptive meaning and

understanding about the learning journeys of the participants, as they emerged from dynamic, interactive social situations and incidents within the ‘inclusive’ college classroom between participant LSAs’ and post-sixteen learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Robson, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1993). Analysis focuses on how college policy provided, or did not provide, a framework for the work and training of college LSAs’. This chapter critically analyses and critiques the sociological tools needed to implement ‘inclusive’, ethical and meaningful education for young people with LDD. Attention is drawn to issues that relate to policy theory and how these feed into practice. In order to understand and illuminate these issues within a wider, emergent sociology of disability education (Slee, 2010), we need to embrace a critical approach. Slee (2010: 562) refers in similar terms to the on-going and ever-existing socio-political dilemmas around disability education as ‘the disability movement’s political struggle’.

Learning Support Assistants are ‘Out of Depth’

From literature, I understand that a professional in a work setting must be supported in various ways by the employer to become the best professional that he/she can possibly be. This must be done by metaphorically linking existing experience and knowledge, ‘where have I been’ and ‘where am I now’ to, ‘where do I need to go’ and ‘how do I get there’ (McGill and Brockbank, 2006: 38). McGill and Brockbank (2006) suggest that the professional development journey of educators must begin on their first day of employment and that learning opportunities must be organised and strategically facilitated by the organisation to build on the existing qualifications, knowledge and skills of the employee, hence the term, ‘continuous professional development’ (Armitage *et al.*, 2007; McGill and Brockbank, 2006: 37; Rogers and Horrocks, 2010: 7). However, data derived from my

research with the participant LSAs' tells, due to a lack in college policy to support the planning and facilitation of professional procedures and learning opportunities, a different story.

Data indications are that LSAs' were inappropriately selected and appointed as they were not suitably qualified for their role in supporting learners with LDD. Other issues also became apparent. LSAs' were not introduced by the college to their new work environment and the college did not facilitate professional learning discussions in the form of reviews or appraisals with mentors or more experienced staff. Work load and tasks for LSAs' were randomly assigned showing the college's lack in considering the learning needs of learners with LDD. From the literature we know that LSAs' in education, are at the heart of the implementation of 'inclusive' policies (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Fox, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2008) so it is, therefore, fair to say that if LSAs' professional learning and development needs were not being met, their professional contribution and practice in the classroom would be compromised. In light of all of the above it was vitally important that the college subjected LSAs' swiftly and responsibly to the necessary professional learning, commencing with an appropriate induction on their first working day (Gravells and Simpson, 2008). Institutional failure to support college LSAs', as we will see below, compromised the ethics and social justice that 'inclusive' policies aimed to secure within disability education (Barton, 2010b; Dyson and Slee, 1999).

Evidence from the data demonstrates that issues occurred due to the college's lack of organisational support and led to stress and a lack of confidence in the ability of LSAs' to cope in a number of situations. Kelly an LSA wrote, 'I struggled to make sense of what I

should be doing and initially thought I made a mistake to take the job. I didn't know where to turn for advice'. Along the same lines, a different LSA Rose expressed her view,

'It would have been helpful to be introduced to key members of staff on the first day. I met my class tutors much later, only when the teaching started. There was an interim period between when the college started back after Christmas and when the students returned and I could have been of help to get resources and materials ready [...] I was looking for something constructive to do, I remember that I roamed the corridors while I felt misplaced' (Rose).

Moira reflectively wrote in her diary,

'if I had a mentor to discuss my weaknesses with, it would have helped me to think of how I can become better. Talking to someone who understand the complexities of our work with older learners and, who can suggest what in my practice I can change to be better would have been supportive' (Moira).

This evidence indicates the need for organisational and structural strategic input and support for college LSAs' who were appointed to support learners with LDD. This is in line with earlier studies completed by educational researchers such as Green and Milbourne (1998) and Robson and Bailey (2008). What is needed are more ruthlessly defined appointment requirements and qualifications, appropriate induction procedures, regular appraisals and identification of training needs, better management of the tasks being assigned to LSAs' and for them to be given a fuller understanding of their role and responsibilities, not only for their own benefit and well-being but in order that learners with LDD are given a more socially 'inclusive' and just education (Tomlinson, 2010; Barton, 2010b).

I continue by analysing data gathered from action research carried out between the Summer/Autumn of 2006 to the Spring/Summer of 2007 at the college where I worked. The following issues arose from a critical engagement with data:

No Recruitment and Appointment Strategy

According to Dyson (1999), educational institutions e.g. colleges for FE, follow a human rights position that focusses on the social inclusion of those who have previously been excluded from social participation:

The ethics and rights discourse, particularly when it is joined by the politics discourse, tends to operate with a concept of social justice that is based on the notion of a participatory democracy in which none are excluded or oppressed, and which celebrates difference (Dyson, 1999: 48).

From this we can argue that learners with LDD in colleges are entitled to the non-discriminative fair practice those with disabilities receive in schools and universities, and that colleges must give serious consideration to the practicalities of how they are going to include these learners with LDD to ensure, not only a meaningful, but also a just and ethical implementation of governmental policies on equality. Literature indicates that for LSAs' to be effective in their roles when supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD they need to either be qualified or actively supported in achieving a relevant qualification to work with disability in an educational environment (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Morgan, 2000). It can be argued that efforts to bridge the gap between the implementation of 'inclusive' policies which result in the enrolment of learners with LDD on vocational programmes and the selection of trained and qualified people to support these learners, must start with the application of an appropriate recruitment and appointment strategy to ensure the appointment of the most appropriate staff. This should be done by means of a structured, well-planned staged approach (set of guidelines) for the advertising, sifting and appointment of the best candidate LSA. Data below shows that the college where I conducted my research lacked systematic, fair procedures on a managerial macro level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), for appointing LSAs' to support post-sixteen learners with a range of LDD (Attwood *et al.*, 2005).

As researcher, I became aware of the limitations which existed within the college's recruitment and appointment strategy which resulted in the employment of LSAs' to support young people with disabilities who did not have the necessary experience of working with disability or knowledge or experience of teaching or working in an educational environment.

A field note of mine reads:

During an informal meeting to clarify some aspects about the implementation of ELSAP with prospective LSA participants today, I am slightly concerned that I may have to redo parts of the programme to add more 'punch'. Quite a few LSAs' appear to have no or very little previous experience, or relevant qualifications to match their roles supporting LDD. Anne supports Entry Level, Claire and Gemma dyslexia, Wilma autism, Emma slow learners. This raises questions in my mind about the application process which these individuals went through. Was there an 'appointment framework' with specifications or were they being appointed on an ad-hoc basis with no specifications as to whom these individuals should be, what interests or prior knowledge/experiences they should have in preparation for their work with disability, qualifications that may have been an advantage to their work and responsibilities etc?? (Field notes)

The systemic and comprehensive role of a college LSA involves supporting the college, the tutor or lecturer, the curriculum as well as the learner (Skills for Business, 2006; Woolfson and Trussel, 2005). For LSAs' to be competent and effective in their roles, they need to have the relevant knowledge and experience to do so (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). Written Tutorials completed with participant LSAs' before commencing on ELSAP substantiate that LSAs' were not subject to any specified requirements as part of an appointment framework. Instead they show they were appointed on a 'trial and error' basis which highlights the ad hoc way in which appointments were made. 'I have no previous experience of working in an educational setting and neither do I have any relevant qualifications. I worked as a nurse in a Radiography department for many years' (Gemma). 'None – no previous experience of learning support. I have volunteered at the Infant School for a short period of time and I am also a member of St. Johns' (Mary). 'I have two children of my own, and I am renovating my

own cottage. I am also chair of playgroup. I guess I have no experience of working with learners' (Wilma).

The above narratives and field notes compound and confirm how a lack in the FE policy context influenced procedures (formal guidelines) which impacted on the application process followed by the college where I worked at the time of my research. It seems new LSAs' were appointed without any thought being given as to what interests, skills or knowledge they had to bring to the inclusive college classrooms in which they would work, despite the fact that the learners in an 'inclusive' setting will have a wide range of abilities and potential disabilities (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Valle and Conner, 2011). This was highlighted by the knowledge that neither a suitable job description, nor a person specification were used as a strategy during the appointment process to help ensure that the most appropriate and suitably experienced or qualified individuals were appointed (Fox, 2000). Crucially, those who have an interest in 'teaching' and working with post-sixteen learners with LDD in a very specific niche within further education (Norwich, 2008), need to be sought out.

As part of the research process to support the LSAs' who found themselves in these difficult and stressful working situations, the ELSAP content intervened by holistically focussing in Unit 01 on familiarising LSAs' with their role and responsibilities, Unit 02, focussed on explaining the importance of working within national and legal frameworks and Unit 03, on empowering LSAs' with teaching and support strategies. Unit 04, made a closer investigation of supporting LDD and, vitally important Unit 05, on how LSAs' can continuously review their own practice for development and improvement. ELSAP theory played an essential part in providing newly appointed LSAs' with critical information on how to carry out their roles. Whereas authors such as Lorenz (2002), Giangreco and Doyle (2007) refer to the highly

skilled special needs assistants who support children with disabilities in schools, Brownlow (1994), Green and Milbourne (1998), Bailey and Robson (2004) and Robson and Bailey (2008), speak about the effectiveness of ‘making learning support work’ in FE (Green and Milbourne, 1998:3). According to Armitage *et al.*, (2006) skills may include, being flexible, an ability to counsel and guide, to challenge discrimination and facilitate equal opportunities and to support effective learning, to name only a few.

Brownlow (1994: 35) argues in a paper that a key element to effective learning support (referring to Staff College, Bristol where she conducted her survey) was that ‘adequate systems for learning support’ should be in place for colleges who deliver HE programmes. Although this point was argued more than two decades ago, it has become even more important within the current climate of budget constraints, regardless of which programme is delivered. Well-informed and knowledgeable LSAs’ form an integral and fundamental part of any ‘adequate’ system for teaching and learning, wherever they work in the educational sector, schools, FE or Higher Education (HE) (Pring *et al.*, 2009).

I think it is fair to conclude that at this particular college where LSAs’ were appointed with no particular experience, knowledge or qualifications, the responsibility of the college to support these LSAs’ with an appropriate programme for their professional development (e.g. ELSAP) was vital to enlighten (and empower) LSAs’ in their role and practice with LDD. The conceptual framework underpinning this research highlights how the complex interrelatedness of the wider (in this case, lack of a proper appointment strategy) college environment can influence practice in classrooms (Hoban, 2002). As seen from the above, highly skilled staff (Fox, 2000), are needed to perform specific roles in ‘inclusive’ post-sixteen classrooms. With no recruitment and selection strategy as to who should be identified

and appointed as the fittest candidate, a college will struggle to provide effective, meaningful education to individuals with LDD (Rogers, 2007). This study aims to change and improve the classroom practice of LSAs' appointed on an ad-hoc basis (Robson and Bailey, 2008), through their participation on a professional learning system (Hoban 2002). Informed LSAs' and changed practice not only benefit learners with LDD but also provide the social justice this particular group of post-sixteen learners are entitled to.

Induction Dilemma for New College Learning Support Assistants

In an effort to find information about LSAs' who were new to their role in FE and the problems they faced, I discovered some facts in the 1994 writings of Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck (1994). These refer to the feelings of new tutors and staff in that they experience sensations of being overwhelmed which results in a tendency to focus only on coping with their immediate responsibilities (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1994). They believe that the way the stresses of a new role and work should be dealt with is through informal discussion and collaboration with colleagues. This implies the facilitation of appropriate induction procedures by an organisation. In line with this Gravells (2007: 10) wrote about being new to working in adult learning, 'when you start work as a tutor, you should receive an induction to the organisation and details about your role and responsibilities'. The same rationale should apply for college LSAs'. A parallel can be drawn with the literature of Fox (2000: 5) who explains that LSAs' who support SEN in schools need to be 'introduced in the right way so that pupil's perception of their role is clear'. This can also be said for LSAs' who support disability in colleges.

For the LSAs' who took part in my research, evidence from the data shows that they had very different experiences from that advocated by Gravells (2007) or Fox (2000) in the quotes above. They were not introduced in any informal (or formal) manner to their new work environment and what it involved. During initial tutorials held with LSA participants, Kelly wrote, 'I did not have an induction when I started', Rose reflected along the same lines, 'no-one invited me to an induction event' and Gemma said, 'an induction would have helped me to settle in'.

Further light on the 'induction' issue was shed before my commencement with the design and development of ELSAP. I convened and conducted eighteen informal meetings with work colleagues to discuss and establish the training needs of their LSAs'. The following narrative shows a comment made by a Key Skills tutor during such a meeting and which I kept as a field note.

Miriam thinks it will be helpful if LSAs' in general cover topics such as: Code of conduct, Confidentiality, Equal Opportunity, Child Protection again after their initial induction sessions, because a lot of this will go over their heads at induction but they should be better able to see the relevance of it after they have been here a while (Field notes).

This quote indicates that my colleague (Miriam) was keen for her LSAs' to undergo training in which specific topics on college policy and procedure were covered. What interested me more though was that she also mentioned 'initial induction' thereby implying her belief that her LSAs' had been subjected to a process where these topics were discussed with them as new members of staff. This was not, however, the case. Two further extracts from LSAs' written tutorials show that LSAs' did not attend inductions when they were newly appointed to commence work in classrooms at the college where my research were conducted. LSAs' (Claire and Emma) wrote, 'I am keen to undertake training for I get lost around the college. I did not have any introduction as to how the college works or where I can find stuff' (Claire),

and ‘I want to know more about the colleges legislation etc ... I know Benita will help me to achieve this, for I was not told anything when I started’ (Emma). This new knowledge about LSAs’ experiences with regard to their not being formally or informally inducted when they started at the college heightened the importance of my investigations with other lecturers and tutors at the college about the training needs of LSAs’ and what, as a result, needed to be built into ELSAP content.

Comments during the informal needs analysis ‘meetings’ with colleagues as well as extracts from tutorials with LSAs’ were vital in informing me about the development of a relevant theory/curriculum for ELSAP. As an example of this when the following topics arose, theory on data protection, equal opportunity, child protection, health and safety, behavioural management and Every Child Matters (ECM) these were integrated into and explained in Unit 02 of ELSAP under the heading - Understanding Legal and National Requirements. An extract from my field notes on 30/10/06 reads, ‘

I am satisfied about the ‘ingredients’ for Unit 02. I have taken into account all the comments from colleagues on what information needs to be included for LSAs’ to be more effective when dealing with accidents and emergencies, confidentiality issues and a general code of conduct when working with LLDD to encourage aspects of inclusion and ECM’ (Field notes).

Legislative frameworks (DfES, 2003; EDG, 2002) form a vital force that underpins our practice, and without an understanding of these, LSAs’ are not equipped for a number of situations such as, for example, the Health and Safety of learners. The college policy on ‘health and safety’ must be explained to new members of staff, in this case LSAs’ who were new to their roles, as part of the college induction process for new members of staff.

Critically, based on the research questions asked and the data gathered it was not possible to assume that ELSAP would bring about changes in the practice of the participant LSAs’ in the

classroom. Nor could it be assumed that post-sixteen learners would benefit from LSAs' new knowledge and understanding of policy after taking part in ELSAP. However, there is evidence which shows that LSAs', who were new to their support role in college classrooms, were not inducted and the research question that explores potential hindrances or barriers for LSAs' professional learning highlighted this as a problem or 'dilemma' as Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck (1994: 5) refer to it, 'We believe that more frustration results from ignoring these dilemmas'. Nilsson (2010) wrote that for the purpose of learning and developing it is important to eliminate all barriers. Data indicates that not having had an induction as a new member of staff was a hindrance in the overall professional learning of those LSAs' who took part in the research (Ashcroft and Foreman-Peck, 1994; Hryniewicz, 2007).

This fact underlines the conceptual framework of this study which aims to understand how the complexity of the wider college environment can play a role and be a key condition to ensure educational change (Hoban, 2002). The data analysed and argued here about new LSAs' not being inducted appropriately as new members of staff to either their work environment or role, philosophically focuses our attention on the dynamics and interrelatedness of the college environment and how what happens on for example, a management level (macro level) can influence the work of LSAs' on a micro level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The lack on the part of the college management to follow an induction procedure with new LSAs', became a systemic condition, which hindered the professional development of new LSAs' (Hoban, 2002).

No Appraisals or Continuous Professional Development

Important parallels can be drawn between the need for lecturers and tutors who teach in post-compulsory or further education and the LSAs' who work alongside them, to engage in self-

evaluation and reflective practice. Also see Armitage *et al.*, (2003). Reece and Walker (2005) refer to reflection as an integral part, together with experience and learning, of a cyclic model in which these reciprocally influence each other to optimise learning. This is in line with literature acknowledging the importance of new approaches (Steward, 2009) in adult learning and development by recognising the individual's professional needs and inspiring pragmatic engagement. Hryniewicz (2007: 323) wrote, 'self-evaluation is important for everyone, and is the basis of the current Ofsted inspection process'. As seen above and as discussed in Chapter 3, reflective practice (Schön, 1987) is not only an institutional process, but can also be seen as the 'vehicle' with which to review own knowledge and understanding about one's practice in order to identify training needs.

Pring *et al.*, (2009: 82) write in *Education for All* the following: 'professional development requires the establishment of reasonable targets [...] to spell out what constitutes a good teacher, and in the light of that analysis, to set appropriate teaching targets'. Nilsson (2010: 300) emphasises the need to undertake such professional development by saying, '...there are insufficient numbers of qualified staff to support people with learning disabilities in need'. He later suggests 'work-based' (Nilsson, 2010: 302) learning as a training option for people who work in naturalistic environments in existing professional roles. Appraisal procedures must be facilitated by the organisation and must be central to plans for LSAs' professional development.

The LSAs' who participated in my research all had the advantage of working in existing roles as LSAs' with opportunities to reflect on their work and learning. Data from Written Tutorials before the LSAs' commenced on ELSAP indicated that they all were seeking opportunities for training and professional development. McConkey and Collins (2010: 136)

agree with the above mentioned authors and continue to further explain that the focus of such professional development should be, 'to provide opportunities for people to declare their aspirations as well as the development of a plan to assist in achieving these stated goals'. The following extracts from written tutorials completed before participant LSAs' commenced on ELSAP are in alignment with field notes from my research diary. These indicate that opportunities to discuss training needs and opportunities to generate action plans for development, had not taken place for the LSAs' who took part in my research, even though they were in a good position to reflect on their work and training needs as existing workers.

I have been working at the college now for 13 months in my existing LSA role. I have not been called in to review my practice in an appraisal-style manner since I started. I am keen to do this ELSAP studies with you because I have not been given any training or opportunities to train and gain new knowledge. I work in various roles and I do need to use different skills. I mostly work on the GCSE programme supporting 3 very different students. I mean they each have different needs (Mary).

Mary expresses here her concerns over not being given professional development opportunities which would include opportunities to talk and reflect on her strengths and weaknesses as a professional LSA at the college. Analysis of this data shows that she has not had the opportunity to take part in vitally important evaluations to increase her knowledge and understanding about how she delivers support. Although it cannot be substantiated assumptions can most probably be made that her practice has been compromised. A narrative from Moira below, states more or less the same.

Apart from my LSA role I teach Basic Skills on two evenings. I have worked at this college for 5 years already and not once had an appraisal about my work. Before this I volunteered as a helper in schools and I still work as a Sunday School Leader. I think I do not qualify for training because LSAs' are not full-time members of staff or qualified teachers (Moira).

Upon engaging with data from written tutorials I reflected on the following from my field notes written during the research process. The extract indicates my reflections as both researcher and practitioner, two of the roles (amongst others) I played within the research:

I read the written tutorials tonight and realised the need for LSAs' to do training for their own professional learning and development are even greater. I am not a middle manager in the college structure and did not realise before tonight that LSAs' are not subjected to appraisals to review their performance. I did notice that LSAs' were not mentioned on our (tutors and lecturers) training day schemes for CPD days and always assumed that they had separate events scheduled for them for CPD. Shockingly, it appears not to be the case (Field notes).

The above narratives and my field notes indicate the lack of an appraisal and CPD framework for LSAs' within the college. They show that no college policy or procedure specifications existed to support staff members to review their practice in classrooms and offer them appropriate professional learning opportunities as a result of such reviews. Moore (2007) accentuates the need for college policies and procedures to echo the need for LSAs' to engage in relevant and appropriate professional learning events. Parallels between the need for LSAs' to be subjected to CPD, and the requirement for FE lecturers and tutors to undergo CPD which is vital to their effectiveness during practice, can be drawn (Armitage *et al.*, 2006; Norwich, 2008; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Reece and Walker, 2005). Due to this lack of a professional development strategy for college LSAs' at the time of my research, the development and implementation of ELSAP (Units 01 to 05), with their aim of providing a tailor-made professional learning intervention for participant LSAs', was vitally important and key to improving their practice.

From the research we can conclude that not having had an appraisal or similar opportunity to reflect on their practice, or having had their training needs identified and addressed as a result of such reviews, a significant hindrance was posed to the professional development of the college LSA participants in my research study. Theorising the above data indicates that the reciprocal nature of the multi-systemic college environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) shows that, for classroom practice to be effective (Armitage *et al.*, 2006; Reece and Walker, 2005),

LSAs' need to have regular reviews and opportunities to reflect on their practice (Schön, 1987) in order to identify their training needs (Pring *et al.*, 2009).

Unexpected or Sudden Additional Responsibilities

What is in the name LSA? According to Wright, *et al.*, (2006: 34), support staff in colleges are known by a number of different names: 'language support teachers; additional support workers; learning support workers and curriculum support workers'. According to Wright, *et al.*, (2006) these names, indicative of the roles support staff have, may change over time, but what does not change is the support that they can provide. Wright *et al.*, (2006: 34) continue to outline and describe an interesting list of strategies as to how LSAs' should be managed to ensure 'students receive high-quality input, leading to an overall cohesive educational experience' in contrast to LSAs' providing support that is not valued and which may lead the LSAs' to lose her/his morale.

The first and most vital point on the strategy list according to Wright *et al.*, (2006) is the existence of a college policy on the deployment of LSAs'. The question can be asked, 'are support roles and responsibilities clearly identified and relayed to those concerned?' (Wright *et al.*, 2006: 35). Effective management should ensure that lecturers, tutors and LSAs' are clear about their professional relationship and what they can expect from each other. Job descriptions should provide clarity on roles and tasks and should rule out any misunderstandings (Fox, 2000). Although literature does not make specific mention of the issues around 'unexpected or sudden duties', it is nevertheless clear that a policy for the deployment of tasks should be in place to reduce misunderstandings and to ensure efficiency on the part of the LSAs'. This is in accord with Russell *et al.*, (2005: 176) who argues that there is a 'lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities between teachers and LSAs'. Russell *et*

al., (2005: 176) continue further to make a link between this uncertainty and a need for training with the following words ‘the link between role and training is an obvious one’.

The literature emphasises the need for greater clarity in defining the role and responsibilities of LSAs’ and how they are deployed in the classroom. At present they are often given additional tasks or placed in positions of authority which as the following extracts from their reflective diaries show, take them beyond the responsibilities they are properly equipped to undertake.

Over the five years that I have been working at the college, I often have to cover for my class tutors when they are sick. There is usually no time for me to get ready or prepare as I am often handed the work just before the class is about to start. Although I have some idea of the work, I feel that I don’t have enough on it to actually teach the session. This is very stressful and can leave me feeling drained and tired (Moirra).

Although Moirra felt unable to cope with the teaching of a class, she still agreed to do so. There may be various reasons for this but this is not the place to speculate about them. Further narratives also show that LSAs’ often found themselves in ‘over their heads’ due to sudden unannounced changes in their roles or more responsibility being imposed upon them, without any discussion or the necessary support as demonstrated by Wilma in her reflective diary.

I work in the Painting and Decorating department of the college... In this area we try to teach the students how to paint and hang wallpaper without making too much of a mess. This process will hopefully prepare them for work within a company or maybe their own business. I am employed to work 1-1 with a student who has Asperger’s Syndrome. He is a willing student who is eager to please but finds lessons difficult as he doesn’t take in all that has been said. On Thursday we began by giving a second coat of eggshell paint to the ceiling in his work area, I have to constantly remind him to take care and not go over the lines or get wet paint on the walls. Part way through the lessons the tutor asked me to help two more students who also seemed to struggle to paint their ceilings. I diverted my attention and walked across to the others which were on the other side of the room. My 1-1 student who was halfway up a ladder and who needed constant prompting became very agitated and could not cope without me (Moirra).

On the surface it appears that the learner with Asperger Syndrome has become too dependent on his LSA. It has been thought that all learners, including those with LDD, should be able to cope with subtle changes to their daily activities if required, and still succeed at what they are doing. However, upon further exploration, the point here is that the participant LSA has been appointed according to her contract to support only the learner with Asperger Syndrome and not to support other learners as well. Previous analysis supports the notion that it takes careful consideration and skill to support a learner with Asperger Syndrome during the learning process and unexpected additional work assignments or tasks can increase stress for the LSA which may compromise the meaningful education of the specific learner with LDD.

In this extract from data, the tutor, unintentionally, overstepped their boundary by instructing the LSA to take on two further learners without clarifying it with her beforehand. This indicates poor communication between the college's operational manager and this particular tutor who should have been informed about the extent of the role and responsibilities of the LSAs' working in his class. But beyond this, it shows a lack of a fair dissemination of tasks or a job strategy. Critically, what this narrative suggests is a significant health and safety risk to both the student and the LSA (and potentially others) due to a lack of college policy (guidance/strategy) on communication between the operational manager, the painting and decorating tutor and the LSA. Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory (2005), suggests how occurrence in one system can influence an outcome in another. This forms the underpinning philosophical argument on which my research was based and which is very well demonstrated by the dilemmas encountered in both the above narratives.

These extracts from data reveal an insight into failings of the organisational management of participant LSAs' at the college. They indicate a lack of college policy locally, which results

in the mismanagement of support staff. Managers rely on the goodwill of support staff who feel obliged to help, Fox (2000: 26) refers to LSAs' working with SEN in schools as 'saints or superwoman – or both!' and who they know would not refuse to cover when their lecturers or tutors are absent. These extracts also raise concerns about the imbalance of power and top-down approach to management in the college. Reading Tomlinson's (2010: 542) tribute to Barton, where she refers to 'the common-sense view by those in control of education systems [...] to maintain the current aims of the organisation', sharpens my understanding of the reasons why management in the college where my research was conducted did not seem to acknowledge the importance of a meaningful education of those with disabilities. Theorising this matter indicates that other priorities must have taken preference over the quality of provision and service offered to post-sixteen learners with disabilities otherwise more attention would have been given to how LSAs' perform when supporting disabilities. Clearer monitoring and internal quality assurance is needed about what LSAs' are expected to do when they work with learners with disabilities (Fox, 2000; Pring *et al.*, 2009).

A college strategy for how jobs and tasks are assigned to individual workers, including LSAs' who support learners with LDD, should not only indicate a code of conduct as to how decisions in classrooms should be taken but also how instructing LSAs' about their responsibilities should be carried out. It should specify what tasks LSAs' should contractually be responsible for and in doing so safeguard LSAs from tutors who unexpectedly impose extra work on them. Giangreco and Doyle (2007: 436) state that institutions must, 'establish logic and equitable decision-making practices for the assignment and utilization of assistants'. Unit 02 of the ELSAP intervention provides clear information and guidance on lines of communication as well as the code of conduct between managers, tutors, lecturers and LSAs'. It aims to provide participant LSAs' with much needed information on how

decisions about their work are formulised and who is responsible for communicating this to them.

Conclusion

From analysis, and based on national and international equality and non-discrimination legislation, it is evident that at the time of my study at a specific college, policies did not exist that outline the important steps that need to be taken to provide the rightful inclusive provision for young people with disabilities. More specifically college policies must inform the organisation's implementation of operational inclusive strategies and in this case, strategies for the appointment and processes involved to ensure that the most appropriate LSAs' are being appointed to support learners with disabilities. Further to this, policies must stipulate strategies to ensure inductions and the on-going professional learning and development of LSAs' and, how LSAs' work load is to be administered to ensure contractual applicability to the LSAs' and justice for the learners who are disabled. Evidence has shown that this lack of college policies not only compromised an ethical or meaningful education for post-sixteen learners with LDD, but also failed to provided information and guidance to safeguard LSAs' in respect of their role and tasks.

From the literature we have seen that for college LSAs' to be effective in their roles (Armitage *et al.*, 2006; Norwich, 2008; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Reece and Walker, 2005), an FE policy context must be in place locally (Barton, 2010; Norwich, 2008;) as well as nationally on a macro level to provide a legislative framework that guides, supports and safeguards members of staff who operate on a micro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this research we have seen that certain college policies were not locally in place.

The reasons for this are unknown but exploring this is not the purpose for this research. However, due to the reciprocal nature and complexities of a college environment, we can conclude that a lack of local college policies resulted in a lack of support and professional development for the LSAs' who enrolled to participate on ELSAP. Although we can claim that these dilemmas impacted on LSAs' classroom practice, we cannot, however, make overarching claims that LSAs practice disadvantaged the post-sixteen learners with LDD (Hoban, 2002).

The following chapter will present findings and discussion on inclusive education and disability which is an important theoretical stance from the literature for this research study. The *QCA*, *no date* [online] <<http://www.collegenet.co.uk>> suggests that 'planning for inclusion means thinking about how teaching and learning can be designed to match the needs and interests of the full range of learners'. Chapter 6 explores analysis and discussion on data from my research about inclusive approaches to FE teaching and learning with specific reference to the teaching and learning of post-sixteen learners with LDD.

CHAPTER 6

‘REALITY CHECK’: INCLUSIVE FURTHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY

Theoretical Backdrop

Colleges for further education and training, in the same way as other educational settings in England, embrace international and national policies on equality and social inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Barton, 2010b; Farrell *et al.*, 2007; Jones, 2003; Norwich, 2008; Pring, *et al.*, 2009). The implication of this for the college in which I conducted my research was that they followed an inclusive policy in which all learners, including those with LDD, were equally encouraged to participate by enrolling on vocational training programmes (Morgan, 2000). As seen in the literature review chapter (Chapter 3), the emphasis has been on equal access to education and services (Slee, 2010) to increase skills and improve life chances (DfES, 2006; Peters, 2010). Reform in education brought welcome modernisation (Bines, 1986; Pring, *et al.*, 2009; Norwich, 2008). However, research within disability studies in England shows that discrepancies still exist between ‘non-disabled’ people and disabled people in the work sector (Fumagalli, 2009). Although it is not the intention to speculate here about the reasons for this, there are indications that point towards the need for even greater change in the education sector to move us forward even more effectively.

Colleges ‘inherited’ children with special needs statements from school settings. Children with SEN all appeared to have comprehensive transition plans that mapped out their progression routes and plans (Ashdown and Darlington, 2007) for launching them into post-

sixteen education. (Post-sixteen education is indeed the next step, but planning should ideally show a more holistic approach with *employment* as the final goal). LSAs' in FE were largely employed to provide one-to-one learning support with these named learners who held SEN statements whilst at school (Fairclough, 2008). However, LSAs' were appointed without any or very little prior experience or knowledge of either 'teaching' or 'disabilities' and this impacted on their classroom practice. The previous chapter, 'Out of Depth', showed how a lack of an FE policy context and strategies affected the management (i.e. recruitment, appointment and induction processes) of college LSAs. This in turn, rippled down to the LSAs' in 'inclusive' classrooms and affected their classroom practice. This may, in turn, have inhibited a meaningful education for those with disabilities (Robson and Bailey, 2008).

On a philosophical level, these practicalities can be explained in line with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) 'systems thinking' and Hoban's (2002) ideas on how to manage 'educational change' as part of a collaborative system (instead of linear approaches) for learning. These theorists argue that educational settings, such as a college, can be seen as a dynamic, multi-layered and inter-connected environment (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In other words, what happens in one particular area or 'system' can have a major repercussion for an adjacent area or 'system'. In our case, the impact of the lack of LSA knowledge on inclusive practices, teaching approaches or techniques for learners who are impaired, were detrimental to how they applied themselves and this influenced the quality of teaching these learners received.

This research explored the work of LSAs' supporting learners with disability within inclusive college classrooms, by using qualitative methods which included observations, reflective diaries and my own field notes (Robson, 2002; Schön, 1987; Seidman, 2006; Spradley, 1980; Stevens and Cooper, 2009) as well as quantitative methods (i.e. pre and post self-assessment

questionnaires and knowledge tests) (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), as fully discussed in Chapter 4. Qualitative analysis was applied, using coding rules for excluding and including concepts and thematic connections were made (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Taylor, 2002). For a deeper understanding of themes, I used relevant research questions as a lens, emphasising a singular focus, but within the wider, holistic context of the situation (Coffey, 1999). In combination to this, quantitative evaluation (Seidman, 2006; Spradley, 1980; Rossi and Freeman 1993), where LSAs' were asked to rate their own increase in knowledge on a scale between 1 and 7, before and after the delivery of each ELSAP unit, was also employed. In the same way LSAs' were also asked to rate their own levels of 'knowledge and understanding' and 'application of skill', before and after participation on ELSAP. These evaluations provided a clearer holistic insight into the professional learning and development of LSAs' and supported the overall interpretation of qualitative methods used as described above.

The theoretical field of inclusive education and disability formed a large part of my review of the literature and was a key element in guiding my action research. I continue by engaging with the themes that emerged from a rigorous analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected in this theoretical field during the course of this study. The data provides a first-hand take on LSAs' experiences (Coffey, 1999; Plummer, 2001; Taylor, 2002) within classrooms and the personal and professional obstacles they experienced as well as accurate measures on how they viewed their own increased levels of skills and knowledge in relation to their classroom roles (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

‘Reality Check’ on College Learning Support Provision

College as Complex Work Environment

According to Pratt (2000) a need for technical skill training emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and resulted in the emergence of colleges for vocational training. Current colleges form part of the lifelong education sector (LLUK) which is a complex system due to, for example, enormous student numbers; the wide range of learning programmes on offer (including partnerships with HE); specifications of the qualifications framework; how provision is being funded and national policies that underpin provision and developments (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Dimpleby and Cook, 2000; Melville and Macleod, 2000; Smithers, 2000). For the purpose of analysing data on LSAs’ who participated in my research and who supported learners with LDD within an ‘inclusive’ college, I continue by theorising the first theme that emerged which accentuated the uniqueness of the vocational curriculum and how this concept can be perceived as stressful for untrained LSAs’.

Uniqueness of the vocational curriculum

‘The main purpose of all education and training is to enable students to learn’ (Dimpleby and Cook, 2000: 73). In order to achieve this, Parrot (2007: 25) argues that programmes (curriculums) for adult education should provide learners with a model to instil ‘civic and democratic values that was not, and is not, available elsewhere in our consumerist and individualistic society’. The particular importance of these authors’ views to my research is that learners with LDD should be able to LEARN from the experience of participating in a college vocational curriculum and that this participation will substantially form their democratic and moral views. In Chapter 3, different approaches (behaviourists, humanist, socialist and more modern approaches such as cognitive approaches) are different contexts in

which adults learn (Curzon, 2004; Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003; McCown *et al.*, 1996; Mezirow, 2000). For learners with LDD to learn on an equal basis they need to access the mainstream curriculum effectively. This depends hugely (amongst other contextual aspects) on the quality of the one-to-one classroom support from LSAs' (Fox, 2000).

The following data shows that LSAs' who were untrained and unqualified to deliver this vitally important one-to-one support had difficulties within specific vocational curriculum areas. Several abstracts from participants' reflective diaries show how working in a particular curriculum area can add to the systemic complexity (Hoban, 2002) of their role and responsibilities in delivering learning support. Here are a few examples:

I have been working mainly one to one with a student who has hearing difficulties in this particular class. The student has hearing aids but chooses not to wear them. The student's main problem area appears to be over enthusiasm and rushing at practical work, causing careless mistakes. The tutor came to speak to me about what could be done to minimise the amount of mistakes made on these tasks. I suggested that I work physically alongside the student during today's practical task to encourage him to listen, watch and copy each stage. Me being close by his side also gave the opportunity for discussion about work when a query was raised and for observation and discussion when mistakes were made and to correct the mistake before progressing further. During this practical task other students developed problems and needed support too. My duties casually expanded from helping my student to having to help quite a large group of five to six students. This became quite a difficult job for me due to the practical nature of the Engineering task. The main aim was to see how well students can remember theory in order to apply it to their practice, using specialist equipment. All had to be done within a certain amount of class time. There was a real panic amongst the students. I felt exhausted at the end of the lesson (and quite relieved that it was over!) (Kelly)

This narrative highlights key aspects of what happens generally in classrooms. This is that some instructions were communicated to facilitate a lesson aim and that learners had to complete a task within a given time-frame which involved practice and specialist resources. This is in line with Pring *et al.*, (2009: 99) who describe a curriculum as a 'set of proposals of what and how to teach'. However, in the above case, further contextual factors contribute to it to not being just a 'general' teaching experience for the LSA. The learner presents with

learning difficulties which adds another dimension to the task of the LSA as did more learners feeling unsure and needing guidance and learning support as the lesson progressed. This all accumulates to cause internal stress for the LSA who felt unsure about her role to begin with. Critically, in this scenario, the uniqueness of the practical Engineering curriculum, together with other extrinsic factors, formed the basis of the difficulties experienced by the LSA.

Kelly continued to write about her learning support experience during that same day's afternoon Key Skills lesson:

After lunch I had to support two students in the Key Skills class. The work is more portfolio building and involves researching different topics, making the decisions and planning how to present the work. Both students find reading and writing tasks difficult and easily get frustrated with themselves. On reflection – perhaps I needed to be more encouraging. The second half of the lesson involved both my students having to complete an online diagnostic test. My role is to support them to use the computer correctly so that they can complete the test and once they have finished, show them how to produce a final score and go into the feedback section to look at any errors. Both my students found this quite disheartening because they didn't achieve as good a result as their peers. It is often difficult for me to judge the amount and level of support needed when I work in Key Skills. Wednesdays are particularly stressful for me because of the switch between working in Engineering in the morning and Key Skills in the afternoon. The nature of the assignment work is so different (Kelly).

In this narrative, the same teaching-learning mechanics exist as in the first example. However, here Kelly admitted openly to the fact that the switch between the two very different curriculum areas, Engineering and Key Skills and the adjustments that she obviously had to make to accommodate these were difficult and stressful. Norwich (2008: 121) devotes an entire chapter in 'Dilemmas of Difference, Inclusion and Disability' to 'Curriculum Dilemmas'. In this chapter he makes substantial references based on evidence from research about 'tension' and to what degree professionals working in 'inclusive' classrooms, experienced this (Norwich, 2009: 121-129). Parallels can be drawn between

Norwich's findings and Kelly's reflective writing on how she experienced stress as a result of the particular curriculum areas she worked in.

Claire who on occasion supported learners in the Painting and Decorating department wrote in her reflective diary about her classroom experiences:

The first years have been given an assignment and I am helping Andrew (pseudonym) to go through his. At first glance, it looks quite complicated as there is a lot of information. Andrew gets overwhelmed quite easily and views things sometimes as more complicated than they actually are. I explained the first few pages to Andrew and we went through it together. We had to draw and label a panelled door and write down the order it was painted in. Andrew and I both found this assignment quite hard. There was too much theory to take in and apply at the same time. I sometimes wish I know the answers beforehand (Claire).

The above shows that theory to do with the curriculum area of Painting and Decorating can be difficult due to the large amount of specific technical information needed to be known and applied in order to carry out assignments. Had Claire been a trained professional (or recruited and appointed appropriately as a person who had knowledge of painting and decorating – see Chapter 5), it would have helped the situation. According to Forlin (2001: 235), experience and 'participation in formal training were associated with a reduction in stress'

Another example from Claire's reflective diary read:

Kyle is doing an assignment on scaffolding. The students started in December, but Kyle is still on his first page. I think having to theorise about something very practical in Construction, is beyond him (Claire).

Although in this narrative Claire perhaps made a somewhat unnecessary remark about the learner's ability to learn, it was actually the clumsy way in which she tried to express that Kyle found the unique characteristics of the practical Construction curriculum which is underpinned by theory, difficult.

We can see from the above that delivering support in inclusive college classrooms can be a hugely diverse task in order to incorporate the varied range of curriculum areas (Ogunleye, 2007; Pring, *et al.*, 2009) such as Construction, Engineering and Painting and Decorating. More practical approaches to teaching and learning are needed to encourage the acquisition of specific vocational skills.

Equally important are the effects of working in such diverse curriculums on the emotional state, coping mechanisms and actual practice of LSAs'. Although LSAs' all exhibit good on-the-spot thinking skills and rationales for acting as they did, this does not take away the sense of uncertainty, emotional despair, and in one case, relief, that LSAs' experienced while performing their learning support tasks. Wright, *et al.*, (2006: 40) asked the question, 'Who supports the support staff?' According to them, good discussion and dialogue with LSAs' should form the basis of their support. Discussion helped them to feel supported and that their professional needs are being met and a key outcome ought to be 'access to good quality training' (Wright, *et al.*, 2006).

A second theme which emerged upon critical engagement with data was how LSAs' became unsure of what is expected of them when lecturers and tutors followed conflicting or inconsistent classroom procedures to support teaching and learning. The Estyn Report (2004) highlighted the important role which LSAs' play when they deliver learning support to enhance teaching and learning in colleges. However, we have seen from data discussed in the previous chapter that the policy development processes to support LSA practices', were slow to catch on in the same way that they had, for example, in schools. This lack of college policy infrastructure had an impact on teaching and learning at classroom level and on the delivery of learning support within the college where I conducted by research.

Conflicting classroom procedures generate confusion

According to Reece and Walker (2005), there are no necessarily completely right or totally wrong answers when it comes to decision-making as part of the educational process. Educational teaching strategies are based on various approaches and a lecturer will apply those in relation to the lesson aim. A LSA reflected in her diary how she understood her role in relation to the lesson aim. She expresses her feelings of uncertainty about her specific application of support but unfortunately does not indicate why she did not consider asking her class tutor for advice and guidance.

Purpose of lesson – all students completed an on-line diagnostic Key Skills Level One practice test. This is done so that their results can be analysed, identified and weak areas of knowledge and the course can be more individually tailored to their particular learning needs. *My role* – as the results need to be a true reflection of the students' own knowledge, it would not be appropriate for me to assist them in answering the questions...*Outcome* – I find it quite difficult not to help with the test particularly when I can see they are struggling with the answer. *On reflection* – To support and help make corrections is the nature of my role. The switch between when to help and when not to, can be very confusing, even though I understand my role during tests (Gemma).

The above narrative typifies a moral dilemma which LSAs' often experience within their 'support' role, and one which I often came across during data collection and analysis. As an integral part of the college workforce, LSAs' deliver learning support in order to raise standards (Duckworth and Tummons, 2010; Pring, *et al.*, 2009). During the implementation of learning support, LSAs' need to make a professional judgement on the amount and level of support which they employ. Upon making these judgements, they need to continuously modify their support which should always be aimed at increasing a learners own independence during the learning process. The moral confusion which Gemma exhibited in her support role, in the above narrative, stemmed from the fact that the classroom teaching approach has changed from 'teaching learners and supporting learners' to one where no help was needed because the learners were sitting a test.

This change in approach confused Gemma whose main role is always to support. For an outside person who does not work and has not experienced that type of difficulty, this confusion may appear somewhat strange. However, when I used research questioning as a lens to gain a more in-depth understanding of what this meant it showed that the first had to do with her own learning style (Armitage *et al.*, 2003) whereas the second related to her teaching or supporting style (Minton, 2005). In this case, Gemma has learnt her role through repetition, from doing the same thing over and over again. Minton (2005: 310) uses the words 'conditioning' and 'reinforcement'. This has resulted in her becoming a 'creature of habit' with the risk that she will fail to question her actions, or the rationales that underpin those actions. According to Minton de-condition is difficult and depends on the person's own attitudes and mind-set. He wrote, 'Much of what makes a 'person' is a result of conditioning [...] Unlearning such reinforced behaviour is extremely difficult, if not impossible, particularly if it is accompanied by a mind-set of beliefs and attitudes' (Minton, 2005: 310)

What is it that seems to support or hinder Gemma's professional learning and subsequently her practice? We can say that Gemma's previous 'learning' and 'development' did not create enough opportunities for her to reflect on how she works and delivers support. Steven and Cooper (2009: 37) say that 'transformational learning involves critical reflection'. A lack of professional development opportunities as analysed in Chapter 5 was a real hindrance which, with the confusion and uncertainty it caused, impacted on Gemma's emotional state and subsequently her practice. Some of the phrases she wrote e.g., 'I find it quite difficult' and 'when to help and when not to, can be very confusing' indicates that the conflicting approach to teaching (support) when the learners were doing tests, resulted in her feeling uncertain about her role. Adequate and relevant professional development, e.g. ELSAP, from which Gemma can learn to ask for the overseeing class teacher's advice, and understand that she

does not have to take the overall responsibility for the learner's learning. Upon analysis, training seems vital for Gemma on different levels. Her emotional state as an LSA, which is in line with Armitage *et al.*, (2003) who argues that a person's emotional state is a key aspect of being an educator in post-sixteen education would improve. She could additionally learn about approaches and theories for adults learning (as also discussed in Chapter 3) and how these can influence her own learning and practice. For example, as mentioned earlier, a theory based on 'transformation' for learning (Mezirow, 2000) where cognitive connections are being made between new and prior knowledge and then transferred to the LSAs' own practice (McGill and Brockbank, 2006), through a process of prolonged work-based learning (Boud and Solomon, 2008). This will counteract the emotional dichotomy which LSAs', as seen above in the case of Gemma, experience in their roles from time to time.

LSA learning and development will further benefit from the forming of learning communities (DuFour, *et al.*, 2006) in which group work expands to a wider context of LSA workers with particular emphasis on supporting each other during difficult work experiences. Within group work issues can be clarified and conflicting emotions or emotional confusion can be off-loaded. Brid Connolly (2008: 21) is a lecturer within adult and community education in Ireland and he wrote:

It all seems normal, even natural, for people to cluster together in families and communities for sanctuary and substance... It seems part of the human condition to find comfort and strength in one another, to form teams and groups just to get through daily life...It is based on the notion that groups are imbued with dynamic relationships between members, which generate energy and processes that combine to create a synergy.

Groupwork thus embraces the reflective (Schön, 1987) nature of 'working together' but also, feeds the innate need of humans to discuss and share highs and lows of everyday life within a safe and secure environment. In line with the above theme, a further narrative from my field notes reads as follows:

Over the last three months (since ELSAP implementation) my awareness has been raised on many sorts of issues LSAs' experience while they work in inclusive classrooms. For me, they can be clustered in three main sections: practical, professional and emotional issues. The majority of times, LSAs' have practical and professional issues. These issues are in a reciprocal relationship to one another, and on a personal level, allow feelings of confusion, frustration, stress and sometimes anxiousness to develop. In turn, these emotions can lead to ineffective practice and performance in the classroom. Relevant training for our LSAs' is vital. Training will cluster LSAs' together in groups for discussion and equip them beyond professional and practical knowledge and understanding, emotionally, for their often difficult, daunting and challenging tasks and responsibilities. Training = Empowerment! (Field notes).

My insiders' voice captures (Coffey, 1999) the underlying low mood of LSAs' over the course of a prolonged professional development intervention (ELSAP, as discussed in Chapter 2) and highlights the need for them to be professionally and personally empowered. It also aligns with the earlier extract about the confused LSA with theories and literature on adult learning. Critical engagement with data further underlines the importance of the development of professional learning as a 'system' of learning (Hoban, 2000) for college LSAs, (in contrast to one-day, linear workshops that only reinforce what LSAs' already know).

The next sub-theme which emerged from data interpretation showed that LSAs' experienced the complex college work environment as unhelpful and somewhat unfriendly. Mclachlan (2004) states that LSAs' become part of the teaching team in inclusive classrooms, who teach, instruct, monitor and assess. If this is the case, why are LSAs' often treated as less valued than the rest of the teaching staff? In the following I report on examples regarding this from my action research.

Work in isolation - no staff room or designated area

Data indicated that LSAs' often felt under-valued and unsupported and that these underlying feelings came from isolated working conditions in which systemic factors do not encourage natural communication amongst colleagues. They found it extremely difficult to form effective working relationships with others, (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). In Florian's (2007) The Sage Handbook of SEN, Giangreco and Doyle (2007: 429) wrote a chapter on 'teaching strategies and approaches'. Amongst other things they theorised about 'contemporary issues and complexities regarding teacher assistant supports' (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007: 433-437). Their conclusions on how to ensure that learners with LDD receive a meaningful education includes that, in the case of schools (parallels can be drawn with LSAs' who work in FE due to the similarities in the nature of the support role), 'must provide appropriate *supports* for their existing teaching assistants (for example, respect, role, clarification, orientation, training, supervision)'. In my view, humanistic support for LSAs' in the work place are needed to meet their basic needs and that once these physical needs have been met (for example, a physical designated space in the college where they can meet, collaborate and discuss issues in safety), these supports will impact on their personal and professional self-esteem. LSAs' will then begin to feel that they belong and are valued and this will support the establishment of a healthy and positive professional identity (McCown *et al.*, 1996).

LSAs' in the college at the time of my study had no designated staff room where they could collaborate informally or formally, share ideas and concerns with others or reflect on tasks or discuss issues. This situation contributed to them establishing negative professional identity perceptions. This theme has been observed several times and re-occurred in my field notes:

The college corridors and cafeteria seem to be overflowing with students. The bitter cold spell and snow outside sends and keeps everyone indoors. I feel a hint of discomfort for our LSAs' who always appear to be 'hanging around' with students in packed corridors with nowhere to go or meet before college starts, during the fifteen-

minute break between classes, or during the lunch hour. Not good for the professional image! Not good for fostering collegial relationships! Not good for LSA morale! (Field Notes)

Working alongside college LSAs' in the UK has sensitised me to their personal and professional needs over the last decade and a half. An extract from my field notes which I kept during the course of the research read as follows: 'Kelly mentioned this morning that she wishes she had a place to hang her coat and put her bag down', and

'I bumped into Gemma with whom I needed to catch up with this morning and invited her to join me for a coffee later in the staff room which I shared with six other lecturers and tutors. Although we had a good chat I was aware of how nervous she appeared, almost as if she didn't think she was 'allowed' in there. She whispered and spoke with a tiny voice throughout' (Field notes).

My experience and feelings were echoing their own reflective narratives. From a written tutorial, the following piece of extracted data explains how isolated and locked-in LSAs' felt as members of the support team. In one example an LSA describes the difference ELSAP brought about for her. She used to feel very lonely and 'cut-off' from other adults working in the college. Since participating on ELSAP she has met other LSAs', formed working relationships with them and set up one or two informal meetings with those with whom she shared common goals as part of her work. Valle and Conner (2010) listed many benefits of collaborative team teaching for learners with LDD. They compare the closeness needed amongst professionals in the 'inclusive' classroom with a 'professional marriage' and one in which learners must receive 'at both ends' (Valle and Conner, 2010: 167, 168). From research we learn how important opportunities to connect and form and maintain such professional relationships are. In my research, ELSAP provided much needed opportunities for LSAs to collaborate and form professional cohesion with others and in the narration from data below, the LSA has become a much happier worker.

I used to go in to college just to be on time for my classes. I disliked the 15 minute change overs between classes and really did never look forward to lunch times. Why?

Due to the nature of my work with a learner with severe Autism, natural opportunities to mingle and speak with others just did not happen. The fact that we do not have a particular area in the building to go to put our stuff in, meet others, before classes or over lunch, contributed hugely to me feeling ‘cut-off’ from others. It would have been nice to have someone to share and discuss work and problems with. As much as I enjoy working in the class room, I disliked the periods outside. This is where ELSAP was good. Going there helped me to meet other LSAs’ and I now have made a few friends. We look out for each other and have arranged and seen each other a few times already outside class. We once met up over lunch. It is not always possible to get together for we work in very different areas of the college and our lunches don’t always fall at the same time. Still, I now know about them and they about me. I have started to feel a bit better, a bit more supported (Mary).

Another example of a narrative indicates that participation on the ELSAP intervention helped with overcoming an LSAs’ feelings of loneliness and of not being valued as a support worker in college. Emma consolidates this in her diary:

Having the opportunity during ELSAP to discuss different situations in the classroom gives meaning to why we have learners behave in a certain way, how we should react and communicate and which strategies are good to adopt. I am regularly trying to find answers. Before I engaged in ELSAP, I often doubted my own actions and whether I was doing the right thing. Having been able to discuss this with other LSAs’ made me feel less uncertain about a lot of things. Meeting in this way in a classroom is a great idea and I hope we can continue to do so after ELSAP, since we don’t have an existing meeting place. I feel more valued and listened to than before (Emma).

From this, there seems to be other reasons why the LSA felt lonely. This analysis is not, however, the place to speculate about those. It is indicative from this narrative that Emma, in the absence of having a designated LSA staff area or a space of their own, fosters feelings of isolation and a lack of her importance as part of the workforce. These emotional manifestations added to the complexity of the college environment in which LSAs’ supported learners with disabilities, which is in line with the complexity theory discussed fully in Chapter 3 (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Lack of knowledge on aspects of teaching and learning

As theorised in Chapter 3, effective communication which includes clear and accurate verbal speech, appropriate non-verbal language or gestures and active listening, are all key elements

in achieving success in the general classroom (Curzon, 2004; Minton, 2005). The situation in the classroom may become more critical, as also discussed in Chapter 3, when the learner presents with communication or sensory delays, difficulties or impairments. The teaching and learning process can require a specific knowledge and understanding by staff, including LSAs', such as, the ability to use Makaton or Braille (Farrell, 2001; SENET, 2005; Snyman and Engelbrecht, 1996). According to research for these learners with LDD to have a meaningful 'inclusive' education it is a requirement for teaching staff, including LSAs' to 'instructionally engage' with these learners (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007: 434). Giangreco and Doyle (2007: 434) continue by explaining:

Teachers who are instructionally engaged with students with disabilities express responsibility for educating *all* students in their class, regardless of characteristics or labels (for example, disability). These engaged teachers [...] communicate directly with them [...] They maintain an instructional dialogue [...]

From this extract only one form of verbal communication, which is vital for the application of different teaching strategies or approaches in the 'inclusive' classroom, is being highlighted.

There are many more including, for example, explanation, questioning, demonstration and prompting, to name a few (Curzon, 2004). To establish knowledge on how effective LSAs' think they communicate in the classroom was for me as the researcher, one of several aspects of the teaching-learning process which I wanted to explore. In order to do this I decided to use a different format in the form of a self-assessment questionnaire in which LSAs' could self-reflect on their professional knowledge and skills by means of a rating-scale. This brought an interesting component of evaluation into the action research process (Mertens, 2005; Rossi *et al.*, 2004). Questionnaires were easy to use with accurate inferences of data which triangulated well with the limitations of other action research methods (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

For this section quantitative data was derived from Pre and Post Self-Assessment Questionnaires (as discussed in Chapter 4). Questionnaires were used to engage students in a process of self-evaluation where they had to rate their own levels of professionalism (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Firstly, they had to self-evaluate their own knowledge and understanding of a particular field or area of work and secondly, their application of skill. Within each area they were asked to rate themselves on eight different items on a five point Lickert scale (1 = need improvement, 5 = excellent) (McMillan, 2008). Examples of items in the ‘knowledge and understanding’ category were: in regard to their role and responsibilities, on barriers to learning and on ways to review and develop their practice. Examples of items in the ‘application of skill’ category were: supporting a post-sixteen learner, basic teaching skills and supporting a learner with LDD. Higher scores indicate that LSAs’ have assessed themselves as being more skilled in comparison with before. As researcher, I had the benefit of direct observations and analysis of the behaviour of LSAs’ within the social college setting. By using a combination of mixed methods, i.e. field notes, tutorials, reflective diaries, including self-assessment questionnaires, it was possible for information to be cross-validated (Benjamin, 2002; Robson, 2002; Taylor, 2002).

Below are a range of table presentations on findings extracted from the self-assessment questionnaires. The use of a table format is simple and minimalistic and allows the reader to focus on numerical values and the potential increases in them. According to Becker (1998) this is a different way of extracting the ‘truth’. For example, Table 6.1 demonstrates that overall, participants rated themselves as being more skilled in both of the assessed areas after completing ELSAP than they had before the programme began. It also shows that overall, LSAs’ rated themselves relatively equally in knowledge and understanding and application of skill, which suggests that the course paid equal attention to both.

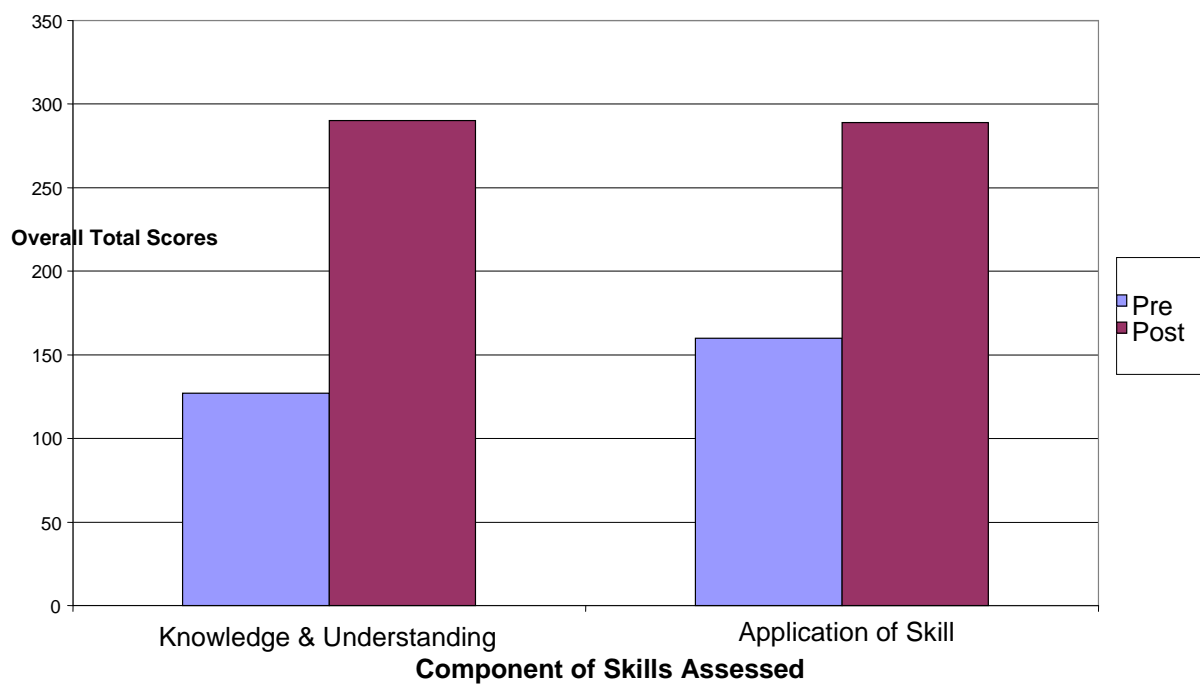


Table 6.1: LSA scores in ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ and ‘Application of Skill’ on Self-Assessment Questionnaires

Further graphs in Table 6.2 and Table 6.3 show the total scores for each student in both components assessed.

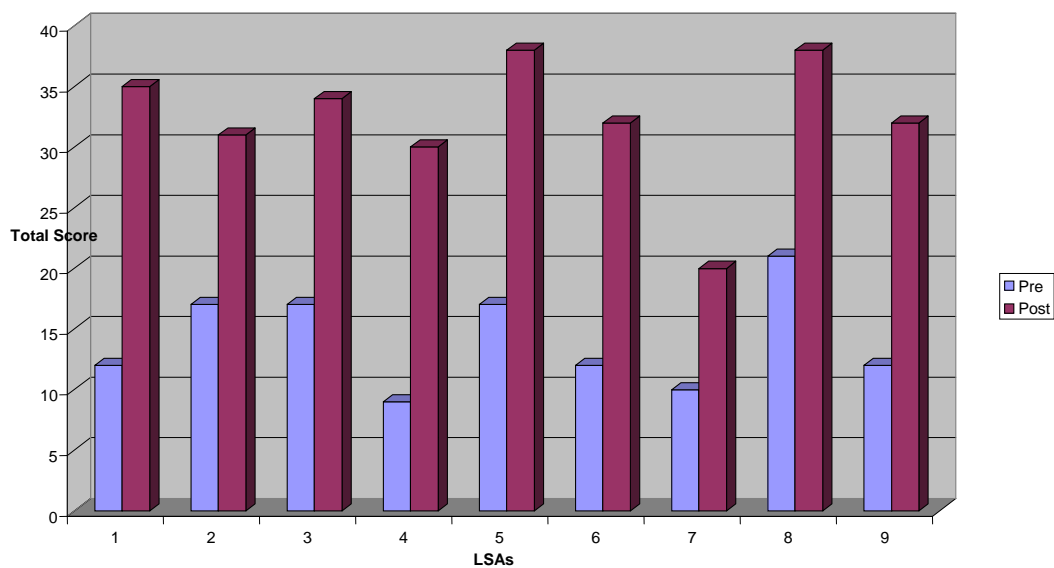


Table 6.2: Total 'Knowledge and Understanding' Scores on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Each LSA

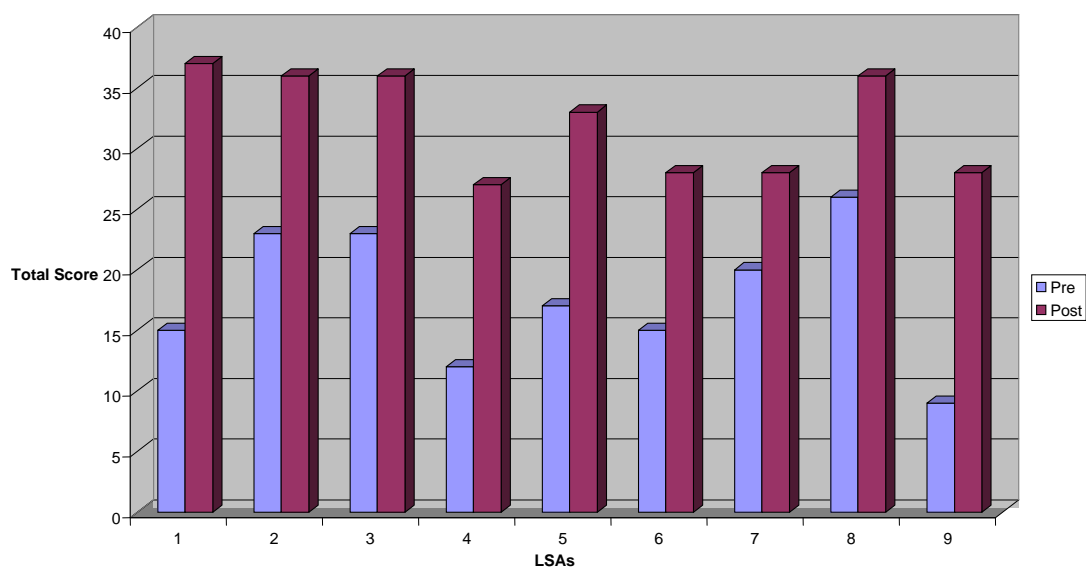


Table 6.3: Total 'Application of Skill' Scores on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Each LSA

The graphs show that no LSAs' rated themselves as equally or less skilled in any area assessed after completing ELSAP. This significant difference between the pre and post scores means that the differences found are unlikely to be due to chance and are meaningful changes. These differences are therefore indicative of the gaps in knowledge which previously existed across all nine participant LSAs'. From the increase in skill shown by the LSAs' ratings after ELSAP we can perhaps assume that this led to improvements in their practice in the classroom.

Extracts from classroom observations, carried out at regular intervals during the research process, substantiate this increase in knowledge-base and practical skill. The extract below is an example for the purpose of showing the cross-communication of mixed methods, in which Table 6.3 indicates Moira (participant 6 on the horizontal axe) to have increased her level of application of skills from 14 to 27, as indicated on the vertical axis:

Moira is delivering small-group support for learners who for various reasons, are making slower than average progress. She engaged in ELSAP at the beginning of October this year and I can begin to see that she has become more confident in using a range of strategies, for example, questioning, demonstration, reinforcing through re-explaining, prompting and checking again, encouraging and praising. She continues to vary her approach and change the level of her support to suit the learners. She shows a greater flair in her role and takes charge off her group when needed. She stops them and draws their attention back to the tutor's initial aim. It is clear that she's central to the learner's learning, they now approach her for help and they seem to benefit from her support during the lesson (Classroom observation).

This indicates how ELSAP produced beneficial changes in Moira's abilities and performance.

This narrative also indicates that the inclusive college environment is a dynamic, interactive social context where each context forms a different layer or system (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Metaphorically, this multi-layeredness brings depth and dimension and reciprocal interaction (Hoban, 2002) between politics, managers, lecturers and tutors, LSAs', administrators and all learners. In the following section I establish that there is a lack of personal and professional

knowledge within the LSA ‘system’ and how this lack of knowledge may influence their practice in inclusive classrooms and, thereby, the education of learners with disabilities. Research questions explored situations which hindered or enhanced the professional development of LSAs’ and although their lack of knowledge was a restriction as to how effectively LSAs’ performed their roles, it did, on the other hand, present LSAs’ as a ‘clean sheet’ for learning and development.

To conclude, all the data above pointed towards significant increases in LSAs’ knowledge base during ELSAP engagement. The lack of knowledge and skills that had been a hindrance to their performance was to some extent overcome by their ELSAP involvement and led to greater efficiency in their performance. This completes the analysis of data which emerged as the sub-theme, college as a complex work environment, as categorised within the main theme of ‘inclusive college education for learners with disabilities’.

Lack of knowledge and understanding of post-sixteen learners with LDD

For LSAs’ to appropriately and effectively engage with post-sixteen learners with LDD, they need to have substantial knowledge on various aspects of teaching and learning (Fox, 2000; Morgan, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2008). For example they need knowledge on: the type of needs post-sixteen learners have and how they impact on the learner’s learning; the role medication, pain, therapy or counselling play during the learning process; ways in which learners with disabilities can access the mainstream curriculum; modification of resources, specialist equipment or materials and/or alternative types of communication needed; the impact of the developmental stage of the learner and his/her preferred learning styles, to name only a few. Upon critical engagement with quantitative data, insights emerged from pre and post knowledge unit tests which identified the level of knowledge LSAs’ had with regard

to learners with specific needs (LDD) that they supported in classrooms. In line with this, qualitative data that emerged in extracts from a written tutorial completed with LSAs' before they signed up to ELSAP, indicated the LSAs' lack of knowledge and understanding about working with learners with LDD. More qualitative data from classroom observations which were carried out at regular intervals, further clarified the situations that arose in classrooms due to this lack of knowledge and understanding.

Further to the above, the following extracts from LSAs' written tutorials completed before they commenced on ELSAP, identify a lack of knowledge about their work with learners with LDD and how that lack of knowledge complicated their work and undermined their confidence.

I would like to develop my knowledge and understanding in how best to help students with learning difficulties so they can achieve the course which they have chosen. Also, I need to increase my own knowledge on the different disabilities and difficulties which students have. I would like to feel more confident in the classroom, and feel that I know what I am doing (Rose).

Another two examples from data read, 'I support learners with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and need to find out more about what exactly that means for the learners and how it affects them. I don't always want to feel unsure and stressed' (Emma); and 'I support a variety of students special needs e.g. dyslexia, autism, ADHD, MS, etc. I would like to have more knowledge on these to do my job better. I often have questions, but don't know where to find answers' (Anne).

ELSAP comprised five units and pre and post knowledge unit tests to assess LSAs' knowledge in respect of these five units were administered before and after each unit delivery (as discussed in Chapter 4). Each test was relevant to the outcomes of these five units. A maximum score of seven was possible for each test. The nine LSAs' completed all the tests

for each unit including for Unit 04 which was specifically aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding of LSAs' in respect of working with learners with LDD. For the purposes of analysis, I draw your attention to the quantitative findings of the tests carried out in relation to Unit 04.

Table 6.4 below demonstrates the findings of the pre and post knowledge unit tests. The graph shows that overall LSAs' scores were considerably higher in the post knowledge test. It also indicates that LSAs' scores after each unit were similar for each test (except unit 02), which suggests that the same level of knowledge was acquired across the units regardless of the pre-study scores.

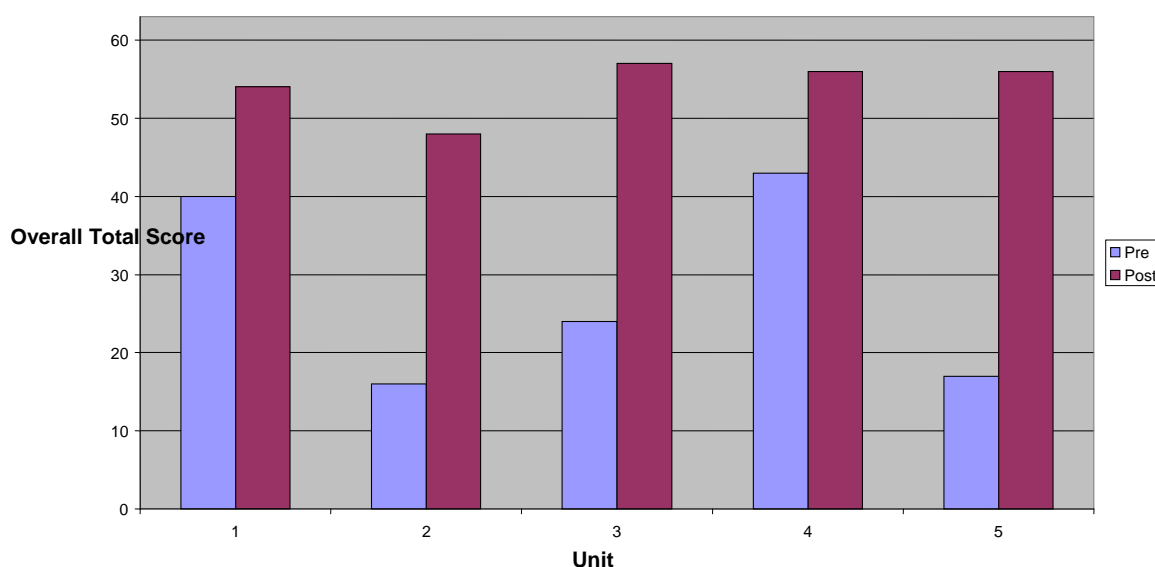


Table 6.4: Overall Total Scores of Knowledge Unit Test Administered Before and After each Unit

Table 6.4 details the overall total score for each unit pre and post the ELSAP programme. The overall total scores are out of a possible sixty three. The graph shows large differences in the before and after unit scores which indicates that the difference between before and after scores were meaningful and are unlikely to be due to chance. Unit 04 specifically shows the

meaningful increase in knowledge and understanding of LDD by LSAs' following their ELSAP participation. This increase in knowledge and understanding signifies the initial 'absence' of LSAs' knowledge-base on LDD.

Qualitative data from classroom observations confirmed the above by noting LSAs' increased knowledge and understanding when working with learners with LDD. An example of an observation completed on Wilma in the Engineering department of the college reads:

Wilma managed the behaviour of a learner with social and emotional needs in a positive way during a practical lesson today. She read his triggers well at the first signs that he was starting to feel annoyed with himself. She intervened timely by gently prompting him towards problem-solving and solutions. She managed to change what could have been a negative situation for the learner and the class to a positive outcome instead. Although the learner remained restless, he experienced some success and will hopefully be more patient with himself next time. Small steps forward (Classroom observation).

Upon critical engagement with this data, I initially thought that this change in LSA practice was not necessarily a result of her participation on ELSAP. Further investigation, however, showed that ELSAP Unit 04 delivery took place in the same week as the classroom observation. Positive behaviour management (Rogers, 1998b) was being discussed at length in Unit 04. The key terminology we unpacked were 'triggers' and how to 'de-escalate' negative behaviour, and 'strategies' to turn a negative situation into a positive one which were explained through the use of case-studies and simulations (Rogers, 2001). Vitally important caring and supportive gestures and language during behaviour management were also highlighted (Rogers, 2000). I think it is fair to conclude that through Unit 04 this particular LSA has increased her limited knowledge of positive behaviour management. So in analysing whether LSAs' learnt from a positive professional learning experience and whether this new understanding changed their practice, one can positively conclude, that in this case, LSAs' did learn from taking part on ELSAP. New knowledge and understanding brought a

change to their practice which happened in parallel with ELSAP delivery. In other words, ELSAP impacted on LSA practice.

Analysis heightens the importance of relevant personal and professional development for college LSAs' who support learners with LDD (Bruce, *et al.*, 2010; Woolfson and Trussel, 2005). In philosophical terms, the dynamic relationship between the micro and meso levels is being illustrated here (Benjamin, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1933, 1986). The micro level being the inner emotions and views of LSAs' on their own levels of competence which are reflected in their low levels of confidence and self-doubt. The immediate environment of LSAs' in this case forms the meso level, i.e. the inclusive classroom and their work with learners with LDD. Professional learning and development opportunities, (or the lack thereof before ELSAP), also forms part of the meso level, layer or system. The reciprocal relationship between these systems (as described in Chapter 3), in this case means that untrained LSAs' with low levels of knowledge and self-confidence will almost certainly carry that over into their application of skill and practice in the classroom. In other words, LSAs' will not be as good as they could be in performing their roles.

This concludes analysis of the findings on the sub-theme which emerged during rigorous analysis of LSAs' experiencing the 'college as a complex working environment'. The final sub-theme is now discussed in relation to the wider inclusive college context and focuses on service delivery for learners with LDD.

Hindrances in Supporting Learning

Legislative developments and reports supported the move towards social inclusion and inclusive education for post-sixteen learners with LDD (Barton, 2010a; Gibbs, 2005; Morgan,

2000; Oliver and Barnes, 2010; Tomlinson, 1996). Since April 1993, colleges for further education have been employing LSAs' to support learners with LDD in inclusive classrooms (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Green and Milbourne, 1998). Mclachlan (2004: 3) wrote about the work that college LSAs' do in classrooms, 'their role and responsibility go beyond being just an extra pair of hands. They become part of the teaching team who observe, assess, teach, supervise and support'.

Since the 1990s authors claim that LSAs' in colleges should be trained to understand their role and deliver specific tasks ranging from pastoral care to 'specialist' (SENET, 2005; Sutherland, 1997) tasks. Hoban (2002) argues that professional development for teachers of teaching (and by implication for LSAs' who work as part of the teaching team), is to facilitate professional learning as a process of learning and development for educational change (Hoban, 2002). Skills for Business (2006) defined the role of college LSAs' by developing professional standards for LSAs' who work in colleges in 2006. This was followed in 2007 by the outline of a pen portrait on personal and professional characteristics for college LSAs', by Lifelong Learning United Kingdom (LLUK) who are the sector skills body for colleges (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). However, an appropriate training framework for college LSAs', supported by national and legal requirements, still does not exist. Within the context of this absence of a satisfactory training framework for the professional development of college LSAs', it is important that we understand the content of the following sub-sub-themes that became apparent from a critical engagement with data.

'Hindrances' as identified upon analysis and interpretation of data were seen as a direct result of the lack of up-to-date relevant and adequate professional learning for LSAs'. Norwich (2008) refers to these as 'dilemmas' while Giangreco and Doyle (2007) named hindrances as

‘issues’ and ‘complexities’, within ‘inclusion’. This consolidates that barriers within ‘inclusive’ educational practice do exist and I shall continue by explaining the narratives which formed the sub-sub-themes in relation to the ‘hindrances in supporting learning’ sub-theme. LSA’s reflective diaries proved to be a useful tool to extract their own inside views and thoughts about their knowledge and practice. Their writing was done in an almost confessional manner which at times reflected the emotional, personal difficulties, and short-falls and dilemmas they experienced (Coffey, 1999 Stevens and Cooper, 2009).

The first theme shows how LSAs’ misunderstood what was expected of them and how this misconception negatively influenced their practice. Please keep in mind that the narrations were completed over a prolonged period of time during the ELSAP intervention. The impact of ELSAP is apparent in these narrations and this highlights the ‘gap’ in LSAs’ understanding prior to participation.

Misconception of own role, responsibilities and tasks

From reading Anne’s narration (see below) we can see how she has increased her knowledge-base; she uses words e.g. ‘feedback’ and ‘plan’, which are both key teaching-related vocabulary. She also mentions herself that she ‘learnt’ and then explains what she has learnt.

I did not realise that I observe students for a specific reason. Working in the class and being amongst students almost appears informal and natural. I learnt to be much more observant of specific things (like students behaviour). When I discuss students now with the tutor, I focus on what I need to report on for my job is to give feedback, did students complete their task, and did their behaviour affect how they completed the task. Tutors take my feedback into account when they plan their next lesson (Anne).

Another narrative reads along similar lines, ‘communicating with students is part of what I do. I never really give it that much thought’ (Moir). The difference between these two narratives is that in the first instance, the LSA realised that observations are very important and for a good reason. Almost two decades ago, data from a research brief conducted by

Farrell, Balshaw and Polat (1999: no page number) for the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), indicated that 'LSAs' value training which had direct practical application'. In my professional experience and role as a lecturer for LSAs' supporting disability education, the same is true today. I reflected in my field notes the following:

During a professional discussion with one of my LSAs' today, I realised the importance of flagging up specific aspects of their performances during these discussions. What may seem like an informal generic chat to the class teacher may be experienced as valuable constructive feedback for the LSA and an opportunity to learn about important detail of his/her performance. Professional discussions, formal or informal are valuable training opportunities (Field notes).

The second narrative above shows a lack of understanding as to the importance of effective communication. The absence of explanation around the subject highlights this lack. As theorised in Chapter 3 and also discussed in a previous section of this data chapter, effective communication is key to our role in classrooms (Curzon, 2004; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007; Minton, 2005). Theories of communication involve the art of active listening, verbal use of language and how non-verbal language should support verbal speaking. Giangreco and Doyle (2007) summed up that this theory is needed for instructional dialogue. Communication with the learners is also much different to communication with the tutor as part of the teaching team (Fox, 2000). Reasons for and barriers in communication need to be understood. Knowledge on how to support learners with receptive or expressive communication impairments is vitally important (Snyman and Engelbrecht, 1996).

According to Snyman and Engelbrecht (1996), receptive communication impairments refers to, for example, learners who are speakers of other languages who struggle to comprehend what has been said, or learners with cognitive impairments who subsequently also have comprehension difficulties. Learners with expressive communication impairments may also be second or third language users or it could be due to a physical difficulty such as stuttering.

LSAs' would need very specific training in all of the above cases to fulfil their role and tasks in inclusive classrooms effectively (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Fox, 2000). Other issues to do with communication as part of the LSA role include, for example, issues on data protection and confidentiality, and the issue of power relations. Peters (2010) conducted an interesting study to explore disabled student's voices. He discusses how knowledge on power relations in 'inclusive' classrooms can support student's developing much needed resilience and identity. It is, therefore, essential that the broad area of communication is included in programmes for the professional learning and development of LSAs' which is why it is a component of Unit 03 of ELSAP.

The first extract above indicates a positive change in classroom practice. Although we may need to make assumptions about the second extract as to whether educational change has occurred, we can conclude that as a key responsibility of the LSA role, 'effective communication' has hitherto been hugely under-explained. This absence of explanation indicates a significant lack of LSAs' knowledge on 'effective communication' as well as significant misconceptions about its importance in the teaching (supporting)-learning-process. The next theme continues by describing a lack in LSAs' knowledge base as it emerged from data which, in this case, is a lack of understanding in specific regard to teaching or supporting learners with LDD and how to access the curriculum for those learners.

Unsatisfactory knowledge on LDD and appropriate interventions

Supporting post-sixteen learners with, for example, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties can be challenging (Ayers, Clarke and Murray, 1999; Fox, 2000; McSherry, 2001; Rogers, 1998b). It is almost as if by now they should have grown out of the attention-seeking

behavioural stage, which is more age-appropriate to younger children than young adults, but this is often not the case (Rogers, 2000; Rogers 2001). There are various reasons for people to behave in a certain way and in college we often 'inherit' young people who dropped out of secondary education and who, for some reason or other, failed to achieve. This in itself is grounds on their part for defensive behaviour (Rogers, 1998b). LSAs in college support these post-sixteen learners with behavioural difficulties and need to employ a sound knowledge of the reason for these behaviours, and how to support these learners by using positive behaviour management strategies (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Farrell, 2000; Hallowell and Ratey, 1994). An LSA who supports a learner with ADHD reflects in her diary:

Worked with Steven today. He has a very short attention span and loses interest in his work easily. He is not good at writing stuff and today he had to construct a paragraph or two towards his assignment and I just couldn't help him to achieve that. I struggled to get through to him. He can be very fidgety and once he starts to be restless, the situation usually gets worse. Today was no exception and he ended up being sent out of the room. He got annoyed with himself and started to kick off and when a fellow student offered to help, he actually swore at him. I feel sorry for Steven he is not a bad lad (Rose).

Rogers (1998b), explains that behavioural interventions draw on the effective use of language on the part of educationalist to correct behaviour. According to Rogers (1998b), knowledge on other aspects such as non-verbal language, timing, tactics, diversions, distractions, to name a few, are all vital to re-directing challenging behaviour. (Also see Hill and Parsons (2000) with specific reference to 'effective communication' as a key element in the forming of team strategies for managing behaviour). This is yet another instance where research highlights the importance for LSAs' working with young people to be adequately trained if they are to acquire the necessary knowledge on behaviour management. Another extract from a LSAs' reflective diary also relates to supporting a post-sixteen learner's behaviour. However, the origin of the behaviour is somewhat different than in the previous narrative. In this case the learner has been identified with moderate to severe autism, which triggered

unpredictable and sudden outbursts. This further theorises the importance for LSAs' to be subjected to practice related training. Below follows the self-explanatory narrative of Wilma who worked in the Painting and Decorating Department of the college supporting Chris (who is autistic) and his challenging outbursts:

Today Chris my 1:1 finished stripping of his wall. He usually needs lots of direction and support for he gets bored easily and he also works better in a quieter area. He suffers from severe autism and the slightest change in his programme, noise levels, his own frustrations or boredom, can trigger sudden and rather aggressive outbursts. I trust my instincts when I work with Chris. I do not have any training for autism and although I have worked out a lot of things for myself, it would have been good to discuss Chris's issues with someone who can give me specific advice on how to manage his behaviour even better (Wilma).

Although the LSA does not describe a specific incident or how she dealt with it, she does show some insight and knowledge about Chris and his difficulties and admits that she could have benefitted from relevant training on autism to be more effective in her role. In this case, the narrative describes the lack of proper and adequate training with regard to a LSA supporting a learner with LDD.

In both these cases the behavioural interventions are very specific. The use of language (verbal and non-verbal) and communication play an important role in positive behaviour management (McSherry, 2001; Rogers, 1998b; Rogers 2001). Further to this, interventions such as the break-down of the physical day by using a linear time-table, and consistency and predictability of the environment play a vital role in the teaching-learning-process for someone who presents with autism. A calm, quiet work area is also important as sensory overstimulation can induce outbursts (Fox, 2000; Mouton, 2000; Snyman and Engelbrecht, 1996).

From both these examples from LSAs' diaries we can conclude that there existed a lack of practice- specific knowledge about how to support post-sixteen learners with LDD. Although we do not have evidence of how the lack of knowledge affected the work of the two LSAs' involved, it is rational to think that it would have had a somewhat less than desirable impact on their classroom practice and for the post-sixteen learners involved. The next theme also deals with learners with LDD and how LSAs' lack of knowledge on symptoms of physical conditions/impairments, effects of pain and medication on learners with physical conditions, affects LSAs' practice and subsequently the learning of learners with LDD.

Limited understanding of physical symptoms on learning

From experience learners with moderate, severe or profound physical disabilities (Farrell *et al.*, 2007; SENET, 2005) can at times suffer from pain or the effects of medication taken to ease the pain. Anne reflected in her diary:

I support Entry students on Friday afternoons. Although I circulate amongst the group and support whoever needs my help, I mostly support a male student who is wheelchair bound because of his Cerebral Palsy. He is severely physically disabled and has very little use and movement of his arms and legs. He becomes tired very easily. My role in supporting him is to transcribe his thoughts which are often a guessing game because of his severe communication impairment. Although he usually enjoys being part of a social group and getting attention, it is obvious that he suffers pain in the afternoon for he begins to make loud noises. I wish I knew what caused his condition and how I can make life easier for him. He has a wicked sense of humour and is an important member of the class (Anne).

Working with young people with a physical disability can be very tough both professionally and at a personal level. To witness someone in pain and not be able to do anything about the situation can be emotionally very draining and stressful for the LSA involved. Parallels for coping as educators of learners with LDD can be drawn from the key report by Tomlinson on 'inclusive education' in 1996, and current practice. According to Tomlinson (1996), for those learners with disability or learning difficulty who were initially permitted to access

mainstream education, the starting-point was usually the description of their condition (diagnosis) given by doctors. Tomlinson (1996: 5) continued to explain about LDD and strategies for teachers:

Each student must learn the ways needed to proceed in the chosen study and adjust their learning styles accordingly. The task of teachers is always to effect a marriage between the requirements of particular subject matter and the predispositions, stage of development and the capabilities of those who would learn [...] we extend this view to the learning strategies adopted by people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties and their teachers.

From Tomlinson (1996) the message was very clear, although the implication of ‘inclusive’ education for those with LDD may be challenging, teaching staff need to adapt to ways to cope, taking conditions and special requirements into account. Professional learning for LSAs’ who work in similar situations as the above LSA (Anne) would benefit hugely from opportunities to explore the special needs of the learners that they support with this type of ailment. They ought to be able to research the area of need, find definitions for and the potential causes of the physical condition, and bring these to the table for discussion with other LSAs’ and more senior staff. Tomlinson (1996: 8) suggested in his ground-breaking report (discussed earlier and also in Chapter 3), that ‘staff training’ will support cooperative, interdisciplinary team support which is needed to enhance knowledge about learner support for LDD in ‘inclusive’ settings.

Almost two decades later, the above reflects my own professional experience and confirms my current views that professional development interventions on how to physically support a learner who is, for example, on the severity level of the spectrum of physical needs are required. This would include: how to know when to administer pain medication and to make allowances for the influence of medication on the learner; ways to access the curriculum and to develop skills around making good judgements on when to do which type of

activities/tasks. An extract from my field notes illustrates my experience and supports my views:

Andrew, is a learner on MENCAPs' Essential Skills programme who seem to benefit from the social aspect of being at college. He has a co-morbidity of physical and sensory needs. He's hard of hearing and refuses to wear his hearing aid most of the times. This results in him often not understanding what is expected of him and becoming frustrated. In addition to this, Andrew also has physical needs due to a rare syndrome, which mean that his muscles, particularly the muscles in his limbs, can go into sudden spasms which can be very painful. He has to take medication daily which we administer in the afternoons. Accessing the mainstream curriculum for Andrew is a daily challenge for me and the LSAs who support him. With no fault on Andrew's part he is either in a state of drowsiness because of his medication or being intolerant with himself because of his poor hearing and lack of comprehension. He also has a very short attention span and can have a mood swing when he is in physical pain (Field notes).

This narrative shows the diversity of knowledge, skills, initiative and stamina Andrew's team must have to support him in college. LSAs' who worked alongside me of whom some attended ELSAP, benefited from having professional development opportunities during which they discussed their professional and personal needs of when it came to supporting Andrew and others in similar situations in inclusive classrooms. We must assume that the physical, sensory, emotionally and cognitive needs of learners must be an integral part of the mandatory training for the supporters of these learners. Support in this area means support within a specialism (Sutherland, 1997; Woolfson and Trussel, 2005). Referring back to the above narrative by Anne, she expresses her need to increase her knowledge on Cerebral Palsy, the condition which she supports and she thereby 'admits' to having a gap in her knowledge.

Further analytical engagement with data from the diaries of LSAs' shows that, to a lesser extent, gaps in knowledge on specific special needs existed. Claire wrote in her diary:

Today, there was only one student who I was required to support, it was the student with the sensory impairment. She has both hearing and visual difficulties which often left her feeling confused during classes. She sometimes suffers headaches and has to

take medication which makes her feel spaced-out. Because she is enrolled on a GCSE course which required consistent hard work on her part, it is important that she does not fall behind on assignments. It is my task to ensure that she stays on track and that her physical condition does not become too much of a hindrance in her progression. This is not always an easy task for like today she has shown signs of tiredness. It is the end of the week and the three-hour lesson was just simply too long for her. Although she has worked on her own and alongside me for the majority of the time, she may have benefited from going home earlier, getting some rest and to continue with assignment work at a later stage when she felt up for it. Sometimes we just expect too much of our learners with disabilities in the name of inclusion. I think that there is a definite physical limit as to what learners with disabilities can take and do within one college day. Not being disrespectful, but this is just how I feel (Claire).

This is a candid insider's reflection on the experience and role of an LSA who supports a learner with physical impairments in mainstream college education (Becker, 1998). Although the LSA demonstrates with this narrative an awful lot of insight, there is some room for improvement. Although the three-hour lesson appeared to be too lengthy for this specific learner who presents with both hearing and visual impairments, there are ways in which the LSA could have broken down the time and the learning/writing assignment into more manageable chunks.

An adequately trained LSA would have negotiated a different learning frame with the tutor/lecturer for this student which allowed the student to take short breaks to revive her levels of concentration (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010). The narrative did not explain the resources used or the modification of learning materials and we cannot make a judgment on the quality of the learning support in this respect. However, there being no mention of this may indicate the 'absence' thereof (resources and modification of learning materials), which may indeed highlight an urgent need for training on specialist ICT equipment, enlargement of documents and specialist auditory equipment.

A further aspect of the above extract is that it shows signs of mild emotional burnout on behalf of the LSAs' which, in my view, may impact on her professional judgement and practice (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). LSAs' need to be trained on how to deal with the emotional component of their work. They need to stay mentally healthy in order to perform effectively in their support roles as an element of personal involvement is always inevitable when a person delivers this kind of 'caring' work (Robson and Bailey, 2008). It is important that LSAs' form forums or learning communities which offer them opportunities to discuss their work (and difficult situations) within a safe and secure environment (Wald and Castleberry, 2000). Reflection will help them to ventilate feelings of powerlessness and sadness for some of the severely disabled students that they so often have to support (McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Schön, 1987). The following sub-sub-theme shows how inadequate knowledge about the curriculum area impacts on LSAs' practice during learning support:

Little/no previous or existing knowledge and skills of the vocational area/curriculum

Earlier in this chapter, the data on the 'uniqueness of the vocational curriculum' has been theorised. Similarities can be drawn between the above and that previous discussion. We have understood from earlier discussion that in order to make sense of the uniqueness and range of vocational programmes, we need to learn and adopt specific skills, for example, to support the practical tasks in Engineering or Painting and Decorating. In this section, short extracts from written tutorials and reflective diaries highlight the lack of curriculum-related knowledge and understanding on the part of LSAs'. It is logical to assume that, as a result of this, learning support will be compromised. An extract from a written tutorial reads: 'I am new to being a LSA in college and this is the first time that I work within the area of Painting and Decorating' (Kelly). Another extract from a written tutorial states along the same lines, 'Although I have worked as an occupational therapist before, I am new to my LSA role in the

college, and I am new to working in early years' (Mary). Another LSA reflects in her diary, 'although I have worked in a nursery before I am new to working on entry level courses' (Rose).

Upon critical engagement with data a sub-sub-theme arose, pointing towards a lack of understanding and knowledge for the vocational areas within which these LSAs' work. The vocational curriculum is very different from the school curriculum and vocational studies also differ hugely from each other. Each area falls at a specific level within the wider QCF (Dimbleby and Cooke, 2001) and will have specific entry requirements, curriculum and curriculum outcomes. In order to be effective as a teacher in these vocational areas, very specific vocational knowledge and skills are required and the same is true for the LSAs' who work alongside these tutors in classrooms and workshops.

Unsatisfactory knowledge on how to motivate learners during teaching-learning-process

Motivation is an educational psychological science (McCown *et al.*, 1996). According to McCown *et al* (1996) motivation involves a sound knowledge of the theoretical aspects of the educational psychological aspects of motivation, for example, the different forms of motivation, and the intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors which influence the motivation of learners and barriers to that motivation. For LSAs', motivation has to do with how they communicate and how they use their own verbal language, facial gestures, tone of voice, etc. It is also about showing an understanding of how you communicate with learners and the impact it may have on their motivation (Curzon, 2004; Fox, 2000; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007; Hill and Parsons, 2000; Minton, 2005).

Motivation can take on many forms, for example, showing an interest, answering questions, praising and encouragement. Data indicates a lack of LSAs' knowledge on the science or underpinning theory of motivation. The following examples from LSAs' reflective diaries show how they failed to use opportunities for motivating their learners. I think it is logical to conclude that this happened due to a lack of knowledge of the science of motivation rather than interpreting this as chance. Rose made the following entry in her diary:

I have made a point of being more professional. I seem to not getting on with a particular student that I work with and don't think I support him enough. I often struggle to communicate with him or get through to him. I want my relationship to be better with this student - he needs a lot more encouragement from me. I want to be professional and model effective communication and am currently undertaking reflective practice to improve my work (Rose).

Although Rose shows a lot of insight into the cause of her dilemma, she needs to consolidate a good working relationship with the student she works with through building his trust and respect. Being professional and the way in which she communicates is going to be vital to achieving this. She shows an understanding of these aspects and has tried to improve by reflecting upon it. In the same diary entry she wrote, 'reflective practice has been particularly beneficial to me, I have made a point to talk to other LSAs' about this particular student that I have difficulties to work with and I have tried to take advice from them'. This is in line with the benefits of reflection on practice (McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Stevens and Cooper, 2009; Schön, 1987).

Moreover, Rose continues to write, 'the student seemed not to respond to my gestures of communication and encouragement and instead appeared not to have heard my remarks'. There could be various reasons why this has happened, but we cannot speculate on these. Analysis indicates that there is a real effort from the LSA to become more professional in how she communicates. She shows some understanding of her own professional limitations

and wants to better herself. If adequate LSA training is provided, she will continue to learn and improve her communication skills (Farrell *et al.*, 1999; Robson and Bailey, 2008) and begin to better understand the methods used for building and establishing interpersonal working relationships to improve her interaction with and the responsiveness of a student. As soon as that has happened, she will be able to discuss his reasons doing his course and figure out what motivates him (McCown, 1996). Is he participating in this course to please his parents (external motivation) or is he doing it to become employable and independent (internal motivation)? Once the LSA finds answers to these questions, she will become more confident about how to motivate this student. Further analysis provides a logical explanation as to how this situation of inefficiently trained LSAs' can be resolved. This particular LSA had and took the opportunity to engage in effective and relevant training through her participation in ELSAP and others with similar training needs should be given the same opportunity. A second narrative reads:

I have worked in a nursery before and found it much easier to praise and encourage children compared to the young adults who I now support. One has to be so careful with young people they pick up more easily if you don't mean what you say. It is also much harder to show a real interest in what they do if they are not easy to chat to. How can I encourage them if I don't know what they've done or what they were supposed to do? ... Perhaps I am just not cut out for working with college students (Mary).

Another confessional and rather candid narrative (Becker, 1998) reflecting the self-doubt of the LSA. Her way of writing and rhetorical questioning are clearly indicative of how little she knew about motivation as part of effective communication when working with post-sixteen learners. Again, adequate training would provide the theoretical knowledge on effective communication and how to motivate and she desperately needs this to do her work effectively. Training would also provide her with the emotional empowerment and inner strength she deserves and needs to have as an LSA of post-sixteen learners (Skills for Business, 2006). Domain A of the National Occupational Standards for LSAs' working in FE

refers to the personal attributes these individuals must have or develop (Skills for Business, 2006). (See Chapter 3 for a full discussion on these). We can again assume that the LSAs' practice would have been affected by her lack of knowledge on how to motivate the college learners that she worked with. The next sub-theme in relation to the main theme, 'hindrances in supporting learning' explores how a lack of knowledge and understanding about college policies impacts on the quality of the learning support.

Limited understanding of college policies/codes of conduct

College policies provide a framework for practice (Barton, 2010b; Benjamin, 2002; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Rogers, 2007; Slee, 2010) for all members of staff, including LSAs'. For example, policies on behaviour, data practice, health and safety, teaching and learning, safeguarding children (in the case of 14 and 15 year olds who attend college), accident and emergency, ICT and more. Engagement with data showed that on a number of occasions LSAs' were oblivious to the existence of these policies, let alone their key aspects or how they would influence their practice (Bailey and Robson, 2004). I quote an extract from a classroom observation completed just before the LSA commenced with ELSAP:

Gemma had to deal with an incident which occurred during a practical lesson in Engineering where a student got slightly injured. Although she was very caring and supportive to the student, she failed to write up and log the incident on the required paperwork (Classroom observation).

If Gemma had knowledge on the accidents and emergencies procedures as outlined in the college policy for accident and emergencies she would have completed the correct paperwork.

A different situation occurred but also relates to a lack of knowledge on college policy with regard to confidentiality. Below is the extract from Kelly's reflective diary:

I got told off by my class tutor today, for I mentioned an incident which occurred in the classroom a few weeks ago to another adult who used to work at the college and it got back to my class tutor. According to him such information is always confidential and I may have breached the students' right to confidentiality with regards to the college policy on Data Protection (Kelly).

The above extracts further highlight the need for relevant professional learning and development for college LSAs' who work as part of the teaching team in inclusive classrooms (Tomlinson, 1996). Although nothing serious has happened to the LSAs' involved in these incidents, this may have very well resulted in formal disciplinary action against them or even dismissal should a learner have been disadvantaged due to their unprofessional actions. A further sub-sub-theme which emerged from data analysis heightens the lack of knowledge and understanding LSAs' had on how adults learn.

Lack of knowledge on adult learning theories

A lack of knowledge on the adult learning theories which underpin our approach to teaching and support had a significant impact on LSA practice. When teaching, and by implication supporting, we base our approach to teaching on various factors, including, theoretical knowledge of the different learning theories (Curzon, 2004; Sutherland, 1997). The development of adult learning theories from Pavlov and Skinner's work (as discussed in Chapter 2), to more modern explanations and approaches of how adults learn which includes the work of Mezirow, Bandura, Maslow and Vygotsky show how these different views have shaped our practice in adult education over the last sixty plus years (Daniels, 2009; Getzel and Wehman, 2005; Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003; Mezirow, 2000).

Qualitative data generated from classroom observations and my insider's field notes, illustrates that untrained LSAs' in colleges do not necessarily ground their practice in classrooms upon a knowledge of andragogy, and that often, therefore, they do not understand

why they have to deliver practice in a certain way. The following is an extract from a classroom observation, around the time that Gemma commenced with ELSAP.

Gemma has been working with me for almost a couple of months, since beginning of September. She is new to her role and I told her today the best way to learn how to do her job is to copy me. This is a good a strategy for direct contact and implementation of instructions and most tasks. Gemma helped me to organise the tables and lay-out the materials. She copied me and went around from table to table, listening and prompting discussion amongst the learners. From Gemma's body language, I, however, doubt if she fully understood the rationale behind social learning (Classroom observation).

The above extract refers to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which is based on the view that people learn far better from their peers and within a social context (Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003). An extract from my field notes reads that more LSAs' will benefit from professional development opportunities to explore theories of learning:

I had a brief conversation in the corridor with an LSA today who asked me why I thought her tutor allows his students to work in groups of four and with their friends. She felt annoyed by the fact that the classroom is always noisy and that learners were always talking (Field notes).

Social learning implies that there will always be a buzz in the classroom. It indicates discussion, debating, analysing and learning (Jarvis, *et al.*, 2003). How tutors (and LSAs) manage the groups and facilitate the group work and feedback is very important to the overall success of employing social learning. Both extracts above, highlight the lack in LSAs' knowledge-base on this aspect of learning. Appropriate training should address these teaching needs of LSAs'. Although these examples from data do not explicitly tell us if this lack of knowledge impacted on their practice as LSAs', it indicates that they may never be capable of being in a position where they have to facilitate and manage social learning by themselves.

Although knowledge in this area would probably enhance LSAs' use of certain strategies in the classroom we do not have evidence to support this statement so it remains speculative for

the purposes of this thesis. The last sub-sub-theme which emerged under ‘hindrances for learning support’ is LSAs’ overall lack of knowledge on professional etiquette.

General lack of professionalism

LSAs’ play a vitally important role in the success of post-sixteen learners, especially those with LDD (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Tomlinson, 1996). For the benefit of these learners it is important that LSAs’ access information, provide feedback, report on situations that have occurred and liaise with others in order to best serve the interests of their learners. However, there is a definite boundary to the role of LSAs’, a ceiling to what they can and cannot do (Fox, 2000). From experience, I know that LSAs’ are often put in positions where they have to take the lead or make decisions outside their remit. This contravenes the boundaries within which they are supposed to operate. There is always good justification for this, (so the managers say!), however this puts LSAs’ in a vulnerable position, especially when they suddenly have to cover for someone who is ill and they need to access information to do so. Nevertheless, as part of their role, LSAs’ first port of call is always their class tutors or lecturers (Fox, 2000). It is not professional to contact managers or outside course leaders without the ‘consent’ of their tutors and lecturers. This would be seen as undermining the authority of their immediate collaborators.

As theorised earlier in this chapter, these aspects of a ‘line of communication’ need to be explained and discussed with LSAs’ as part of their personal and professional development (Curzon, 2004; Farrell, 2001; Minton, 2005). I made various field notes over a prolonged period of time in which I reflect on the lack of knowledge of LSAs’ in relation to lines of communication. A few extracts follow as examples of gaps in LSAs’ knowledge as to whom they should report to. ‘Moira has just pushed passed a line of people waiting at a curriculum

manager's door. Apparently she had to clarify an issue'; and 'I overheard Claire questioning the curriculum head of Engineering in a corridor'; as well as, 'Received an email from the vice-principal today, saying that she supports Wilma to do a course in Asperger Syndrome. When did Wilma speak to the VP???'

Professionalism always impacts on class room practice. Unprofessional behaviour of this type may not impact directly on LSAs' classroom practice, but it will leave a stain on their practice. Whether it is peoples 'backs they've got up or peoples' toes they've stepped on', they will be sanctioned one way or the other, and this will affect their practice. My aim with ELSAP was for LSAs' to become empowered and for their professional profile to be raised through professional development and for them to develop a professional voice (Skills for Business, 2006). (Also see, as fully discussed in Chapter 3, five domains of the NOS for support staff working in 'inclusive' colleges (Skills for Business, 2006)). Data indicated that there was room for improvement and because these incidents occurred when LSAs' had already started to participate on personal and professional training, data provided me with an opportunity to bring these pitfalls to the table for discussion. My approach and intervention were in accordance with McNally (2009: 942), who argued the following:

It is important for teachers to be provided with opportunities to undertake reflective, collaborative, classroom-focussed inquiry in order to develop a well-informed approach to their own learning journey or trajectory. Approaches to initial teacher education and continuing professional development across the UK should aim to support teachers in this way.

Conclusion

The title 'reality check' of this chapter indicates that not all is what it seems and that the 'reality' is often at variance with what actually happens or to what should happen. In this

research a combination of quantitative and qualitative data were generated from using inductive exploration using methods such as, LSAs' own reflective diaries, classroom observations, written tutorials conducted with LSAs', my own field notes as well as pre and post self-assessment questionnaires and pre and post knowledge tests.

We have now seen evidence from data on how two main sub-themes arose, the first indicates how LSAs' experience the 'college as a complex environment' and the second shows 'hindrances to learning support' in relation to the main theme 'inclusive college education for learners with disabilities'.

To summarise, the themes which emerged from a critical engagement with mixed data and which relate to the sub-themes, college as a complex environment, are: uniqueness of the vocational curriculum; conflicting classroom procedures generate confusion; work in isolation - no staff room or designated area; lack of knowledge on aspects of teaching and learning; lack of knowledge and understanding for post-sixteen learners with LDD. Themes from the second sub-theme, hindrances to learning support, are: misconception about own role, responsibilities and tasks; unsatisfactory knowledge on LDD and appropriate interventions; unsatisfactory understanding of how physical symptoms, pain and medication effect learners and their learning; little/no previous or existing knowledge and skills of the vocational area/curriculum; unsatisfactory knowledge on how to motivate learners during the teaching-learning-process; little/no understanding of college policies/codes of conduct; lack of knowledge on adult learning theories; and lack of professionalism.

These themes have all been discussed and evidence from the data shows that all these issues need addressing if the performance of LSAs' in their supporting roles is to improve. They all

indicate gaps in the knowledge and qualification of LSAs' and demonstrate that training programmes such as ELSAP are vital to not only overcoming LSAs' lack of knowledge, but to their self-esteem and the confidence with which they conduct their practice. The data again highlights the need for appropriate personal and professional development training on a meso level for college LSAs' in order to bring about educational change to inclusive classroom practice (on a micro level) for the benefit of post-sixteen learners, including those with LDD (Hoban, 2000; Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The next chapter aims to present findings and discussion on the professional learning of college LSAs' which formed an important and final theoretical field as part of the literature which guided my research.

CHAPTER 7

‘EFFICACY OR INEFFICIENCY’: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Theoretical Backdrop

Nilsson (2010: 262) explained the concept of ‘social inclusion’ as ‘multi-faceted’ to stimulate equal opportunities for enrolment in education, nevertheless with concerns about the possibilities for young people with disabilities to gain ‘access to the labour market’. According to Nilsson (2010: 265), ‘VET (Vocational Education and Training) should improve the chances of young people to gain access to the labour market. He positively describes the importance of further education in the employability of young people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). Based on my research, apart from the potential benefit to access work and employment, the concept of social ‘inclusion’ is fundamentally a social ethics and rights discourse that, ‘tends to operate with a concept of social justice that is based on the notion of participatory democracy in which none are excluded or oppressed, and which celebrates difference’ (Dyson, 1999: 48).

In line with Dyson (1999), my research shows that LSAs’ are employed in colleges to work alongside their class tutors and lecturers to support learners with LDD to equally access and participate on various vocational curricula of their choice (Bailey and Robson, 2004). However, my research also shows that the work and role of college LSAs’ is complex for many reasons, most of which are highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6 (Green and Milbourne,

1998; Morgan, 2000). Further enlightenment about the work situation of LSAs' can be seen in the writings of Robson and Bailey (2008: 16) who state the following about LSAs' 'as they strive to assist colleges with the achievement of their organisational objectives, they may be vulnerable in different ways'. Robson and Bailey (2008) refer, with this quote, to the emotive aspect of the 'caring' role of FE staff. Robson and Bailey (2008) continued by drawing conclusions from Hochschild (2003) who wrote about the 'emotional labour' (Robson and Bailey, 2008: 1) of organisational workers, in this case, LSAs'. Parallels between Hochschild (2003) and Robson and Bailey can be drawn as seen in descriptions such as 'burdensome workloads' (2008: 16) and 'unrealistic expectations that they will address all of their students' needs' (2008: 16), which indeed, as some of the results of my research will show in this chapter, further highlights the emotional and, therefore, personal aspects of LSAs' implementation of their role (Skills for Business, 2006). For LSAs' to be efficient in their roles, they need, amongst other specific skills and knowledge, to be emotionally equipped (and empowered) to work with the daily stressors of being an educator in a large organisation with the additional responsibility of assisting disability (Forlin, 2001).

In line with the above, during my research it came as no surprise that LSAs' were personally and emotionally poorly equipped for their roles in inclusive classrooms. To illustrate this, I draw upon my own ethnographic writings during the research process, 'Wilma was in tears today, she thought she misread the triggers of her learner with Asperger's Syndrome and did fail to keep him safe' (Field notes). Another example is as follow:

'Gemma became visibly upset during an ELSAP class discussion tonight when we discussed strategies for supporting learners who are on the profound spectrum with regards their disability. She was explaining to others how the suddenness of a learner who suffered an epileptic seizure impacted on her personally and which in the future may impact on her ability to make quick professional decisions. She has become fearful of the inevitable, another attack' (Field notes).

Although these extracts indicate the often stressful professional judgments on the part of the LSAs' which participated on ELSAP and who work in real world conditions, they raise significant questions about the impact of this unresolved stress on the immediate and long-term practice of these LSAs' and the impact this may have for learners with LDD. We can ask ourselves, in the current climate of having inappropriately trained LSAs' supporting our learners with LDD, how meaningful the education that our young people with disabilities receive is. Is this truly non-discriminative, socially just and ethical education? If not, what are our responsibilities as educators to facilitate rightful education to comply with the social rights of 'inclusion' and what it aims to achieve (Dyson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2010)?

The above analysis leads us to discuss the important topic of LSAs' professional learning and development. An earlier study completed by Bailey and Robson (2004), on the work and training of college LSAs', shows that very little thought has been given to either their work or professional development. National Occupational Standards (NOS) was published in 2006 for college LSAs' and Lifelong Learning United Kingdom (LLUK) (who took over from Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) in February 2005), published a pen profile for college LSAs' in 2007 (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007; Skills for Business 2006), but no official training framework was produced for LSAs' who work in colleges in England. At the time of my research in 2006/2007, I explored the different training scenarios (discussed in-depth in Chapter 2) for the professional learning and development of college LSAs' and found that there was no real choice and that training only comprised one-day events on topics such as 'SEN in FE' (Wharf, 2005). Fogarty and Pete (2004: 57) refers to these one day training events as 'dog and pony shows'. The message is clear that what's on offer contradicted authors such as Hoban (2002) who argue that linear training events only reinforce what people already know and that new knowledge and skills should be learnt

through a more ‘systems thinking’ approach which focuses on collective (compared to individualistic) development for educational classroom change:

What is important when thinking about educational change is that these frames act collectively, not individually, to influence the change process. Consequently, educational change behaves as a *complex system* with multiple frames or elements acting together as a system to produce non-linear interactions (Hoban 2002: 36).

The complexity of change as described here refers, in the case of my research, to the different elements or layers which can either work together to bring about change (professional learning for LSAs’) or indeed, resist that change/learning.

‘...interactions are *complex*, meaning that a system can respond with an inertia to resist change and stay the same, or dynamically self-adjust to a new order or balance...change is difficult to predict because of the dynamics that exists between different changing frames or elements that influence the change process itself’ (Hoban, 2002: 36).

According to Hoban (2002) it is important to recognise these elements, layers or systems and the influences they may have within a process of change to bring new knowledge and skills to the classroom.

Importantly, attempts at managing change need to consider the multiple influences collectively and focus on the whole dynamics of the change process. What is central to this non-linear process that encourages or resists change are the interrelationship among the multiple change frames...each frame is also a system in each right...each frame being interconnected so that change in one frame affects change in others (Hoban 2002: 37).

The writings of Hoban (2002) were of particular significance to the aim of my research which was to increase LSAs’ professional skills to enhance their practice in order that a more ethical and meaningful education was provided for our post-sixteen learners with LDD. Hoban’s (2002) views were in line with Figure 3.5 in Chapter 3 in which I explain in depth the micro, meso and macro layers as complex and dynamic systems that influence change/professional learning for college LSAs’ (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Von Bertalanffy 1968). From reading and analysing Hoban (2002) and others (Forlin, 2001) I increased my own understanding of

favourable conditions to for the development and learning of college LSAs' who support post-sixteen learners with LDD.

In the absence of other research on professional development and learning for college LSAs', I often had to draw comparisons with what has been happening with regard to teacher training and teaching assistant training in schools. Bruce, *et al.*, (2010: 1707) wrote, 'sustained professional learning programmes that are collaborative and classroom-embedded support effective professional learning experiences'. This is in line with Hoban (2002) and authors such as Bruce, *et al.*, (2010), who point out that although several models for teacher training exist, the important thing is to acknowledge the complexity of the educational environment by including important features such as, opportunities for (collaborative) learning communities with interaction and dialogue, reflective learning, and encouraging long-term learning within work-based contexts (DuFour, *et al.*, 2006; Kolb, 1984; McGill and Brockbank, 2006; McNally and Menter, 2009).

I developed the Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP) as a solution to overcome the lack of appropriate and relevant professional learning schemes for the LSAs' in the college in which I worked. ELSAP was implemented over a prolonged period of time to allow ethnography to take its course (Coffey, 1999; Taylor, 2002). In line with the important words of Wright Mills (1959), I reasoned about the practical and institutional dilemmas I had encountered in regard to the professional learning of college LSAs'. (See Chapter 1 for more information about my personal motivation). I also used my sociological imagination to develop non-rigid methods to explore and find answers to what has been happening in this area of focus within my work and research. I quote, 'what he needs is a quality of mind that

will help them to use information to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world' (Wright Mills, 1959: 5).

This chapter continues by analysing themes as they emerged from a critical and analytical engagement with the data gathered during the ELSAP intervention. This includes qualitative data taken from reflective diaries, classroom observations, LSAs' written tutorials, my own field notes as well as quantitative data from programme delivery evaluations. The first theme explores the personal and emotional state of college LSAs' during their ELSAP participation.

Establishing the 'Efficacy or Inefficiency' of Learning Support Assistants

Emotional State

Literature on learning methods stresses the importance of individuals to stop and think and become self-aware within the learning process. The cyclical nature of Gibbs's (1988) reflective process argues for different stages which include; a description of what is happening; the feelings of the participant; evaluation of what was good and what not; analysis or sense-making of the situation; conclusion about what else can be done and action planning for future responses. For the purposes of this research and my analysis of data about LSA participants' emotional feelings, it is the *feeling* stage of Gibb's (1988) cycle that attracted my attention. Gibbs (1988) explains that learners need to tap into their own feelings during the learning process by asking questions such as, what am I feeling and what am I thinking? This type of self-questioning raises the learner's knowledge about him/herself and encourages self-identity and self-awareness and determines how they feel at the time of the event and how their feelings prompt their thoughts about the outcomes achieved. LSAs' need

to feel empowered and in control to successfully deliver during the challenging and sometimes daunting tasks they encounter on a daily basis.

Evidence from my field notes indicates that LSAs' have a warm and naturally caring side (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Fox, 2000). I wrote:

I have now met all the individuals who showed an interest in taking part in ELSAP. They all seemed to be from the same breed of people: open, friendly, enthusiastic, caring and hugely interested in what they do at college. They all expressed a need to receive more up-to-date information and training on the learners and their disabilities and how to support them. Not one of the LSAs' appeared hesitant to enrol as a volunteer to get that information – inspirational stuff! (Field notes)

Further evidence from research about the 'good nature' of LSAs' comes from Robson and Bailey (2008). Their research focused on the perceptions and relations between teachers and LSAs' in colleges in England and in their concluding discussion they say, 'There is a high level of consistency in the respondents' accounts, particularly with regard to the position of the LSW (learning support worker) as a caring and supportive member of staff...' (2008: 13).

In accord with my own experience and with Robson and Bailey's (2008) research, the NOS for college LSAs' (launched in October 2006), identified Domain A: professional values. This explains that LSAs' must possess a good set of moral principles and values to underpin their practice (Skills for Business, 2006). Although the participant LSAs' were warm and friendly and showed excellent interpersonal skills, it was too early to form a view on their moral values such as trustworthiness, punctuality or work ethics, in relation to their work in classrooms. However, toward the end of ELSAP implementation as part of the research process, I commented as follows in my field notes:

ELSAP implementation is drawing to a close this week. In some way I am relieved for the volunteer LSAs' who participated in their own time, some of them with young children of their own. It was admirable to see how well they attended over the 14 week period. Only a hand-full of occasions occurred when people could not attend but then made arrangements themselves to attend and catch-up on the second night of

delivery. Their commitment and positive attitudes count for a lot in my book (Field notes).

The above is my insider's account on how the emotional state of LSAs' appeared during the research process. What was perhaps more important, based on evidence, was how self-aware LSAs' were during the research process. From individual self-reflections further themes emerged on their emotional state and well-being: e.g., enhanced levels of personal confidence within their professional role; increased professional identity (which stemmed from a sense of self-identity); feeling more valued. I continue by reporting on the themes that emerged from critical engagement with data:

Enhanced confidence levels

Educational reform (Bines, 1986; Booth and Ainscow, 2002) over the last few decades (as conceptualised in Chapter 3), intensified, and according to, Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008), so did the complexities of teaching and learning for educators. They state that teaching staff operate increasingly 'within a climate of increasing accountability' (Vescio, *et al.*, 2008: 80). The assumptions are that this situation, together with other systemic factors, heightens the need for LSAs' to continuously participate in professional development in order to improve professionally. However, Vescio *et al.*, (2008) continue to argue that professional development needs to be far more than the acquisition of new knowledge and skills and I fully agree with Vescio *et al.*, (2008) that professional learning needs to aim to support the holistic development of the individual, including personal attributes such as self-confidence (Skills for Business, 2006).

Since commencing on ELSAP the LSAs' have reflected on the increase in their levels of confidence in general and particularly in relation to an increase in levels of knowledge and understanding on aspects of their work. A couple of extracts prove this point:

I work with a student whose mood is affected by health/personal issues. I think she realises that she needs help with her work and does want support but finds it difficult to accept it. I noticed during the lesson that she made a point of saying out loud 'I'm confused' 'I don't understand' which I think is her way of saying 'I want you to help me but I'm not going to ask'! ...I think that although I need to tread carefully with her, I need to be more confident and need to develop a thicker skin to her attitude and keep plugging away at giving her help. Although this is challenging, I can already see some small positive changes in myself and in my confidence levels when I work with her, since I volunteered on Benita's course (Gemma).

From the above narrative, one can conclude that participating in professional development supported Gemma to become more confident in her role. Gemma named it as 'small positive changes'. Along the same lines, an extract from a classroom observation on an LSA assisting a learner with moderate learning difficulties to build his Key Skills ICT portfolio, in the Motor Vehicle department, read:

This student struggles to understand the assignment brief, has difficulty staying on-task and is easily discouraged. C will confidently target set with this student one step at a time, either writing out exactly what he has to do and explaining it verbally at the same time, or getting the student to hand write a draft under her instruction before he attempts to key it in. At the beginning of the year, C appeared much less confident in using different support techniques, but as she has gradually gained confidence over time with her training, her ways of working has improved which benefits the student. (Classroom observation)

This extract is an example of data which shows 'improvement' and explicitly explains increased levels of confidence during practice. Extracts from a written tutorial and a reflective dairy also show enhanced levels of self-confidence in a LSA role:

I have no formal qualifications in this area, it has been valuable to learn new information, particularly about teaching styles, which will benefit me in my job. I have also gained a lot more knowledge about anything I think. This course has given me a lot more confidence and I already feel that this has made a positive difference to my work (Rose); and

'I am not as nervous as I used to be about taking a group without a tutor' (Moir). These narratives are all indicative that ELSAP provided opportunities for LSAs' to develop their

knowledge and understanding of teaching and support strategies and techniques which are key aspects of their work. These newly acquired skills and knowledge improved LSAs' levels of professional confidence and this, in turn, had a beneficial knock-on effect on their application of skill when working with learners with LDD in inclusive classrooms.

This description of how events unfold and how influences are in reciprocal relationship with each other is in line with complexity theory within a systems thinking paradigm which formed the underpinning philosophical argument for my research. It acknowledges the educational context as a dynamic one, with various interrelated levels/layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1933). One can positively conclude that LSAs improved their personal and professional levels of confidence with the assumption that participating on ELSAP did bring beneficial change to their practice. As the researcher I needed to ask *how* ELSAP facilitated micro-level, personal change in LSAs'? The answer relates back to Gibbs's (1988) cyclical nature of reflective learning which, encouraged by ethnography, provided participant LSAs' opportunities to *think* and become self-aware (Schön, 1987) and develop personal attributes needed for their role (Skills for Business, 2006). (Also see Domain A of the NOS which refers to personal attributes for college LSAs'). The second sub-theme which materialised from data was the development of a professional identity for college LSAs'.

Increased Professional identity

McNally (2009) wrote that educators' levels of commitment (and resilience) are influenced by their own background, initial professional education and induction to their work setting which is also their learning environment. On close analysis of data, it emerged that the way in which LSAs' see and view themselves professionally is closely influenced by these

background or historical factors. However, it is not the intention to speculate here about the fact that the LSAs' who enrolled on ELSAP had no prior qualifications or experience of disability education and that this became a predisposition and hindrance in their forming a professional identity. In other words, how a person sees him/herself personally carries over to his/her professional self-awareness. Analysis of data, however, made me realise, that during informal discussions (and later written tutorials) on the prospects of participating in ELSAP, almost each and every individual expressed a great desire to gain a suitable professional qualification in a quest for professional recognition and acknowledgement of their work in classrooms. Data for this has been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. According to McNally (2009), the forming of professional identities for educators (and in this research the LSAs') is to engage in prolonged learning programmes which allow participants to explore outcomes non-restrictively.

As support staff members, the LSAs' expressed a need to have a professional 'voice' and identity. In most professions, this would be gained through a recognised qualification. LSAs' also expressed the need to feel empowered to do what is required of them. The following extracts are examples of how LSAs' felt about themselves in terms of their own professional self-worth and identity, 'I would like others to see me as a full member of staff' (Kelly); 'I would like to feel that I know what I do and that I belong here in the classroom' (Wilma); 'I would like to receive a Certificate in Professional Development in Education' (Mary) and, 'that I can get the best for myself (in terms) of qualifications (Anne).

The above narratives show the need for professional status and identity. They ask that LSAs' be acknowledged and recognised for what they do and the professional values they stand for.

Valle and Conner (2010: 194) wrote about teaching assistants (TAs') as they are called in schools:

qualifications vary widely; most are not college educated and are hired with no or little prior training or experience in education or special education [...] lowest paid workers [...] limited career ladder options [...] on-going disagreement and confusion about what constitutes appropriate roles [...] tend to receive inadequate orientation, training and supervision.

This applies equally to LSAs' in colleges. Are we keeping these important members of the educational work force down because it suits us politically and economically? Could this be the reason why it took several years from the first request in 2001 until 2004 for a formal invitation to tender for the development of the NOS for college LSAs' (FENTO, 2001; FENTO, 2004) and then a further two years for the NOS to actually materialise (Skills for Business, 2006) but the sector is still without a training framework for college LSAs'.

Evidence from research and literature shows firstly that a professional identity for college LSAs' does not exist which recognises the important work LSAs' do with post-sixteen learners with LDD (Robson and Bailey, 2008; Slee, 2010) and secondly, and more importantly that, at a deeper level, this reflects the low esteem in which society holds our learners, their needs, their opportunities for education and ultimately their employability (Barton, 2010; Benjamin, 2002; Rogers, 2007). An example from literature is evidence of the little respect others have for the professional identity (professional integrity and credibility) of the work LSAs' do in education. I quote from recent research in a London based project: 'Service users were employed as classroom assistants and tutors' (Lau *et al.*, 2010: 15). Although this was written up as a 'good news story' for social inclusion and mental health it raised a number of practical education and professional concerns for me. It shows that learning support in education is potentially a dumping ground for anyone who does not have the necessary relevant experience or qualifications to appropriately carry out the work which

compromises the professional identity of LSAs'. It seems too easy, as seen in Chapter 5, for policy development to be neither sufficient nor robust enough to support or protect the services provided for learners with LDD in colleges.

The next sub-theme is in alignment with the previous ones which have dealt with 'enhanced confidence levels' and 'professional identity'. It refers back to the cyclical learning theory of Gibbs (1988) (as discussed above) in which he describes the learner's underlying feelings and self-awareness (in this research the LSAs') as detrimental to the learning process. Interestingly, psychology proclaims that a person values him/herself by how others treat us (McCown *et al.* (1996). If LSAs' are being asked to do low-level jobs, in terms of structural hierarchy on the lowest pay-scales with no prospects of career progression or any real professional development opportunities, how can they think of themselves as *valuable*?

Being undervalued

According to Norwich (2008), the core educational values in England are about the development of each child or young person's happiness and balance in order for their full potential to be realised. The implication for colleges is the implementation of individualised learning programmes (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010) for learners with LDD, which as seen from the literature and through no fault of their own, is supported in the classroom by untrained LSAs'. Although we will not speculate here about the reasons why LSAs' in the college where my research was conducted were treated in a less than favourable manner to such an extent that they fostered deep feelings of not being valued, it is possible to conclude that the various aspects previously discussed have contributed to this situation. Contributing factors include; the ad hoc manner (discussed in Chapter 5) in which LSAs are appointed and assigned to classroom duties; the fact that no or little attention is given to whether or not they

have any previous or related experience of working in education or with disabilities; the fact that qualifications are not a recruitment requirement; the lowest level of remuneration scales and the absence of a professional identity or image (Robson and Bailey, 2008).

Upon interpreting data on these aspects of our college LSAs', I found myself drawn into an emotional state of some despair. Although at times I felt powerless to help or to bring about the much needed change for these hardworking individuals who deserve the support that would give them personal and professional recognition, I felt even more convinced that ELSAP could only improve the situation. An entry in my field notes read:

I have started to read the first accounts and reflections in my participant LSAs' diaries. All nine diaries have been religiously kept to date. Individuals write with tremendous honesty... pouring their innermost professional fears and desires onto paper. I wish there was more that I could do to help. I feel humbled and have such great admiration for them as people (Field notes).

LSAs' themselves reflected and narrated their stories with regard to 'being valued', I quote:

'...also I would like to feel valued as a person' (Anne); 'to feel that people consider my input' (Kelly); and

The tutor that I worked with has been absent all week and there has been no-one to stand in for him. I have, therefore, had to supervise the whole group and have found that I have felt rather isolated and 'unimportant'. No-one offered advice or help (Moir).

This data reflects the raw emotional state which the participant LSAs', who participated on ELSAP, expressed during the research process. The reflective nature of the learning methods facilitated by ELSAP, encouraged self-exploration and raised self-awareness of these individuals (Gibbs, 1988; Schön, 1987; Stevens and Cooper, 2009). Critically, if it is true that we value ourselves by how others treat us (McCown *et al.*, 1996), we can conclude from the above data, that LSAs' did not think or feel that they were seen by others as professionals or that they were being valued and supported to grow, learn and develop personally and

professionally as a way to self-actualise either their own or their group's professional identity (McCown *et al.*, 1996).

This completes the reporting and theorising of data on the sub-themes: 'confidence levels', 'professional identity', and 'being valued' which emerged as aspects of the sub-theme, 'emotional state of college LSAs'. I continue by exploring and discussing themes relating to the professional capabilities of LSAs' which emerged upon critical analysis of the data.

Professional Competence

Professional competence and capability in respect of LSAs' who work in inclusive college classrooms involves two key areas. These are knowledge and understanding of their role and responsibilities and smart judgement on how to apply their skills. My ethnographic-self (Benjamin, 2002; Coffey, 1999; Plummer, 2001; Taylor, 2002), and my experience over the last decade, (through my coordinators role with regard to the training of TAs' who work in schools), taught me that there are two components or categories which best describe or outline the main aspects of a college LSAs' role and work. These are knowledge and understanding (KUS) and the application of skill referring to the performance in a role. These concepts are reflected in existing TA training programmes set-up by the different awarding bodies, for example Edexcel, Oxford Cambridge Registrations and City and Guilds. The newly launched Qualification Curriculum Framework (QCF) criteria, similarly distinguishes between what support workers need to KNOW (to perform in roles) and what the TA needs to DO (demonstration of skill during practice).

Professional occupational standards for college LSAs' was published and launched, as discussed in Chapter 3, in 2006 in which five separate domains were outlined: professional

values; supporting teaching and learning; specialist support for learning; supporting the planning of learning and supporting assessment for learning (Skills for Business, 2006). I developed a curriculum (Connolly, 2008), which I later named ELSAP, based on five core units, with each sub-divided into one or more elements. (See Chapter 3 for more information on how I developed ELSAP). The data below reflects the LSAs' own learning journeys and stories before, during, and after ELSAP participation. Themes that emerged upon vigorous analysis showed an improvement or enhancement in particular aspects of their work. The first theme which arose indicated an increase in knowledge and understanding of their role as LSAs' in 'inclusive' post-sixteen classrooms, is discussed below.

Enhanced understanding of the LSA role

One of the first handbooks which was written for LSAs' was Fox's (1998), 'Learning Support Assistants: Teachers and Assistants Working Together'. In Chapter 2 of this book, Fox (1998) explains the role of the LSA with regard to their responsibilities when working within 'inclusive' classrooms, the tasks that LSAs' can expect to do and the ground rules which underpin their practice. The participant LSAs' in this research were mostly new to their role, except for one individual who had been in the college for almost five years at the time of the ELSAP intervention. According to evidence from data discussed in Chapter 5, we know that they had not been through an induction process or had their role adequately explained.

This heightened the need for professional development opportunities and ELSAP was designed to provide such opportunities for the nine LSAs' who engaged in this training programme. Extracts from LSAs' stories show an enhancement in their general awareness of what their roles entailed and this spilled over into key aspects of their work. The following

examples from data substantiate these findings: ‘The course (ELSAP) has made me think about my work and approach in school and made me research professional practices, such as how to report abuse’ (Gemma); ‘The course has overall made me see that there is a lot more to being in college than just being an extra person in the classroom’ (Rose); Other examples read, ‘I have realised how important communication is within my TA role’ (Kelly); ‘My new skills have widened knowledge on my role, my responsibilities...’ (Wilma); ‘My knowledge of the TA role has increased’ (Mary).

Although some specific aspects of LSAs’ work come to the fore in these narratives such as knowledge on how to report abuse and the importance of effective communication, they are mentioned in the context of the LSAs’ new understanding of their role. Fox (1998) wrote that in their role it is helpful if LSAs’ have an understanding of the background and the framework which underpins the way in which learners with LDD are being identified as having special needs, and the ways in which they are being supported in education in England. It is fair to conclude that these extracts on the sub-theme of enhanced knowledge on LSAs’ roles, indicate the thoughts of how LSAs’ experienced ELSAP as a professional learning and development intervention and benefitted significantly from their participation through an increase in knowledge about their roles and work.

Increased knowledge and understanding about specific areas of work

Specialist knowledge or knowledge on a specific area within your role and responsibilities are vital for efficacy (Ayers *et al.*, 1998; Fox, 1998; Fox, 2000; Kamen, 2010; Lorenz, 1999; Morgan, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2004; Rogers, 2007). For example, ‘communication’ plays an integral part of what LSAs’ do in classrooms, whether it is supporting students through encouragement, prompting or active listening or whether it is communicating with a

colleague as a member of a team, or building a positive working relationship or giving feedback (Burnham and Jones, 2006; Kamen, 2010). The theoretical knowledge-base on communication which LSAs' need to develop includes, for example: alternative forms of communication, reasons for communication, ways of communication; types of communication, barriers in communication and how to overcome these, the beginning, middle and end of conversations, and the communication cycle (Burnham, 2007; Curzon, 2004). ELSAP Unit 01 explored the integrative role of effective communication when supporting learners in the classroom and the importance of constructive feedback and active listening needed when working as part of a team (Burnham and Jones, 2006; Kamen, 2010). Kwakman (2003: 152) says 'the reasoning behind this call for collaboration is that feedback, new information or ideas do not only spring from individual learning, but to a large extent also from dialogue and interaction with other people'.

Analysis from data indicated that LSAs' benefitted from having this input of knowledge on effective communication. Below are a few narratives to illustrate this finding. 'I believe that when I am working I do keep in mind what I have learnt on my course. I try to work in a professional manner and model effective communication. I apply active listening, make good eye contact, show an interest in what is being said and acknowledge the speaker by nodding' (Wilma); 'I have noticed a change in my practice...my classroom manner and communication is now up to standard' (Gemma). A third LSA wrote, "Yesterday was a good example of how I applied my newly acquired knowledge about communication, to manage/de-escalate behaviour. The student was at the end of his tether and I made light of what could have been a big deal. I used verbal language, short sentences, and a lighter tone. He saw the lighter side of the situation and I thought using humour was a good idea'. According to Rogers (2001), 'the language of management, and of discipline, operates in a

dynamic relationship. Developing skills in this area does not simply involve a series of words, phrases and sentences. If it is our intention to discipline with respect and confidence that intention needs to come *through* the language.’ The importance of managing post-sixteen learner’s behaviour through use of positive language and humour was a critical component of ELSAP. Rogers (2001: 80) astutely summarises, ‘Shared humour affirms something basic about our humanity’.

The above is a good example from data of how professional training on a micro, individualistic level, had a knock-on effect to a meso, classroom level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This argument is in line with the complexity theory within a systems paradigm, which was the chosen philosophical rationale for my research (Hoban, 2002). The college can be seen as a complex, dynamic environment with what happens in one area influencing the other (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). It can be concluded that LSAs’ did learn from their ELSAP experience. New knowledge did change their practice, and that change was in accord with ELSAP with learners benefitting from the change. The next theme shows how an increase in professionalism supported LSAs’ to build positive working relationships with students and colleagues.

Enhanced professional relationships/with learners/colleagues/team

Building and maintaining a professional working relationship with colleagues, is a professional quality (Fox, 1998). Rigorous engagement with data shows that LSAs’, through participating on ELSAP, think and act more professionally with regard to working with others as part of a team. Forming of reciprocal respect and professional working relationships are vital. Fox (1998: 19) says, ‘working in any partnership implies communication’. Communication is central to theorising the importance of what and how we work in

education and has been discussed and theorised about in data Chapters 5 and 6 (Curzon, 2004; Fox, 2000; Snyman and Engelbrecht, 1996). In line with the important role communication plays in forming positive working relationships is a narrative from an LSA diary which reads as follows:

‘All information I have learnt at ELSAP I share with my class tutor before I have put it into action. It always makes great discussion. It also supported me in forming a professional bond with my tutor. I realised that we shared views and goals’ (Wilma).

In this case, analysis shows that the LSA is now conducting professional discussions as part of her role. For this to take place she needed to use proper educational terminology in her language such as, individual learning plan (ILP); lesson plan; medium term planning; short term planning; learning outcome; scheme of work; curriculum; to name only a few. Although I do not have concrete evidence to make the assumption that these topics or others were discussed between Wilma and her tutor, the important fact for analysis is that there was a dialogue taking place.

Discussing boundaries as part of the LSA role was an important topic during the ‘effective communication’ element of ELSAP (Hryniewicz, 2007; Kamen, 2010). There is a fine line between getting too personal and informal with learners and still being open, friendly and trustworthy (Skills for Business, 2006). Although LSAs’ new to their role do not always realise this, it is simply about being professional and building a professional relationship (Curzon, 2004). Data from the research provides evidence that learners benefitted from the change in the way LSAs’ communicated during support and, thereby, forming professional relationships with them. An LSA wrote the following during a tutorial in which she reflected on her learning and her practice:

I am trying to be more professional in my work with others. I particularly tried to take advice from my tutor in relation to one particular student with behavioural issues...In

doing so I feel that I already built a better relationship with the student, but also with my colleague (Kelly).

Similarly, other narratives express the same:

I developed skills I didn't know I needed or had. It helped me to become a valued member of our team. Because of this, I feel more confident and the new information I have learnt I now put into action in the classroom. My knowledge is very much still developing and I'm learning new things all the time' (Mary).

According to Stark (2006), professional learning which is action driven and where participants feel the need to find solutions, is more effective. Nine LSAs' enrolled on ELSAP because they felt the need to improve their existing knowledge and skills on aspects of teaching and learning. At the time of my research, one-day workshops were the only course being offered as professional development solutions. However, according to literature, more prolonged, integrative, systemic and reflective approaches are needed to ensure educational change and application in the classroom (Hoban, 2002; Kolb, 1984; McGill and Brockbank, 2006; Schön, 1987) and this was the intention of ELSAP. The following section reports and discusses another sub-theme which is crucial to LSAs' being competent members of the college workforce. It refers to the ability to review and reflect on one's own practice in order to learn how to become more efficient.

Learn to review/reflect on own practice

Learning is a lifelong and a continuous process (Duckworth and Tummons, 2010). We learn as we work and we work as we learn! Boud and Solomon (2008) refers to this as 'work-based learning', learning at work, about work. Many theorists have written about different forms of actions that people can take to review or evaluate their own learning. However, I found that the writings of Schön (1987) offered the best description on how to be a reflective practitioner.

Underlying this view of the practitioner's reflection-up-action is a *constructivist view* of the reality with which the practitioner deals – a view that leads us to see the

practitioner as constructing situations in practice, not only in the exercise of professional artistry but also in all other modes of professional competence...In the constructivist view, our perceptions, our appreciations, and beliefs are rooted in worlds of our own making that we come to *accept* as reality (Schön, 1987: 36)

As researcher, I incorporated principles of Schön's (1987) teachings and Kolb's (1984) theories on the reflective cycle together with McGill and Brockbank's (2006) descriptions of the four dimensions of reflection, (as discussed in Chapter 3) into the implementation of ELSAP Unit 05, with its aim of showing LSAs' how to become reflective practitioners.

On completion of Unit 05 professional learning discussions, LSAs' reflected: 'Participating on ELSAP made me very aware of how important reflective practice is. I am now keeping a diary' (Moir); 'The reflective practice has been particularly beneficial to me. Instead of just feeling dissatisfied with my work I have been able to pinpoint what was not so good and assess how to address this' (Rose); 'I now undertake reflective practice to improve my work' (Wilma). These are just three examples from data showing LSAs' new knowledge on reflective practice, how it is a vital tool for learning about their own practice in classrooms and that it is particularly useful for reviewing and in improving practice. Many authors have written about the value and use of reflective practice as a method to acquire insight into one's actions. See Bradbury *et al.*, 2010; Stevens and Cooper, 2009; and Bolton, 2006 but to conclude on this sub-sub-theme, I quote Tummons (2007: 42):

Reflective practice [...] the opportunity to sit back and mull over a day's work can be, for many teachers in FE, the best opportunity to evaluate teaching practice and consider how anything – if at all – could or should have been done differently. Sometimes, this is best done in isolation. Other tutors take the opportunity to talk through dilemmas and concerns with colleagues. It isn't always easy to find time for this, but it can be a valuable activity'.

From the data we can see how participating on ELSAP provided opportunities for LSAs' to collaborate and explore new ways to think about their work. The data also shows how they

learnt and benefitted from the experience of using a reflective diary and how they can use reflective practice as a method to learn about their own practice. This concludes the findings and discussions on the sub-sub-themes which emerged within the sub-theme of professional competence. The following theme is on LSAs' views concerning the need for future professional learning and skills development (Fox, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Skills for Business, 2006).

Need for Future Training

Laufgraben *et al.*, (2004) wrote that the overarching reason for professional development is for individuals to develop a framework for ethical, national and local social responsibility within a wider, democratic and global, citizenship-context. For LSAs' professional learning is vital for many reasons, some of which have been theorised in Chapters 5 and 6, but the promotion of deep learning through meaningful experiences and community with others, is key to this as it generates a structure and coherence for the making of meaning (Bruce *et al.*, 2010; Kwakman, 2003; Laufgraben *et al.*, 2004).

Three sub-themes arose in this section. The first reflects a clear indication of methods for learning which LSAs' found worked well in this research. The second reflects how LSAs' viewed ELSAP programme delivery and the third makes useful suggestions for future programmes for the professional learning and development for LSAs'.

Facilitation of engagement and focussed discussion during learning

As facilitator it was important to me that the professional learning process was successful for LSAs' and I felt this could only take place within a relaxed, supportive and non-judgemental atmosphere in which we all felt encouraged to engage and share. Laufgraben *et al.*, (2004: 2),

theorise the following basic characteristics of learning communities which are that it is about ‘creating connections’ between, in this case, LSAs’, the college, their class lecturers and tutors, their post-sixteen learners with disabilities and their role. As part-time professionals ELSAP encouraged LSAs’ to integrate by means of learning activities which included discussion and dialogue (Fitchman and Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Hallowell and Ratey, 1994; Hoban, 2002; Kolb, 1984; McGill and Brockbank, 2006). This type of engagement supported LSAs’ in establishing professional networks through meaningful socialization and collaboration (Laufgraben *et al.*, 2004).

Within this context, an LSA made an entry in her diary towards the end of ELSAP implementation which suggested that she enjoyed the way in which the course was delivered. She wrote, ‘The best thing about coming to college in the evening is that I can just sit and relax around a table with others, listen to relevant discussion and participate how and when I choose to’ (Gemma).

Another LSA shared a similar view with me during an informal conversation and I noted the following in my field notes. ‘Wilma shared with me tonight that she found the structure of the ELSAP teaching very informal but informative. She appreciates the skilful way in which I lead discussions but still facilitate and encourage LSAs independent thinking’. Connolly (2008:92) wrote about facilitation, ‘this approach is synergy of self-awareness, the consciousness of social forces, capacity for identifying with group members and commitment to the process’. My aim was to introduce underpinning theories to the participant LSAs’ and generate discussion on how these theories relate to their classroom practice (Eraut, 1994). The process of facilitating ELSAP very much reflected my own deeply felt values and beliefs (Connolly, 2008) about how these adults should learn. In engaging LSAs’ in critical

discussion on teaching and learning related topics it can be argued, from a meso (environment) position, as influencing reciprocal change in thought, views and perceptions on a micro, individual (LSA) level and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). The following sub-sub-theme within the sub-theme of a need for future LSA training is about how LSAs' evaluated by means of quantitative rating-scales the impact of ELSAP on their learning.

Impact of Delivery Evaluations

Each participant LSA was asked to complete a programme delivery evaluation at the end of each unit to evaluate that unit. All nine LSA participants completed questionnaires for units 01 to 05. There were six questions on each of the five questionnaires. The LSAs' were asked to respond to each question using a 4 point Likert Scale with these ratings; 1 (very much) to 4 (not very). There was also space for LSAs' to comment further on each question if they wished. Table 7.1 below shows the percentage of responses over all five units for each question.

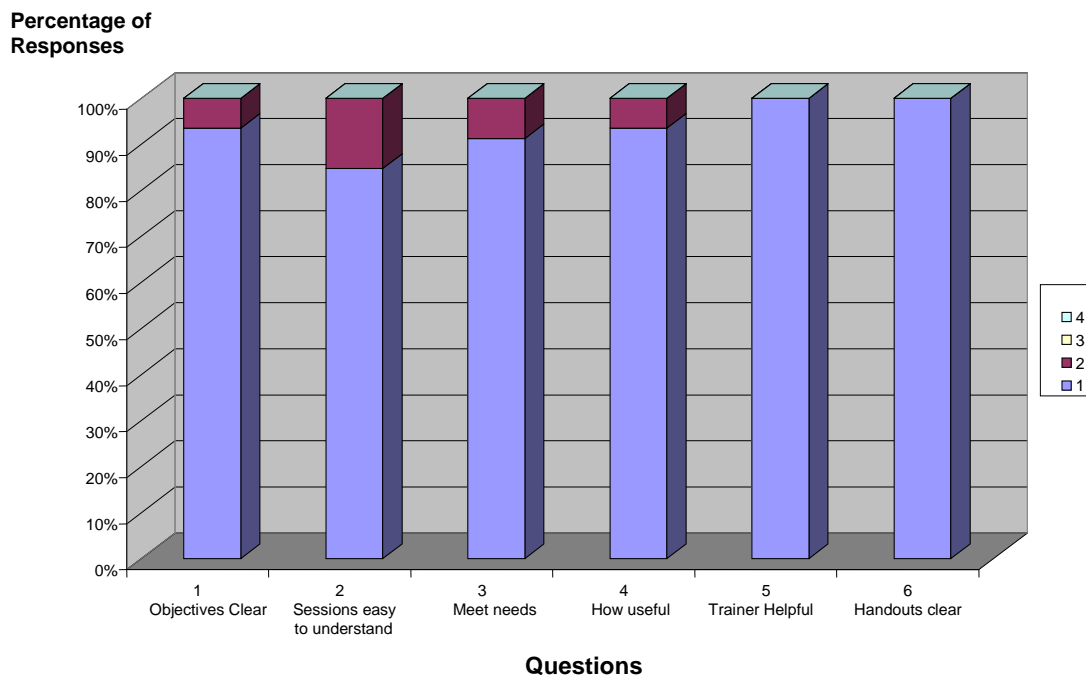


Table 7.1: Frequencies of Responses on Programme Delivery Evaluation Through-out the Course on Each Question

The graph in Table 7.1 shows that 93% of LSAs' over the five units rated that the objectives of a unit were "clear" (gave a rating of one). 84% of LSAs' rated that the training sessions were "very easy" (rating of one) to understand. 91% of students responded that their needs had been met (rating of one). 93% thought their learning/training would be "very useful" (rating of one) for their work. All LSAs' rated the trainer as being "very helpful" throughout the programme and also rated the hand-outs and visual aids as "very clear". Throughout the programme, no question received a rating of two, three or four.

Percentage of Responses

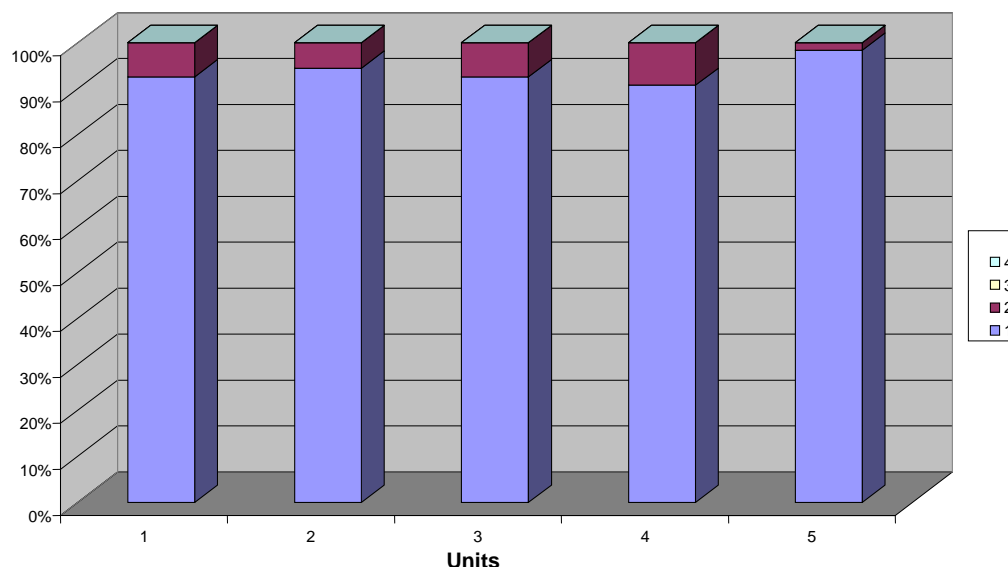


Table 7.2: Overall Percentages of Responses for All Questions on Programme Delivery Evaluation for Each Unit

Table 7.2 above shows the total number of LSAs' responses on every question for each unit. Each unit received greater than 90% of responses rated as a one for every question (range: 91% (unit four) – 98% (unit five)). This demonstrates that the quality of programme delivery remained consistently high throughout the fourteen-week period of ELSAP delivery.

This concludes the discussion on data collected on the theme 'programme delivery'. The final reporting on data is on the sub-sub-theme 'implications for future delivery'. The underlying rationale for using these quantitative evaluations at regular intervals during my research was to gain a holistic understanding of aspects of programme delivery to make improvements for future training. It acted as a form of standardisation to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Tummons, 2007). Tummons (2007) further stresses the importance of standardisation to improve and maximise effectiveness and accountability for the sake of

the participants/staff. The sub-sub-theme is a shared view by all participant LSAs' on some aspects of ELSAP which they felt could be improved for future implementation. These findings, in line with the earlier qualitative discussion on standardisation (Tummons, 2007) will act as a future safeguard against unsuitable or ineffective professional learning and training.

Implications for future delivery

As seen in earlier discussions, professional development is very important for a great many reasons. Key to this is the acquisition of new educational theory and skills for staff (Baume and Kahn, 2004; Bolton, 2006; Bruce, *et al.*, 2010; Eraut, 1994; Kwakman, 2003; Laufgraben *et al.*, 2004). Crickmore and Wray (2009: 300) reflect on education and training for health care professionals and what they say can also be said for the LSAs' who support LDD in inclusive college classrooms, 'there are insufficient numbers of qualified staff to support people with learning difficulties in need'.

Within this context, LSAs' were encouraged to voice their thoughts on what they would like improved or changed for the future delivery of ELSAP or similar professional learning activities. This placed an emphasis on the learning processes by which LSAs' felt they could develop and grow professionally and the conditions that support and promote such growth (Gravani, 2007). Constructive responses were made and recorded during my last tutorial with the nine LSAs'. As examples, I quote: 'I would have liked to have some devoted sessions in more depth - how the varying difficulties affect learning and how we as supporters/teachers can overcome this' (Wilma); 'Maybe more research as by finding info out the knowledge sticks in the brain easier than sitting listening to someone talk' (Kelly); and, 'It would have been nice to have had more time to go into some of the subjects in greater detail, particularly

teaching methods' (Gemma). Many years later I am still delivering ELSAP as the only professional learning 'course' for LSAs' at the college where I currently work. In line with authors such as Tummons (2007) I have made amendments to the implementation and delivery of the overall program to incorporate the constructive feedback offered by the participant LSAs' during this research study.

This concludes my reporting on the findings and discussion about the sub-themes within the theme of future training for college LSAs'. The next section offers overarching conclusive comments on this data chapter which has theorised and discussed findings on the professional effectiveness of college LSAs' and their need for professional learning and development.

Conclusion

'Efficacy or inefficiency' which is in the title of this chapter, reflects the mood from literature integrated with data on the professional expectations and requirements of LSAs' to be classed as professionals (Fox 2001; LLUK, 2007; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Skills for Business, 2006). The rest of the title takes the main theme 'professional learning for college LSAs' and this chapter looks at the sub-themes which emerged from this. It analyses and theorises the evidence from qualitative and quantitative data generated by means of the ethnographic stories as well as programme delivery evaluations of the nine LSAs' whose participation on ELSAP showed, that little has been done for their professional learning and skills development prior to this particular intervention (Benjamin, 2002; Coffey, 1998).

In ELSAP I used my sociological imagination (Wright Mills, 1959) and employed mixed methods (McMillan, 2008) to generate qualitative and quantitative data through inductive

exploration as well as evaluations. LSAs' narrated their individual stories (Becker, 1998) through individual reflective diaries (Stevens and Cooper, 2009). Together with classroom observations (McMillian, 2008; Silverman, 2006) and narrations from tutorials (Mertens, 2004) conducted with the LSAs', these have been taken account of in my findings. My own field note narrations together with programme delivery evaluations provided further insight and understanding about individual LSAs' work and professional learning.

From the data, three main sub-themes and several sub-sub-themes arose. In outline these are: *Emotional state of college LSAs'*: enhanced confidence levels; increased professional identity and feelings of being undervalued; *Professional competence*: increased knowledge on an LSAs' role: increased knowledge and understanding on communication, disabilities, policies and support strategies; enhanced professional relationships/with students/colleagues/team; learning to review their own practice; *Future training*: increased engagement and focussed discussion; evaluations of ELSAP delivery and implications for its future delivery.

From data analysis and interpretation we can conclude that LSAs' experienced a raised level of confidence which helped increase their professional identity. We can also say that the professional competence of LSAs' with specific reference to communication as part of a team increased as did the building of positive relations with learners, the knowledge of managing learners with LDD and an understanding of how policies and procedures relate to practice. There was also an increased knowledge of support strategies to enhance learning experiences for learners on the purposes for and how to review own practice. The findings indicate, with regard to the future training of college LSAs', that the identification of good facilitation practice with a focus on engagement and discussion/dialogue and identification of strategies, will improve the future delivery of professional learning activities for LSAs'. However,

nothing in life is static and life processes, including the learning process, remain fluid. The data highlights gaps and limitations in learning processes and shows that professional learning for these nine college LSAs' is work in progress.

The college has been described as a multi-layered and dynamic environment (Hoban, 2002), which is indicative of the need for those who work and train there to remain flexible in order to sustain the reciprocal 'movement' and 'interaction' amongst the various systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), which influence our work and training (Gravani, 2007). Wright Mills (1959: 6) wrote that 'no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections in society has completed its intellectual journey'. We may need to come back and raise more questions about the systemic influences on the professional learning of the college work force, including LSAs'. However, we can conclusively say, that although political and social problems on a macro level continue to hinder the professional development of college LSAs' (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), pragmatic strategies and innovative practice on a meso level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can compensate for such barriers. Innovative practices on the part of LSAs' benefits their post-sixteen learners with LDD by operating at an individual, micro (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) classroom level. This completes the reporting and discussion on data from my research. The following chapter will explore summative conclusions and recommendations for future educational research within disability further education.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS 'LEARNING FOR EXCELLENCE'

Introduction

'we need ways of expanding the reach of our thinking, of seeing what else we could be thinking and asking, of increasing the ability of our ideas to deal with the diversity of what goes on in the world' (Becker, 1998: 7)

My study was conducted within the further education (FE) sector and its aim was to improve the personal, professional and academic learning and development of learning support assistants (LSAs') who work in inclusive colleges supporting learners, especially those with disabilities (LDD), on vocational courses (Hryniewicz, 2007; Kamen, 2010). The study argues that if these learners with LDD are to receive a fair and meaningful education along with all other learners, LSAs' must have the necessary skills and qualifications needed to support them (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Nilsson, 2010; Pring *et al.*, 2009). I argue that to achieve this it should be a requirement that LSAs' are given training appropriate to improving their skills and providing them with the particular knowledge needed to teach and support these learners with disabilities (Benjamin, 2002; Morgan, 2000). For the purposes of my research I implemented an enhanced learning support assistant programme (ELSAP) which I designed to explore the learning journeys of LSAs' in the college where I worked at the time of this research. Nine of the LSAs' employed at the college volunteered to participate in this educational programme.

In following international and national policies of equality of opportunity colleges embraced inclusive agendas (Dyson, 1999; Jones, 2003; UNESCO, 1994) and could no longer exclude anyone from access to vocational curricula on the basis of ethnicity, gender, religion, culture or disability (Clough and Corbett, 2004). Although the college where I conducted this study embraced this inclusive agenda it nevertheless recruited LSAs' on an ad hoc basis without them having either the necessary experience of working in education or knowledge about disability. This situation of under qualified LSAs' working in important supporting roles raised, apart from numerous practical dilemmas, serious moral issues. On a human rights level (Barton, 2010b; Norwich, 2008; Tomlinson, 2010), it can be argued that this is in direct conflict with policies on equality of opportunity and inclusion, as it was not providing appropriately trained or qualified support for either the educational rights or the social justice that learners with LDD are entitled to.

My programme of action research (Coffey, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Taylor, 2002) was informed by historical and contemporary literature on disability education (Bines, 1986; Rogers, 2007) and how this is supported on a meso (inclusive classroom) level within the wider social college context (Von Bertalanffy, 1986). The main theoretical fields in this study are: policy on equality and inclusiveness; learners with disability; the professional learning of support staff. This theoretical framework underpinned my personal and professional philosophy about current educational provision for disability, which, based on socio- political and educational arguments (Oliver and Barnes, 2010; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Robson and Bailey, 2008; Slee, 2010) is that in order to reconcile this provision with an ethos of equality, educational change is necessary (Hoban, 2002). My research argues that although change can be a complex and difficult paradigm within a multi-layered organisation, it can be successfully facilitated on a variety of levels by means of systemic thinking (Bronfenbrenner,

2005; Von Bertalanffy, 1986). Epistemological methods were rigorously employed to explore and understand how nine participant LSAs' learnt, how new skills and knowledge changed their practice and how the change in their practice can benefit the learners with LDD. Research methods also explored the practical dilemmas LSAs' face, and evaluated how successful the ELSAP intervention would prove to be in meeting their training and development needs.

Acknowledgement of Limitations

My research was conducted in a very busy college in East Anglia that served a large geographical and rural area toward the end of the last Labour government when colleges, like other institutions, faced multiple financial and resource challenges. The practical challenges I faced as sole-researcher were brought about by the financial and time-constraints under which everyone who worked in the college was operating.

My line manager, who also acted as the college's head of curriculum, was particularly stretched for time. During the initial stages of my planning and development of ELSAP, she was very helpful and provided me with good suggestions and ideas. However, I did not feel she was very successful in communicating to the principal and his two vice-principals the essence of and real need for this particular study which was to provide much needed professional development for the college's untrained and unsupported LSAs'. From the beginning, although it was clear that my managers supported the 'project' they had granted me permission to carry out, they had no great interest in it.

This did not over concern me because I was aware, that as part of the college senior management team, they were very busy people. Professionally however, their non-engagement and participation in the study meant that they would not be contributing their expert views and opinions to my research to bring wider and richer data and to offer valuable explanations on the college's practices and procedures (for example, those that have been explained and discussed in Chapter 5). Such input could have provided much needed analysis and insights by contextualising the external and internal constraints of the college context within which we all, and in particular LSAs', worked and trained.

Further instances of a lack of support and interest by management for the LSAs' came once ELSAP had been developed and I began to plan its implementation (which also formed the research process). LSAs' were not granted permission to participate on ELSAP during the working day due to their respective active time-tables. To encourage and welcome the nine LSAs' (who now had to become volunteers) I therefore offered them two alternative evenings on which they could participate. When permission to take nine ballpoint pens and writing pads from our college stock cupboard to give to the ELSAP volunteers on their first night of attendance (together with their ELSAP course handbooks) was denied, I went out shopping and got them a range of pens, highlighters and writing pads. Reflecting on what happened at that time makes me realise that my behaviour may have been a bit over the top but it was important to me, as no-one else at work seemed to show any interest in them as professionals, to show the volunteer LSA participants that I valued them as people and cared about their professional development and their potential to learn to improve their skills

I put the attitude of management and their lack of support for the LSAs' (and interest in my study) to the back of my mind and focused on the research process. The overall culture and

mood of college staff was not collaborative and inclusive. We were managed in an old-school, 'top down' fashion, so the lack of support and general interest in our work and training was not new to us. Our professional views and perspectives on the conditions in which we worked and were being educated were never sought. In the five years that I worked as a full-time lecturer I was never offered an opportunity for an appraisal of my work, responsibilities and duties. The challenge for me was to stay focused on my research and soldier on.

Months later, when an urge developed to share some of my interesting data and findings with my line manager, promises were made to meet with me but no dates ever materialised. Around this time the college senior management announced that discussions to merge with a neighbouring college had begun. Less than a year later, the college where I conducted my research was taken over by a neighbouring college so although this discussion offers some viewpoints on limitations and some explanation about the work and training situation of LSAs' it is not meant to blame or criticise. My focus was concentrated on the interests of the LSAs' whereas managers may have had to give priority to far more complex institutional needs at the time of my research study.

Apart from the limitations discussed and as mentioned through-out my thesis, conducting a study of this nature, is about doing it individually and solely. The most obvious constraint was that one could argue that the overall positive findings (as discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) were due to the Hawthorne effect (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and my positive interest in the LSA participants, rather than their participation in ELSAP. It is perhaps natural that some positive change in their personal and professional skills and knowledge may have occurred due to the 'feel-good' factor generated by my genuine interest in their work and education. However, in

my opinion, although my enthusiasm and interest may have been an initial instigator, it was down to the LSAs' themselves to stay motivated during the prolonged attendance required by the ELSAP delivery sessions and for them to apply themselves in order that they could gain new understandings and skills in their practice.

I would also argue that data used from, for example, quantitative methods such as end of unit pre and post knowledge tests, sufficiently demonstrates a measurable increase in the knowledge, understanding and skills of participant LSAs' and that this rules out a Hawthorne effect (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Thus, for the purpose of making an overarching statement as to whether any of the limitations impacted on the processes and outcomes of the research, (as discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7), I would strongly argue that the overall positiveness that the ELSAP intervention, as an educational tool, brought for college LSAs', counteracted any hindrances (discussed in Chapter 1) which were experienced and brought about much needed personal, professional and academic interest, information and knowledge for college LSAs'.

A Matter of Social Justice

'Having regained their rights as citizens, they would go about their business like anyone else: get a job, rent an apartment, go shopping for food and make their own meals, marry, raise children – in short, become ordinary normal productive citizens' (Becker, 1998: 36).

This description of Becker's (1998) concept of de-institutionalization (1998) can be generalized to apply to all human beings that were categorised on the basis of 'difference' and who have historically been subjected to social exclusion on the grounds that they needed special treatment, care or supervision. Developments in international and national policy development acted as a springboard for socio-political and educational reform (Barton,

2010b; Jones, 2003; Tomlinson, 2010), and influenced and changed people's perceptions and understanding about the interventions and support needed for these vulnerable people who are 'different', including learners with LDD (Allan, 2010; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Reform in education in England led to investigations and the publication of important reports for example the Warnock Report in 1978 (DES, 1978). Unjust and unfair treatments, based on the stereotypical thinking and attitudes of the authorities were identified and challenged. Today, educational policy development continues to support and safeguard the rights of learners who have LDD, by giving them the choice to access mainstream education. Colleges for further education in England have now been accommodating the participation of all learners, including those with LDD, for more than three decades (Bailey and Robson, 2004). This created the need for new approaches to teaching and learning and meant that educators needed to diversify and focus on the individual learning needs of each individual (Bines, 1986). Colleges implemented inclusive policies as part of a strategy to embrace this diversity and equality of opportunity and began to appoint LSAs' to assist learners with disabilities in classrooms and workshops (Tomlinson, 1996; Green and Milbourne, 1998). However, as this study reveals, no or very little attention was given to the level of skills or qualifications needed by LSAs' to carry out their role in the classroom, at the college where my research was conducted. Although LSAs' were enthusiastic and friendly, they were recruited without either the necessary experience of working in education or knowledge on disability both of which are needed to ensure a meaningful learning experience for post-sixteen learners with LDD. On a human rights level, it can be argued that for LSAs' to provide more professional and more meaningful education for learners with LDD, it is vitally important that they receive training if the social justice this group of learners are entitled to is to be provided.

Policy Development Informs Inclusive Practice

From literature we can draw conclusions that educational policy should support modernisation toward a more social model for learning (Barton, 2010b; Bines, 1986; Dyson and Slee, 2001; Jones, 2003; Morgan 2000; Norwich, 2008; Slee, 2010). However, this process of reform for greater equal opportunities and non-discriminative practice continues to be a challenge (Benjamin, 2002; Florian, 2007; Robson and Bailey, 2008) and Rogers (2007: 173) talks about the, ‘contradictions that arise from educational policy and provision’, which implies the existence of difficulties and pitfalls.

New approaches to teaching focus on the learner him/herself within the teaching-learning process with the aid of a support assistant, worker or mentor (Bailey and Robson, 2004; Fox, 2000; Robson and Bailey, 2008). Mezirow (2000) and Nind (2007) stress that, for learning to be meaningful, educators must facilitate communicative dialogue and collaborative and supportive coalition amongst themselves and the learners. If this is the case, one can argue that within disability education, the qualities and skills required for this type of collaboration needs to be that of experts (Skills for Business, 2006; Slee, 2010). We can, therefore, claim that LSAs’ who support post-sixteen learners in colleges need to be carefully selected for the demanding supporting role expected of them. Institutional support is also vital to an on-going programme of professional development for LSAs’ if colleges are to adhere to their inclusive policies with equality of opportunity for all (Dyson and Slee, 2001; Jones, 2003; Norwich, 2008; TDA, 2010).

The following conceptual themes emerged from data referring to educational policy development and showed that: (i) no institutional strategy was followed to select and recruit

new LSAs' at the college where my study was conducted in 2006/07. No thought was given to the desirable or essential skills these individuals should have. This ad hoc approach resulted in the potential for almost anyone, regardless of previous experience, being appointed to teach/support learners with LDD; (ii) no institutional strategy was in place to induct newly appointed LSAs' starting their career at the college; (iii) LSAs' were not subjected to on-going professional appraisals to review their practice or to set targets for professional learning and development whilst they were working at the college and (iv) unexpected and new responsibilities or tasks were often imposed on LSAs' with very little notice and without any support or discussion as to how these responsibilities and tasks should be implemented.

From these themes, it can be seen that, although wider educational policy reform had well-intended aims to include post-sixteen learners with LDD, including some who were previously excluded from a mainstream further and vocational education, there were no real systems or policies in place to provide the skilled support needed by these learners. The absence of a national qualification framework for the proper training of support staff (LSAs') in colleges highlights the institutional gaps in knowledge on a meso level (lack of strategies and procedures for practice) and thereby fails to support not only the LSAs' but the learners with LDD on a micro level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hoban, 2002; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Critically, it can, therefore, be argued that the rights of both these groups of people, the LSAs' as part of the college workforce and the learners with LDD with their right to a meaningful education, are being compromised.

Training Needs Addressed to Ensure Changed Inclusive Practice

From the research study we have learnt that LSAs' experienced the college environment as a complex and difficult place to work (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Themes and sub-themes emerged from the data collected during ELSAP to further conceptualise and bring about a new understanding about the training needs of LSAs'. Two main themes show firstly, that LSAs' experienced the college as a complex work environment and secondly, the specific hindrances they experienced.

Within the theme that the college is a complex place to work the following sub-themes became apparent: (i) the uniqueness and diversity of vocational curricula contributes to confusion and uncertainty in the role and practice of LSAs'; (ii) mixed messages through conflicting classroom procedures generate confusion with regard to their role and duties; (iii) LSAs' feel they work in isolated conditions with no designated area in the college where they can rest, reflect or collaborate with others. This situation fostered feelings of loneliness and did not support the forming of relations and social cohesion with others which, as seen in the literature, is a much needed ingredient for teamwork; (iv) LSAs' lack of knowledge and understanding on aspects of teaching and learning in relation to learners with LDD which undermined their ability to properly support these learners. This last sub-theme shows that the college where I conducted my study could have better fulfilled their responsibilities in respect of the human rights of learners with disabilities or the expectations of their families.

With regard to the second theme, hindrances to LSAs' supporting learning, the research study produced the following sub-themes: LSAs' had (i) an insufficient understanding of their role, responsibilities and tasks when supporting learners with LDD; (ii) an insufficient understanding of the various conditions of learners with LDD, (i.e., specific learning

difficulties like dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD) and, therefore, insufficient knowledge of the interventions needed when supporting these learners; (iii) no or very little understanding of vocational curriculums such as Engineering, Key Skills or Painting and Decorating; (iv) an insufficient knowledge and understanding of how to motivate learners with LDD during the teaching-learning process; (v) little knowledge of college policies or codes of conduct, i.e. Safeguarding and Data Protection (vi) a general lack of knowledge about adult learning theories (i.e. transformative and social learning) and how these should influence their practice when supporting post-sixteen learners with LDD. These sub-themes demonstrate, albeit through no fault of their own, a lack of the experience, knowledge and understanding needed by LSAs' in their supporting role and this again highlights the need for training to improve their professionalism.

To support the global and national political and social ethos of inclusiveness, the knowledge gained from these two main themes and their sub-themes must be used to inform and add to existing research to help set conditions for bringing about the changes that are needed to improve LSAs' practice. It should also be used to guide and improve the institutional provision needed for learners with LDD in colleges.

Quest for Mandatory Professional Learning for Learning Support Assistants in Further Education

To support the teaching-learning process for individuals with a range of diverse learning needs the research study shows that LSAs' need to have an up-to-date knowledge base of the teaching and learning required for adult learners with learning disabilities (Benjamin, 2002; Fox, 2001; Morgan, 2000; Rogers, 2007). Only with this knowledge will LSAs' be able to effectively address the learning needs of all adult learners and be most efficient and adaptable

in their roles. Although some framework does exist for the professional learning of LSAs' in colleges (University of the West of England CPD, 2005-2006: flyer; Wharf, 2005: flyer) findings from my research clearly indicate that nowhere near enough is being provided. Training systems are needed to ensure that we can celebrate changes that produce properly trained and adequately qualified LSAs' who can more efficiently provide the institutional support needed in their important work of delivering meaningful education to learners with LDD.

Professional learning programmes for LSAs' must be provided by institutions such as colleges in alliance with awarding bodies. These programmes should offer qualifications and progression pathways together with higher recognition of the LSAs' role. Appropriate qualifications and progression pathways would assist in forming a recognised professional identity for this group of the college workforce (Bailey and Robson, 2004). LSAs' and the role they can play in inclusive post-sixteen disability education were recognised when they were first employed by colleges in the mid-1980s (Morton, 2000). However, looking into their professional learning needs and development towards standardised qualifications has, regrettably, been neglected (Armitage, *et al.*, 2007; Skills for Business, 2006).

I believe this thesis can make claims about the contribution its research has made to the professional learning and development of college LSAs' within their field of specialised education in FE. From the research data and its analysis, three overarching themes emerged which reinforced the need for college LSAs' to undergo personal and professional skills training. These three themes are (i) the emotional state of the LSAs', (ii) their professional competence and (iii) implications for future LSA training. These showed that LSAs', prior to ELSAP, did not feel sufficiently empowered or knowledgeable to efficiently carry out their

challenging roles in inclusive classrooms. However, data from my research shows that improvements in both their emotional state and the performance of their role came from their participation on ELSAP. There was a significant rise in their level of confidence once they had commenced on ELSAP, indicating that their former low levels of confidence and uncertainties about their competence were being overcome. There was improved professional identity with other colleagues including their class lecturers and tutors who significantly contributed to LSAs' feelings that they were working as part of a team and professionally valued. LSAs' showed an increase in their professional competence due to an increase in the understanding of their role and responsibilities in inclusive classrooms. There was increased collaboration, dialogue and engagement with others which, together with an increase in their understanding and knowledge of the topics relating to their role and duties, contributed to their professional competence and enhanced and changed their practice in classrooms. This included an increase in their knowledge and understanding of more effective communication with post-sixteen learners with LDD and of policy framework and how this influences their daily practice both of which brought about marked improvements in their practical support strategies and techniques.

LSAs' also showed an understanding of what is required of them and the importance of being given training to achieve this. All nine participant LSAs' felt that ELSAP had considerably contributed to and benefitted their practice and from delivery evaluations conclusions can be drawn that all participants felt other LSAs' would benefit from similar training. Suggestions made by LSAs' that they would like more time given to peer-discussion and more in-depth discussion and exploration on specific disabilities were useful in considering changes that could improve future ELSAP implementation. I also believe that the dedication and commitment of the nine participant LSAs' to ELSAP over its fourteen-week duration is a

strong indication that there is not only a fundamental need, but a desire for the training such a course can provide. Critically, systemic conceptualisation which underpinned my social research highlighted how bio (the learners with LDD), socio (lack of interaction, recognition and acknowledgement of LSAs' role) political (lack of policies and strategies) factors, together with the complex culture which exists within the institution (top-down management approach), can contribute to the 'efficacy or inefficiency' of the work and training of LSAs' in colleges.

Overall Concluding Comments

'First, one tries to get it straight, to make an adequate statement – if it is too gloomy, too bad; if it leads to hope, fine' (Wright Mills, 1959: 78).

This quote is indicative of how difficult and daunting my study sometimes seemed to me as the sole researcher during the seven-year period of this study. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) argue that research in an educational environment is difficult because it is such a complex and unpredictable environment. This did not, however, deter me from my efforts to try and find 'truths' and new understandings about aspects of my work as a lecturer of LSAs'. Three main theoretical fields informed and guided this research. These theoretical fields, educational policy development, inclusive FE provision and professional learning as discussed and argued in Chapters 2 and 3, explore the phenomenon of untrained LSAs' supporting learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in FE. The focus of this research study was the professional learning and development of these members of the workforce with the aim of bringing about systemic educational change. ELSAP, with its 5 Units, was developed to explore the learning journeys of the LSAs' who participated. In Chapter 4, epistemological decisions were discussed and research questions were employed to gain a deeper

understanding of the conditions and situations regarding the professional learning for these members of staff. How do LSAs' learn? How can a new understanding change their practice to benefit post-sixteen learners with LDD? How does this guide future training? Findings from LSAs' insiders' narratives (reflective diaries), my field notes, lecturer and tutor classroom observations, self-assessment questionnaires and knowledge and delivery evaluations, which formed the mixed methods that were analysed and interpreted, are reported on in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Below are my final comments of these findings from these three main theoretical fields of this study.

Final Comments

Having untrained LSAs' to support learners with LDD in the college where I worked is a public issue (Wright Mills, 1959) which raises doubts about how meaningful the education being given to these individuals is. The existence of this social issue conflicts with what past and current educational policy development set out to do, which is to provide 'inclusiveness' and non-discriminative practice. Unless a training framework for LSAs' becomes mandatory the doubts and concerns of learners with LDD and their families on the meaningfulness of their post-sixteen education will continue to exist (Rogers, 2007). Should we perhaps be questioning whether the present lack of a national policy framework for the training of college LSAs' or an effective institutional policy is supporting exclusion of a different kind?

Future Research

Discourse continues to stimulate policy developments, and I hope that the findings from this research will also achieve this. There is a definite need for a clear and specific set of requirements for what is expected of LSAs' personally, professionally and academically if they are to work most effectively in colleges supporting disability. We need to determine who they need to be, what they are supposed to do and how their development will be supported by the institutions in which they work. Florian (2007) agrees the much needed depth for appropriate educational research on learning support within 'inclusive' education. Existing literature on learning support and 'inclusive' education remains patchy and random and does not address key aspects such as selection requirements, strategies for work, need for qualifications and a call for mandatory training of LSAs' who work in colleges. On-going research is needed to further explore the effect the lack of these key aspects is having on the classroom practice of LSAs and the quality of the institutional service young people with disabilities experience (Florian, 2007; Miller, 2003).

I would like to recommend that this study be used as a baseline for further research in the field of professional learning and development for college LSAs'. This research has identified the conditions for learning and the barriers to further educational provision that currently exist. This all indicates that we are not providing the meaningful education for our young people with disabilities in the way that we ought to be or recognising the wise and important words of Gravell and Simpson (2008: 31), 'People with disabilities and learning difficulties play an important role in all aspects of life'.

This research brings to the forefront a new dimension in the need for learners with disabilities in colleges to be supported and cared for by trained professionals. It emphasises the need to develop relevant training towards a proper qualification framework for LSAs' and I believe ELSAP is a first step in that direction. This study hopefully paves the way for future researchers to either develop new and relevant professional learning programmes or to make amendments to ELSAP to meet the changing needs of participants and stakeholders. I believe that further research in the field of disability education will both inspire and empower educators to promote and provide an excellent service and in doing so, provide better social justice to learners with disabilities.

Post-Study Activity

As explained in Chapter 4, very little opportunity arose to discuss with college managers how my research findings might potentially influence college practice with regard to the management, work and education of LSAs' at the college where my study was conducted. It would be unfair to speculate here about the reasons why manager's seemed 'resistant' to meet with me but I do know that the college was undergoing major structural and organisational changes due to the then forthcoming merge with a neighbouring college. This had an impact on the availability of managers, time-scales, practicalities and the logistics of the everyday running of the college. Some curriculum areas were under threat of disappearing and this meant people's jobs were also under threat and for some months intense discussion was taking place between the college managers, governors and unions. It was a hugely stressful time for everyone who worked at the college and I made a decision not to pursue my study findings with the managers as there were clearly more important issues on the table for them to deal with.

However, in good time, I took up a position at another college and continued with my role in delivering teaching assistant training to adult learners who support children with special needs in schools, working closely with awarding bodies such as CACHE and City and Guilds. I have since shared my findings and voiced my interest with managers to be involved with the professional development of our support workers locally in the college and have been offered opportunities to do so.

Nationally, I presented a paper on my research findings at Anglia Ruskin's Fifth Annual Research Conference which was held during May 2011. More recently on the 16 May 2012 I presented a paper (Complexity, Chaos & Change) at the Australian Multicultural Interactive Institute's international conference for innovative research in a changing and challenging world, in Phuket, Thailand. I also wrote an article based on the results of Chapter 5, which is currently under review for publication in the *International Journal for Innovative Multidisciplinary Research*. The aim of participating in these conferences and writing for publication was to broadcast my findings on a national and international platform to maximise opportunities to get the 'word' out and raise awareness of important issues about disability post-sixteen education in England. An overarching finding from my research pointed towards the need for both international and national policies to support and influence local work contexts within further education in England.

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