The nature of entrepreneurship for people with learning difficulties: a narrative inquiry

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Abstract

This thesis considers the nature of entrepreneurship in the lives of people with learning difficulties in the UK using the narratives of experience constructed in collaboration with three disabled entrepreneurs who run their own business. It offers an exploration of self-employment as an alternative route to work and considers the relevance of specialist employment support structures to the development of small business opportunities. Working collaboratively with people who are so often framed as marginalised, the study embraces disability studies and critical pedagogy as its theoretical mooring and weaves together personal experience, practice and scholarship to explore ways in which enterprise becomes a site of resistance to the social, cultural, political and structural barriers faced by many disabled people.

The study reveals that although entrepreneurial activity aligns well with wider efforts to create more employment opportunities, employment support is frequently conceptualised, arranged and funded in ways that are incompatible with the broader benefits of pursuing entrepreneurial aspirations beyond the narrow confines of job creation. Furthermore, it proffers a reconceptualization of self-employment that considers the confluence of disability, enterprise and support as a ternary of hope, capable of subverting and disrupting notions of disability, independence and autonomy and replacing them with generosity, reciprocity and humility. Rather than analysing employment education, training and support as an isolated intervention "delivered" to disabled people, the study concludes that, central to the support mechanisms found helpful by people with learning difficulties pursuing their entrepreneurial ideas, it is this ternary of hope that transfers vitality to the communal vision of an alternative future.

This thesis notes the significance of self-employment and recommends further reflexive empirical research regarding self-employment for and with people with learning difficulties in the UK.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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Thank you all

1. Introduction

'Who knows about horse blankets?'

In my mind we all turned at once in response to such a peculiar question.

'About what?'

'Horse blankets. One of our participants is interested in setting up a business that cleans them.'

'That's interesting – is that a thing?'

'I'm not entirely sure – s/he certainly seems to think so. The family live near a farm and definitely know about horses. They've already identified a space where they could run it and are talking about getting some sort of commercial washer-drier.

'This is brilliant. I'm guessing they would need to think about other stuff too and do a bit of research. How can we help?'

'I can help with some of the planning but as this is obviously beyond our expertise, getting advice from other people who understand that world would be good'

'Do we know anyone?'

'I can't think of anyone but the family might well have connections. I'll ask if they know anyone. I really like this idea and they are clearly interested and knowledgeable enough to have spotted the opportunity. I think it's well worth exploring further….'

As a pre-pandemic meeting, representative of many similar conversations I have enjoyed in my work in enterprise facilitation, this exchange arose during a regular session of disability employment specialists who had come together to discuss building better support for people with learning difficulties interested in exploring self-employment and small business ownership. The combination of an idea linked to the interests of a disabled person, support

workers understanding the limits of their own capabilities and enterprise being perceived as a journey not a destination renders this important.

Learning difficulty, enterprise, training and support. That's what this research is all about.

1.1.   Another starting point

In 2009 the Department of Health published Valuing Employment Now; a strategy designed to 'radically increase the number of people with learning difficulties in employment' (Department of Health, 2009b, p. 4). At the time it was estimated that the employment rate for people with a learning disability known to local authorities was less than 10%, with most people working part time (Department of Health, 2009a, p. 12). Drawing on a significant body of research (Beyer & Robinson, 2009), Valuing Employment Now set out to increase the numbers of people, so labelled, in work by introducing 'a package of changes to address barriers' (Department of Health, 2009b, p. 10) and facilitate a shift to the prevailing approaches, attitudes and aspirations (Department of Health, 2009a). Some twelve years later, and with the most recent Government disability and employment strategy, Improving Lives (Department for Work and Pensions & Department of Health, 2017), echoing the desire to 'understand fully and remove, barriers to employment … [and] … transform life chances through better employment opportunities' (Department for Work and Pensions & Department of Health, 2017, p. 58), the employment rate for people with learning difficulties has fallen to 5.1% (NHS Digital, 2021). We are advised that work is important, and many report its strong correlation with mental and physical health and wellbeing (Waddell & Burton, 2006). Work is recognised as a right under Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and, specifically for disabled people, countries are required to safeguard and promote work under Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). It is perhaps no surprise then that work attracts the persistent focus of local, regional and national Government. Yet the world of work is changing and the relationship between employer and employee is more complex than ever. The emergence of the so called "gig" economy, platform working and the dependant contractor has shifted typical working arrangements leading to the indistinct cry of 'good work for all' (Taylor, 2017, p. 5) that demands a greater understanding of work in modern times.

One of the most significant changes in recent years has been the increase in numbers of those choosing self-employment and small business ownership as their route to work. Although recently impacted by the global pandemic (Clark, 2021), pre-COVID levels for self-employment in the UK stood at around 15% of the UK workforce, representing a substantial proportion of the new jobs created since the economic crisis of 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Used by some to describe 'any activity where individuals work for themselves and trade off risk and return' (Parker, 2014, p. 39), and by others as the 'smallest unit of entrepreneurial activity' (Demirgüc-Kunt, et al., 2017), the term self-employment captures a multitude of economic, social and commercial arrangements and are considered an important part of the United Kingdom's economic infrastructure. Seen by some to also offer a way for disabled people to 'enjoy the satisfaction of making their own way, with independence and flexibility' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021), Governmental attention has turned to the role self-employment might play in creating employment opportunities for people furthest from the labour market. Both Valuing Employment Now and Improving Lives contained optimistic glances at the potential self-employment presents, especially for people with complex difficulties (Department of Health, 2009a) and, although little was said about how this might be achieved, interest continued via a slew of reports that sought a greater understanding of the experience of disabled people who had explored it.

Driven partly by the desire to address 'disability employment inequality' (Department for Work and Pensions & Department of Health, 2017, p. 3), publications from the Department of Work and Pensions (Adams, et al., 2019; Department for Work and Pensions, 2016) and the Community Trade Union (Lima-Matthews, et al., 2019), all attempt to shed a light on the secrets of disability and entrepreneurship by probing for a deeper understanding of the policy infrastructure, supports, barriers and motivations that surround it. However, the buoyant optimism for self-employment is less apparent for people with learning difficulties and in a survey of disability employment support agencies, fewer than 1% of new jobs reported were described as self-employment (Boss Employment, 2018). The construction of education, training and support mechanisms designed to improve employment rates for disabled people is clearly a complex arena that demand decisions that cut across the key 'message systems: of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 156), but in

the choice of who gets taught what and why (Dillon, 2009), self-employment appears to be largely ignored as one of the possible ways to create employment opportunities for people so labelled.

Perhaps opportunities for self-employment have not been widely pursued by support agencies (Greig, et al., 2014) because enterprise is considered likely to 'offer fewer opportunities for social inclusion in wider society' (Department of Health, 2009b, p. 6), but I do not think this holds. Not only does my personal experience of self-employment suggest it engenders networks and relationships, but I have been witness to the opportunities it offers people with learning difficulties to connect with both supply chains and customers (Griffin & Hammis, 2007). However, this research is not just about enterprise as a job creation strategy, but as a possible site of resistance. Looking beyond the shallow myopia of (un)employment rates, it attempts also to excavate self-employment as a response to the neoliberal ecosystem of ableism (Goodley, et al., 2014) and its demands for an increasingly flexible, casual and productive workforce (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010). For it is here that welfare is re-orientated as workfare (Etherington & Ingold, 2012) and the wider perceptions of people with learning difficulties as unemployable are re-enforced (Humber, 2014). This research therefore asks what self-employment *does* in the lives of people with learning difficulties.

Yet this research does not relinquish all interest in the "how" of self-employment. There is already a plethora of research that attests to the position that people with learning difficulties make hard working and enthusiastic employees (Beyer & Robinson, 2009) who bring 'new skills, talents and perspectives to their workplace' (Bates, et al., 2017, p. 1). The problem is that very little is said about how this applies to self-employment and entrepreneurship. With its collection of values, practices and processes, supported employment (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018) is widely held to be one of the most fruitful approaches to supporting people with learning difficulties into work (Greig, et al., 2014; HM Government, 2011) and thus, appears to be a good place to start an exploration into support for enterprise, too. Sometimes referred to as the 'place, train and maintain' approach (British Association of Supported Employment, 2017), supported employment believes that, for many people with learning difficulties, the best place to learn a job is in the job. This challenges the somewhat more prevalent preparing-for-work models

on offer across the UK where the emphasis tends to be on getting people ready for the world of work before applying for jobs. An ever more sophisticated understanding of its features, benefits and quality presents the evidence of supported employment's effectiveness as 'unequivocal' (OECD, 2010, p. 159). However, with support for employment frequently confined to an obligation to focus almost exclusively on employment outcomes, irrespective of means, this research delves deeper to reveal ways in which training and support structures have been individualised to render them helpful for self-employment too.

The principal educational agent in the supported employment infrastructure is the job coach. Their role is to work with the disabled job seeker and 'provide systematic and structured training into and through the workplace' (Bates, 2019, p. 7). As job coaches play such a pivotal role in facilitating the career aspirations of the individual and creating the personalised training and support infrastructure needed to develop these, this research also considers ways in which such interactions with education, training and support mechanisms also serve to advance or hinder the entrepreneurial aspirations of job seekers with learning difficulties.

1.2.   Approach

Despite the ebullient endorsement of supported employment, the number of people with learning difficulties in paid work remains stubbornly low (Humber, 2014) and, if anything has reduced in recent years (British Association of Supported Employment, 2021). Having working in the supported employment world for nearly thirty years, this evokes confusion, fascination and horror in equal measures and provides the early impetus for my engagement with this enquiry. If we presume to know what works, what then is driving the systematic inability to apply this in any consistent and joined up way? Not only must this elicit concerns as to how such inelegance contributes to the perceived un-employability of this section of the population (Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2015; Humber, 2014), but it also brings into question the way employment is organised and the place of people with learning difficulties in society.

The research, therefore, is approached from three perspectives.

Firstly, with evidence suggesting that self-employment offers a chance to arrange employment in ways that meet an individuals' preferred working patterns, health needs and personal situation (Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013), it considers why self-employment does not appear to have been seriously pursued as a potential route to work for people learning difficulties. Secondly, with the principles and practices represented by supported employment 'frequently cited as one of the most respected educational approaches to supporting people' into jobs (Bates, 2019, p. 2), it asks if and how supported employment can translate to self-employment too. Thirdly, there appears to be 'strong evidence that cultural and attitudinal factors influence both the likelihood of someone choosing self-employment and their chances of making a success of it' (Meager, et al., 2011, p. ii). Therefore, this research will reflect on the ways education, training and support structures influence access to, perception of, and success in self-employment. It will also ask what else self-employment does in the context of disability and society. Specific research questions are shared in Chapter 2.

Presented in narrative form, this thesis depicts the journey of self-employment from the perspective of three people with learning difficulties, each of whom have established an enterprise, alone or alongside others. Portraying their experiences in storied form, their narratives are punctuated by the reflections of others – colleagues, support workers and families among them - amid the broader context of employment, education, training and support. My own observations, recollections and reflections are woven between and across the stories in an attempt to apply a contextual deliberation that draws public concerns from these private experiences (Wright Mills, 1959). Mooring this narrative inquiry to a relational ontology of experience (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009), this research is grounded in subjectivity (Brown, 2017) as it absorbs the 'the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). Conceptually, it embraces a presumption of competence and employability that considers people with learning difficulties capable - of communication, contribution and inclusion - while recognising support as a profoundly human endeavour that can be arranged in ways that do not sacrifice individual agency (Bascom & Perry, 2022). By doing so, it asks questions about the social construction of disability and yet, whilst

exposing the convention of work as a driver of difference, presents the pursuit of employment to be – by and large – a good thing.

Support, especially with regards to employment and enterprise, is considered a deeply educational act and may be used as short-hand for education, training and support – terms that are used interchangeably. With the exception of direct quotations, the term "learning difficulty" is used throughout. Although there are many other terms in current circulation both in the UK and internationally, it continues to be the preferred choice of many people so labelled (Emerson & Heslop, 2010). Learning difficulty terminology is explored in some detail in Chapter 2. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the introduction of self-employment, and its conformist correlation to innovation and entrepreneurship, remains the primary locus of this research as it considers how disability, enterprise and training act in unexpected ways.

1.3.   Summary of chapters

The thesis is arranged over 6 chapters but could, of course, have been arranged in many different ways. There is no compulsion to read chapters in any strict order, although the heart of the thesis contains the stories of enterprise as told and developed by the three disabled entrepreneurs and their collaborators. This introductory Chapter serves as an opening, a tentative outline – a teaser perhaps of the tales to come – but also sets an intention and offers a warning. Although there is no identifiable beginning and certainly no definable endpoint, like all stories, this thesis involves characters, plots, actions and settings. It does, however, represent only one version of the telling and only one way of presenting it.

1.3.1.   Chapter 2 - Locating the study

Chapter two sets the scene by positioning this research into the existing employment support and self-employment literature before braiding it with my personal experiences of supporting people with learning difficulties into work. It has 6 sections. The first exposes my own practice and theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014) and offers partial justification of my role in the project. Importantly it reveals my positionality and presents one account of how I came to this research, my background of working with disabled people and the origins of my ideas around self-employment as a subject of interest.

Section 2 charts the emergence of employment as a deliberate policy intention for disabled people generally, and for people with learning difficulties specifically, as it captures the key markers in the development of employment support provision in the UK. Told through an encounter with social care workers, this section considers the adoption of preparing for work strategies, sheltered workshops and job readiness before making way to ponder the emergence and significance of supported employment as an evidence-informed employment support arrangement.

Section 3 invites self-employment and small business ownership to the story as it contemplates the significance of a conversation held at the launch of Valuing Employment Now in 2011. Continuing the entanglement policy and practice, this reveals the ways in which enthusiasm for the idea of people with learning difficulties running their own small business becomes infused with barriers and conceptual misunderstandings. Section 3 draws on the specific research on learning difficulty and enterprise but in response to the scarcity of such literature, benefits also from the broader enterprise research as it examines entrepreneurial motivations, barriers and facilitators encountered by disabled people.

This makes way for Section 4 which considers the language of disability to expose the term learning difficulty as a social construct. Charting the emphasis on, what is known as, normalisation and social role valorisation as a distinct response to the alienation of people with learning difficulties, Section 4 explores the medical, relational and social models of disability amid an attempt to materially disentangle disability from impairment. Attending to a definition of learning difficulty so far into a thesis that involves people so labelled may appear curious yet is, none-the-less, intentional for two reasons. Firstly, to present a consideration of learning difficulty ahead of employment support or entrepreneurship was felt to risk aligning with the opinion that disability is definable as a trait and it is the person and not the way training, support or enterprise is arranged that require alteration. Secondly, this reflects the actuality of research that is not designed, generated or administered by disabled people. Although I have known poor health and disabling circumstances, I do not consider myself disabled and this is the point at which I considered a definition of learning difficulty – however fluid or socially constructed it is – might be helpful. I suspect this illustrates how easy it is to slip into homogenous assumptions when working in the human sciences.

Chapter cohesion is sought in Section 5 which draws form around this research project before conferring concluding responsibility upon Section 6 through its presentation of the projects justification, aims and objectives and the elucidation of research questions.

1.3.2. Chapter 3 - Methodology – a research journey

Chapter 3 is, in essence, the story of how the research design came about. The chapter documents my methodological journey, confusion, wrong turns and awakenings as a doctoral student as I wrestled with Grounded Theory and Participatory Research before settling on Narrative Inquiry. Fundamental to this was a forced interaction with the COVID virus and the challenges it brought about in a time of lockdowns, restrictions and amid the uncertainty we all faced at the hands of a pandemic.

Other approaches of course could have been chosen but the option to work alongside disabled entrepreneurs and their support colleagues in a way that celebrated researcher involvement was too much of a temptation. As many have said, we lead storied lives and use stories to make sense of the world and our place in it. Inviting collaboration with people with learning difficulties with a narrative iniquity also went some way to give voice to their experiences in a way that handed at least partial control to the entrepreneurs to reflect, emphasise or linger on the parts they found important.

1.3.3. Chapter 4 – Stories of enterprise

Chapter 4 presents the three collaborative entrepreneurial stories as they have been written, negotiated and agreed with the business owners; the three entrepreneurs. Each is presented as a stand-alone story independent of each other and liberated from the potentially distracting noise of analysis. Such a move at once acknowledges the situated nature of storytelling and recognises the prominence of the reader in the pursuit of meaning.

However, the detachment of the stories from any analysis of them, also neatly sidesteps the debate about whether stories really do speak for themselves or require something more by acknowledging both positions. Chapter 4 allows the reader to experience the stories unencumbered. Nestled somewhere between fact and fiction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the stories tread the timid shale of the familiar - of experience that resonates with the

everyday in ways that infer continuity, interaction and setting amid Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space. A space that invites the reader to think *with* the stories.

1.3.4. Chapter 5 - A search for meaning and significance

Charter 5 therefore becomes the offer of analysis, an excavation of the stories and a reflection of what they reveal and what they don't. Although analysis involved lots of corroborative conversations with participants that some might describe as member checking (Attia & Edge, 2017; Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994), it is largely of my own doing and is approached in three sections:

Section 1 considers the stories with a lens firmly trained on the individual, exploring what it means to be human and what it means to be disabled. Using a disability studies perspective, Section 1 asks what enterprise can do to disrupt the emphasis on heteronomous work as a key arbiter of human worth (Graby, 2015).

Section 2 shifts the attention to the education, training and support experience as it exposes the narratives to a number of alternative readings to consider the power of enterprise support as a site of radical exchange. Drawing on Freire (2017) and others, section 2 ponders the application of hope as a driving force capable of fundamentally disrupting a social order, of raising awareness and of imagining a different future.

Finally, Section 3 reflects on enterprise itself as an autonomous body, a unit of connection and exchange and a vehicle of change. This section troubles the conventional understanding of business, market viability, customers and consumers to evoke an alternative conceptualisation of business that dallies with the 'less brutal aspects of capitalism and competition' (Griffin & Hammis, 2007, p. 2).

1.3.5. Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Concluding the thesis, Chapter 6 seeks to braid the strands of the project together by returning to the aims of this research and, along with a nod to the limitations of study, picks up the analytical connections, implications for practice and contemplates the contributions this research makes to theoretical and practice knowledge. Perhaps Chapter 6 becomes a moment of de-familiarisation – the making of known things unfamiliar (Thomson, 2015) -

and a place where I trouble common-sense readings of the 'discourses of normalcy' (Lal, et al., 2012, p. 8). However, it is also a site of reflexive and summative commitment that, I hope, adds texture to the shades of this research endeavour.

A conclusion can never, of course, represent the end of the story but only ever a pause. Yet it does seek to address the 'so what?' and 'what next?' questions that I extract, so inexpertly, as a proxy for Labov and Waletzky's (1997, p. 35) narrative evaluation and coda – the 'functional device' that brings us back to the now. It is here that thoughts return to the research questions, of disability, enterprise, education, training and support and of what more needs to be done.

1.3.6. Appendices

The appendices detail the supporting information pertinent to the research project. This includes, but is not limited to, one version of the interview guide, used to offer structure to the early conversations with the entrepreneurs, but altered each time as participants dictated the speed and direction of the conversations. Also offered is a copy of the ethics application which confirmed ethical clearance was in place prior to data collection.

Easier read versions of the participant information sheet and consent forms are also included. These were made available to prospective participants from the outset and shared alongside the standard text based sheets so that participants could choose to have either version – or both.

Lastly the appendices also contain publications that emerged alongside the research process as the paths of scholarship and practice entwined. These practice guides were written alongside the thesis, during the initial COVID lockdowns and were heavily influenced by the research.

1 - Thinking about self-employment?

Designed primarily with people with learning difficulties in mind, this series of easier read guides seek to provide a structure to conversations about self-employment and confidence in people interested in exploring a business idea, independently or with support.

There are 5 guides: Your business idea, Getting productive, Money, Customers, and Support.

Figure 1 - RED Guides - Thinking about self-employment?

Each contains a worksheet and questions intended to help entrepreneurs think about different aspects of their business idea. Later, these can be used to form a business development plan. One is presented here as an example of the positive impact emerging from the research. Others are available at https://www.rapid-enterprise.co.uk/business-planning-tools.html

2 - Facilitating enterprise: Using break-even to assess the potential of a business idea

This guide is support worker facing and provides a basic approach to assessing whether an enterprise is worth pursuing. Although frequently sequenced in terms of viability and business sustainability, break-even also offers a simple way help people to think about whether a self-employment idea is well placed to meet their personal employment aspirations.

Figure 2 - RED Guide- Using break-even to assess the potential of a business idea

1.4. Final remarks

This introduction has provided an overview of the study, its structure and the contents of the appendix and, to some extent, frames the start of the story. It will become apparent that I come to this project with significant time in the field, good connections and no little opinion. But I hope these will be tempered by a process befitting the task, a transparency of approach and an openness to alternative readings of all that is presented.

> I never did find out what happened to the horse blankets.

> As with all stories, it is not finished.

> Perhaps too, it's a story for someone else to tell.

2. Locating the study

This section contextualises this exploratory excavation of entrepreneurship in the lives of people with learning difficulties, by reviewing the literature that considers employment support approaches for people so labelled and reasons, ways and means some choose self-employment as their primary employment option. Presented through storied accounts to locate the theory within my own practice settings, these are followed with a question – "what do we mean by learning difficulty?" in order to problematize a body of thinking that considers the social construction of the term and the treatment of people so labelled as an homogenous group (Goodley, 2017). However the section starts, perhaps a little unconventionally, by placing my own self-employed work in the landscape of promoting, supporting and celebrating entrepreneurship for people with learning difficulties. Although this might have equally been placed later, alongside the other entrepreneurial stories, it made sense to position it alongside the other contextualizing conversations that locate the research in the wider employment support and training setting.

As this section will reveal, the extent to which entrepreneurs, especially disabled entrepreneurs, are pushed or pulled into self-employment is one of great interest to researchers, but such curiosity is also led by the positionality of those researchers, their interests, their experiences and their personal, social or academic leanings. I therefore begin with my own story that inevitably starts halfway through and finishes before the end and, for me, raises questions of becoming that places entrepreneurship and people with learning difficulties in the midst of other academic, theoretical and practice conversations later revealed.

2.1. Jumped or pushed? An auto-ethnographical slant

2.1.1. (dis)Abled awakenings

Where does the story of enterprise begin? Does it start with a business idea and some personal characteristics, with a view of the possible or a lack of alternatives? I had rather stumbled into the supported employment world as a result of working with unemployed volunteers on a recycling project that was seen as an attractive source of voluntary work for

people with learning difficulties. Although the volunteers came and went, I got to know one guy – I shall call him Joe - particularly well and we spent time trying to figure out the best way to enable him to increase the number of tasks he could perform independently. I became interested in how to support Joe and learned more about what worked for him and what didn't. He later introduced me to his support worker who described his life in social care and day services and I got a sense that I might enjoy working in this world.

Soon after, a job supporting people with learning difficulties into work caught my eye. My application was successful and I started work as a job trainer. One of the first people I encountered in this new professional capacity was Billy. Keen to get a job, Billy attended a local day centre and I met him there, along with his support workers. I was terrified; mainly because it was all new to me but also because I wanted to do the right thing. Billy was lovely and articulated his employment aspirations well. My problem was that, at first, I could not understand a word he said. I remember the awkwardness of not wanting to ask him to repeat everything. I suspect it was more about wanting to avoid embarrassment than about developing a level of disability sensitivity at that stage, but I was grateful for his patience and generosity and I got to know Billy well in the following months. I learned a lot about the supported employment approach and about working with people with learning difficulties and it became clear quite how many barriers people faced as they explored their employment options; the uncertainty of support, transport, worries about benefits and a general reluctance by employers to give people a chance. Each year we held a "service user" conference where we invited people to give feedback, ask questions and make suggestions about how we might improve things. These were enjoyable events and gave us a chance to reflect on our work. One year, when answering the question 'what else could we do', a couple of people suggested support for self-employment.

Once funding was identified, my previous experience on community projects meant I was given the responsibility to develop this new project. 15 or 16 people showed up to the introductory session to hear about how we intended to support people to set up their own business. Although numbers quickly reduced after that first session, 7 people signed up to the project. Borrowing heavily from the co-operative sector's business development tools, I set about navigating my way through vague sources of advice and suggestions to form a development plan. The trouble was, no-one had really done this before so there were no

resources specific to developing enterprise for people with learning difficulties. Yet we met weekly, discussed options and talked about opportunities. Although we were largely making things up as we went along, we got to know each other and came up with about 20 business ideas. As some were ruled out due to our lack of capital, premises etc. the list was reduced to businesses that focused on cleaning, catering, gardening, arts and crafts. As a very familiar set of jobs for people with learning disabilities, I often wonder what role I played in creating such a restrictive list and reflect on the impact we have as support workers on the employment choices people make. However, a call from a local business centre would prove decisive as they were tendering out their cleaning contract and, hearing of our project, wondered if this might be of interest. The group agreed that this could provide the break we needed; work we could do and the opportunity to do it. A labour only trial was successfully completed and the contract was secured.

2.1.2. Developing enterprise

Until that point I had been charged by the excitement of such an innovative project, but things started to happen that revealed the much deeper social barriers that people with learning difficulties face. On hearing about the new contract, a couple of support workers at the day service suggested it wasn't worth bothering as 'it would never last', the local co-operative development agency seemed to distance themselves from our work and the local college asked one member to take time off work so he could go on work experience. At the same time my anxieties stemmed from my lack of experience of the processes of business, of registration, insurance and accounts – what were the legal and financial obligations and whose responsibility would it be to ensure they were met? The Directors all had learning difficulties and although I was influential, I worked for another employer and my role was ambiguous. This was new. Yet the company was registered, contracts drawn up, insurance secured and financial systems put in place. As my role shifted from trainer and facilitator, I became some sort of community navigator. This notion of support occupied me at the time and I started to describe myself as a consultant rather than a support worker to make it sound less of a social care project and more of an enterprise. I was aware that this didn't quite fit as the endeavour was a much more collaborative affair and I had started to truly appreciate the individuals I was working alongside.

2.1.3. Becoming self employed

The idea of people with learning difficulties running their own business was new and attracting attention so we started to get requests for information and advice; to speak at conferences and to attend round table discussions. It was at this point that I decided to become self-employed myself. I always recount this as a monumental decision but, in truth, the circumstances at the time probably made it easier. Job security was increasingly an issue with precarious funding rounds and the uncertainty that generated each year. I had learned how the health and social care sector worked and I knew by then how to run a business. I was already having conversations with other organisations about the possibility of new pieces of work so after ringing a few people and satisfying myself that enough work would come my way, I took the leap and became a self-employed development consultant.

Yet my decision to "go it alone" was anything but. This was not about doing things independently but involved, first and foremost, long conversations at home with my wife. We had a new baby, a mortgage and she was on maternity leave. Although I was confident, income was not guaranteed and we had little in the way of savings. Self-employment is a risk, can involve long hours and is a journey that needs the long term support of those around you. Behind every great man etc. Secondly, it involved my professional support network; people I worked with who were willing to help with contacts, ideas or contracts. There is much made about the push and pull factors involved in the decision to become self-employed. Questions that ask whether people are motivated by the flexibility, control and freedoms of self-employment, or the lack or alternatives; restrictive working practice or unhelpful employers. I guess I experienced a bit of both, but it was the excitement of doing interesting work that drove me. The interest in enterprise development for people with learning difficulties continued and I was lucky enough to support the establishment of quite a few - co-operatives, social enterprises and sole traders. Yet the issue of support was never far away. Some new support workers seemed to restrict the business integrity of these enterprises and operations frequently got caught up in the availability of support and the workings of the wider care infrastructure. Support workers lacked the specific skills needed to operate within these settings and, while everyone was well meaning, I pondered the question about balancing support, advice, learning and collaboration endlessly.

2.1.4. In work and self employed

The wider appreciation of the power of enterprise to "do good" saw the emergence of the term social enterprise and for a while I found myself enmeshed in this new world of enterprise development as the social enterprise mantle had been well and truly picked up by the Blair Government and it's "Third Way" politics (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). Unexpectedly, I was approached by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (FPLD) who had just secured funding for a self-employment development programme and were on the lookout for someone to lead it. In Business was a project designed to develop self-employment options for people with learning difficulties by focusing on 'innovation, enterprise development and service delivery change' (Bates, 2009, p. 29). Importantly, the project led to a surge in the uptake of self-employment, but many of the business ideas were quite unsophisticated and rarely led to a decent income for the entrepreneurs. This led me to wonder whether these "micro-enterprises" were about 'employment with a bit of person centred planning … or … person centred planning with a bit of employment' (Bates, 2009, p. 13). Either way, one example that appeared in Valuing Employment Now (Department of Health, 2009a) had a massive impact on how I think about entrepreneurship.

Having spent most of his life in hospital or residential care, Delroy frequently required 2:1 support, was considered a "challenge to services" and was not considered capable of work. As part of his care package, Delroy had some support from a community support worker who, unsatisfied with this account of Delroy, was determined to find a contribution he could make. Although he did not use speech, we found out from others that Delroy liked to crush plastic milk bottles, enjoyed being outdoors and was keen on transport. In a weird throwback to my former employment, we also discovered that, despite promoting the environmental benefits of recycling, the local authority did not collect plastics. As initial market research suggested that a number of his neighbours would be keen to pay someone to take the plastic away, we supported Delroy, using his existing support structures, to set up a plastics recycling business. No longer was Delroy a service receiver, but was now a service provider, making a positive contribution to his community. Importantly, it was his support workers' determination and refusal to accept the general assumption about Delroy that was the catalyst (although I like to think my role and previous experience of recycling

played some small part too). Delroy's story had a profound effect on me and how I conceptualise self-employment and disability and is one I continue to use as an illustration of the possible.

That period also led to the incubation of Rapid Enterprise Development (RED), an initiative designed to improve the business skills of disabled people by removing the mystique from business and making the planning process much more enjoyable. RED started as a venture to train disabled entrepreneurs in business skills, but it quickly became clear that support workers, the people stood next to the disabled people, also needed the training. However it was apparent that this only addresses one of the barriers to self-employment experienced by people with learning difficulties. Other barriers included a lack of aspiration, expectation and assumption, the unsophisticated nature of many of the business ideas and the fact that few support workers had experience of running a business. I spent the best part of 10 years at FPLD and realise how lucky I am to have enjoyed a variety of influential positions at the same time as developing a job coach agency and other practical support and training organisations. Having left FPLD, I aligned my work under one umbrella and started to trade as Mutually Inclusive Partnerships. This offered a chance to bring the various strands of my work together, braid the national and the local and, importantly, involve some of the disabled entrepreneurs I had worked with over the years. I was once told by an academic colleague of mine that what I had been doing all this time is research even though I was calling it development work. The conversations with my academic colleagues were held as I hesitated over an application to join the EdD programme in Sheffield; an application that would eventually lead to me writing this.

Clearly the "recall button" tends to smooth out some of the edges when the reality has been much tougher - more challenging and much more precarious and my work has involved some long hours and quite a bit of hard work, not all of which was enjoyable. I wonder sometimes why I choose to be self-employed. Certainly the security of being in control of a number of organisations allowed me to bypass the insecurities faced by many sole traders and although I carry the responsibility for the work of others, I guess it's also a form of freedom. It has needed the support of others, at home, in my teams and with colleagues and I have benefitted from working with many good people who have taught me much. Entrepreneurship is certainly not a solo pursuit and shortly I will outline its role in the

lives of disabled people. However first, I will consider the broader employment support construction designed to get more people with learning difficulties into work.

2.2.   A remembered conversation about employment support

2.2.1. Workshops

'It's a shame we don't have those workshops any more where people could work. They were good'.

Thus spoke one of the social workers at a meeting at which I had been invited to speak as part of a drive to improve the local employment rates for people with learning difficulties. The team of social workers and care managers had been established as part of the preparing for adulthood requirements brought in under the Children and Families Act (2014) and their role was to support young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) achieve better employment, independent living, and community inclusion and health outcomes (Preparing for Adulthood, 2020). We were all crowded into their office which formed part of a community hub in an old school building. Some sat at their overflowing desks while others pulled chairs into a wide circle all facing me. A new local employment plan had been developed to boost the number of people in work and to improve the understanding, capacity and sustainability of good support. I was there to help them get involved. My colleague was right. Training workshops had been an important part of the employment landscape for people with learning difficulties for decades and were still seen as a sensible way to prepare people for work. Of course, the idea of people with learning difficulties working was not new and perhaps there was something of a tired revisit to some of the headings in the plan – making sure people knew it was possible to get a paid job, ensuring a range of employment options, training for support staff and starting the conversation about employment early in a young person's life – but the lack of progress (Hatton, 2018) was driving the new attention.

Sheltered workshops, as they had become known, were widespread across the country and many learning difficulty day centres were routinely engaged in productive activities -

assembly, packing or sorting - with the idea that participants would gain the skills needed for the workplace.

> 'The thing about workshops' she continued 'was that most of the people we work with aren't ready for work so they offered everyone a chance to prepare'.

Sheltered workshops emerged in the early 20th century as a way to provide vocational training and rehabilitation to disabled people. For some, their origins stretch further back to reveal ideological links to the workhouses of the 19th Century poor laws when concerns about poverty, disability and difference (Weiss, 2018) spawned structures designed 'to be deliberately harsh, to dissuade people from seeking poor relief and to incentivise work' (Guise, 2019, p. 1). With many originating from religious or medical institutions (May-Simera, 2018), sheltered workshops played a significant part in therapeutic and rehabilitative approaches across Europe and beyond (Mallender, et al., 2015; Hoffman., 2013). Although arrangements vary across and between nations, sheltered workshops routinely provide a protected work environment for disabled people under the supervision of trainers whose role is to 'support production and regulate the working environment' (May-Simera, 2018, pp. 3-4). My problem was that I had always felt discomfort with segregated, preparing for work approaches and the seemingly endless employability training they conveyed for people with learning difficulties. Yet my colleague was echoing a commonly held view that getting people ready for work was the first step.

In the UK, the number of sheltered workshops grew rapidly as a result of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (1944) introduced, at least in part, in response to the increased number of disabled people returning from the war (Mercer & Barnes, 2004). Although workshops had been run by a wide range of charitable and voluntary sector organisations, the Act established Remploy, perhaps the most well-known provider of workshops, which went on to develop a UK wide network of factories providing jobs for thousands of disabled people (Holroyde, 2021). Remploy, along with other workshops, day centre activities and work units became the prevailing approach to employment preparation for disabled people during the 60s and 70s, combining a philosophy of occupation, safety and charity (Dague, 2012) with ideas of training and skill development. However, as ideas about the productive capabilities of disabled people with learning difficulties started to change in the 1970's, some viewed the idea of segregated workshops for unemployed disabled people as merely

reinforcing social ideas of unemployability and difference (Weiss, 2018). With few people moving on (Beyer & Robinson, 2009), the main problem with sheltered workshops was their cost and, with Remploy needing £111 million per year (BBC, 2017) from the Government to run, it was eventually considered too expensive. In 2012 plans were announced to end the subsidy (Brindle, 2012).

As the conversation continued, I explained that sheltered workshops were no longer considered the most appropriate way to support people into work as there was little to suggest that people with learning difficulties benefited from them. This was underpinned by research that indicated that because of the cognitive, memory and processing challenges faced by many people with learning difficulties, learning a job in a training location with the expectation that they would later transfer that learning to a "real" job somewhere else was problematic (Department of Health, 2011). Yet, I did agree that there was an important link between training, education and work, and that our new employment plan contained an ambition to not only ensure employment was part of the curriculum for young people with learning difficulties but, by extension, a vision of working futures, even if, for most, such ambitions did not amount to a concrete reality.

Preparing young people for work was a major part of the 1978 Warnock review (Warnock, 1978) which sought to outline:

> the pattern of educational provision and the opportunities for vocational training and employment required by young people over statutory school leaving age who have special needs (p. 162).

Yet, although Warnock proposed combating the 'common assumption that certain jobs are intrinsically unsuitable for anyone who is disabled in whatever way or degree' (p. 186), the review continued to contextualise work for people with learning difficulties in terms of 'training, therapy and care' (p. 5). Sheltered workshops and adult training centres were promoted as the primary arrangements for employment support. A move I had always felt did little to present young people with learning difficulties as capable employees. However, although little was said in the review about how this might be effectively translated into practice, some of the Warnock recommendation were contained within the 1981 Education Act. However, the inability of individuals to benefit from 'educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools' (Education Act, 1981, p. 1) continued to be considered an

individual problem. The restrictive clauses that would link an assessment of 'each child's attributes and needs' (Warnock, 1978, p. 206) to the availability of resources, ensured that preparing for employment would only be an option for some people, some of the time. Much has been said about the power of curriculum as a 'selective tradition' (Apple, 1996, p. 22) and the problematic separation of educational practitioners from the production of curriculum as a 'delivery system … of uncontested educational outcomes' (Carr, 1996, p. 18). Although few would say the Warnock Review was without merit, it appears to hold as a case in point and our new plan was at risk of following suit.

Yet my colleague was surely just trying to think of ways to help the people she worked with and I started to see a difference between how social care professionals saw employment and the change that the new plan was trying to introduce. I was struck by the persistence of the view that employment for people with learning difficulties continued to be seen as an additional thing to do; another service to be explored when everything else was sorted. There was still an element of persuasion required, employment was not seen as a priority.

2.2.2. Employers

'But what about employers?' asked another of the other social workers.

'Not enough employers give people a chance. Shouldn't they be doing more?'

It was another good point. I was aware of the UK's tradition of disability employment policies that focused on the perceived barriers to work and in which both sheltered workshops and employer quotas had featured heavily (May-Simera, 2018).

A system of quotas had also been introduced by the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (1944) which at first glance provided another "common sense" approach to enhancing employment opportunities for disabled people. However, detractors highlight the risks of such policies becoming tokenistic and suggest that that they place 'undesirable pressure on people with disabilities [sic] to register as disabled in order to enable their employers to meet the quota' (Warnock, 1978, p. 186). In the UK, the quota system was poorly implemented and managed (Mercer & Barnes, 2004) and was eventually abandoned in the 1990s in favour of anti-discrimination legislation in the shape of the 1995 Disability

Discrimination Act which among other things, protected disabled people from discrimination in work.

Yet the idea that employers should "do more" is a recurrent one in the world of employment support and certainly the new plan placed heavy emphasis on the importance of linking the skills and interests of young people with learning difficulties to the needs of local employers. Promoting the business benefits of employing people with learning difficulties was central to the plan and stemmed from research that indicates that more diverse recruitment policies can enhance staff reliability, reduce levels of sickness and staff turnover (McFarlin, et al., 1991), increase customer loyalty (Needels & Schmitz, 2006) and improve morale at work (Beyer & Beyer, 2017; Needels & Schmitz, 2006). Although other research paints a less optimistic picture when foregrounding the very real concerns many employers have over employing people with learning difficulties, (Unger, 2002), still more promote the opportunities it gives employers to reduce recruitment costs, enhance a company's reputation and demonstrate their corporate social responsibility in employment (British Assocation of Supported Employment, n.d.).

While the local employment plan highlighted the importance of talking to employers about the opportunities they might have for people with learning difficulties, the Government also launched the Disability Confident campaign (2014) with the aim of 'encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people' (para. 1). Disability Confident offered a higher level of employer engagement that we hoped could generate interest from larger employers. Sadly, that this was not the case, seemed to be confirmed by research in 2019 that concluded that, despite thousands of organisations signing up, Disability Confident had actually offered limited impact (Pring, 2019). It continues to be a flagship campaign.

2.2.3. Supported Employment

We had discussed sheltered workshops, work with employers and previous training schemes, but what I really wanted to get across was the importance of good quality employment support and how it differed from some of the more familiar support arrangements. After asking if it was OK to outline some of the research into supported employment, I explained that supported employment emerged during the 1980s as an

alternative to the widespread use of sheltered workshops, day programmes and group models (Wehman, 2012) that we had been discussing. Representing a set of principles and practices, supported employment is underpinned by two really important values. The first is that everyone can work with the right support and the second is that for many people with learning difficulties, the best place learn a job is in the job (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018). Constructed as a more individualised employment training and support endeavour, supported employment thus lies in stark contrast to the concept of employability and work readiness designed to prepare people with learning difficulties for the workplace through classroom practice and hypothetical encounters with work (Bates, 2019). Proponents of supported employment suggest that due to cognitive, processing and memory issues experience by many people with learning difficulties, this 'place, train and maintain model' (Beyer & Robinson, 2009, p. 8) provides a more appropriate approach by training people to work in real settings. Borrowing extensively from the work of Marc Gold and his instructional techniques designed to support individuals to perform complex vocational tasks (Marc Gold and Associates, n.d.), such positioning challenges the assumption that employment skills needed to be learned prior to entry into the workplace.

Originally known as the "Try another way" approach, Gold's 'systematic instruction' breaks down work tasks into individual steps and stimulus controls (Collins, 2002) through the 'systematic manipulation of antecedent and/or consequent stimuli to alter the probability of targeted responses' (Horner & Bellamy, 1980, p. 13). These techniques, when underpinned by a set of values that include a presumption of employability, a focus on the positive contribution disabled people can make, and ensuring work is paid for at the going rate (Learning and Skills Improvement Service, 2017), form the basis of supported employment. My colleagues knew of the policy shift towards the individualisation of work focused educational training and support contained within the Children's and Families Act (2014); the same Act that had created the preparing for adulthood strategy of which they were a part. However, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND] code of practice (Department for Education, 2015) and the Supported Internship Guidance (Department for Education, 2014), both also recognised the importance of evidence based supported employment and specialist job coaching. Although much of the research concentrates on

the Vocational Rehabilitation system of the US, the practice of supported employment certainly appears to receive widespread endorsement.

Examining the employment outcomes of 120 disabled jobseekers, McDonnell found supported employment was linked to better wages, increased integration and improved job retention and that it's systematic approaches were 'strongly associated with successful employment outcomes for workers' (McDonnell, et al., 1989, p. 417). Similarly, by drawing on a study of 200 workers, Griffin and colleagues concluded that those in supported employment experienced 'significantly higher levels of job satisfaction' (Griffin, et al., 1996, p. 142) when compared with those in sheltered workshops – perhaps the OECD's 'unequivocal evidence' of its effectiveness (OECD, 2010, p. 159)? In his assessment of the UK's progress towards better employment integration, Beyer (2012, p. 192), confirms the:

> significant benefits from delivering a supported employment approach for people with learning difficulties … [and]… evidence of better wage and social inclusion outcomes from this model.

As we discussed the research, a few of the social workers talked about the people they had worked with. Many of them were interested in having a job and a few had previous experience of working for an employer. However, in almost every case, the job had been lost or there had been a change of circumstances which made the job unsustainable. Concerns were raised about the impact of getting a job on welfare benefits, service users' [sic] ability to use public transport and the social workers own limited capacity. Yet although there was a general sense of caution about trying, those who spoke in the meeting agreed that employment was a good idea. This was crucial as finance to support those known to local authorities frequently came in the form of some sort of social care funding. For people with learning difficulties, employment was considered a health and social care issue.

Although there tends to be some variation in how supported employment is arranged at a local level, there is broad agreement that its systematic approach follows the five stages of 'Vocational Profiling, Job Finding, Job Analysis and placement, Job Training and Follow-along services' (Beyer & Robinson, 2009, p. 9). Lying central to these 'procedural components' (McDonnell, et al., 1989, p. 417) is the job coach, the key educational practitioner of supported employment and described by the Foundation for People with Learning

difficulties as the 'vital link between the job seeker and employment opportunity' (Burke & Bates, 2019, p. 15). I wondered whether jobs had been lost due to poor, or non-existent, support so wanted talk about the ambition held by the new plan to increase the capacity of skilled and experienced job coaching support in our area. Although job coaching is cited throughout the research literature as a significant agent of change and an important part of any supported employment construction (Burke & Bates, 2019; O'Toole, 2015; Beyer & Robinson, 2009), it is not just about the teaching of specific employment skills in the workplace and many studies allude to a far broader utilisation of the role. In a study of 16 supported employees, Jones and colleagues (Jones, et al., 2002) found job coaches played an important role in training social as well as work skills and, at times, supported individuals to navigate the complex workplace culture. In their inclusive research report Tucker and colleagues (2012) likewise place heavy emphasis on job coaching practice at all stages of the employment journey and stress the importance of support for the employer. Swan and Newton (2005) add travel training to the job coach repertoire. Yet the conceptualization of job coaching in such broad terms is hardly surprising given its strong historical links to the principles of normalisation and their emphasis on community participation.

Originally emerging in 1960's Scandinavia and further developed in the US and UK, normalisation offered an interface for disability' and particularly learning difficulty, that called for 'ordinary patterns of living … that reflect the regular circumstances of life in society' (Goodley, 2017, p. 17). Far from being about making people fit some notion of normality, normalisation espoused typical life experiences, including employment for all (Bates, 2018). Borrowing heavily from the Nordic relational model of disability that locates disability in the contextual mismatch between the disabled person and their environment (Goodley, 2017), normalisation was later rebranded Social Role Valorisation. This renaming was, in port to avoid the terminological confusions, but also to highlight the importance of finding valued roles for people, to counter the systematic devaluation experienced by many people with learning difficulties (Jones, et al., 2016). Supported employment and job coaching draws heavily on the principles of Social Role Valorisation by promoting employment as a valued social role and ensuring people with learning difficulties are able to 'function with the greatest level of autonomy possible and to have ordinary relationships with the rest of society' (Jones, et al., 2016, p. 17).

My colleague expressed their view that some of the jobs may have been lost due to the lack of sustainable support. In fact the size of their caseloads often meant that once a person had secured employment, very little contact was maintained - a reality that can also skew official employment rates. As part of the wider Valuing Employment Now strategy introduced by Blair's New labour Government (Department of Health, 2009a), obligations were placed on local authorities to report the number of people with learning difficulties in paid employment. The Public Service Agreement 16 recognised sustainable employment as one of the 'key factors in reducing the likelihood and impact of social exclusion' (HM Treasury, 2017, p. 5) but offered little in the way of guidance as to who, or what to count. Individual local authorities were left to decide what was meant by 'known to councils with adult social services responsibilities' (HM Treasury, 2017, p. 28) and whether to include the numerous examples of people with learning difficulties working just one or two hours per week. Locally, just keeping tabs on who was in work at any one time was a major job in itself while reviewing everyone 'on the books' at one point had increased the employment rate by 2 percentage points. Despite the frequency with which the employment support sector quote these employment levels, such inconsistency is picked up by Hatton (2018) who, while charting the 'extreme variation in … rates reported across local authorities' (Hatton, 2018, p. 121) highlights the lack of quality data and consistent methodology for collecting it.

> 'If we know so much about what works, why are so many people still unable to get a job?' the team manager asked. Another good question and the puzzle after all, that everyone in the supported employment world gets stuck on.

2.2.4. Policy

Although research into supported employment is replete with suggestions that it facilitates many people with learning difficulties into work (Beyer & Robinson, 2009; HM Government, 2011; OECD, 2010), concerns remain that there has been a widespread inability to construct the appropriate educational pathways on the ground. Whilst reviewing the cost effectiveness of supported employment in the UK, Grieg et al. (2014) found wide variation in the way supported employment has been approached. Commenting on the 'lack of widespread knowledge amongst commissioners' (2014, p. 98) about supported employment, Grieg et al. (2014) conclude that not only are significant monies spent on

services that do not offer a clear and consistent approach to supporting people into work but that few also collect data on the impact of doing so. This disconnect between policy and practice is picked up by Blamires (2015), who questions about the ability of well documented Government pilot projects to expand their impact on a national scale and while Kathy Melling, previously the National Employment Lead for Valuing People Now, is encouraged by improved policy implementation, she concedes that:

> there are far too many people working with, educating and supporting children, young people and adults with learning difficulties who really do not think they can work. What is needed to fully implement these changes is a huge cultural shift, changing mind-sets about what people can achieve (Melling, 2015, p. 168).

The gap between current policy and practice is also explored by Wistow and Schneider (2007) who used semi-structured interviews with the managers of 31 employment support agencies to conclude that more stable funding and leadership is needed to assuage the 'lack of momentum in moving from policy to practice' (2007, p. 134). Humber agrees, but suggests this is about how employment support is managed and the way responsibility for it has been allocated to the 'non-state sector' (Humber, 2014, p. 285). Although the literature touches on the variations in employment data collection methodologies (Hatton, 2018), it seems pretty conclusive that the employment rate for people with learning difficulties reveals an appalling inequality. Moreover, with plenty of research providing the case for adopting supported employment approaches, might it not be possible to say that 'we know what works'?

Perhaps so. Yet much of the research, such as that conducted by Hoffman et al. (2012) and Howard et al. (2010), relies on randomised control trials [RCTs] - that 'gold standard' (Wellington, 2015, p. 29) in the educational research world. However, although these are used extensively by commentators to illuminate their views on the effectiveness of supported employment, RCTs are unable to capture the voice of supported employment participants and risk limiting research to that which has 'largely focused on the planning, implementation, outcomes and cost: benefit analysis of supported employment, rather than its fundamental premises' (Wilson, 2003, p. 99). According to the British Association of Supported Employment, those "premises" should ensure that employment meets the individuals life goals and aspirations, enables active membership of the working community

and changes the way society is organised (British Association of Supported Employment, 2017). So what does the research literature say about this?

Drawing on interviews with both learning disabled jobseekers and their support service providers, Humber (2014) considers the quality of employment experience and the extent to which it encompasses individual inclusion. In doing so, Humber (2014) distinguishes between inclusion in the work *place* and inclusion in the work *space* and, by suggesting that the latter is more indicative of how many people with learning difficulties experience work, concludes that it is early segregation in education that 'distorts the nature of relationships made with non-disabled work colleagues and others' (Humber, 2014, p. 286). Continuing to highlight the inability of a market-driven supported employment to shift the employment rate for people with learning difficulties, Humber (2014) offers comment on the 'dialectical links between the needs of labour market, the perceived un-employability of people with learning difficulties and the social construction of their identities' (Humber, 2014, p. 275).

This, of course, brings into play the suggestion that supported employment is more than an enablement system for disabled people to sustain employment and evokes a more transformatory function that might seek to change the way work is organised and made more inclusive. Indeed, the Taylor Review of 'Modern Working Practices' (Taylor, et al., 2017) recognises a more general shift in working patterns and calls for what he describes as 'good work for all' (p. 9). Driven by the increase in quasi self-employment and the so-called 'gig economy, the review sought solace in a general set of 'aspirations ... for modern citizenship [where] people feel they are respected, trusted and expected to take responsibility' (Taylor, et al., 2017, p. 7). Yet it is perhaps of some concern that those values seem to include a reliance on employers doing the right thing rather than any wider restructuring of employment.

For disabled people, and especially people with learning difficulties, the problem with employment is not an inability to conduct a prescribed number of tasks' but a set of exclusionary processes that, according to Thomas (2004), delimits their ability to sell their labour and 'the opportunity to independently obtain the means of subsistence' (p. 35). Despite its origins in the culture of normalisation (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018), many question the ability of supported employment to achieve the

revolutionary change required. Indeed some, such as Wilson (2003), question whether the pursuit of standardised employment for disabled people is even realisable or desirable. Drawing on ethnographic case studies designed to uncover the employment experiences of 30 people identified as learning disabled, Wilson found that many undertook roles that would not 'otherwise be done by a non-disabled worker' (Wilson, 2003, p. 102) and therefore asks whether they could be described as real jobs. In doing so he highlights one of the consistent tensions of supported employment: the extent to which it is about finding existing opportunities and if adjustments are required, where 'the responsibility of change' should lie (Wilson, 2003, p. 103).

Concluding that a focus on "real jobs" fails to recognised the very tangible impact of impairment and the fact that disabled people have to learn more than just a set of job tasks in order to achieve notions of success, Wilson (2003) calls for a deconstruction of job arrangements that 'remain focused on non-cognitively impaired people' and offers a reminder of the inequalities experienced by disabled workers. Alas such telling insights provide little solace in the behaviourist origins of systematic instruction and the very real danger that, in the wrong hands, it will do little but reinforce the medicalized notion that disabled people are a bit of training away from the Shangri la of neoliberal citizenship. However in the right hands, there is something very powerful about the adoption of supported employment processes – especially when embedded within the values of inclusivity and aspiration (British Association of Supported Employment, 2017). Yet although far less is known about self-employment in this context, research does show a growing understanding of self-employment and, as the next section will reveal, work to link this to people with learning difficulties has begun.

2.3. Including self-employment

It was an early start on the morning of 24th June 2009. A cold station platform and an eye wateringly expensive ticket. A day in London in order to make the launch of Valuing Employment Now (Department of Health, 2009a), the new cross Government Employment Strategy designed to 'radically increase the number of people with moderate and severe learning difficulties in employment' (Department of Health, 2009a, p. 2). Habitual black tea from the overpriced kiosk soothes a sense

of anticipation. At the tube station in London, I bumped into a colleague whilst scrutinising the tube map to find my best route. That was a relief. He had already worked out a route so we made our way together and, as we were a little ahead of time, grabbed a coffee en-route. I smoked in those days so we sat outside and pondered the inclusion of various aspects of employment support for people with learning difficulties. There was quite a buzz around the development of Valuing Employment Now and we hoped that we might, at last, see significant improvements to the way employment support for people with learning difficulties would be organised.

I was somewhat nervous. Along with many others, I had contributed to this strategy and provided stories and case studies of what I considered to be good practice. During conversations with colleagues at the Department of Health, I had been particularly keen to promote self-employment as a realistic route to work for people with learning difficulties - an enthusiasm based largely on my work of many years developing and promoting co-operatives, social firm and small business ownership. This was a big day for learning difficulty and employment. The first time that all government departments had come together to consider the role each had in improving the lives of people with learning difficulties. However, I was not certain how much attention self-employment was going to get.

On arrival we registered and found a seat at a table with others that we knew. Pre-conference chatter filled the room as delegates took their seats around large round tables replete with corporate pencils, note pads and water bottles. Never enough glasses. Our launch pack contained a bound copy of the strategy so with cursory acknowledgement of the others on our table, I flicked through the booklet to find what I was looking for. Chapter 7: Promoting self-employment. It was in there. I quickly scanned the text. At only 4 pages, the chapter was very short but mention had been made and the reader informed 'that self-employment can be an effective route into the labour market for people with learning disabilities' (Department of Health, 2009a, p. 65). I knew this, but it was good to see it in print. I don't think it registered at the time how little the strategy actually said about self-employment other than it was a possibility. Perhaps that was enough. Crucially though, it included

Delroy's story, the man described as having 'a severe learning disability' (Department of Health, 2009a, p. 66), whose story had first enabled me to see self-employment differently - to consider the wider implications of enterprise development beyond the job numbers and how it might serve to help us reframe human worth (Goodley, 2017). More than anything though, a chapter on self-employment, however brief, provided the public and strategic reinforcement that it was at least on the cards.

Of course, none of this was new. Beyond the swanky launch budget and the photo opportunities with Government Ministers – I had mine taken with the minister for Disabled People – the ongoing struggle to develop employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties was led by an army of dedicated and proficient practitioners. Indeed, the use of business and trade to create some of those opportunities was an ongoing effort that could be seen across innumerable day centres, adult training units and preparing for work courses. These included a myriad of enterprising activities - some good, some less so, some born of informed choice, others developed as a reaction to circumstance. However, a more co-ordinated determination had come from the co-operative and social firm movements which sought the use of more mainstream business processes to support people into work. Heavily influenced by the German and Italian social co-operatives movement (Jeffery, 2005), social firms started to appear in the UK as businesses designed to use their 'market oriented production of goods and services' (Cox, et al., 2005, p. 8) to create employment opportunities for disabled people.

As a precursor to the arguably more successful social enterprise brand skilfully adopted by Blaire's New Labour, social firms set out to traverse the perhaps inevitable tensions between trade and social mission. Expanding quickly from just a handful of businesses before 1997, to a sector employing over 1500 people by 2005 (Warner & Mandiberg, 2006), social firms started to be viewed as a serious player in the employment support sector. Boosted by both European and UK Government funding, Socials Firms UK provided cohesion for the previously isolated pockets of entrepreneurial activity through which social firms blended the use of trading and grant income, employed both disabled and non-disabled workers and promoted the participation of disabled people at all levels of the enterprise (Secker, et al., 2003). Yet beyond the specificities of social firms, the establishment of a

social enterprise strategy unit in the Labour Government in 2002 signalled a wider recognition of the benefits of combining 'strong public service ethos with business acumen' (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002, p. 5). The Blair government saw that alternative approaches might be able to reach into corners of society that mainstream services were unable to get to and with New Labours' "Third Way" thinking working as 'the philosophical gatekeeper for policy decisions' (Somers, 2013, p. 96), the social enterprise unit spearheaded the drive to use enterprise and entrepreneurship to build a more inclusive society (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002).

However, despite the jubilance of an expanding social enterprise sector, questions remained as to the effectiveness of social firms as a sustainable way to develop employment for disabled people. One of the problems that the push for social firms introduced was that nearly everything started to be described as one. For a while, it seemed as though every day service, college group and community gathering became a social firms, introduced worker meetings and talked about 'paying wages as soon as possible'. Many did not, although new language appeared to describe the 'emerging' and 'potential' social firms (Secker, et al., 2003) that hadn't quite made it yet. Elsewhere, the ongoing pressure to balance both business and social needs took its toll. The lack of business acumen held by health and social care staff, so often at the helm of social firms, forced some to not 'place enough emphasis on running a business and covering their costs' (D'Angelo, et al., 2003, p. 14). Moreover, problems with productivity and difficulties securing mainstream contracts left many social firms overly dependent on the whim of funders while, despite their enormous inclusionary benefits (Jeffery, 2005), the involvement of disabled people at board level was less apparent (Mason, 2010). Therefore, although participation and empowerment were cited as examples of where social firms held advantage over wider employment support approaches (Warner & Mandiberg, 2006), their earnest focus on training to enable participants to become good and better employees perhaps fell short of providing opportunities for disabled participants to be seen as innovators and entrepreneurs in their own right.

> The launch continued. 'I'm glad I've seen you' a colleague announced. 'I've been wanting to ask whether you were still supporting people to start their own business. What do you think of the strategy?'

'Oh hi' I replied, 'yes, I've just been looking through self-employment chapter. Only four pages long and two of those are title and case study but at least it got a mention'.

'Good' my colleague said, 'we've been thinking that it'll be good if we can support more people to set up a little business. Perhaps a social enterprise. You do that too don't you? That might be good for some of our participants - are any of your enterprises still running? Perhaps we could arrange a chat.'

I have never forgotten those questions. Partly because they seemed to convey the essence of what and how we engage in conversations about self-employment and disability, and partly because they echo much of the focus of research on the subject. A 'little business' seems to ask questions of viability and scale - of outcomes. But I wonder also whether it carries a hint of patronisation. Did asking if they were still running reveal our disbelief that these were real and introduce an ill-defined assumption of how long an enterprise has to last for it to be considered successful? And what does "do enterprise" say if not that it is support workers and facilitators like me who are the ones actively engaging in enterprise development rather than the participants and entrepreneurs themselves?

Perhaps these are not unreasonable questions. After all, there seems to be widespread agreement that the specifics of disability and self-employment have been underexplored (Renko, et al., 2016; Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013; Pagán, 2009; Maritz & Laferriere, 2016; Yamamoto & Olson, 2016; Caldwell, et al., 2020a), and that paucity of research into entrepreneurship is even more acute when it comes to people with learning difficulties running their own business. A recent systematic review of the literature on businesses run by people with learning difficulties (intellectual impairment) found that out of a total of 1080 papers screened for both business and learning difficulty terms by Hutchinson et al. (2021), only six focused specifically on self-employment for people with learning difficulties and only one of those was UK based. Yet that research which has been conducted appears consistent with wider enterprise research which routinely lingers on matters of business outcome, entrepreneurial motivation and process management (Caldwell, et al., 2019). It therefore seems sensible to adopt these and, along with the benefits of self-employment to the individual, consider questions of enterprise, motivation and support.

2.3.1. Outcomes

With the development of social firms and social enterprises paving the way for a greater understanding and appreciation of non-standard enterprise, UK interest in self-employment for people with learning difficulties got a boost with the arrival of the "microenterprise". Although already defined in the UK and Europe as an entity with fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover below €2 million (Financial Conduct Authority, 2021), the term "microenterprise" was appropriated to describe enterprises fashioned out of the interests of individual disabled people, and specifically for people with learning difficulties. This followed experiences in the US where the focus was on 'making money and not about jobs' (Hogg, 2005, p. 4) and shifted the application of enterprise away from job creation towards the wider social benefits they may bring as vehicle for health and social care (Cole, et al., 2007). My question at the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities (Bates, 2009) - was this enterprise development or social care? - aligned with others who considered enterprise in terms of its benefits to the individual and the creative use of formal and informal supports to achieve good life outcomes for people considered to have high support needs (Thoresen, et al., 2018).

Interested in the 'experience of self-employment for individuals with disabilities and health conditions' (Adams, et al., 2019, p. 2), the 2019 qualitative study conducted for the UK's Department of Work and Pensions by Adams and colleagues found that 'businesses run by disabled people are disproportionately likely to be solo self-employed, run from home, and lack a growth ambition' (p. 5). However, clarification for these 'struggling and surviving' (Adams, et al., 2019, p. 6) enterprises is advanced by Shaheen's earlier (2016) study which posits that, for some, starting small might be more desirable and appropriate with options to ramp up 'small scale lifestyle businesses' (p. 62) into something more later. Interestingly, Caldwell et al. distinguish self-employment from entrepreneurship by suggesting the latter involves profit and growth oriented activity as opposed to 'job creation for one individual with the goal of becoming financially self-sufficient' (Caldwell, et al., 2020a, p. 500). However others rightly acknowledge the extent to which the terms entrepreneurship and microenterprise are used synonymously for self-employment in disability research (Yamamoto, et al., 2011).

The tension between economic prowess and personal and social outcomes are perhaps most keenly felt in the research that explores how people with learning difficulties interact with entrepreneurial options. That social outcomes may overshadow economic ones is once more picked up by Reddington and Fitzsimons (2013) who find no correlation between income levels and notions of success. This aligns with Beyer and Robinson's proposition that self-employment may be a good way of using one's hobby to make some money and 'another way of people with a learning disability moving from being a client to being a citizen' (Beyer & Robinson, 2009, p. 66). Either way, with the emphasis on personal development, choice and control, enterprise size doesn't seem to matter.

> So what was my concern with my colleague's reference to people setting up 'a little business'? Perhaps it stemmed from a wider unease surrounding the aspirations and expectations we collectively held about employment for people with learning difficulties. Indeed the supported employment world had been striving for years to think ambitiously about the employment options for people so labelled and make progress from the endless cycle of work preparation, volunteering and very part time work experienced by so many. Did we also not think it possible for people with learning difficulties to do more than run a little business? My experience suggested otherwise as I had already been working with, and for, many disabled people for whom self-employment and small business ownership had been a successful and lucrative choice. In short, despite the fact that 96% of UK businesses are considered microenterprises (Ward, 2021), I didn't like the 'micro' assumptions and the way self-employment and microenterprise were starting to be used interchangeably.

None-the-less, with research serving the appetising positivity that engagement with enterprise, of whatever size, can lead to benefits for the individual, it is time to consider whether such findings influence the choice people make to explore what it has to offer.

2.3.2. Motivations

Frequently described as either push or pull motivations to distinguish between those driven to self-employment as a result of difficulties in accessing the wider job market [push] or those drawn by the prospect and benefits of self-employment [pull] (Caldwell, et al., 2020a), much research attempts to understand individual decisions to engage in entrepreneurial

activity. In their study, Adams et al. found that for many disabled respondents, the choice of self-employment was made only once other forms of employment were found not to be 'viable' (Adams, et al., 2019, p. 2). Work at the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities concurs, suggesting that self-employment is frequently 'the option of last resort' (Bates, 2009, p. 28) once everything else had failed. Others however, caution against directing people towards self-employment just because getting a job with an employer is too hard. Griffin and Hammis (2007, p. 1), for example, suggest they 'gently nudge more people away from self-employment than into it'.

Yet not all research comes to the same conclusion. Jones and Latreille (2011) used data from the UK Labour Force Survey to unpick the motivations behind disabled and non-disabled entrepreneur's decisions to start their own business and in doing so, found 'strong evidence of the work-limiting nature of disability being an important positive influence on self-employment' (p. 4177). Their conclusion that self-employment offered an attractive option for disabled people to accommodate their individual preferences is illustrative of the pull of enterprise. Similarly, in their examination of eight enterprises, Hagner and Davies (2002) found that self-employment provided opportunities for increased levels of control, community integration and social contact while Shereen et al. (2016) emphasised the superior choice and control over working arrangements offered by 'inclusive entrepreneurship', the term he uses to describe the broader desire to 'promote change at an individual, program, and systems level' (Shaheen, 2016, p. 58). Perhaps his further suggestion that the experience of self-employment can also lead to positive changes to self-perception is the result of the utilisation of the business owner's unique combination of skills and interests highlighted by Griffin et al. (2014)? Demonstrating that evidence of these benefits can also be found outside of the US, Pagán offers an interrogation of the European experience which likewise identifies higher levels of job satisfaction among disabled self-employed workers when compared to their salaried counterparts. (Pagán, 2009).

Beyond a general interest in the reasons why some disabled people choose self-employment, motivational considerations are important because of their relevance to the introduction of policy. As Caldwell (2016; 2020a) explains, where disability employment policies link strongly to push motivations, policy designed to encourage entrepreneurship relate more to pull motivations. This indicates that such concern is also not specific to

disability, Block and Koellinger (2009) found, in 1,547 nascent entrepreneurs in Germany, satisfaction with self-employment was at least to some extent dependant on whether an individual business owner was an 'opportunity' entrepreneur, keen to exploit business opportunities or a 'necessity' entrepreneur, for whom alternative work choices were more limited. Motivation, it would seem, is important.

Although much of the research concentrates on the experiences of disabled people as a broad (and perhaps uncomfortably) homogenous group (Goodley, 2017), questions of pull motivation have also been asked specifically of people with learning difficulties. Doing so, appears to suggest that self-employment not only presents the potential to 'combine the skills, interests and aspirations of the individual with a genuine market demand' (Bates, 2009, p. 130), but also passage to 'excellent and long lasting outcomes' (Reddington & Fitzsimons, 2013, p. 130). However, the easy distinction between push and pull factors is questioned by Caldwell et al. (2020a) who, in their excavation of entrepreneurial ambition for people with learning (intellectual) disabilities, conclude that self-employment is frequently driven by both push and pull factors, even if more needs to be done to 'promote an environment that facilitates opportunity-based entrepreneurship' (Caldwell, et al., 2020a, p. 508).

Whatever the problems of articulating an adequate generalisation of the motivations behind the uptake of self-employment and small business ownership, self-employment does seem to offer an attractive option for some people. Yet my conversation also troubled the involvement of others - the supporters, facilitators and developers of enterprise and their role in stimulating and discouraging entrepreneurial options.

2.3.3. Supports

Poorly concealing an enthusiasm to discover 'what works' in supporting disabled people to establish their own enterprise, there is extensive coverage of the education, training and support arrangements considered helpful. Although many, such as Yamamoto and Olson (2016), also identify other internal and external factors upon which enterprise relies - in their case, personal characteristics and market conditions - the focus on support arrangements, efficacy and cost is widespread. Yamamoto and Alverson's (2015) emphasis on the vocational counsellor typifies the dominance of US research in the field and the

prevalence of the Vocation Rehabilitation system on which much employment support is built. However, other studies identify employment advisors (Hagner & Davies, 2002) or social and community enterprises (Shaheen, 2016; Ouimette & Rammler, 2017) as the source of external support. In the UK, Adams (2019) cites peer mentoring as 'an ideal type of support by self-employed disabled people as it would provide practical help and support on running a business and managing time, workload, and expectations' (Adams, et al., 2019, p. 7). Reddington and Fitzsimons (2013) provide a reminder of the importance of families.

That support mechanisms are formed of such a wide range of formal and informal arrangements (Caldwell, et al., 2020b) highlights the fundamentally interdependent nature of enterprise development. However, although the quality, knowledge and experience of support draws frequent attention as a limiting factor in enterprise development, few studies detail the precise nature of the intervention referred to. Of those that do, access to support with experience of enterprise development may offer an obvious starting point. Hagner and Davies (2002) found that many employment support professionals possessed neither 'business expertise nor a strong interest in business' (p. 69) and that although links with the wider social care infrastructure may offer personal support benefits, services were generally ill-equipped to make the transition into enterprise development. Their finding is certainly in line with that of Yamamoto and colleagues (2011, p. 10), who also highlight the inadequacy of support systems, whilst suggesting that 'non-traditional sources may provide greater flexibility … to timely address specific issues'.

Reddington and Fitzsimons' (2013) conclusion that support in the UK is similarly recognisable by a lack of business know-how may also explain why some suggest that it is a lack of belief in the ability of disabled people that underpins the absence of ambition to explore self-employment (Hagner & Davies, 2002; Shaheen, 2016). That it is too frequently seen as a nice idea - for someone else, may explain Adams and colleagues' (2019, p. 5) point that 'relative deficits in human capital' at least partly explain the difficulties disabled people face in establishing enterprise. Helpfully, (Pavey, 2006) sidestep this uncomfortable observation by calling for a different way of thinking about entrepreneurship that is more inclusive of people with learning difficulties.

> As the launch event came to an end and we started to make our way out of the
> venue, I remember the feeling of puzzlement. My fleeting euphoria at the inclusion

of a chapter on self-employment made way for further questions about the significance of self-employment as more than just a tool for employment. Many of those questions remain.

But this also raises a new one. Who exactly is it that we are talking about and how might we identify them? Certainly Valuing Employment was developed for 'people with moderate and severe learning disabilities, because they have benefited least from previous initiatives' (Department of Health, 2009a, p. 13) although 'people with profound and complex disabilities should not be excluded' (2009a). With employment rates for this group of people hovering below 6% (NHS Digital, 2021), this surely makes sense? Yet I am not sure everything is that simple. Disability is a complex mechanism desirous of complex consideration and, with ontological and epistemological implications at stake, may benefit from a bit of scrutiny. As Goodley puts it, 'disability is often made sense of in popular culture, our educational institutions, health care, settings and workplaces and communities as the lack of ability' (Goodley, 2021, pp. 75-76). But is that always the case? I briefly turn attention to this question.

2.4. What do we mean by learning difficulty?

The notion of disability has been the locus of a debate since the 1970s when a group of activists, coming together as the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), offered a reconceptualization of disability as a social construction, disentangled from its medicalised roots (UPIAS, 1976). Prior to that, the domination of a bio-medical contention that located the "problem" of disability with the individual (Berghs, et al., 2016), resulted in a focus on the amelioration of conditions through intervention, treatment and adjustment (Goodley, 2017). However, by 'distinguishing between the impairments that people have, and the oppression which they experience' (Shakespeare & Watson, 2015, p. 10), the social model of disability set out the terms on which the social 'barriers' faced by disabled people might be distinguished from the 'functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment' (Oliver, 1998, p. 1447).

> I felt an extreme discomfort as I turned to the dictionaries and a feeling that they may belie the social construction of the term suggested by the social model. Yet by citing the definition of learning difficulty offered by the OED as a problem of

'acquiring knowledge and skills, esp. (in later use) in comparison with the norm for one's peer group' (OED online, 2020a), the point is well made. Learning difficulty is all about a set of norms.

This significant shift in focus had major implications and, although its initial impact came through the speedy adoption of the social model by practitioners and advocates (Gleeson, 1997), its resonance continues to be felt today in the way many services, supports and intervention are commissioned, constructed and evaluated. With disability set out in terms of social oppression rather than impairment (Shakespeare & Watson, 2015) the social model mobilises tenets of Marxist thinking and the role of capitalism in facilitating the segregation of certain individuals from the workings of society by exposing notions of independent living, the right to work and a shared disability culture' (Berghs, et al., 2016, p. 36).

However, amid the rejection of disability as a personal tragedy (Goodley, 2017; Barnes & Mercer, 1997), some suggest that an artless separation of impairment and disability presents an oversimplified distinction (Shakespeare & Watson, 2015) which ignores the realities of living with an impairment or long term health condition (Morris, 2013). This turn to a social model of *impairment* to 'address the existence of illness, pain and distress, and how people deal with them' (Pring, 2020) highlighted the limitation of a social model and, by re-socialising impairment (Goodley, 2001) presented opportunities to consider a broader take on disability and impairment that accepted that some impairments might also be socially constructed.

The view that 'impairment and disability are not dichotomous, but describe different places on a continuum, or different aspects of a single experience' (Shakespeare & Watson, 2015, p. 22), certainly illustrates the complexities of evolving a single theory of disability. Yet the social model remains a game changer in the way many conceptualise disability and the implication it has in understanding the role of social and cultural barriers in the development and maintenance of segregation. Yet importantly, the social model was rather UK focused and represented a conceptualisation of disability that was somewhat distinguishable from approaches emerging elsewhere including the civil rights approach of North America and the Nordic Relational model developing across Sweden, Denmark, Finland and other countries. Whereas the North Americas tended to categorise disabled people in terms of their status as a distinct minority group and drew on (amongst others)

the politics of the black civil rights movement (Goodley, 2017; Shakespeare & Watson, 2015), the relational model stood as an examination of the incompatibility between the individual and their environment and considered disability to be relational (Tøssebro, 2004). Although the relational model was less of a direct consequence of the disabled peoples movement (Goodley, 2017), some have argued that it serves as just another type of social model (Shakespeare, 2004). Either way, it offers an interesting relevance to the potential exclusion of people with learning difficulties from the wider social model due to its close ties to ideas around normalisation and social role valorisation.

As we have seen, theories of normalisation originally emerged in Denmark through the work of Bank Mikkelson, but the ideas were crystallised by Bengt Nirje in Sweden and further developed by John O'Brien in the UK and Wolf Wolfersberger in the United States (Jones, et al., 2016). Nirje saw disability in terms of three things: individual impairment, the social response to that impairment and awareness of the individual (Nirje, 1970) and, while normalisation represented a focus on the second, doing so meant it could also provide a way to address the others (Nirje, 1970). Normalisation promoted access to typical daily, weekly and yearly routines and, amid 'normal development experiences of the life cycle' (Nirje, 1970, p. 66), required structures of support to be designed around these principles. The ideas were further developed by Wolfersberger (2011) who saw the systemic devaluation of some vulnerable people, and especially people with learning disabilities, as an illustration of the way society considers some aspects of segregation and exclusion as common sense (Jones, et al., 2016). Later repositioned as Social Role Valorisation (SRV), partly to sidestep confusion between normal patterns of life and normal behaviour (Wolfensberger, 1983), but also in recognition of the way valued social roles impact on perceptions of disability and ability, normalisation continues to underpin many ideas around personalisation and service design.

Earlier I provided an OED definition of learning difficulty that located it within a vague conception of 'normal' and it is here that I would like to return. The ontological and epistemological enthusiasm of the social model to draw a district line between disability and impairment has led some to question its relevance for people with experience of mental ill health, learning difficulty and other neuro-diverse groups (Berghs, et al., 2016). Others suggest that the social model in general has had much less of an impact on people with

learning difficulties (Chappell, et al., 2001), with Goodley suggesting the 'socially created nature of learning difficulties' (Goodley, 2001, p. 209) needs challenging alongside the grand narratives that frame people so labelled as 'personal tragedies of their unchangeable organic impairments' (Goodley, 2001, p. 211). Yet I note my seemingly uninhibited drift between learning disability and learning difficulty. Are we really talking about the same thing? Certainly the OED defines one in terms of the other but, mindful of the synthetic fluidity with which we define people, I might add intellectual disability, developmental disability, cognitive impairment and even mental retardation to the list. The point being that each is but a label with its own temporal, geographical and socio-political reference point. Certainly my own experience attests to the position that learning difficulty is frequently the result of some social construction so I will conclude this section with an illustration.

I was at an early stage of my career as a support worker for people with learning difficulties and supporting one man to apply for Disability Living Allowance [DLA], a benefit designed to meet the extra care or mobility costs associated with disability (Elizabeth Finn Care, 2020). Typical of the allocation process of many resources, the application required input from a Doctor; perhaps itself a clear illustration of the continued adherence to a medical model of disability. The form came back stating that the man's "main disabling condition" was asthma. Knowing that this would not meet the criteria for awarding DLA, I was asked to accompany the man to his Doctor's surgery. We were seen by a locum doctor and asked for the form to be completed "correctly". However, on checking his medical records, the doctor could find nothing suggestive of learning difficulty or disability. We explained that he attended a local authority day service for people with learning difficulties and that I was a support worker from a large national charity that worked with people with learning disabilities. The form was duly completed and the benefit awarded.

I have often reflected on role I played in defining that man as a person with learning difficulties and the importance of doing so in the allocation of resources. However, the experience illustrates perfectly the way notions of learning difficulty play out in reality: A medical professional relies on the proximity of a social care worker to assist in the allocation of a label. The question surely becomes whether that label is also a key. Perhaps that question sits at the heart of this thesis. Avramidis & Smith (1999) certainly contend that the

positivistic leaning of much research around learning difficulty links directly to the continued conceptualisation of disability in medical terms.

2.5.   Thinking with research

It's clear that no two doctorates are the same and that we each have to navigate our own path through the learning process and any resultant reappraisal of one's identity and relationship with the outside world (Wellington, et al., 2005). Mine started with a desire to explore self-employment and the role it might have in improving the employment rates for people with learning difficulties. Initially, very much a search to find what works (Slavin, 2004), this was about disabled people and enterprise, and the way we train and support people into work. Although there may be no such thing as value free or neutral research (May, 2001), I think I still set out assuming the process was going to excavate some external truth; something that was already out there just waiting to be uncovered by my own clever research methods. It was clear from reading the literature that interest in employment for people with learning difficulties, and especially the efficacy of employment support structures, leant heavily in favour of objectivist research approaches which do just that, seek dispassionate, stable and generalizable answers to pre-determined questions (Wellington, 2015). Indeed, the commanding use of statistics, randomised control data and other quantitative approaches make a powerful ally in the development of policy, the allocation of resources and the improvement of practice. For practitioners in the employment support world, the focus on what works is frequently driven by endless conversations with social care commissioners who need persuading that investment in good practice employment support would be money well spent (Greig, et al., 2014). With funding frequently linked to unemployment rates, the risk of young people becoming NEET – not in education, employment or training – and reducing welfare spend, many in the employment support sector therefore are well versed in the positivist assumptions of reliability, validity and replicability.

Stemming from an objective take on the world and a search for universal explanations and prediction (Abraham, 1996) positivism craves certainty and, by typically dealing with big sample sizes, testing hypotheses and by applying an 'experimental control of variables' (Hammersley, 2012, p. 20), trades in confidence. Of course, one's epistemological position is

important as it lays the groundwork and justification for many of the decisions made about research design, approach, methodologies and methods (Crotty, 1998). Whereas ontology represents what there is to know (Thomas, 2013) and might be considered the study of being or, more simply, 'what is' (Crotty, 1998, p. 10), epistemology asks how we know. These ontology and epistemology questions are significant as they refer to ways in which we perceive our social world (May, 2001), and ask whether it is ever possible to know an objective truth, whether that truth exists externally from the observer and whether therefore it is possible to generalise research outputs from one situation to another (Pring, 2000). These are highly complex philosophical problems which contemplate the difference between knowledge and belief (Wellington, 2015) but broadly speaking, objectivists consider the world as observable independently of the researcher while subjectivists submit that reality as a social construction that we can only know from the 'transaction between our sentient and intelligent selves and a world we cannot know in its pristine state' (Eisner, 1992, p. 14). Whereas positivists have traditionally sought the objectification of knowledge by claiming the researcher remains outside of the phenomenon they seek to understand, (Goodson & Scherto, 2011), interpretivists look for processes, social constructs, the influential role of the researcher on those constructs and the situation in which they develop (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Where quantitative researchers look to numerical data and statistical relationships, often in isolation (Goodson & Scherto, 2011), qualitative researchers interpret the world from their place within it and celebrate the mosaic of possibilities this brings to research.

Of course while a categorical differentiation that equates quantitative research with positivism and qualitative with interpretivist might be helpful to illustrate broad alliances, the reality is somewhat different with some suggesting that ultimately it is one's paradigmal leaning that dictates the research process, not the type of data (Avramidis & Smith, 1999). In any case, like others in the educational research world, I have never been fully satisfied that the either/or discussions about quantitative or qualitative approaches are helpful (Pring, 2000) and I prefer to think in terms of a productive, if clumsy, relationship between the two. I too share the view that quantitative research can often be 'suggestive of differences to be explored in a more interpretative mode (Pring, 2000, p. 259), although I suspect the influence can equally work the other way as well. That the prevalence of

objectivity in educational research was mirrored across the employment training and support sector and that plenty of it endorses the claim that supported employment works (Beyer, et al., 1996; Beyer & Robinson, 2009; Beyer, et al., 2010; OECD, 2010; Mavranezouli, et al., 2014), it remains useful for engaging in conversations about funding with those who suggest there is 'no magic money tree' (O'Hagan, 2017). At work, I frequently use the findings of such research to add weight to my arguments, to persuade people, to leave little doubt that what I am saying is right, and, with particular regard to disability and employment, to reimagine community education, support and training. 'Research shows that … people with learning difficulties, can and do make great employees … supported employment is one of the best ways to arrange support … If we do A, B and C, we can expect X, Y and Z to happen…'. This can be enormously helpful in the already Sisyphean task of sustaining the supported employment sector and the need to present the message that we know what works, can control inputs and outcomes and understand cause and effect (McNiff, 2007).

But such an approach does not change the conversation, or the basis on which it is held. Offering more efficient spending, tighter control over interventions and a broad acceptance that getting more people to work within the existing structure does little to disrupt the way we have collectively arranged education, training and work. There are also limits to what such research can tell us. Despite the way I, and many of my colleagues use the big research findings, I hope for good reasons, I think about the gaps, the questions that are less frequently asked, and the wider picture, observable only beyond the viewfinder of pre-determined questions. What are the human stories? Who were the job seekers? And what did they think about their support? Employment training and support is not a neatly linear progression from unemployment to work and we do not always know what works, or why. As I read and reviewed the research and considered the people that I worked with, it became obvious that there is a big difference between knowing something works and knowing how something or, more importantly, why something works. Like so many aspects of social and educational life, choices about particular approaches, the sustainability of programmes and the allocation of resources appear to contain more than a hint of the political. Engagement in the research process, the reading of both general academic texts and specific employment support literature therefore provoked broader questions.

Combining these with my own experience of supporting people to explore entrepreneurial options triggered thoughts about the context in which people were becoming self-employed, the social world in which it happened and what it meant. These were less about how self-employment was 'done' and more about what it 'did'; how it might shape (and possibly improve?) the lives of people with learning difficulties. That my interest in this area was formed in praxis – 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 2017, p. 51) - demanded something more exploratory that required indirect questions at the start in order to leave space for new ones to emerge later, that considered the mechanistic educational forces at play in order to unpick how they interacted with the educational art (Schwab, 1969) of employment support and that asked what self-employment does, for the entrepreneur, the educator and for all of us. Methodological questions were therefore writ large - how to achieve this? What set of approaches would be most conducive to this type of inquiry? What were my actual research questions?

With review of the literature at some level of completeness – to the extent that one's literature review can ever be complete – I had a growing sense that there was little in the way of research that was asking the same questions as me. My puzzles seemed different (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and sought the broader picture, the alternative reading, the experience of disabled entrepreneurs and the meaning they attributed to their self-employment. I was interested in the practice of support and enterprise facilitation so it could be better understood and problematized rather than contained and controlled (McNiff, 2007). Perhaps this research project was always going to be interpretive, but I found myself looking beyond the frame of the typical canonical focus of quantitative research (McNiff, 2007; Harrison, 2008), and less interested in measuring the efficacy of the support infrastructure and the reassurance provided by this 'gold standard' (Wellington, 2015) of knowledge production offered by the positivist. That of course is not to say that quantitative methodologies can never consider the experience of self-employment, as some have done just that (Meager, et al., 2011; Renko, et al., 2016; Jones & Latreille, 2011), but this was becoming much more of an exploratory project, interested in what self-employment does beyond the 'how-to' guides and business planning toolkits. Furthermore I had a sense that, given the opportunity, individual business owners were demonstrating

levels of agency that challenged deterministic assumptions (Wellington, et al., 2005) behind much of the 'what works?' concern.

2.6.   Justification, aims and objectives

Having explored the context of education, employment and enterprise in the lives of people with learning difficulties, unpicking the research that has built a greater understanding of the training, education and support structures as well as the motivations behind choosing self-employment, I turned to problematize the notion of learning difficulty in the hope of revealing it as (at least) a largely social construction. This creates space, a gap to be explored, that considers disability not with impairment in mind but in terms of human relational perspective. Certainly this is in itself not new territory and, as shown above, many have pursued a social model of disability. But linking disability to self-employment, not from a business development perspective but from a human perspective, and employment support, not in terms of economics (though that may be important), but in terms of social engagement is new, especially when it is the interaction of the three that is under investigation.

Perhaps we know what works, though I doubt fully, as without the specifics of time, place and circumstance we cannot locate our learning. There are also the ontological and epistemological questions that remain hanging – what is there to know and how might we know it anyway? I confess also to some disquiet as to the separation of these concepts and, as others, consider how knowing and being might be mutually constituted (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018). So though I present this research project in chapters, I have in truth, been unable to satisfactorily separate the thinking, the questioning, the theory and the data. Perhaps this is due to my own role and the extent of work I have done in this area or perhaps the truth lies in the post qualitative arena and that thinking with theory presents a more apt and opportune approach to researching this field. I liked the post qualitative ideas of putting relationships before questions and listening before method (Runswick-Cole, 2020) and felt that a properly reflexive approach would offer collaboration. From the outset, my interest in entrepreneurship seemed uncomplicated. I could name it, pitch it in an elevator (to borrow an Americanism), thought I understood its importance and had a sense of how I would undertake research into it. In chapter 3, I will suggest that I did not.

The other essential thing to establish, of course, is why a study of the entrepreneurial experiences of people with learning difficulties might be important. The 'who cares?' question. It would be easy here to mutter something about social justice and evoke the bland spirit of fairness but, although these are commendable starting points, I'm not sure they adequately relate to this deeply autobiographical endeavour and I must resist the temptation to link the personal with the public (Wright Mills, 1959) too quickly. However, as research rests within a temporal cortex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and what started as an interest in exploring opportunities for employment creation, become a much wider exploration into what happens when people are supported to start their own business. My initial line was to provoke concern over the consistently low employment rate for people with learning difficulties (Hatton, 2018) and suggest that self-employment may be a way through the fog of perceived unemployability (Humber, 2014) that engulfs people so-labelled. My experience of working within the supported employment sector had exposed the required duality of campaign and service inherent in the work. A duality where championing the rights for, interests in and possibilities of employment for people with learning difficulties make way for a focus on constructing enabling education and support mechanisms that might prove helpful. Early experience of co-operative enterprise exposed me to the potential offered by harnessing the power of enterprise to both champion and construct social good, but what little was known about the numbers of people exploring this route, suggested they were low (Greig, et al., 2014; Boss Employment, 2018). Yet I knew people were able to set up their own business, it seemed to make a positive difference to their lives when they did, and I was quite good at supporting people to do so. Certainly a Slavin-esk search for what works drove part of my desire and I wanted to know what good practice in developing enterprise looked like, yet as such obfuscatory indulgence concealed my puzzlement of why so few people with learning difficulties became self-employed.

Although research rarely offers a linear response to problem definition and solution and more frequently forms around emergent research puzzles (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this research became not about self-employment per se and the chance to stimulate employment numbers, but about the opportunities it offers to liberate the entrepreneur from the shackles of a disabling society. I wanted to know if self-employment disrupted notions of ability, independence and autonomy and just as the 'life of an individual cannot

be adequately understood without reference to the institutions within which his [sic] biography is enacted' (Wright Mills, 1959, p. 161), so surely the aim became to excavate those institutions to unearth the meaning behind self-employment. Then, rather than explore 'how can we do more?' we might ask 'why do we do so little?'.

With some questions remaining consistent with the research proposal (Bates, 2019), this research therefore asks:

- What can entrepreneurship "do" for people with learning difficulties?
- How does employment support practice interact with ways in which people with learning difficulties engage in entrepreneurial activity?
- Who is the entrepreneur in the job coach – job seeker relationship?
- In what ways do local employment agencies, families and others utilise more distributed entrepreneurial approaches?

3.   Methodology – a research journey

The ubiquitous desire for rigour to satisfy the hunger for process can also encourage a formalistic design and methodological approach in qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Typically commencing with a problem or set of problems, educational research asks questions and, by locating them in the existing literature, constructs theoretical and contextual frameworks within which the research might sit. Although it may be a little unfair to accuse authors of peddling an oversimplification of process, I found more than one textbook presenting research as rather a linear progression moving seamlessly from problem to conclusion. Indeed my reality was far from the enviable A-Z depicted, resembling more of an entangled mess which consumed me, confused me and changed me. The research proposal had talked enthusiastically about developing theory, the importance of the actor's voice and the adoption of a case study methodology to research 'a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context' (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Reference was also made to constant comparison; a strategy for analysing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which, with its origins in grounded theory, seeks theory in 'data systematically obtained from social research' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 2). My initial inclination was therefore to adopt a grounded theory methodology and, with helpful guidance, I embarked on an exploration of the different flavours of grounded theory, its emergence as a collaboration between Barney Glazier and Anselm Strauss, their epistemological tensions, later separation and the rise of constructivist grounded theory as an alternative conceptualisation espoused by Charmaz (2014). Attractive for its systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data, grounded theory seemed to offer space to develop theory inductively from the data and the constructivist tilt (Charmaz, 2014) aligned well with my ontological and epistemological position that understands the world as socially constructed and in need of interpretive consideration. Yet further in, despite accepting Charmaz's appreciation of the researcher as a co-constructer of meaning, I still experienced a hesitation. What was my role in all this? Was I a passive observer or an active ingredient?

Although early forms of grounded theory rejected the notion that knowledge could be 'formulated merely by applying a few ideas from an established formal theory to the substantive area' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33), recent interpretations better acknowledge

the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the theoretical sensitivity that the researcher brings to the endeavour (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 1996). Charmaz (2014) proclaims the benefits of researcher knowledge in the initial coding of data as long as they remain 'provisional, comparative and grounded in the data' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 117). There is a risk, of course, of trying to summarise complex processes, but grounded theory's systematic approach to the segmentation, organisation and coding of data (Jankowska, 2014) offered an attractive progression that went beyond the mere description of interesting phenomenon. Yet I still could not fully dislodge the feeling that I possessed neither an open mind nor an empty head (Charmaz, 2014). As a practitioner, developer and consultant, I had spent a significant time in the supported employment field and wanted to work closely with the research participants in collaboration, not just to listen as an outsider, but to actively engage in the telling of stories (Lal, et al., 2012) that countered prevailing social narratives (Harrison, 2008) of disability and enterprise.

Having decided that grounded theory might not, after all, be the perfect ally, I set aside the intoxicating allure of methodological clarity and pursued alternatives. Like others, one concern was that too great an emphasis on coding could result in a fragmentation of data (Jankowska, 2014) and that decontextualizing the accounts of self-employment would risk 'stripping away the individual and their experiences' (Lal, et al., 2012, p. 13). Although grounded theory might be well suited to drawing out challenges and problems by generating theory about what is going on, these research questions evolved to be more about understanding the entrepreneurial experience of people with learning difficulties, so demanded something more intense, more complete, something that might offer the connection between the personal and the political (Wright Mills, 1959). Perhaps the production of any more generalizable theoretical statements (Charmaz, 2014), that could outlive the specifics of individual entrepreneurial experience, could come later.

But first came COVID.

3.1. Clarity in COVID?

Research is always a temporal activity, subject to the specifics of its time but what a time this turned out to be. Just as I had completed an early draft of an application for ethical

approval, the world ground to a halt as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. I was working overseas at the time on a transnational project designed to support more disabled people consider self-employment. I had to make a hasty retreat back to the UK just in time for the nationwide lockdown that would change the way we all live and work and, likely, alter the way we support people in and through work in the longer term. Yet somewhat ironically, the imposed restrictions offered me the reflective space I needed; a chance to consider, reconsider, reflect and review.

Some consider it the researcher's previous relationship with the research topic that intersects with research design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lal, et al., 2012) but it is clear that the circumstances that surround research can equally influence research patterns and approaches (Dodds & Hess, 2021). Reflecting on research at a time of COVID provided the perfect illustration of how complex epistemological questions of research interact with wider social, political and economic messages. The opportunity offered by the pandemic to watch research unfold in real time was compelling (Thomson, 2020) and from the outset, it was possible to witness politicians, of all persuasions, confirm their allegiance to science, declare loyalty to research, and, when it came to the easing of restrictions, be led by 'data not dates' (BBC, 2021). Yet, the same virus data was being interpreted differently, by different people, in different places, for different purposes - when to lock down, when to wear masks, when to go to restaurants, when to open schools, when to work from home. It was clear that there is, after all, no one science, but numerous possible interpretations of the data. As Thompson (2020) put it:

> 'Right now we can actually see sciences plural, and researching and interpreting results as knowledge making practices. In real time. How exciting is this! Our colleagues are not only talking to each other in laboratories and in academic journals – much of their conversation is now in public. On blogs and twitter, in op ed piece and television commentary. They debate. They disagree. They develop informed hunches together. They dispute numbers. They create and challenge graphs. They make different interpretations of the same data'.

The use of 'science' as the foundation upon which COVID responses were built played out at an international level as the pandemic spread across the globe and we compared national response and political positioning. The big numbers were everywhere, number of cases, numbers in hospital and, most shocking, the number of deaths. Yet as the months passed

and the lockdowns came and went, the conversation switched to vaccines. Again we pawed at the science, double blind trials, randomised data collection – were they safe? Did they work? What were the side effects? Once again, it was about numbers. How many people had participated in the trial? What age were they? 37,000 was comforting, 2,500 less so. The reassurance of the medical trial, of scientists plying their craft accurately, away from the politicisation of data interpretation, came to the fore. I, like many I'm sure, wanted to know about proper process, about validity and generalisability. No research is value free (May, 2001), but I wanted some of it to pretend it was.

However, amid the jubilance of scientific success offered by the vaccine and the Churchillian rhetoric of triumph offered by some politicians, stories started to appear of people with lived experience of COVID who had been ill and although assumed better, had not fully recovered. Emerging slowly were accounts of the longer term impacts of being unwell – of Long COVID. These were not originally borne of scientific experiment, of a tested hypothesis, but emerged as narratives at the periphery, initially away from the spotlight, as a cry for recognition, of individual importance, not yet headline news. Slowly that recognition came, a greater understanding generated through individual cases, personal stories and later, acknowledgement, and guidance (Venkatesan, 2021; NHS, 2021). As experiences of Long COVID became more prevalent, so too did the research projects (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021; NIHR, 2021). However, these had not been suggested by differences identified during quantitative research (Pring, 2000), but by stories of experience. Case studies continue to contribute to a growing understanding of what COVID means, what it does and how it affects people.

Stories shift perception and our understanding of the world and move us beyond pre-formulated questions and test-and-measure approaches to knowledge generation. They also remind us of the need to think carefully about the selection of research approaches that are appropriate to the questions, the circumstances and the purpose. Research findings are not discovered, but created by all involved (Pring, 2000).

3.2.   A reflective turn to narrative

As COVID spread, it became evident that the pandemic was not going to be a short inconvenience before we could all go back to "normal". However, through the horror of what was being played out before us and although restrictions to face-to-face contact presented challenges, opportunities for change started to emerge. At work, we quickly set about adjusting the way our support structures were organised and started to think about how we might engage the learning disabled community through and beyond the immediacy of the pandemic. It was during this process of reflection and planning that it became clear how much of our work involved the sharing of individual and collective tales of employment. We used stories to convey the successes, challenges, aspirations and expectations of disabled people, their families and others and we used stories to have impact, to reassure and to reimagine the futures (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013) of the people we supported. These were always other people's stories, or at least our version of other people's stories, but the dawning realisation that we are inextricably linked to the stories of others was a profound moment.

I was listening to a colleague recount a story I told about Bret, a man I knew who had set up his own business. The story set out Bret's experience and how, despite the perceptions of many around him, he had become self-employed. Although many assumed him unable to work, his support worker had worked tirelessly with Bret to explore options for work and, by enlisting the backing of others, had come up with an idea for a business. Despite the concerns of her managers, she worked with Bret to design, plan and test the business idea and start trading. This generated community connection, a small income and a change in the way some people thought of him. Bret's story was a story of success that was often used to encourage others to think creatively about support. However, although my colleague seemed to accurately relay the main details, the nature of business, the barriers overcome, the characters involved and the process, somehow it was not the same. As I listened, it became clear that the story had shifted and that different parts were being emphasised while other details were missing. My initial reaction was that this was wrong, that this wasn't a true reflection of what happened, that the story needed to be told properly. But then I realised that what was different, was that my colleague was including me as part of

the story. Instead of me telling the story as the entrepreneurial experience of a disabled man from the perspective of an observer, I was now presented as one of the actors; I was now in the story. This was no longer a story I told, but a story I experienced.

Plummer (1994) distinguishes between the role of producers, coaxers and consumers in the production of narratives. Producers are the story-tellers, the interview subjects, the chat show participants and others that turn 'themselves into social objects' (Plummer, 2008, p. 34). Producers tell the stories but only selected parts. Theirs is not the whole story but a selective representation of the life lived (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). Next are the coaxers who entice the story, encourage its' telling and play an active role in its construction. Coaxers 'probe, interview, and interrogate' (Plummer, 1994, p. 21), and can control the nature of the telling as they sift the detail by the way questions are asked and responses offered (Harrison, 2008). Lastly, the consumers, the listeners and the readers. Consumers, too, play an active role in the production of stories (Earthy & Cronin, 2008) as tales are told in different ways, times and contexts (Plummer, 1994). Appreciating that different readers and listeners will consume stories in different ways is an important element of understanding Plummer's (1994) producers, coaxers and consumers and how they combine in the production of stories. It also ushers comprehension of the way culture and language regulate what, and how, stories are told and heard and how this controls which stories are considered conceivable, relevant and possible (Bruner, 2004). At work, the fluidity of roles, producer, coaxer, consumer, showed that all were temporary. The producer of one story is the reader of another. The coaxer in one instant is a consumer in the next. The story had changed, my role as a coaxer, with it. My colleague was no longer the consumer, but now producer. Yet the story lived and, in the world of employment support, continued to be told as a way to reshape grander narratives of learning difficulty and their perceptions of unemployability (Humber, 2014). Stories are important.

Some suggest that the doctoral journey can involve crossing some sort of threshold as researchers move from an 'unstable liminality' (McKenna, 2017, p. 464) towards moments of clarity. I am not sure if this was such a case, but this glimpse at the role and importance of story made it clear that a narrative inquiry would be a more appropriate methodological underpinning for this research. It was also the moment that I could see a map, not in full detail of course, but one with enough service stations marked (to adopt a clumsy analogy)

to provide a level of confidence. From an eager statement about capturing data emerging from the mouths of participants, eventually came a refocus on narrative that would offer a structure through which the lived experience of disability, enterprise, training and support might be explored. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 50) proclaim the answer to the question 'why narrative?' to be 'because experience'. Perhaps I started to understand what they meant and how, by interweaving my own story of enterprise facilitation, I could perceive my role, not as an interested outsider, but as producer, coaxer and consumer - part of the meaning making endeavour.

3.3.   What is narrative research?

The use of story to relay guidance, meaning and purpose and to tell tales of experience is, central to the human condition (Moen, 2006; Josselson, 2011; Clandinin, 2006; Bruner, 2004). Whether great works of literary genius or conversations in the street, stories weave through the fabric of social life as they are told and retold, interpreted and reinterpreted. Whether Shakespeare's use of tragedy, comedy and history to explore power, love and confusion (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2021), the Thousand and One Nights portraying plot, intrigue, and hope framed within an intimate conversation between man and wife that never quite ends (Irwin, 2003), or recounting the experiences of a recent holiday to a friend, we are storied beings who live storied lives (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Narrative research takes as its starting point the idea that people live and understand their world in storied ways (Josselson, 2011) and explores connections between lives as lived, lives as experienced and lives as told (Bruner, 2004). Narrative research constructs stories through an interaction between the narrator and researcher and considers the meaning behind experience (Wang & Geale, 2015) and the social, cultural and institutional contexts within which they are set (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). With a focus on the temporal, spatial and social, narrative research involves 'listening, observing, living alongside another, writing and interpreting texts' (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). Stories offer a glimpse into another's world, another's time and another's place yet carry something current and relevant to that of our own. Stories carry meaning and offer social and educational researchers a way of exploring lived time (Bruner, 2004).

Cutting across sociology, anthropology, education, health and psychology (Goodson & Scherto, 2011), interest in narrative draws on a variety of epistemological positions including symbolic interactionist, social constructionist, feminist and psychoanalytical traditions (Josselson, 2011). Despite early examples of narrative use in anthropology at the start of the 20th Century, its theological underpinning and links to ancient Greece (Lal, et al., 2012) suggest the interpretation of narratives boasts a venerable pedigree. However, narrative research became more prominent during the 1960's and 1970's as the dominance of positivist thought started to make way for an interpretivist take on the production of knowledge. Where once reality was understood as something external and objective that could be examined, counted and observed "out there", so life history, biography and narrative, with echoes of Chicago School thinking (Brown, 2017; Goodson & Scherto, 2011) and the qualitative approaches they favoured, considered reality to be complex and uncertain (Hammersley, 2012).

Narrative researchers typically collect data in the form of participant experience through interviews, conversations and field notes although they can also use reflective diaries, observations or documents (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative research is all about gathering information pertinent to the lived experience of the participants and exploring the contexts within which that experience occurs (Josselson, 2011). Of course to some extent, individual experience has always been the stuff of qualitative research. However, the epistemological significance of narrative research stems from the role narratives play in the production of knowledge. Where other qualitative approaches can treat narratives as a true reflection of a participant's life, narrative researchers consider the social construction of stories and the transformatory effect the process can have on both the teller and the audience. This distinction predicates the human organisation of experience through narrative (Moen, 2006) - we are all storied - and is an important one, especially when narrative inquiry seeks the voice of marginalised people, opposes and challenges prevailing ideas (McNiff, 2007) and presents alternative modes of recognition and affirmation (Faulkner & Curran, 2016). As narrative research offers opportunities for participants to tell a new story as a political act (Earthy & Cronin, 2008), narrative researchers are interested in the purpose of a story and reflect on the choices made as research participants offer their account in a particular way. According to Riessman (2005, p. 1):

events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience. Storytellers interpret the world and experience in it; they sometimes create moral tales – how the world should be.

This exploration of 'meaning and social interaction through storytelling within situated contexts' (Hyde-Clarke, 2016, p. 79), positions narrative as both a descriptor of the method and of the phenomenon (Goodson & Scherto, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006). Although narrative as a social act can be the object of research, narrative as a research method 'examines and invokes narratives as a mode of observation, a vantage from which the world can be seen or heard' (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 203)

3.4.   An elusive definition?

The multidisciplinary interest in narrative, the so-called narrative turn (Goodson & Scherto, 2011; Atkinson, 1997; Miller, 2017) invites a myriad of methodological approaches as researchers variously consider the language, structure, process and context of storytelling (Earthy & Cronin, 2008) and pursue a sociology of stories (Plummer, 1994). For some, this lack of precision (Polkinghorne, 1995) positions narrative as something of an umbrella turn (Goodson & Scherto, 2011) and may explain the fluidity with which scholars have generated definitions of narrative or narrative research. However, all stories consist of structure, plot and context (Bailey, et al., 2013) and through their chronological sequence (Polkinghorne, 1995), narrative researcher seek purpose, meaning and significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Often compelled by a crisis, turning point or complicating action (Labov & Waletzky, 1997) the sequence of events is propelled towards a deterioration or improvement to the situation (Riley & Hawe, 2004) or other such change that conveys meaning to those events (White, 1980) . Temporality and chronological order, at least to a western conceptualisation of experience (Duran & Duran, 1995), therefore combine with the emplotted and coherent connections between agent and action (Goodson & Scherto, 2011), to capture the essence of a narrative as a process of:

> meaning making through the shaping and ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organising events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Chase, 2018, p. 549).

Thus narrative construction transcends the mere collection of events, annals or chronologies (White, 1980) to engender questions of narrative identity through the connection between a story and its audience (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). Narrative research therefore attends to the need for a teller, an audience and an occasion of telling as it assumes the inseparability of lives lived, from lives told as 'we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives' (Bruner, 2004, p. 394). For researchers, narrative appeal is claimed on two important fronts. The first that narratives can offer access to truths that are unavailable to other, more traditional research approaches and second, that they can be used in transformatory ways to challenge social orthodoxy especially in relation to marginalised groups (Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

Stories require an agent, an action, a goal, a setting and an instrument (Burke, 1969), in order for a drama to be understood in terms of who, what, why, where and how. Trouble, generated by a mismatch between any two (Bruner, 2004), drives stories toward resolution, and provides the significance of the research story. For some, that significance resides in the 'evaluation' and 'coda' (Labov & Waletzky, 1997) of narratives which correspondingly ask the 'so what?' and the 'what happens next?' questions that justify the research enterprise. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 126) provide welcome reassurance that 'uncertain plateaus' are part of the process of defining the 'what?' of narrative research and a reflexively induced blurring of distinctions between research and researcher and the production of knowledge in a bi-directional symbiosis.

By placing researchers alongside research participants in the meaning making process, narrative research understands the entire research process as storied and presents:

> a way of understanding experience … [through] … a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

That the world is considered relational and interactive, appeals to Dewey's (2015) theory that experience is continuous and socially situated and channels, what some describe as, revolutionary epistemological implications (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This places the transactional ontology of experience (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009) at the heart of narrative inquiry and:

implies that the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world … In this pragmatic view of knowledge, our representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38).

In this way narrative researchers seek not to convey stories as an exact representation of truth, but as an interpretation of events made at a particular time, by particular people for a particular purpose (Josselson, 2011). Narrative accounts do not mirror reality but present a diffracted view of the world (Riessman, 2005), with which researchers link the personal to the political (Wright Mills, 1959). 'Life is not "how it was" but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold' (Bruner, 2004, p. 708). The entangled role of the narrative researcher in the social world of the participants (Goodson & Scherto, 2011) therefore blurs the line between research and lived experience as story is placed at the heart of the research process. Bret's story of self-employment was constructed for the purpose, audience and situation for which it was intended.

3.5.   Critique of narrative as a method of inquiry

For the early researcher, the inexact nature of narrativity (White, 1980; Ewick & Silbey, 1995) evoked anxiety, whilst rejecting the dominant voices of research orthodoxy presented dilemmas that I did not, at first, feel sophisticated enough to fully understand. My reading of the literature around supported employment suggested that significant proportion was influenced by objectivist and positivistic thinking, concerned with the structure of support and training. At the same time, interest in disability and enterprise was largely confined to understanding the motivations for exploring self-employment and the support required to sustain the enterprises. Neither provided satisfactory consideration of the experience of either route so, with research about self-employment and people with learning difficulties particularly rare, I returned to the significance of understanding the nature of entrepreneurship as a relational social action. There is no perfect methodological approach and clearly no "Ronseal test" to check that narrative does what is says on the tin, but narrative inquiry appeared to provide a way to ask the broad exploratory questions I was keen to explore. However as with all research approaches, narrative research needs to address its limitations and a number of recurring considerations were emerging.

Firstly, for some, the expansive application of story and the enduring inability of scholars to come up with a simple definition (Chase, 2018; Brown, 2017) undermines the credibility of narrative as a refined methodological approach. However, while others celebrate this lack of narrative orthodoxy (Josselson, 2011), there does appear to be certain common elements to all. That humans organise their world in a narrative way and that the stories told are influenced by the narrator's individual experiences, the context of the telling, the audience and the multiple voices contained within the story (Bruner, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995; Moen, 2006), underpin most narrative forms. Further commonality exists in the distinction between historic and narrative truth, the treatment of the whole story as the unit of analysis rather than its individual elements and the desire to ensure that the content and form of a story are understood contextually (Josselson, 2011). Narrative is definable.

Secondly, by eschewing methodological convention and its positivistic obedience to validity and reliability, narrative research remains exposed to criticism regarding its ability (and desire) to represent truth. Yet, by offering transparency and process as their offering to trustworthiness and credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), narrative researchers provide clarity of process as a way of facilitating academic and practitioner acceptance that their research is worthy of attention (Nowell, et al., 2017). The use of thick description (Geertz, 1973) to describe, in rich detail, the participants, context and setting of the research similarly attends to issues of believability and usefulness through what some describe as an 'epistemology of the particular' (Stake, 2000, p. 440). In this way narrative research is born of a different ontological and epistemological stable which seeks not to replicate positivistic ideals of reality but offers alternative, always partial, always hesitant and always interpretative readings of experience.

> Stories … long to be used rather than analysed; to be told and retold rather than theorised and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undeniable conclusion; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744).

Thirdly, some report concerns that foregrounding individual meaning making as a gateway to understanding social reality involves an 'excessive individualism' (Harrison, 2008, p. xxx) that does not, in and of itself, make for good research (Atkinson, 1997). Calls to reject such 'hyperauthenticity' (Atkinson, 1997, p. 341) in autobiographical accounts recognise

narrative as just a type of data which should be subjected to the same systematic scrutiny as any other. However, this risks missing the point that storytelling is a relational endeavour with a substantial role for the audience in developing and interpreting the purpose of telling stories (Frank, 2000). Locating the narrative researcher within that relational community therefore occasions opportunities to hear stories from an experiential rather than analytical perspective and the chance to see different worlds within our own. As 'analysis seems to depend on an experience that is prior to and always somewhat outside the analysis' (Frank, 2000, p. 362), the individual story can foreground a different reading that challenges the 'comfortable dominant complacency' (Delgado, 1989, p. 2438) and invite social participation through sites of potential activism. Analysis from that standpoint becomes personal rather than systematic and ethical rather than methodological (Frank, 2000).

Fourthly, and somewhat related, are concerns relating to the limited ability of narrators to relay a whole account of experience, amid their propensity to forget, be inconsistent or embellish a story (McAlpine, 2016). Yet along with many interpretive accounts, it is now widely accepted that constructing accounts from the past will always be something of a selective endeavour (Harrison, 2008) and that 'both experience itself and the research texts that we compose to represent experience are partial and necessarily incomplete' (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 601). Furthermore, narratives do not speak for themselves (Riessman, 2005; White, 1980) or proclaim to provide accurate renditions of the past (Earthy & Cronin, 2008) but instead offer a truth from the 'shifting connections … [narrators] forge among past, present, and future' (Riessman, 2005, p. 6).

Lastly, the relationship between narrator and researcher and control over the story also requires consideration. Narrative tensions emanate from the need to write outlines before the research is defined, to explore experiences rather than truth and to capture meaning and significance from the inevitable gap that emerges between researcher and participant voice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This asymmetry of power (Mishler, 1991) can be especially acute when narrative research considers the lives of people considered marginalised and confers responsibility upon the researcher (Munro, et al., 2004) to maintain a sensitive, reflective approach throughout the research endeavour. However, issues of power are not the exclusive terrain of narrative research and must be part of any ethically and morally robust inquiry. Verification and member checking processes (Creswell,

2007; Attia & Edge, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994) can ensure as much harmony as possible and once again turn the spotlight on issues of quality, transparency and process.

> The aim is to elicit stories around a theme in as unobtrusive a manner as possible, attending to the context of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and then to analyse these stories in the framework of the questions that the researcher brings to them (Josselson, 2011, p. 228).

3.6. Identifying participant collaborators

Narrative inquiry demands collaboration and I was interested in focusing on the experience of 3 learning disabled entrepreneurs and the training and support infrastructure that surrounded them. My plan was that a further narrative of entrepreneurship and disability would trace my own story of self-employment as an enterprise facilitator and consider the co-directional nature of learning and meaning through the entanglement of stories and reflexive contribution that, I hoped, would acknowledge my part in the world that was under study (Goulding, 2005). However this threw up moral and ethical questions which I do not think have ever been fully settled. Whose research was this? Which voices were to become most prominent, what would this research do? It is not uncommon for research interests to shift over time as the inquiry proceeds, reading continues and perspectives change and indeed, there are some compelling arguments in favour of a 'developmental approach … which foregrounds the continuing growth of the whole-person-who-researches as integral to the research process' (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 34).

With the COVID-19 pandemic still in its early stages and little yet known about how events would unfold, the uncertainty, as for the wider population, risked generating a great deal of anxiety for disabled people, disrupting routines and causing distress. After some consideration, I decided that approaching people I had a connection with would be more comfortable than trying to develop new relationships and, in a very practical senses, would alleviate my concerns about communicating using digital technologies without first developing a rapport. To some extent, with such a small population of learning disabled entrepreneurs, the identification of participants was always going to be somewhat pragmatic (Denscombe, 2003), but selection became more purposeful (Stake, 2000) as I approached those who had either started trading or were in the process of establishing an

enterprise. Information about the research was circulated through existing networks and potential participants invited to collaborate through informal contact made via support or family connections. Letters of invitation and further information provided in an easy read format, outlined the aims of the research and respondents potential role within it. The aim was to reach points of informed consent whilst bypassing any pressure entrepreneurs may have felt to be involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Seven entrepreneurs were approached in total.

Pleasingly, positive responses were received from three disabled entrepreneurs with whom I then had informal conversations with – both individually and in the company of a support worker or a family member - to discuss what would be involved and to answer any questions they had. There was, of course an element of gatekeeping to this (Nind, 2008) and I was aware of the reliance on others to facilitate access. This was a little uncomfortable and felt as though I was asking permission of the supporters. However another advantage of approaching those I had connection with was that I had also established rapport with the support teams and a level of trust prior to my approach. Communication was especially difficult in the early days of the pandemic so it is not possible to be sure how (or if) the invitations to participate were relayed but, although others may have chosen not to participate, there were no outright refusals. Certainly I was also aware of a least one support worker who had been immediately furloughed at the start of the first lockdown, seemingly irrespective of the support needs of the people they were working with – an indication perhaps of the multiple additional disadvantages faced by disabled people throughout the pandemic (Liddiard, 2020).

With decisions to participate representative of a constructive and collaborative approach to ensuring informed consent (Cook & Inglis, 2009), a similar approach was adopted for support workers and information was shared along with an invitation to discuss participation in more detail. Two agreed to participate bringing the total number of research collaborators to 6 and offering a focus on three enterprises:

- P1 - an experienced enterprise leader who had previously co-ordinated a small business for a number of years, developed new income streams and raised the profile of the enterprise significantly.

- P2 – had been self-employed for a while, but was experiencing a surge in business activity as P2's reputation as an innovative and creative entrepreneur spread and new contracts had been secured.

- P3 - a nascent enterprise owner whose business was at an earlier stage of development when the research began.

- P4 – support worker for people with learning difficulties working on a range of community, educational and employment related activities.

- P5 - runs a specialist employment support agency providing training and support for people with learning difficulties or severe and enduring mental health problems.

- P6 - has spent many years supporting people with learning difficulties into work and developing co-operatives, social firms and enterprises to create more employment opportunities. I am P6.

Mindful that all researchers have impact on research activity, evolving positionalities were considered throughout the collection, interpretation and presentation of data. I maintained a reflective diary throughout the process in which thoughts, concerns, questions and ideas were captured and which provided the reflexive space for ethical and theoretical considerations that emerged (Guillemin & Lynn, 2004). By facilitating sensitivity to the interaction between the treatment of participants and the production of knowledge, reflexivity encourages awareness of the power relations involved in all research and to reflect on the any difficult and unexpected ethical concerns that may arise (Attia & Edge, 2017). Reflexivity also provided space to consider the everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research beyond the ethics of procedure, approval and ethics committees (Guillemin & Lynn, 2004).

3.7. The "P" Word

At the start of this 'writing up' period I adopted a system that described the collaborators in this research as P1, P2 and P3 etc. Used initially as lazy shorthand to avoid committing to other ways to protect the anonymity of participants, I never quite got round to changing them. I recall mentioning to my supervisor as I sent in an early draft of my methodology chapter that although I fully intended to come up with appropriate pseudonyms I was keen to get the words down and would do this later. Yet over time I came to know my

collaborators in this way. Despite occasionally thinking about a range of alternative names, I struggled to feel comfortable using them for people I had been working with for so long. I understood clearly the importance of anonymity, but found it hard to shift my thinking. I toyed with using clever non-gendered and non-racialized names in order to throw potential readers off the scent - but still the use of "P's" endured.

P's became familiar, as the more I wrote, the more comfortable I felt with identifying each participant in this way. I had renamed them anyway and it seemed somewhat fitting that the monikers I had given each entrepreneur became symbolic, representative of individual life. P1 was symbolic of one life, P2 another and P3, a third. Yet as I wrote about enterprise, disability and support, the almost disrespectful adoption of P's seemed somewhat demonstrative of the relationship each entrepreneurs had with the social world. I thought of the Cat in the Hat book and considered the presentation of Thing 1 and Thing 2 - faceless, deviant, outsiders - it seemed fitting.

I decided to make a point of keeping the P's in the final draft as a representation of the impersonal, assumed homogenous lives of people with learning difficulties so endemic in this research.

3.8. Ethics

Part of this, of course, was the fact that this research involved people with learning difficulties; a fact that automatically triggers concerns to protect the vulnerability of participants throughout the research process. These are important considerations that rightly focus on consent as the 'basic tenet of ethical research' (Cook & Inglis, 2009, p. 55) although doing so risks carrying unnecessary assumptions into the research collaboration about what people can and cannot do. Apart from the lack of any serviceable classification of what constitutes an individual's autonomy to consent (McClimens & Allmark, 2011), there is a concern that an emphasis on independent and autonomous participation translates into an expectation that collaborators have to work alone and 'conform to normative expectations regarding research participation' (Caldwell, 2014, p. 491). As Goodley (1999, p. 43) puts it, 'disability researchers walk a fine line between authentically capturing the actions of participants and reinterpreting those actions in [ableist] terms that emphasize victim images of disabled people'. The label "learning difficulties" does not capture a

homogenous group (Goodley, 2017) and, as we have seen, can be challenged as a social construction (Caldwell, 2014; Björnsdóttir, et al., 2014). Entrepreneurs each had experience of the label learning difficulty and had received support to explore self-employment, but the direct involvement of disabled entrepreneurs as active participants, was not only good participatory research practice, but foregrounded the voice of disabled people and the meaning they attached to their experiences.

The role of power is a constant research phenomenon and, as such, demands an equally constant and reflexive vigil (Björnsdóttir, et al., 2014). With an appreciation of emancipatory research, instigated, led and controlled by disabled people (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Oliver, 1997), providing a commanding articulation of the need to consider the power imbalances between researcher and researched (Stalker, 1998), care was taken to reflect on partnership, participation and inclusion as the ethical triad on which this research was built. Pursuing a considered balance between consent, agency and activism positioned the collaborators as capable influencers and, borrowing from the Nordic relational model of disability, assumed issues of disability to be variable and situational rather than a constant (Tøssebro, 2004). With ethical approval granted, the task ahead was to identify the tools with which to engage the puzzle of self-employment and disability. Given the nature of narrative, and the underlying ontological and epistemological position it considers, interviews were the immediate choice, especially as other qualitative options such as focus groups and observation were rendered unrealistic by the pandemic. But research methods do not come ready-made to be selected at will from either positivist or interpretivist piles, but rather must be 'painstakingly custom built' (Clough, 1994, p. 2) to ensure they are appropriate for the task in hand.

Research interviews play a major part in much qualitative research and provide good opportunity to elicit data based on the feelings, experiences and opinions of participants (Denscombe, 2003). Typically described as structured, unstructured or semi-structured to correspond to the level of control exerted by the interviewer over the content, direction and flow of the exchange (Thomas, 2013), interviews can connect participants to the research in ways less available to other data collection strategies. Yet, although 'interviews are a sea swell of meaning making in which researchers connect their own experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up conversation about how we live' (Mercer, 2017, p.

10), they are rarely neutral and frequently introduce a level of complexity into the research relationship that places a responsibility on the researcher to reflexivly consider their own influence. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 110) put it:

> The way the interviewer acts, questions and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the way the participants respond and give accounts of their experience.

Interviews involving people with learning difficulties provoke further consideration to ensure participants to be able and willing to understand questions and convey their responses gladly. Much has been written to endorse the active inclusion of people with learning difficulties in research (Goodley, 1999; Goodley, 2017; Beazley, et al., 1997; Oliver, 1997) and the importance of ensuring interviews are conducted in a way that augments that position. However, some suggest this simply represents good interview practice that should be applied in all situations (Atkinson, 1988) and that difficulties encountered during the interview setting should not necessarily be attributed to participants, but rather to poor design or a lack of skill on the part of the interviewer (Hollomotz, 2018). For many, good practice in interviewing people with learning difficulties include, getting to know participants in order to develop a rapport (Hollomotz, 2018), conducting interviews at a time and place of their choosing (Atkinson, 1988) and recording conversations rather than taking notes to facilitate active listening (Dowse, 2009). While there is some debate over the relative merits of asking open or closed questions (Atkinson, 1988), the provision of support and how to deal with perceived acquiescence and reticence (Hollomotz, 2018), the pertinent question becomes what approach works best for each participant in order to maximise their participation in the research project.

Given the ongoing influence of the health crisis and the demand for social distancing, conversationally orientated semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone and video conferencing systems, each chosen and adapted to suit participant preferences. One person chose telephone contact supported by a parent while the others specified their choice of video conferencing system. With the proliferation of platforms made available during the early lockdown periods – Zoom, Team, Skype, Google etc - this provided an important early point of negotiation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and confirmed the collaborative stance adopted by this inquiry (Cook & Inglis, 2009) and allowed participation (Beazley, et al., 1997)

on individual terms. Interviews followed a loose interview guide that enabled participants to tell their stories and present their experiences as a dynamic process (Björnsdóttir, et al., 2014). The guide was subsequently adjusted to facilitate conversational flow. For the nervous first interviews, I hoped to initiate an easy exchange about enterprise and the experience of self-employment before teasing further considerations of disability and support. I was ready with my prompts and had the words of my academic supervisor ringing in my ears – "try to keep quiet as much as possible". Yet, contrary to my wishful expectations, the conversations did not immediately flow.

On the phone, the first conversation with P1 felt a little uncomfortable initially, especially as their parent seemed to direct some of the answers. However, on further reflection, these only followed dyadic interview principles (Caldwell, 2014) which appreciated interdependence and choice of support rather than insisting that participants had to do everything for themselves. We were talking about experiences from a long time ago and I was worried about the parent taking over and potentially modifying how and what was recalled. But they too were part of this story and to ignore that fact would itself create the disabling conditions emphasised so strongly in the social model (Caldwell, 2014). As my notes at the time reflected:

> … the involvement of [parent] had an impact. By prompting P1 to answer questions in the way [parent] thought they needed to be answered, not everything initially went to plan. But the point of a semi structured interview is to enable participants to take control of the direction of conversation and themselves to define the important aspects of their entrepreneurial experience. This was my learning

> Short silences were occupied by the parent. Were they just trying to ever provide that link between son/daughter and the outside world that does not care? The 'problems' of learning difficulty were all presented as nuanced unintended consequences – the no time, the no relaxation, the constant worry, the loneliness. Is this what I witnessed?

Similarly, although I tried not to steer the conversation too much, I became increasingly aware of how shared the story that emerged was. My diary again:

Speaking to P1 was like catching up with an old acquaintance with whom history and experiences was shared. We hadn't spoken in a while so the early conversations were more reminiscent, with me asking if P1 remembered this and that and what their thoughts were about various aspects of running the enterprise. Not everything was remembered at first and I felt that I steered that early conversation towards the questions I wanted to ask.

That narratives of experience are always selective and partial (Harrison, 2008) was evident from the start as I found myself torn between my own story and that of my collaborators. Between interviews I sent across some newspaper clippings from the early years of the enterprise which seemed to help PI although I hoped that the fact that I also did more of the talking in the early interviews merely reflected my discomfort and inexperience. Thereafter things – and my clumsy start – improved.

There was a fluidity to the conversation with P2. We knew each other quite well and had worked with each other for a while. Yet sometimes P2 used the wrong words and referred to support workers as boss. Did this suggest that they were not in charge? This raised anxieties in me as my hope was to reveal self-employment as an arbiter of control and independence.

and

With P3 it was different. We knew each other less well and, although we'd met a couple of times, I sensed an enthusiasm to present a completed picture of enterprise. More than once they talked of one hundred percent levels of confidence, ability and autonomy … In those early conversations there was an element of persuasion and justification that perhaps revealed a discomfort with me. Yet the relationship developed and after a few meetings, things became less formal and revealed more about how they experienced self-employment

Interviewing entrepreneurs ahead of their support workers explored and challenged my guiding interests (Charmaz, 1996), which, although founded on my own knowledge and field experience, still required authentication. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim although not all conversational or confirmatory 'yeah, 'yes's', 'aha's' etc. were

included. Transcripts were made quickly after the interview and stored alongside diarised reflections, written on the day of the interview and the following days. The transcripts offered a way of getting to know the text and to relive the interviews while further collaborative conversations were held over the subsequent seven months, complimented by a collection of business documents, reports, websites, articles about the enterprises and my own reflections.

Although the global pandemic had threatened to disrupt the process, it was relatively straightforward, in the event, to conduct interviews by telephone and video conferencing. With much of the data collected, the logical next step in the research journey was to analyse those data through what Clandinin and Connelly describe as a search for ''patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes' (2000, p. 132).

3.9.   Analysis

Narrative attracts analytical approaches from across the qualitative research world including thematic and critical discourse analysis and grounded theory (Josselson, 2011; Clough, et al., 2004); considers specific narrative approaches (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) or adopts new and creative arrangements such as critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014) and voice centred relational methods (Gilligan, et al., 2011; Jankowska, 2014). Narrative analysis can explore what is said, the way it is said and the interactional processes between teller and audience as new texts are created for further analysis (Riessman, 2005). In this way, it is the narrative and how it interacts with personal, social and cultural, that is of interest. Yet there has always been some that suggest that stories do not need analysis (Bogdan & Taylor, 1976) and that their words speak for themselves, that analysis inevitably increases levels of researcher contamination (Plummer, 1995) and that the careless use of others people's words risks further marginalising oppressed people (Freire, 2017). Others hold that narratives do not have 'unanalysed merit ... and … require interpretation when used as data' (Riessman, 2005, p. 2) to render them more powerful. Frank (2000) suggests that, in any case, people tell stories, not narratives, and that analysis 'locates structures that storytellers rely on but are not fully aware of' (Frank, 2000, p. 354). Drawing inspiration from Goodley (1998), I shall heed both positions and present the stories in isolation so they can be read without reference to the later

discussions on what might be learned from them. Either way, describing analysis as the 'next step' after data collection, once more dishonestly conceptualises research as a linear process and belies a far messier reality in which analysis started long before the earliest conversations with participants and occurred through a 'constant interplay between data and ideas throughout the research process' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 159).

Jackson and Massei's contention that the collection, reading and analysis of data are not distinct activities, but might be described as 'dynamic becomings and generative differentiations' (2018, p. 719) was warming and captured well how it felt to be in the middle of a research endeavour and generating so many deliciously tautological moments as I encountered data, theory and people in the midst (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). None-the-less, adopting a clear, disciplined and systematic approach to analysis (Byrne, 2017) not only informed my map, but also, I hoped, a way of allaying the concerns of people who think the results of narrative research are merely contaminated descriptions of events with a bit of reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Plummer, 1995).

Lieblich et al. (1998) offer two interrelated dimensions along which narrative readings might be made. Along the first dimension, they distinguish between the categorical and the holistic to depict differences between analyses of an utterance, section or category within a story (categorical) and analysis of the story taken as a whole (holistic). The former, categorical approach, helpful in exploring the shared experience of a number of narrators, contrasts starkly with the latter, holistic take, which aligns more closely with studying an individual life (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). Across the second dimension, Lieblich et al. (1998) differentiate between narrative content and narrative form. Here, research may seek to unpick the story either in terms of what was told, both the explicit and implicit, and the meaning and importance a story holds for the narrator or consider the form and structure of a story, the use of plot, coherence, style and metaphor. Thus the four classification schema (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) - holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content and categorical-form - provide helpful shape to understanding the analytical options within narrative research and ways of thinking about, and with, story. Yet simplicity frequently obscures the complex, and it is pleasing to know that Lieblich and colleagues keenly acknowledge that their approach conceals the many opportunities to also read texts along the numerous midpoint positions available (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Yet Lieblich's (1998)

dimensional approach still seemed to conceptualise analysis as a separate effort - something done after data collection (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018) - and I felt increasingly drawn to attempts to clarify, and perhaps distinguish narrative inquiry from the use of narrative in other forms of qualitative research, as offered by Polkinghorne (1995) who artfully differentiates between the analysis of narrative and narrative analysis.

The analysis of narratives, according to Polkinghorne, is all about the search for common themes and categories among collected stories and is, in a sense, about taking stories apart to understand what they mean (Polkinghorne, 1995). Others describe this as thinking *about* stories (Bleakley, 2005) and, as in Lieblich's categorical dimension above, it is widely used in qualitative research. Narrative analysis, on the other hand, is about creating stories from descriptions of events provided by research participants and is therefore, more about the construction of stories. According to Clandinin and colleagues (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), in thinking *about* stories, the reductionist search for themes and categories, familiarised by many qualitative research outputs, risks reducing a complete narrative into something less, something removed. In their view, an event is not beheld as something happening but is rather 'an expression of something happening over time ... with a past, a present as it appears to us and an implied future' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). Similarly, by starting with theory, they say, formalists disregard the importance of experience, the agency of the participant and the influence of the researcher in generating and growing knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As narrative analysis in these terms considers the role, views and knowledge of the researcher in that process of thinking *with* stories (Bleakley, 2005), the product of research becomes the stories themselves, constructed in an attempt to answer how and why experiences come about (Polkinghorne, 1995). For some, narrative always starts with experience, but it is the meaning and significance beyond the identification of categories and themes that is revelatory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.10. Getting organised

The important organisational task was to get to know the data; a task for which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest demands an archivist's eye. A process of cataloguing identified a surprisingly wide range of data sources (field texts) as summarized below:

- Transcripts of interviews
- Reflective diary
- Newspaper and TV articles
- Marketing materials
- Autobiographical notes
- Social media posts
- Animations
- Websites
- Support organisation self-employment scheme publicity and programme evaluation

These data were organised across the three enterprises as set out in Table 1 below:

P1	P2	P3
• Transcript of interview with entrepreneur • Researcher's reflective diary • Newspaper and TV articles • Marketing materials • Autobiographical notes	• Transcript of interview with entrepreneur • Transcript of interview with support • Researcher's reflective diary • Facebook entries • Animations • Autobiographical notes	• Transcript of interview with entrepreneur • Transcript of interview with support • Researcher's reflective diary • Website • Social media • Autobiographical notes • Support organisation self-employment scheme publicity and programme evaluation
Table 1 - organisation of data across enterprises.		

Questions of analysis, meaning and significance are part of the enthusiasm with which narrative research considers the whole story in relation to its parts and the parts of the story in relation to the whole *(Josselson, 2011)*. As narrative inquiry focuses on each complete story, it involves reading and rereading or, as Miller *(2017, p. 47)* posits, going 'backwards and forwards, up and down and across' the data as different interpretations are explored. Thus initial close readings *(Chase, 2018)* of the interview transcripts and other data facilitated an overall sense of how the narratives were constructed and pursued a general 'Gestalt', or organised whole *(Josselson, 2011)* which was used to consider how narratives fitted with other theoretical literature; in this case, the literature on enterprise, disability and training.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer a Three-dimensional space (Table 2) as a way to further organise data by thinking about how experiences are continuous (having a past, present and future), interactive (both personally and socially) and situated (contextualised). Positioning this alongside the thinking of both Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) and Clough, et al. (2004), the table below emerges as an analytical framework that aligns the Three-dimensional space with other analytical approaches. First, "temporality" and "continuity" conforms to the idea that narratives, like good novels, have a sequence. Second, "interaction" is analogous to the way Voice Centred Relational analysts read data for information about relationships. The consideration of temporality and interaction absorb Dewey's (2015) thinking that all experience is continuous and that today's experience not only builds on yesterday's experience, but paves the way for tomorrows. Similarly, this considers experience as both a personal and social phenomenon in which neither can be understood without the other. Third, as many believe that narrative research must also consider the historical and social context (Goodson & Scherto, 2011) in which stories are told, "setting" considers the political, cultural and structural influences on the experience (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Clough, et al., 2004).

Three-dimensional space					
Temporality (continuity)			Interaction		Setting
Past	Present	Future	Personal	Social	Situation/Place
Look for remembered experiences, feelings and stories from earlier times	Look for current experiences, feelings and stories relating to actions or an event	Look for implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look for feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look for existential conditions, in the environment with other people: their intentions, purpose, assumptions and points of view	Think about context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Table 2 - Analytical framework. Adapted from (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Clough, et al., 2004)

The Three-dimensional space is not prescribed as a strict framework, but rather a thinking tool to help organise the data and identify the elements of the story: the plot, characters, scenes, voices, and audience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With no specific analytical order, they suggest the initial focus on character, place and storyline makes way for 'questions about … meaning and social significance' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132) as research texts emerge and are later positioned in terms of wider social theory. Clearly there are a variety of approaches to the analysis of narratives and some debate between those who advance the need for both an analysis of social context and structure (Atkinson, 1997) and others, who champion the significance of the storyteller (Frank, 2000). However, the adapted Three-dimensional space provided opportunity to consider both and, over the following months, these narratives of self-employment were used to further explore the entrepreneurial experience of participants.

3.11. Using the 3-dimensional space

Following readings for individual voice, relationship and plot, texts were marked against the adapted Three-dimensional space and then organised to help appreciate sequencing, the main characters and the wider circumstances in which the enterprises were established. While using the Three-dimensional space provided opportunity to capture the narratives and further intense reading of the transcripts, field texts were coded using Burke's (1969) narrative dimensions: agent, action, goal, setting and instrument, described by Bruner (2004, p. 702) as his 'pentad of dramatism'. Transcripts were read and reread while coloured post-its, margin comments and observations were inserted – at times systematically and at others more scribbled. Other thoughts, reflections and ideas made it to the reflective diary or were tried out on more random pieces of paper. Excerpts from this process are shown in a sample of four transcript pages from the interview with one entrepreneur in figure 3 below:

Figure 3 - Example analytical pages from interview with P3.

Not only did this reveal considerable ambiguity and overlaps (Burke, 1969), but also gaps in the stories and in each case, further information was sought from entrepreneurs and their supports to clarify, append to and explore aspects of the narratives. In all, each entrepreneur was met at least four times in a seven month period.

> With narrative analytic terms in mind, narrative inquirers begin to narratively code their field texts. For example, names of characters that appear in field texts, places where actions and events occurred, story lines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge and continuities and discontinuities that appear are all possible codes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131).

3.12. Presenting stories

Collaboration involved discussing works in progress, going through what had been written to date and planning the next steps. As an interesting aside, I had anticipated more feedback about accessibility, but it didn't come. Yet what did ensue were quite complex conversations about how the texts might be presented. As a highly collaborative venture, narrative celebrates the tensions inherent in deciding 'how and where we decide to freeze the picture and how that decision influences the construction' (Björnsdóttir, et al., 2014, p. 98). As I nervously submitted a draft story to each collaborator and, afterwards, their support workers, my concerns were manifold. Should these be stories of enterprise or of people? Should these by presented as one story or as separate narratives? Written in first person or third? Were my versions of these stories able to reflect the experience of the collaborators? Although I hoped my efforts were acceptable, I was equally concerned that a wholesale acceptance of these first drafts would be indicative of a worrying acquiescence (Caldwell, 2014; Hollomotz, 2018; Mishler, 1991). As my diary reflected:

> I am trying to rationalise the narrative approach and work out how I can present the stories in various ways. On one hand I want to highlight the struggle and the oppression and show self-employment to be the saviour – the way forward. On the other, I want to present a tale of business development – the way people use enterprise to provide an interest, a job or a place.

> Yet I do not yet know which way round these go. If one is the negotiated story constructed by my engagement with the entrepreneur with input from the

supporter, is the other my voice alone? Are these stories of people or stories of enterprise? Am I the one who highlights the oppression of the enterprise – or am I the oppressor?

Unsurprisingly each entrepreneur had a different take on this although each requested an initial draft from me that could be discussed in detail. Consistent with the construction of interim texts to "practice" ideas and threads, this offered a great way for us to work together (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and became the starting point from which we explored, further developed and thought *with* stories (Bleakley, 2005). Drafts utilised the broader range of field texts available beyond the interview transcripts - websites, media posts and my own personal stories from memory - fashioned into a plotline by me. These contained the words of both entrepreneurs and support workers and attempted to set a context – local strategic endeavours, funding etc. - for each enterprise, but the issue of voice remained. Presented as a first person narrative, the stories risked disguising researcher renderings as the stories were retold (Freeman, 2012). Yet told in the third person risked subjecting the collaborators to a position of Other. Similarly, changing names and altering the nature of each enterprise to protect anonymity confused one or two people and I sensed that this moved the research further away from them. P3 changed the descriptions back again.

None-the-less, the feedback on the first drafts was largely positive although in each case, requests were made to change content or include additional information. Although a relief, this offered ample reminder that these enterprises had moved on since our early conversations, while the drafts I presented had frozen them. In the words of Harrison (2008, p. 29) the products of narrative research:

> congeal or freeze already preconstituted moments of a life from the storyteller and the coaxer and await the handling of a reader. The meanings of life stories are hence never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction.

We met again to update the drafts and to settle on the changes. After some debate with each of the entrepreneurs, we settled on the following. P1 opted for a composite story written in the first person that blended their experience with observations from their parent and me. P2 chose a mix of first and third person that told their story and used their words.

P3 took my initial draft and rewrote it to their satisfaction – again in the first person. At my suggestion we deployed text colour and indentation to differentiate the words of the entrepreneur from that of other contributors although I am not sure it helped. I initially, and rather clumsily, described this as co-production, but later referred to these efforts as collaborative in order to sidestep the feeling that this didn't seem to represent the full power of co-productivity. However, to call this member checking (Creswell, 2007; Attia & Edge, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994) I think, devalues the collaboration especially as the process itself was reassuringly helpful. This, along with an open stance regarding researcher positionality and detailed (thick) description of the data and the circumstances within which it was generated (Geertz, 1973), also goes some way toward establishing trustworthiness and credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In each case we now had agreed versions of the story, but next questions emerged about how these might be used.

3.13. Using the research product - quid pro quo

My original offer to gift my time as an enterprise facilitator, in recognition of the time the entrepreneurs spend meeting me, raised particularly interesting ethical dilemmas. Interestingly, while entrepreneurs opted for support to think about website and marketing and other ways to promote their business and generate more work, the support workers were more interested in information about the impact on welfare benefits, understanding business risk and liability. Such unceasing tensions of narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) arise from a desire to ensure that the product of research is fruitful and that participants might, as a result, experience their situations differently (Frank, 2000). The two active entrepreneurs expressed their interest in using part or all of their story to promote their business. This not only elicited worries about confidentiality, but also fascinating questions about the role of research as a process of change. Thus a tension emerged between the research aspiration to offer anonymization and the promotion of enterprise sought by my collaborators. More importantly, the tension again raised the question of voice and control of the research output. My naïve blurring of the distinction between researcher and activist was exposed although, once more, collaborative exploration resolved the problem. It was agreed that two stories would be written for each – one inward facing – the research story - and the other outward looking – the enterprise story.

The personal and entrepreneurial journey of each entrepreneur was captured, and the sociology of each story (Plummer, 1994) started to emerge.

Bret's self-employment venture and the story that emerged, illustrates the power of narrative to not only foreground experience, but to corrupt prevailing thought about what is possible. That the story shifts between tellers as it ricochets amid different audiences highlights the fluidity with which stories retain their power. While some of that power is directly linked to the experience of self-employment, others stem from the role Bret's story plays in serving a purpose designed by others. At once simple and complex, static yet moving, Bret's story invites a reflection; of the implications for practice (praxis?) and scholarly considerations about meaning and significance as it moves from being a life lived to a life told (Bruner, 2004). And so it is with the entrepreneurs at the heart of this research.

As the next section will reveal, each story conveys something of a journey, of agency, action, instruments of change (Burke, 1969) of a context, a time and a place. The stories are presented alone, but it cannot be said that they are without analysis. Choices have been made as to what to include and what to leave out; negotiated choices yes, but I reflect on how I have influenced those choices. While each offers an important conveyance of individual entrepreneurial experience, the application of meaning must always be interpretive and the discussions about what we can learn from these stories are led by me. These I present in Chapter 5 as I position this work within wider scholarly conversations about social significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and order, mindful of Plummer's caution that:

> the meanings we invoke and the worlds we craft mesh and flow, but remain emergent: never fixed, always indeterminate, ceaselessly contested. Change is ubiquitous: we are always becoming, never arriving; and the social order heaves as a vast negotiated web of dialogue and conversation (1994, p. 20).

4. Stories of enterprise

4.1. I am P1

Black text – first person P1 – shared input

I grew up in a very supportive family with parents who ran their own shop. I used to help out now and again when things were busy or would come out for a chat and end up serving customers. I enjoyed talking to people. I also went to a day centre which did some training for work, but getting a paid job was hard. My parents helped me to find jobs, either through people they knew or by asking about opportunities they'd heard about. I worked in a card shop, a supermarket and a couple of care homes, but none of them lasted very long. They said I was too slow in the card shop, so they let me go after a couple of weeks. I didn't stay long at the supermarket either. They said it was because I had problems lifting things and that there wasn't enough other work I could do in the store. Anyway, that was the reason they gave though I don't know why they didn't put me on the checkouts.

The care homes were better as there were more jobs I could do there. I worked in two. When I started at the first one, my mum spoke to the person in charge and gave them some information about me, but I still had to carry cups of hot tea up and down the stairs. I found this difficult and in the end I left. The other care home was much better and I enjoyed working there for quite a long time. However, eventually the people in charge changed and it came down to the things that I couldn't do. I think that's the sort of things that happened. Sometimes this was because I had problems doing the jobs they were asking me to do, jobs that involved co-ordination or lifting, but I think it was mainly because of people's attitudes and what they thought people with learning difficulties could and couldn't do. I even tried the Job Centre, but they were no better and told me that I couldn't work because I had learning difficulties. That made me really angry and knocked my confidence.

> The idea of supporting people with learning difficulties into work was not a new one, but these were difficult economic times with perpetual uncertainty over local authority funding. We worked hard to keep our supported employment agency going and each year held

a 'service user' conference where we invited people to give feedback, ask questions and make suggestions about how we might address some of these barriers. These were enjoyable events and gave us a chance to reflect on our work. One year, when answering the question 'what else could we do?' a couple of people suggested support for self-employment. I'm still not sure why 'self-employment' was interpreted as 'co-operative development', but we secured a small grant from the local training and enterprise agency to set up a co-operative project to explore this idea further.

Our agency had particularly close ties to one particular day centre in the area that had a focus on employment. They already ran various 'work' schemes - packaging and production line stuff that was typical of many social care and sheltered workshops at the time. The manager was really enthusiastic about our ideas and hosted a couple of information sessions at the day centre. Quite a few people initially showed up to hear about the project although this number reduced once we started meeting as a group. Eventually 7 core participants met weekly to explore enterprise options, play co-operative games and discuss opportunities. As there were no business development guides suitable for people with learning difficulties at the time, we were largely making things up as we went along, as we slowly got to know each other.

Later, when there were some meetings at the day centre to talk about starting a company and I was asked if I wanted to get involved. At first I said no because I didn't know if I would be able to do the job.

A group was set up at the day centre to work on a project that would try to create jobs for people with learning difficulties. Some of the support staff said it wouldn't work but I knew the people involved and soon after it was set up, they asked again if I wanted to get involved. This time I said yes. My Dad came with me to an interview and met people from

the company and their support worker who asked me lots of questions. I was really pleased when they offered me a job. It felt good.

I really liked the idea of joining because the company was run by people with learning difficulties and created paid jobs for people who could not get a job anywhere else.

The group learned together and started to get a better understanding of both business and co-operative working and began to think about what business ideas could link the skills and interests of the group to real opportunities. They came up with a list of 20 or so ideas which they went through, rejecting ideas that would cost too much to set up or needed premises etc. This left enterprise ideas that involved cleaning, catering, gardening and arts and crafts; very common employment sectors for people with learning difficulties. Yet a call from a local business centre proved decisive as they were tendering one of their supply contracts and, having heard about the project, wondered if this might be of interest to the group. With everyone in agreement, a trial was arranged and a start date fixed. Despite plenty of nerves, all went well and the contract was secured. I remember hearing of how they returned to their day centre "with shoulders high". Word spread, a few more contracts were secured.

For a few months, I worked on a different contacts as I learned what needed to be done. It was OK and I enjoyed working with the others. However, it wasn't really the best job for me and it hurt my arm so my support worker suggested that I try working in the office doing admin. This was much better and suited me much more. I had to organise the company meetings, take minutes, work out the finances and pay the wages. In those days wages were paid every week in cash so I would walk to the bank with my support worker to get the money. I got to know the people at the bank who always gave me the right number of notes and coins for the wage packets. However, as the company got bigger and I was carrying too much money from the bank, we had change things and started paying people into their bank accounts. Once a week, I would meet with my supporter worker and do the admin, check the finances and pay invoices. We had lots of forms to fill in, but doing the admin

helped me to really understand how the company worked and what we had to do when we got more contracts and employed more people. My support worker helped by encouraging me and making me feel at ease. I got more confident and was able to learn new skills and take an NVQ. It was really important to have good support and to be able to have a job that suited me. That was one of the best things about running our own company.

> Despite the excitement, the project revealed the much deeper social barriers that people with learning difficulties faced. A couple of support workers at the day service suggested it wasn't worth bothering setting up a company and that it would 'never last'. The local co-operative development agency distanced themselves from our work and suggested we 'seek specialist advice', whilst the local further education college asked one member to take time off work so he could attend work experience. We wrestled with the processes of business, the legalities of registration, insurance and accounts – what were the legal and financial obligations and whose responsibility would it be to ensure they were met? The Directors all had learning difficulties and although I was influential, my role was to support not to become an integral part of whatever was started. Were people with learning difficulties even allowed to set up a company? If so, how might we do this and what would be my role?

The company got more contracts and employed more people which was great. We met every Friday morning to talk about things, plan cover for the contracts and to sort out any problems. I think we were a good team and we all worked together with our support worker. We even did the lottery together. I was really pleased with how things were going and I became one of the Directors.

> Registering the company marked a shift from theoretical development to real life business. Employment contracts were drawn up, insurance secured, financial systems put in place. It took a while to develop these as, at each point, information had to be presented in a way that would be useful to the workers. At the time, the use of

symbols was emerging as a way of making information easier to understand for people with learning difficulties and everything from the company memorandum and articles, the accounts and minutes was created using them. Social and professional contacts rallied round to help with logo design, marketing materials and ideas.

As the company started to offer paid work opportunities, a number of people expressed concern about whether earning money would lead to them losing their welfare benefits. For this reason, most people chose to work part time and limit the amount they earned.

As people started to hear about us, we got to appear on the TV and had articles written in the papers about us. Because companies for people with learning difficulties hadn't been done before, lots of people wanted to talk to us about what we did. We were invited to a number of conferences and training events, to talk about how the company worked. It was good to know that people were interested in our work and I enjoyed showing the slides and talking about the (enterprise activity) stuff.

Local newspapers were quick to report on the successful launch of the company while other papers, the BBC and Channel 4 all ran pieces. The idea of people with learning difficulties running their own business was new and attracting attention and locally, a number of other small enterprises were set up. We started to get requests for information and advice, to speak at conferences and to attend policy think tanks. I didn't know it then, but the age of the social enterprise was dawning and others too wanted to blend business with social mission. P1 knew more than most members about the financial and legal workings of the company and, as s/he thrived on public speaking, we set about establishing a training arm of the company. This was really powerful stuff, not only was s/he really good at speaking to large numbers of people (so much more so than I) but s/he was able to explain the technical aspects of running a company. Her/his personal story, from being told by the local job centre that

s/he 'wouldn't be any good doing any work' to becoming a Director of a company and speaking publicly was massive and the story remains important to this day as they celebrate another anniversary in the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, furlough and a typically uncertain future.

We spent a long time practicing and getting the right slides to get across what I wanted to say. I was not nervous about this and enjoyed travelling around with my support worker. I don't think I expected people's views to change but sometimes I was the only disabled person at the conference and so I think what I said made a big difference to the people there. The idea that people with learning difficulties could run their own business was important and I knew that with support, other people could do it. People said that I grew in confidence and, even though I was only really doing my job, I wanted to tell people it was possible and to show how we did things. When I was speaking, it felt like I was a different person, like a different character. I was sort of acting. Getting used to speaking in public also became really handy later when I moved on to get another job.

This went on for a couple of years, but eventually the support worker left and was replaced by someone else. After that, things weren't the same and started to go downhill. I didn't enjoy it as much. My parents were cross about how I had been treated and although it was sad, I decided to leave. However, I was already in touch with a different group that was being supported by someone else I knew and I was able to get a job there so things turned out OK in the end. This was another admin job and involved meeting new people and talking in public. Importantly I was also able to make new friends, earn money and learn new things. I later become a Director of that one too.

If I was asked to give advice anyone thinking about running their own business, I would tell them to be careful in what they do and plan it well. They would need to make sure they had support and enough contracts so they could get paid. If they really wanted to, they should go for it.

4.2.   I am P2

P2 had always been interested in art. Having found it hard to make friends at a young age, P2's mum was told that s/he had hyperactivity. At the age of 5 s/he didn't use speech, but discovered that art and drawing had a calming effect that was helpful to her/him. S/he started to draw.

At first P2 got into trouble for drawing on walls, but after her/his Grandmother encouraged her/him to use paper instead, s/he found that art a way to express him/herself. It wasn't long before one of her/his teachers at school spotted her/his talent and encouraged P2 to join an art class. It was whilst drawing a bowl of fruit that P2 first realised that this was what s/he wanted to do. P2 was an artist.

As s/he got older, P2 continued to draw and started illustrating stories for people s/he knew. As her/his artistic skills developed and her/his own distinctive style started to emerge, P2 was invited to become Artist in Residence for a local charity. It was then that the idea of using P2's work as a way to make money first came about.

I looked at famous artists from a long time ago and people running different art galleries and art shops in different places in England. I felt like I could do that one day. And I looked up people on the internet doing their own artists jobs. And people run their own workshops, like, bit like, (name), he designs some carpentry work, and then just sell it off to the

customers and I just felt like, how they do that in different places. I could do it myself. Just run a few like little workshops and help people.

I was really fascinated when I heard the word self-employed, because it meant like, not only I could run an organisation, I could run my own organisation. I felt like I really want to get out there and do it and for different people in different networks.

Support services for people with learning disabilities in the area were not considered good enough and the employment rates very low, even compared to other places. The local authority brought in a team of consultants to work with commissioners and to assess the situation. They looked at how day and community services were arranged for learning disabled people and what opportunities there were for people to get paid employment. This led to lots of changes in the health and social care department and a reorganisation of services.

The area represented a spread of social economic circumstances which ranged from wealthy urban centres to some of the poorest rural areas in the country.

Like most places, the general view was that increasing the number of employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties would, and should, be a priority and as part of this review, the decision was made to separate employment support from the wider provision of community and day support services. A new employment 'service' was created within the local authority and a number of external organisations were commissioned to augment and extend the capacity for employment support. This was to include support for self-employment.

With employment a central tenet of Valuing People Now, the cross government strategy introduced by New Labour to improve the lives of people with learning difficulties, the

changes were very much in line with wider policy. Indeed, soon afterwards the Government published Valuing Employment Now which outlined the Government's specific ideas around increasing opportunities for employment for everyone.

My social worker made links with the local employment support team so they could talk about how I could be supported to think about how self-employment could work for me. After a few meetings, it was agreed that my personal budget could be used to pay for a worker from the employment team.

With a number of smaller support providers now operating in the area and two significant employment services working with both people 'known' to the local authority as well as others in the community, important steps were being taken to follow the principles laid out under Valuing People Now.

The local authority were keen to prioritise the development of employment support options, as a way of improving the life choices of people with learning difficulties, over other support approaches and link this to a desire to make innovative advances in the use of personal budgets as a way of handing control to those in receipt of social care support. The local authority devoted considerable time and effort to shifting the way it worked, and the role that employment would play in doing so.

They looked at my idea about trying to run my own business and because I'd looked it through with (Charity trustee) not long ago, I felt like it's like this has got to really kick off and go out onto the streets and help people out.

The inclusion of support for self-employment was driven through a development programme of support and training for the new and emerging employment support organisations. This was all about building the skills and capacity of job coaches, employment support workers and others in

supporting people to identify, think through and develop enterprise options as one route to work. Over a two year period the initiative introduced a range of business planning and assessment tools, explored sustainable support structures and tried to promote self-employment as a realistic option.

We started meeting once a week in a cafe for an hour or so to talk about my business, check emails and plan things. I designed a logo and got business cards printed. We also designed a leaflet and I bought my own computer. We set up a support group to help me develop my self-employment and to get new contracts. We called this my business support circle and it was made up of people that I knew and who knew about my business. This included people from my family, people from the organisation where I was artist in residence and someone who knew about running a business. It also included someone who really knew my type of artwork.

I felt like I really want to get out there and do it and for different people in different networks. I really kicked it off and went straight into the business records and people felt like I was such a great guy to work with, I might book him out, book me out. Did a few contracts and I felt like, oh this is great.

Things went well for a year or two and as I was invited to different events and conferences. I had time to get used to being self-employed, develop my art and learn lots of new things about running a business. However, after a while, my support worker changed and different people started to come.

When I first start doing them, drawings, I was stuck with about seven or eight people showing me what to do.

Just having a job coach isn't enough … [and] … would not have offered her/him what s/he needs to run a business. You know, it's not saying that it wasn't helpful, and it wouldn't offer her/him something, but it's a much more kind of holistic thing that is needed.

Thankfully members of my business circle helped me to change things so I could be supported by someone who really understood what I wanted to do. Someone who came from an organisation that knew the art world better and could help me develop my skills and get more work. Ever since, the support I have had has been brilliant. Sometimes I call my support worker, my boss but she's not really. A bit like a PA, but more. Someone to help me plan my work and run my business; the finances, emails and forms as well as arranging new contracts. Someone to help me keep organised.

> It does feel in a way more like personal coaching. I'm not just her/his support worker, you know, I'm not there just to say 'oh, yeah, I'll write that email for you', I'm also there to help her/him really think about, you know, the pieces of work that s/he's working on, what s/he wants to portray, how s/he wants to develop her/his business, how s/he manages meetings, what s/he's going to do when s/he gets the bus to (city), what does s/he need to wear?

It's great to get help with the creative side of my business too. Now I can tell them what I want them to show me, what to do first. And I can look at those ideas and feel like I can definitely do that and give it a try.

> In terms of her/his artistic creativity, I will just ask her/him questions about her/his art and whether that's how s/he wanted it to be.
>
> S/he will come up with some ideas of what s/he wants to illustrate. And then s/he will work on those independently at home on her/his iPad, and then s/he'll send them to me, and then we'll talk through them again.

We meet once a week or when new jobs came in so I can discuss how things are going to work and think through new ideas. We used to go on business trips together, conferences and training courses but that has stopped now because of COVID. It's harder at the moment because I cannot get out so much and I'm having to do a lot more on-line. I have got used

to that though and we have changed the way we work so we can still meet every week on zoom.

And the government's telling us like GOV.UK is telling us we're gonna stay at home, be organised, try and supervise a business through houses and can't go into an office, can't go on the bus. And it's like trying to get the money come through. It's trying to get the organisation to still work for... to exist. And it's trying to keep people interested, and organised.

The biggest challenges has been the money and getting people to recognise that disabled people don't just work for nothing to help people. It's about being paid and being valued. It's not all about the money though. In fact money is a bit of a worry and I have to keep an eye on how much I earn so that my benefits won't be cut. My family are worried too about this so they keep in touch with my support worker so they know what's happening

For many disabled people, the interaction between paid work and welfare benefits is a complex one. The introduction of the work capacity assessment and its delivery by private contractors has received a significant level of criticism with a number of reviews highlighting both systematic and moral failings. Described by many as a benefits trap, people with learning difficulties frequently report concerns about benefits, with many opting to keep work and wages at levels that do not impact negatively on their entitlement.

S/he really worries about it. But that's probably because her/his family worry about it … S/he's already been through a tribunal where s/he's lost his benefits. And that was quite stressful for her/him.

S/he's not the only person with a learning disability in the family. S/he definitely has a sense of responsibility for those around her/him. S/he wouldn't want to let anybody down by doing the wrong thing.

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I also worry about taking on too much because I do have other things going on in my life. I already have a part time job in a supermarket which is really important to me so I need to make sure that my self-employment doesn't make that difficult. Since I was little I'd always been fascinated doing like retail so I want to make sure there is a balance between my retail job and my self-employment.

Good support is really important and I'm glad I have a great support worker and my business circle. Even though we haven't been able to meet for a while, they keep in touch.

It makes you feel like I don't have a brick on my head because when I got, like, so much going inside my head thinking I've got to write down this a minute and draw this a minute and then I got to, like, look at the contract a minute is so confusing. Having that support circle and a PA keeps me down to earth a bit.

> You know, it's about it's not just about money, and clients or customers, it's also about the emotional impact, you know, the anxieties and the worries and the time management and deadlines.

Overall, running my own business has been brilliant. It has stopped me looking out of the four windows and gets me out into the community. But it's also been a chance for me to help other people with learning difficulties and to bring out the magic out of their stories. I just like look at the scribbles and draw pictures that go with the scribbles. And I just put some information with the stick person and just bring it to life a little bit.

Things have changed a lot since COVID and I have had to learn to work differently. This has meant learning new IT skills and working on Zoom, but I have got much better at that. COVID has also created new opportunities. After some work I did in lockdown, more people have heard about what I do and got in touch about their projects that support people with learning difficulties.

> S/he's really confident about what s/he does, s/he feels very proud. And s/he also feels a sense of responsibility that s/he is somebody who is promoting and celebrating the world of

I also hope to start mentoring someone soon. Because they can follow my guidelines, some people see me as an icon as I want to promote and celebrate the world of learning disability through my work.

I really feel like if I can break down these barriers between unemployment, and employment, and we can take these unemployed people out of homes, off the streets and get them into a really good job when they can, like do the artwork, do the business side of it. Try and create an army of learning disability artists and get them to do things to help other people.

4.3.   I am P3

It all started with a level 2 (creative design) course I did at college. I realised I was good at it and decided from there it was what I wanted to do. That's what inspired me to run my own business and it just came from the bottom of my heart. I knew personally it was something I had a talent in. I just decided that it was what I wanted to do. I had tried applying for several jobs, but the employers didn't reach back out to me. I tried work as a waitress for three weeks, but it wasn't really good and didn't work out. I think everything happens for a reason.

My key worker told me about a course that was about to start which was about helping people to set up their own business. I already knew a little bit about self-employment because my Nan on my mum's side had her own business, so I'd learned some business skills there, such as customer service skills and the importance of communication. I was lucky to have family who owned a business, not all special needs people will get this kind of opportunity of work experience with someone who understands their condition.

> *In response to the typically low employment rates experienced by local disabled people, the council funded a pilot scheme designed to help people explore self-employment as an alternative route to work. The programme was developed by a partnership formed by the local authority services and two voluntary sector organisations and was designed to combine formal business training, informal group and peer support sessions and ongoing individual specialist employment support. It was made available to all disabled people in the*

area and advertised widely in newsletters and via providers involved in helping disabled people into employment. We were almost making it up as we went along. There was no template of looking at the individualised support that the person needed.

The programme recruited 16 participants with a range of physical, sensory impairments, learning disabilities and difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and mental ill-health.

I was nervous for the first few days then I got used to it and the experience was great. There were other people on the course and sometimes we worked as a group. It was good to get to know the others and find out why they decided to do their particular business. It was all really inspiring and I felt really supported. The tutor was excellent. He explained about target marketing and all the other stuff that we learned as well as reaching out to customers and quality of products. It was very useful help and I've learned a lot from him. We also learned about pricing and how to do it.

Overall support was provided by an employment support organisation with experience of supporting disabled into work. This experience was an important part of the programme and in some cases enabled participants to work with business mentors with experience of the sector. It's my job is to try and sort of get everyone together, and actually try and sort of help them develop the business together.

The course was run by a specialist enterprise trainer with experience of working with disadvantaged people in an inner city. Although the course covered all the usual aspects of business development – finance, customers, marketing etc., the aim was to imbed this into a wider employment support structure.

> I think the tutor was the right type of course leader, where he allowed that person to build her/his confidence and get exercises that challenged her/him, but at the same time, didn't make her/him feel that s/he couldn't do it

One of the things I found difficult was speaking to people I didn't know. The course introduced me to a mentor who really helped with my confidence and helped me leave my comfort zone. She knew about my business and how to go about it and gave me a space to sell my products outside her shop.

> We were particularly lucky with the mentor … who was very willing, not only to help (entrepreneur), but to give her/him that push by giving shop space and allowing her/him credit from suppliers to actually test it out. Which was a massive boost.

It's helped me with my confidence and how to reach my goals in my business and what sort of customers to reach out to. It helped me get out of my comfort zone because I was nervous at first. Now I'm 100% confident.

> Although s/he knew her/his own business, and was therefore in her/his comfort zone, actually selling the product was probably the biggest challenge.

Before the course, I had sold some of my designs to relatives and people I knew from my church. My challenge was to reach out to people I didn't know. At first I was nervous but once I started doing it, I felt good inside which was a big relief. My mentor helped me to think about my product and suggested I kept working on my designs and to think about what the customers want. That was really important as it really boosted my confidence and built me into a stronger person.

> The mentor was very hard on her/him saying, you've got to improve your product care and s/he took the advice and went on a course to do that. S/he gave some advice on how to take

care of (product) also on how to make the designs look modern. S/he also studied a modern and contemporary evening course.

It can be hard when it gets busy sometimes it's only me running the business by myself and there have been times when I have worked until midnight. I have to make sure there are good quality products as well. My talent is different compared to other creative designers. I'm my own unique person. When I design stuff it is different to the way other people do it. I have a vision that I follow. I do most of it by myself, I usually plan in the morning, but I've had some help for mum as well. Mum helps with wholesaler collections and deliveries, timings and tax returns as I struggle with the paperwork due to my Autism.

So there's always that reality. And I think you get a big crowd behind you on your shoulder saying this will never work. So that builds into your own self-doubts. Most people you'll come across, tell you why self-employment cannot work for disabled people. You'll very rarely get anyone saying - wow, that's cool, err really, I really wish you luck and how can we help with that?

I get help with the finances if I need it but I can do some of it myself now. My mum set up a template on the computer to help me work out quotes when pricing my designs and I brought a book to write receipts so it's all set up now. I get help with taxes and invoices as I'm not sure how to do it yet, but it will take time for me to learn. Eventually I will get there. I think it is really important to have good support as it encourages you to do better, improve your level of skills and believe in yourself. I am grateful to all the help I have had from my job coach, mentor and key worker as well as my family. It has been harder in lockdown but I did meet my Job Coach now and then. Due to budget cuts in the Council I no longer have a Job Coach. I have online meetings and I like to catch up with my mentor when I can. It's been a while but I've been getting on OK. I think it's important to get the right support from people that know about you, self-employment and specifically about business.

I run a charity ... which I think is akin to running your own business in a way. You know, all decisions are yours all the way that you're trying to sort of survive, and you don't have standard funding ... So you have to be fairly entrepreneurial all the time to see if you want to keep the service going.

My Job Coach helped me find a place to run a stall next to the Council. I was working there Tuesday to Friday before the pandemic but it's closed at the moment and everything is now on-line. It's was a good place to work and I had quite a few customers before lockdown. It has been harder since but I have been getting some orders. People contact me through social media, mainly Instagram, where I post pictures and videos of my work. Pictures make the page look more interesting and draw people's eye to the product. It is my business so I need to make sure it runs well. I learned how to take good pictures by seeing how people did that on Instagram. My mum taught me to think about the clear backgrounds when taking pictures as well.

I also use Facebook and post photos of my work I do. Recently I made a TikTok business account during quarantine where I will soon be doing video demonstrations of how I make my designs. This has to be planned in order of how it will be filmed and edited. I also use hashtags on TikTok because that way you get more views, likes, comments and new followers. So far I have done video slides of my images which I add music to the background and edited effects to each photo or short video clips. I work on pricing and put hashtags on my pictures as more people reach out that way. I have had interest even from other countries, not just in the UK, literally all over the world.

I also helped one of the people on the course when they launched their business. That was good. I had to think about what to wear as I had not been to a launch party before but I had support and it went really well.

And it's all those type of things that might not seem big, but actually allow a person to feel that their on message themselves and they can do things. And those are the hidden

The business is quite small still and the pandemic has made things very difficult, especially when the wholesalers were closed, but I want to build up my business and keep making progress so I can keep on improving my skills. I have some regular customers who came to my stall and now I have some that buy my products online. I might make a website with all my pictures and my story so I can inspire others. It's not all about money but about being confident and being creative and reaching out to more people. Building the business bigger will be good for me personally.

Once the business grows bigger perhaps I will be earning enough to employ people, but it will take a while, eventually I'll get there.

We've done an awful lot of work around supported employment, where, you know, we built aspirations up. We've got to start helping people have realistic aspirations about self-employment and what that means to a person. And maybe not belittle people's self-employment sometimes ... I think in self-employment, if you've got a person, and maybe they're doing some recycling scheme, or something, there's a bit of snobbishness about it saying, that's not really real, it's actually real to the person doing that job, and bringing that money in. And what we need to do is help them become as successful as they possibly can at those jobs.

I don't want anyone to feel like they can't apply when they actually can do something that they enjoy. It happens to a lot of people with special needs and I don't want them to feel like they're not capable; that they can't achieve anything when they actually can. Anyone can achieve anything they want no matter what, through thick or thin, just keep pushing forward and follow your dreams.

One thing I think that's really important and is undervalued all the time. It's we've always had low expectations of people, of

disabled people....we've somehow got to change the view that it cannot happen to, well, why isn't it happening?

I think the best bit about self-employment are the events and occasions I get to go to and the opportunities it gives for me to learn new skills, reaching out to people and building my confidence.

Being self-employed means that not everyone knows I have learning difficulties.

To them I'm just a creative.

5. Discussion – Searching for meaning and significance

> We use theory not to exhaust possible explanations but to open up previously unthought approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018, p. 720).

Where do these stories of entrepreneurship begin? I doubt it is at the start of this inquiry. Perhaps an entrepreneurial mind, an opportunity, a response to other circumstances - exclusion, disability – and a determination to join a party that was not welcoming. Perhaps all of these. Perhaps none. Is it the same place as the enterprise itself? I suspect not. But it might be. Could it ever be the same for each of us? A bigger question.

As I have indicated, my move to self-employment, seemingly unforetold, was perhaps there all along, waiting for the right time and place; a particular context, part pull, part push, ever social and always personal. The search for meaning and significance is not driven by a search for some generalizable truth, but is specific to each. But no story is complete. All are still becoming. P2 and P3 continue to develop their enterprises, responsive to the ongoing disruptions introduced by the global pandemic. No longer the entrepreneurs I met. P1 too has moved on from the point of interview to new projects; their entrepreneurship perhaps replaced by intrapreneurship (Myler, 2014) – the same stuff, but working for someone else. Each work the realities of COVID while yesterday's experience is building tomorrow's (Dewey, 2015). Each story though, is significant. Each possessing meaning. Yet, the search for each story's significance, generates more tensions as ideas come and go; tentative and partial depictions of lives, presentation of enterprises moving, theory and practice. It is also not enough just to describe them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) but to demonstrate:

> how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going and, are likely to go (Geertz, 1995, p. 3).

For me, such ambition must be met with research questions that are carved from my years of supporting people with learning difficulties explore self-employment. But to say these questions were my own is to conceal the others that have influenced their emergence. The books I have read, the conversations held and the people encountered. I remain inseparable

from my experience (Ochs & Capps, 1996), from those that came before and others that will follow. Research questions that have emerged, changed, been refined by collaboration, and exposed to scholarly tradition, now need to sit alongside the entrepreneurs, their enterprises and their support. However, whenever and wherever situated. 'Plugging in ideas, fragments, theory, selves, affects, and other lifeworld's (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 728) offer approaches to work theory and practice in new ways (Daelman, et al., 2020). Not abstracted, but placed, always becoming, never being (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Chapter 3 described the intention to present these stories as standalone narratives for the reader to absorb and consider as they chose. For that is the beauty of narrative; once told, stories assume a life of their own and can be told and retold, heard and heard again. Not everyone accepts that narratives contain 'unanalysed merit' (Riessman, 2005, p. 2) and instead proffer that meaning must be applied by the listener, the reader, the analyst. I don't think I have ever really settled on my own position other than to say I am, of course, interested in what these stories reveal and how these interact with my own perspective, opinions and ideas (Goodley, 2021). There is no one single truth, but multiple alternatives arise as different lenses are applied (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Stories must be read with other things in mind, be they personal tales or grander narratives representative of 'the broader ideological forces' (Murray, 2017, p. 193). Large or small and testament to the micro or the macro, they will influence how we hear, read or apply meaning.

But I have to start with a confession. I admit to imagining this section as a conveniently segmented offer in three pieces in which the entrepreneur, the enterprise and the support and training structures might be presented in glorious isolation. Alas it is not to be. I am struck by the way the entrepreneurs are inseparable from their enterprise and the support that helped to plan, establish and run them. All are stories in their own right, but none exist alone. I consider the magnitude of this – how does one present such collective determination in a meaningful way? Does the enterprise necessarily establish the entrepreneur or does education, support and training facilitate both? Does the support even exist without the entrepreneur? The more I read the stories, the more I recognise support in the enterprises, individuals in the support and enterprise in the individuals. This is inconvenient and thwarts my neat presentational plan. But I think it is representative of what these stories suggest. But I also have to mention my inability to stop thinking about my

own work and the other entrepreneurs I meet on a near daily basis. Although these act to combine, confirm or sometimes trouble the entrepreneurial narratives presented here, they become an important part of the meaning making process. Perhaps unanswerable, these questions confront the reality of making sense of enterprise in the lives of people with learning difficulties. Thus I intend to consider each in turn – entrepreneur, support and enterprise – accepting of the interconnectedness that will permeate throughout. As I sense that each might be approached with a different theoretical lens, I do attempt to consider each in turn, cognisant of the overlaps, the repetition and the blurred edges.

It is impossible to think about the meaning and significance of these stories without reaching out in multiple directions, interacting with existing ideas and concepts and forging new ones. Perhaps already rhizomic in nature, these stories radiate multiplicity, decentre and dislodge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) - each revealing other possibilities, alternative narratives. The trick is then to find a way to think about those narratives – to ask not which theory explains everything in front of us, but how theory can help. To use 'theory not to exhaust possible explanations but to open up previously unthought approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018, p. 720). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest drawing maps not traces. As a geographer, I like this idea. A map has no beginning. We must start in the midst (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018).

There are many entrepreneurs and many stories. We choose which ones get told.

5.1. The individual - plugging in the dis/human – push, pull and the human tightrope

I start by thinking back to my time growing up and my early experiences of disability– of southern England in the 1970's. I grew up in small village within easy travelling distance of London. The Surrey countryside. Not quite commuter belt, but that would come. Another boy in the village lived down the road – a good footballer. Left footed so always welcome in football games on the Common. But who would call on him? Not I, his Dad might answer the door. Was it fear or embarrassment of not being able to understand what he said? Not sure. Disabled I was told, cerebral palsy I would realise much later. Not much was said about my friends Dad, but he was never seen at community events, fireworks night or the village panto. Hidden disability.

At primary school now – the school in the next village. Navigating the uncertainty of life beyond my parent's sight, of milk monitors and Victorian buildings. My turn to have recorder lessons. At last. But the older girl's fingers were strange. Not like mine. Thalidomide they whispered but nothing was said out loud. Was I allowed to look? Was I allowed to ask? She was brilliant at the recorder. Silent disability

This story of this research starts with the stubbornly low employment rates for people with learning difficulties (Hatton, 2018) and speaks of barriers to the workplace, the need to raise aspirations, of training and support. Of people seeking fulfilling lives. Yet, spanning a considerable number of years, the stories offered by P1, P2 and P3 serve as a reminder of how little the economic and social inclusion of people with learning disabilities has progressed. Highlighting similarities in experience – perhaps not yet themes – of how learning difficulty interacts with work, their stories illustrate how the normative expectations of productivity and the 'toxic hold of capitalist logic' (Bend & Priola, 2021, p. 12) coalesce to delimit access to the workplace and exclude many who are condemned to exist on the periphery of citizenship unless they are willing and able to confirm to the narrow neoliberal expectations of contribution.

Yet these stories also confront that exclusion by revealing ways in which people with learning difficulties have resisted that subjugation and placed enterprise in the way. For them, self-employment has become the clarion call above which cries for identity, confidence and activism may be heard. But first, there is a journey to be had.

5.1.1. Push and Pull

Much of the literature thinks in terms of push and pull factors to explain the reason why people choose self-employment. Some may be pushed towards self-employment as a result of economic turmoil, unemployment and limited access to the labour market (Dawson & Henley, 2012). Others are pulled into self-employment by the apparent opportunities it offers individuals to design work around their own interest, preferences and needs (Caldwell, et al., 2020a). Attractive and repellent factors include the personal, the social and the economic (Caldwell, et al., 2020a; Yamamoto, et al., 2011) and the ways these interact with wider circumstances.

Yet other elements play a role and, as these stories reveal, a complex mix of motivations, choices and conditions appear to combine to regulate individual decision to explore enterprise. My experience (Bates, 2009) suggests three important features of entrepreneurial drive. Firstly, that certain sectors lend themselves to self-employment. In this sense choosing to work in those sectors, for example, as an artist, tradesperson, designer or hairdresser (Cheary, 2021), will increase the likelihood that work will be organised on self-employed terms. Secondly, that a desire to control an enterprise irrespective of the work it does compels some towards business ownership as a way of working. Here, self-employment itself is the attraction and considered regardless of the specifics of the sector in which the business might operate. Those familiar with TV shows like Dragons Den and The Apprentice (BBC, 2021; BBC, 2021) and the resultant rise of the celebrity entrepreneur will be familiar with people who operate across a wide variety of sectors; not seeming to mind what they do as long as they are in charge. Of course for people with learning difficulties, categories one and two are relevant and indeed many do choose to go it alone for sectorial and controlling reasons. However, for most, it is the third reason that carries most significance. Here, self-employment becomes the choice of last resort and is selected only when every other option has failed.

Ah! When everything else has failed.

> Another zoom meeting. Post pandemic, or is it still mid? Either way it seems to be how everything is done these days. We are in the midst of a discussion about ways to increase the number of people choosing self-employment. The question is asked. How do we identify the people?
>
> My thoughts drift to P1, P2 and P3. It is becoming harder to separate the day job from thinking through the research data. No longer can I distinguish between data, theory, people and practice (Jackson & Mazzei, 2018) as I consider their individual journeys. Each has been fundamentally different though share some aspects, an idea, the right people, a certain attitude perhaps? Or is it just an openness to new ways?
>
> The question still confounds me. Is it possible to identify the entrepreneurial individual from a set of vocational planning tools? The role of support workers in recognising potential entrepreneurs has also been a longstanding yet uncomfortable puzzle. How much have I influenced things to satisfy my philosophy? Certainly the process is opaque and I have not yet been able to establish a consistent answer.

Clearly, the inability to secure paid employment with an employer will make self-employment an attractive proposition. However, rather than framing self-employment in ways to suggests that it is either push or pull factors that control the entrepreneurial impulse, these stories suggest both are in play. After so many failed attempts to find work elsewhere (the push), enterprise clearly offers P1 flexibility beyond the immediacy of the first job (the pull). Similarly, for P3 self-employment was only considered after alternative employment was deemed unavailable (push) despite the clear opportunities it has provided since (pull). Perhaps we should not try to contain motivations so bluntly and follow the counsel of support worker P5:

> P5: I think it's a bit of 50:50. I think if there had been a (trade) near him/her that could have offered him/her a good job where s/he could have developed her/his skills, s/he would have been probably very happy with that.

P2 too operates within more than one motivational code. For them, enterprise was not a last chance selection, but a delightful prospect through which creative space could be accessed. Space that worked in addition to a paid position - a conclusive vote for pull perhaps:

> P2: I was really fascinated when I heard the word self-employed because it meant like, not only I could run an organisation, I could run my own organisation. I felt like I really want to get out there and do it and for different people in different networks.

The combination of both push and pull factors suggests no single determinant prevails as questions of autonomy, choice and response to external factors come to the fore. However, although enterprise offers a way to circumnavigate some of the barriers to employment, Caldwell (2020a, p. 509) reminds us, there is a fundamental difference between the decision to start a business and the desire to do so. I agree, and as P5 states, self-employment encompasses the fluidity with which people with learning difficulties are forced to navigate the employment world:

> P5: I think we slightly pigeonhole people into things and saying, yes, you should be in a job or yes, you should be in self-employment. I'm sure if you'd have asked him/her right in the beginning and someone had offered a job in (trade), they would've probably bitten your hand off, because that's what s/he wanted to do. So the (products) are more important … than the actual ... the route and how to go about it.

Yet as there is more to self-employment than the motivation to explore its possibilities, the focus of consideration unsurprisingly shifts from understanding why people with learning difficulties become entrepreneurs to what happens when they do. For this we must inevitably consider how individuals interact with their enterprise, their support and the outside world. These are human questions.

When P1 is told s/he is unable to work because of a learning difficulty, s/he is denied access to one of the normative constructions of human-ness; a consideration of work. Although its dominance as an indicator of worth is problematic, employment continues to be an abbreviation for contribution, for inclusion and for value. Employment is frequently presented as a route to better health, social status and economic wellbeing (Sayce, 2011)

and, for many, defines them, providing connection to others, an income and social meaning (Suzman, 2020). Despite a sometimes uncomfortable relationship with technology fuelling the unease about wider human displacement in the workplace, for now at least, those that work are and "in", while the unemployed become 'objects of normative human welfare services' (Goodley, et al., 2020, p. 11) that seek effective restoration of normality, pity or hope. In this sense, exclusion from work denies choice and possibility.

Yet devoid of the standard prospects afforded to many non-disabled people, P1 continued in search of alternative ways to demonstrate her/his humanity. Initially, s/he is defined by what she/he is considered unable to do and her/his identity couched in terms of medical detail. Personal information becomes public knowledge as parent's negotiates jobs:

> '… I spoke to the person in charge, and took some information about (medical condition) and things that s/he can and can't do. And the next thing I know s/he was discussing it with the staff. You know it wasn't personal at all'

Yet later, within the supportive and appropriately matched position within the enterprise, P1 performs, outplays and her/his ability is pushed to the fore.

> P6: P1 knew more than most members about the financial and legal workings of the company and, as s/he thrived on public speaking, we set about establishing a training arm of the company. This was really powerful stuff, not only was s/he really good at speaking to large numbers of people (so much more so than I) but s/he was able to explain the technical aspects of running a company.

P1's experience acts as a reminder of the prevalence of humanist individualism that dwells on an image of the successful human as capable and able-bodied (Goodley, et al., 2014). Yet her/his enterprise also presents an alternative to the cordial assumptions of autonomy and responsibility that surround the human category (Goodley, 2021) and reveals different ways of being.

Humanism emerged from the Enlightenment to represent a philosophical alternative to the way the world, and our place in it, was understood during the Middle Ages. Heralding a move from the moulded representation of Monarchy and Church, humanism offers a

rationality that cherishes human qualities such as independence and self-determination (Braidotti, 2013; Goodley, 2021). Yet, while the humanist rational context continues to dominate the philosophical landscape and provides the drive behind the specified desire for equality and social justice, it also works to alienate those who do not meet its expectations (Goodley, 2021). Access to humanist logic is conditional and the early stories of P1 and P3 illustrate well how cognitive impairment and learning difficulty similarly lie beyond what it is to be considered human.

5.1.2. Walking the human tightrope

Figure 4 - Walking the human tightrope.
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P1's experience is not some glamorous before and after shot, nor mine a quick make over. Both relay experiential happenings that construct new and different modes of subjectivity. For P1 this is at once, determination, agency, and talent while my own conceptualisation of disability is not the same as it was in those early Surrey memories. Likewise, attempts to decipher P3's motivational instinct, using cruder binary configurations, seem unhelpful. We all hold remnants of past experiences (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), but while accepting the thriving attraction of humanist endeavour suggested by their aspirations to work, P1, P2 and P3's engagement with enterprise simultaneously evokes what Goodley and colleagues (2017) describe as a DisHuman positionality.

Conceptualisations of disability under the social model are always considered external to the individual – one is disabled by the system, the stairs, and the arrangements. Disability is "out there" and by inviting both the challenge to, and aspiration for, human-ness, critical

disability studies simultaneously emphasise and re-story what it is to be human. Critical disability studies views disability as both a lived reality as experienced by people and as a political and social phenomenon that interacts with wider systems of power and oppression (Critical Disability Studies Collective, 2021; Reaume, 2014). It can also be considered a 'location populated by people who advocate building upon the foundational perspectives of disability studies whilst integrating new and transformative agendas' (Goodley, 2017, p. 191). Furthermore, by taking as a starting point an interrogative stance towards the selective tendencies of humanism, critical disability studies considers a posthuman position that alters what we mean by "human" by offering a 'critique of normative bodily models with the advocacy of new, creative models of embodiment' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 146). Perhaps more potently, this stance reminds us that disability is not a static, binary consideration, no either: or. It is never a case of being disabled or able (Bend & Priola, 2021), but something set within temporal, spatial, cultural and economic contexts.

As part of their disability studies scholarship, Goodley and colleagues (Goodley, 2017; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016; Goodley, et al., 2014) offer a Dishuman positionality as a working of Braidotti's (2013; 2006) posthuman thinking further into a disability context. In doing so they invite an understanding of human-ness from two simultaneous perspectives. Firstly that disabled people engage in community life in ways that emphasise their human-ness in humanist terms – Dis**human** (emphasis human) whilst at the same time as developing new forms of community which extends how we understand the human condition - **Dis**human (emphasis Dis) . Taken together, these align with Braidotti's image of the posthuman that not only claims the humanist human in terms of individuality, equality and civil rights, but also celebrates posthuman qualities which acknowledge the intra-action (Barad, 2003) of the human, the technological and the environmental. Barad (2003) replaces the term "interaction", the consideration of the way pre-established bodies participate in action with each other' (Bend & Priola, 2021, p. 15) with "intra-action" to denote the 'mutual co-constitution of subject and object that do not exist separately but are only relationally distinct' (Bend & Priola, 2021, p. 15). Importantly, this is not a wholesale rejection of the principally Eurocentric homily of humanism (Goodley, et al., 2014; Braidotti, 2006) but rather an invitation to ask what disability tells us about the human as 'an extended, distributed, interconnected and relational entity' (Goodley, et al., 2014). Such an

evocation, seeks the simultaneous rejection and desire of humanism whilst foregrounding the constant intra-action (Barad, 2003) of disability with its social-materialist embeddedness in a 'network of human and material practices, discourses and phenomena' (Bend & Priola, 2021, p. 2).

Here the edges of ontology and epistemology blur – can one ever be without the other? – and I find myself stuck in one of Mazzei and Jackson's (2012, p. 453) 'thought-places' that interrupts this consideration of disability and employment to enfold entrepreneurship. This is no easy addition, but is a complex practice that imbibes human-ness as a shifting construct, broader than the narrow and partial understanding offered by Enlightenment humanism, and in need of recognition of both its signifying power to replicate cultural norms, and its potential to invite alternative conceptualisations of what it mean to be human. P1, P2 and P3 each demand alternative, or more importantly, a series of alternative ways to shape and reshape their identities and in doing so embrace self-employment as a way of eliciting those alternatives. To put this more succinctly, disability intra-acts with enterprise to create new ontological and epistemological positions which appear to trouble the space between conversations about disability and conversations about employment to reveal multiple identities at large. By asking how entrepreneurs intra-act with their businesses we invite an understanding of what self-employment does.

The conditional entrepreneur

> Conditionality – The quality of being conditional (OED Online, 2021) and thus subject to, depending on, or limited by, one or more conditions; not absolute; made or granted on certain terms or stipulations (OED Online, 2021a)

People with learning difficulties lead conditional lives, subject to the ebb and flow of public and private opinion. P1, P2 and P3 each describe forms of training and support. For P2 and P3 this comes in the form of support workers, while P1's experience depicts the era of day services and community-based day activities for people with learning difficulties (Cole, et al., 2007). But access to these involves assessment that continues to be based on an appreciation of need – to be disabled enough to warrant the extra resource. The Care Act (2014) stipulates that eligible needs are those that correspond to an individual's inability to achieve outcomes from a specified list of health, hygiene and independent living criteria.

Eligible needs are therefore those that enable an individual to achieve, perhaps, common-sensical standards of hygiene, safety, nutrition and toileting (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2020), as well as work, training and education outcomes (Department of Health, 2014). The focus is on what someone cannot do that is steeped in the medical and individualised conceptualisation of disability rather than in the factors, conditions and arrangements that foster those needs in the first place. The point here is not that the establishment of eligibility criteria in order to properly manage public resources is bad per se, but that using criteria grounded in the medical model of disability reinforces the disharmony from which it is hard to escape.

In the same way invitations to join the labour market are flanked by considerations designed to sift the "difficult" disabled from the "trying" disabled to ensure productivity, flexibility and value. Is this so very far from the way we used to describe the deserving and undeserving poor, the idiot and the lunatic (Jarrett, 2020)?   Wolfersberger's (1983) identified the need to position people with learning difficulties in valuable social roles in order to 'drain the lethal toxicity' (Jarrett, 2020, p. 303) with which people with learning difficulties are so frequently perceived. Yet is it hard to enable a vision of competence, inclusion and respect when all too often entitlement to full membership of society remains out of reach.

5.1.3. Employability

One of the ways such conditionality manifests itself is through what I shall call the employability complex. Here the incessant thrust of government policy is taken up by the enthusiastic provider intent only on increasing employment outcomes for disabled and disadvantaged people. Employability considers the 'transferable skills needed by an individual to make them "employable"' (STEMNET, 2009) and befits the call for autonomous, reliable people who are ready to work. By detailing the importance of teaching people how to become good employees, employability gives prominence to a set of qualities such as punctuality, flexibility, and a willingness to learn alongside other enactments of common sense - of course we need those! - that make us good employees. Many of the specialist employment approaches for people with learning difficulties or those considered to have special education needs or disabilities [SEND] set out to build

employability as a central tenet of their support offer. I too have been involved in many a workshop development programme designed to characterise the epitome of the ideal worker and the skills and qualities employers want (Bates, et al., 2017). The trouble is, in isolation, I am not satisfied that a focus on the individual is enough. Despite being grounded in the employability complex, P1 and P3 remained unemployed irrespective of the efforts of college, parents and others to secure employment:

> Although P1 attended a day centre which offered some training to prepare people for work few people managed to secure paid employment.

P2 similarly seems to have been on a familiar trajectory - training for work, a bit of experience – always being on the way, but never arriving:

> P5: S/he's done a college course. But s/he's not actually had a proper real, what we would call a paid job. S/he was on. I mean, s/he's only fairly young, and s/he was on that pathway.

In their extensive examination of employer attitudes to employing people with learning difficulties and the business benefits of doing so, Beyer and Beyer (2017) remind us that employers who may be at first reluctant to engage people with learning difficulties are much more positive after they have done so and 'are significantly more positive in their ratings of their work and value to the company' (Beyer & Beyer, 2017, p. 18). This suggests that employment support is not about developing individual employability skills in isolation but about how these combine with community engagement and support to the employer in a more holistic sense. This is about accompaniment, of walking side by side with job seekers (Goodley, et al., 2017), with support workers and trainers sharing a vision for the situation to be "otherwise" (Watkins, 2015). By placing too much emphasis on "correcting" the individual and the amelioration of their disabling condition (Goodley, 2017), employability is far too one sided. A Care Act eligibility assessment that identifies an inability to access employment presents an individual "problem" before considering the provision of support to alleviate that "problem". It does little to change the circumstances that created it in the first place. It is also worth noting that should support successfully enable access to (in this case) work, training and education, once accessed, any later assessment might deem the

support no longer necessary, leaving the person at risk of losing the very support that enabled access in the first place.

It's a long time since Warnock's (1978) review of "special education" was published and although it ushered in important conversations about employment and the role of education in supporting young disabled people to think about a working future, very little seems to have changed. The arrival of the Children and Families Act in 2014 likewise promised 'an increased focus on life outcomes, including employment and greater independence' (p. 11), even though, arguably, the introduction of the Education, Health and Care Plan [EHCP] to streamline the efforts of professional systems across a young person's life has had little impact (Warnock, 2017). Local authorises continue to undertake the assessments against which their own resources may be drawn, the EHCP has become the golden ticket around which hopes of access to those resources are pinned (Bates, 2018) and employment support continues to be about work readiness and preparation, but not actually achieving. Surely this is about the proliferation of the existing order of things? Despite proclamations of intention from the Warnock review, and others since, for disabled people unable to attain the opprobrious delusion of waged life, access to full social participation remains conditional.

5.1.4. Welfare to Work

Beyond the conditionality of citizenship, lies further worrisome conditionality that comes with the UKs welfare-to-work system. Operating a business in the context of welfare inevitably requires the management of a peculiar set of tensions. On one hand, P1, P2 and P3 navigate the precarity of life (Bates, et al., 2015) tiptoeing around the perfomative expectations of disabled people; claiming benefits, undergoing assessments for support and training whilst on the other, forging innovative pathways through which their own liberation from such punary might be considered. Like many disabled entrepreneurs (Hutchinson, et al., 2021) P2 carries such tensions into her/his business.

> P2: In fact money is a bit of a worry and I have to keep an eye on how much I earn so that my benefits won't be cut. My family are worried too about this so they keep in touch with my support worker so they know what's happening.

There are few in the employment support sector who do not approach welfare benefits, originally part of the cradle to grave security offered by the state, (Field, 2011), with a great deal of caution. Claimants, families and support staff are equally anxious of the impact paid work has on welfare benefits, the potential for reassessment and the disruption it represents. Many continue to describe the benefits "trap" (Halabisky, 2014) as a major disincentive to work.

Overhauling the system in 2012 with claims of simplification and a drive to make work pay (BBC, 2013), the department for Work and Pension's maintained a fervent focus on conditionality to encourage welfare-to-work recipients to behave in certain ways in order to increase, or at least maintain, their chances of finding work (Fletcher & Flint, 2018). A claimant commitment sets out how the claimant will prepare for and look for work, and represents that which is expected of an individual in order to satisfy a pretty opaque view of what a "willingness" and "readiness" to work looks like. Although a Work Capability Assessment [WCA] contains some headline protection for those considered less able to work, it determines the level of expectation an individual will be subjected to. Those considered unable to work or in need of alternative approaches are then afforded special consideration. As the Disability Rights UK (2012) website puts it:

> If you are found to have a "limited capability for work" in the assessment, your work-related responsibilities will be limited. If you are found to have a "limited capability for work-related activity" in the assessment, none of the work-related requirements will apply to you.

The WCA has attracted significant, and seemingly justifiable, criticism as private companies were awarded contracts to undertake assessments which were beset with problems resulting in erroneous and misleading results (Harrington, 2010). Parliamentary debates suggest that up to 81% of assessments contained inaccuracies (House of Commons, 2019) and as tabloid headlines citing benefit scroungers and malingerers fuelled their continued justification (Baumberg, et al., 2015), suspicion remains that these assessments are part of an ideological reconsideration of need - less about ensuring reasonable efforts and more about saving money (Larkin, 2018; Roulstone, 2015). Assessment results that concluded that many people with significant impairment and high levels of support need were capable of work, led to a number of reports that challenged an unjust and unfair system (Gentleman,

2012) that 'is a cause of great fear and anxiety for people with a learning disability' (Mencap, 2014). With a WCA focused on individual capabilities, very little is said about the structural, organisational and attitudinal barriers to work.

The expected behaviours of those for whom special consideration is not granted are then managed through the application of sanctions that can reduce, suspend or cease benefit entitlement. Although many welfare systems contain an expectation that unemployed people actively seek work, the scope of conditions as well as the extent and severity of sanctions has widened significantly (Watts, et al., 2014). Conditionality therefore broadcasts an understanding of the causes of unemployment that places the onus on the individual and that certain 'marginalised groups need to be facilitated to behave appropriately and incentivised to take up support' (Fletcher & Flint, 2018, p. 772). Many feel alternative approaches that pursue more facilitatory tactics and encourage labour market participation in more inclusive ways (Etherington & Ingold, 2012) would be more beneficial.

Earning too much becomes a problem and places restrictions on business growth and limits the wholesale adoption of entrepreneurial objectives. Yet self-employment does appear to shift the emphasis and adjust the material relations between worker and job while inviting others to think about employment differently; not as a solo endeavour but as an embedded experience.

Even so, employment remains conditional.

The relational entrepreneur

These enterprise stories are replete with the involvement of others - family, friends, employers and community members as well as technological affiliations that orchestrate possibility and vitality. Whether more formally convened, as in P2's business circle, or P3's willing coalition of mentors, coaches and trainers, circles of support appear to be significant.

> P2: We set up a support group to help me develop my self-employment and to get new contracts. We called this my business support circle and it was made up of people that I knew and who knew about my business.

P3: I think it is really important to have good support as it encourages you to do better, improve your level of skills and believe in yourself. I am grateful to all the help I have had from my job coach, mentor and key worker as well as my family.

At once evoking images of Freirean cultural circles 'designed as a mechanism for problem posing, dialoguing and problem solving' (Homer, 2011, p. 277), these semi-structured arrangements bring additional expertise, skills and knowledge to the enterprise in the form of business planning, support and advice. But do these arrangements disrupt ideas of the entrepreneurship that set independent risk-taking and change management as their central tenet?

I am inclined to think so. Firstly it is clear that business ownership is no solo activity or something to be done in isolation and there are no compelling reasons why it should be. Entrepreneurs who can draw on a 'broad and diverse social network … are more successful' (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998, p. 213). Secondly the use of formal and informal networks add value to the enterprise – and the entrepreneur – by bringing much needed skills and knowledge to the venture. In any enterprise these can enhance business activity, but for enterprises established by people with learning difficulties, they can provide individual, business and sector specific training and support. P2 talks of her/his circle in terms of the contribution it makes as a collective hub:

P2: Thankfully members of my business circle helped me to change things so I could be supported by someone who really understood what I wanted to do.

P2: Having that support circle and a PA keeps me down to earth a bit.

At first glance these appear to be unusual, special or disability specific, but I am not sure they are. As I have indicated, my own enterprises require support - both paid and unpaid – which is sourced from the same formal and informal networks - family, friends and colleagues - to help me do things I can't do, am too busy to do or find too boring to do. But in the lives of people with learning difficulties, as in my own, these networks perform another function beyond the regulatory performance of enterprise, profit and loss and business planning. Importantly they also enable the entrepreneurs to maintain operational competence. P2's circle acts as both buffer and facilitator to her/his business world.

P2: It makes you feel like I don't have a brick on my head because when I got, like, so much going inside my head thinking I've got to write down this a minute and draw this a minute and then I got to, like, look at the contract a minute is so confusing. Having that support circle and that PA keeps me down to earth a bit.

Circles of support assist people to make personal choices and to ensure their work and enterprise selections are aligned to individualised goals – that people are doing what they can, and want to do. This focus on the personalisation is familiar to wider employment support programmes with in-depth vocational profiling and employment planning sitting at the heart of support employments process map (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018). However, rather than the circles of support that are widely used in the social care sector that 'support individuals to become reconnected in the community, and to make friendships and relationships' (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2021), business circles act as an enmeshment device that blurs the edges between the individual, the enterprise and the support.

I think back to a time when we were developing training workshops in business development for people with learning difficulties interested in starting their own business. Set across two days we developed a series of, we hoped, accessible, enjoyable and engaging exercises to enable participants to understand their enterprise idea and plan its development. We followed fairly standard business development processes and talked about products, money and customers. At the end of each session, entrepreneurs presented their businesses - Dragon's Den style. However, in the early days very few ideas seemed viable and we realised we had invented an expensive way of telling people that their idea wasn't going to work. This did nothing to empower, inform or enthuse our participants and continued to reinforce the idea that self-employment was beyond them.

Yet as we considered and reflected upon this, we discovered that we made two fundamental errors. The first was that we had defined the outcome ahead of the workshops rather than within them. We were imposing a definition of self-employment and entrepreneurial rigour that was not shared. We had worked a late capitalist definition of viability without exploring what our participants considered a

success. The second was that many of the enterprise ideas being explored had originated from conversations our participants had with who we described as "well-meaning" support workers – few of whom had any experience of establishing business. Therefore the enterprises lacked the sophistication of more considered innovations.

We set out to adjust our plans in two ways. Firstly, to work with potential entrepreneurs in order to discover what they wanted to achieve and secondly, to think also about support for the person stood next to the disabled person so that all could be part of this learning process.

Such reflections had already shifted my thinking from a focus on the disabled person – an arguably medicalised and individualised conception of disability, to a focus on the support system - an altogether more diffident appreciation of the wider barriers to human-ness experienced by people with learning difficulties. Yet they still evaded the fundamental concern I hold that if we want to see the barriers to employment for people with learning difficulties, we must first look in the mirror. Distributing the responsibility of viability was a start but it did not revoke the need to profoundly review the materialist situation that disabled people encounter. Circles combine the knowledge, skills and experience of their membership to engage with the personal, contractual, legal and financial requirement of enterprise. All businesses need to talk to the tax office, communicate with new and existing customers and create the structures through which business is done. All businesses need people to do the work and others - accountants, advisors, assistants - to help. Business circles help. P2 describes such help in employment terms; of having a Boss, a PA and someone who:

P2: helps me to do my business account. My … contracts, my er materials, my research.

But P2 also holds that help in high esteem and understands clearly how it also monitors the work and regulates stress:

P2: my head will go totally beyond the roof tops and then it's like I've lost that idea or lost that thing that was going through my mind just now…

But self-employment is not just about jobs (Bates, 2019) as it offers the potential to foreground social awareness, self-determination and civic engagement (Giroux, 2010; Coles, 2014). P1 uses enterprise to reposition him/herself as a competent and valuable contributor and to show that business ownership is possible. Such a move also offers up a connection between an entrepreneurial individual and society to foreground the embeddedness of life for people with learning difficulties. There is clearly a space for a more relational version of the independent individual (Graby & Greenstein, 2016), illuminated by a posthuman perspective that invites interrogation of enterprise and its interpersonal characteristics. Braidotti (2006, p. 206) offers the 'modest witness' as a 'border-crossing figure who attempts to recontextualize her/his own practice within fast-changing social horizons' (Braidotti, 2006, p. 206).

In this way business circles speak to the system of enterprise. But they also facilitate the individual skills required to develop, plan and establish an enterprise. This is where respect for starting with the concrete reality of the learner (Shor & Freire, 1987) is most acute. But it is also where the troubling of the normative rendition of self-employment becomes evocative. As autonomy is always found in relationships and is essentially interdependent (Graby & Greenstein, 2016), so too are these constructions of self-employment. At once accepting of neoliberal conventions of enterprise, trade and the market, while at the same time offering new connections, approaches and forms of work. There is clearly a difference between encouraging participation and committing to ideological solidarity (Crowther & Martin, 2018), but business circles raise important questions about accessibility, adjustments and the entrepreneurial interaction with society. Indeed evoking critical aspects of social model activism appears to be how circles perform Freirean praxis.

> With these thoughts occupying my mind, I happened to attend a business circle meeting convened by P2 and her/his support worker where I joined other members of her/his support circle. We were discussing various aspects of work in the development of her/his business. At one point a decision was made to share a piece of work that P2 has crafted recently but no one was able to find a copy which could be shown on zoom.

> 'Shall I send you a copy' P2 offers?

'Please that would be fantastic' voices her/his support worker.

'I'll send it as a JPEG'

Thanks, that'll be great'.

A short and unremarkable exchange perhaps. Yet it was only afterwards that the observation was made that only few months ago such a seemingly simple administrative task would not have been possible. Here we were witness to P2 rendering the task complete with a bit of a swagger and, I suspect, a knowing smile.

P2's commitment through lockdown speaks to both Braidotti's (2013) posthuman and Goodley's (2017) *Dis*human positions. When experiencing lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with familiar support structures and routines unavailable, P2 mobilises the use of technology to fill the void.

P2: Things have changed a lot since COVID and I have had to learn to work differently. This has meant learning new IT skills and working on Zoom but I have got much better at that. COVID has also created new opportunities. After some work I did in lockdown, more people have heard about what I do and got in touch about their projects that support people with learning difficulties.

As a result, P2 is now operating her/his enterprise through a variety of hardware and software applications and evokes the question of who created the void that the tech fills. Not only has this changed the way s/he works, but has demanded a different approach to support. Such advancements are significant and are unlikely to be short term:

P4: I mean, I'm not saying that I won't meet up with (entrepreneur) and we won't work together at (creative charity) again. But you know if there was a day where s/he couldn't come in, or if, you know, we needed to meet outside of that we would now use zoom.

P4: It's great. And s/he works really well. Like this. You know, s/he's just taken to it brilliantly. So and s/he's become very techie.

P2's turn to tech may well have been necessitated by the global pandemic, but doing so has rendered conversation about how and when s/he is supported in the future. Conventional humanist interest in technology has largely centred on how things work, but here P2's relationship with technology invites consideration of the role of technology in forging her/his own entrepreneurial identify. This 'is not a matter of the technology interacting with the social, but of constitutive entanglement' (Orlikowski, 2017, p. 1444).

As I read, I think of Jackson and Mazzei's words – 'we think with whatever we are reading at the moment' (2018, p. 725). Could it be that the enterprises themselves could be considered part of Deluze and Guattari's (1987) machine? I have to admit that I have thought about my business in this way. It's certainly something that requires nurture, but one that has helped me. There are days when my business does the talking and I can remain quiet. Other times my business takes the back seat while I perform. But I also think about the lessons I have learned and the more pedagogical aspects of my self-employment – the people who have taught me both formally and informally about business and about myself and I consider the experience of self-employment from the perspective of people with learning difficulties; a line I would now like to explore in this next section.

5.2. The support - Plugging in pedagogy - Rage, hope and dialogue

'Shall we have one last run through before we start?' I asked

'No, I think I'm OK … but can you explain something?'

The company had been running for a couple of years, the usual enterprise teething problems had been overcome, processes in place and new contracts secured. Now to employ more people. Exciting. More opportunities for people with learning difficulties to get a paid job.

We were about to run our first set of interviews and had been practicing. As an enthusiastic support worker I had produced interview sheets: the agreed questions listed: Why have you applied for this job? What have done before? Do you like this type of work?

We had discussed which type of answers would be considered good and I had included an area on the sheet for the interviewers to rate the answers given - three options – good, bad or average. In a sheer act of brilliance, I labelled the sheet to make the scoring accessible - smiley face for a good answer, sad face for bad, straight face for something in the middle.

I asked 'Everyone happy?'

We had practiced. Interviewing colleagues, other support workers and my manager. The first candidates had arrived. We were ready.

'Yes … but can you explain something?'

'Yes, of course'

'What do these faces mean?'

'Ah yes, right. Well the smiley face is for a good answer, the straight face is for an ok answer and the sad face is for a poor answer. Is that OK?'

'Thanks – yes that's fine. Could you just write that on the sheet please?'

I had not asked. Banking.

The banking concept of education describes an approach in which information is transferred from the "knowledgeable" to 'those whom they consider to know nothing' (Freire, 2017, p. 45). By designing the teaching around pre-defined outcomes (Giroux, 2010, p. 715), knowledge is deposited into students who assume a passive role as receivers of the given reality and are tasked with uncritically adopting this to better "fit" into the world. In this conceptualisation, education is considered an offering for the marginal, 'incompetent and lazy' (Freire, 2017, p. 47), to domesticate the recipient (Allen, 1987), assimilate them into the existing order of society (Giroux, 2010) and privilege the dominant ideology (Tett, et al., 2018). The oppressive relations inherent in the banking approach (Freire, 2017) give rise to 'social, economic and political contradictions' (Pouwels, 2019, p. 5) which delimits the role even well-meaning educators can play in facilitating the interests of the dominant (Allen, 1987). Such contradictions, established in the relationship between teacher and learner (Freire, 2017), belie the possibility 'that teachers can be both educators and learners' (Maylor, 2012, p. 24).

Freirean contradictions flow from a disharmony between the desires for education to raise the awareness in students of their circumstances in order that they might become 'more fully human' (Freire, 2017, p. 18), and the position of educator in facilitating the ideological domination of education as a domesticating relationship (Allen, 1987). Although this raises some ethical questions about what is meant by fully-human, Freire's contradiction in banking education symbolising a 'dialectical conflict between opposing social forces' (Freire, 2017, p. 20 Translator's note) in which students are expected to consume rather than know and information considered abstract rather than presented as an object of reflection through dialogue. It is therefore beneficial to consider the oppressive nature of the teacher: student relationship (Allen, 1987) across all educational circumstances to promote a problem posing education through which Freire (2017, p. 52) seeks 'the essence of consciousness – intentionality'. Only when the teacher-student contradiction is addressed with a problem posing education that is 'dialogical and focussed on reflection and action simultaneously' (Pouwels, 2019, p. 7), can both 'become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (Freire, 2017, p. 53).

Perhaps the key phrase here is "well meaning". Freire (Freire, 2017, p. 48) talks of the 'innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving

only to dehumanize'. Indeed many in the employability sector start from a position of trying to make a difference. I too, was working to improve things for my colleagues who were about to start interviewing, but had failed to involve them in discussions about what would help. I presented a solution to a problem that did not exist instead of working with my disabled colleagues as partners with a common goal.

I had not asked.

5.2.1. Rage

Being on the receiving end of training and support programmes designed to get people into work will be a familiar experience for many people with a learning difficulty. Yet, that familiarity will often be tinged with disappointment as restrictive entry criteria, low aspirations and questionable employment practice (Dearing, 2021) become increasingly evident. P1, P2 and P3 each articulate an aspiration for work, but for two, this is not forthcoming. Attempts to get a job, a seemingly simple transitionary step into adulthood (Preparing for Adulthood, 2020), is mired in difficulties despite the support from college, family and community. The message for P1 is unambiguous and offers little doubt that for them, work is not available:

'they was telling me I couldn't work because I got learning difficulties'

Although P3's words are less definitive, the result is similar:

'I had tried applying for several jobs, but the employers didn't reach back out to me'

Vignettes may serve as illustration, but the broader picture painted by the persistently low rates of employment for people with learning difficulties (Hatton, 2018) suggests these experiences are not uncommon and that for people so labelled, work remains tantalisingly out of reach with 'poor education, low expectation and aspirations, and negative attitudes from employers' (Dearing, 2021, p. 262) fuelling the frustration. With Government policy, in the main, making things harder (Bates, et al., 2015), exclusion from ordinary routes to work makes way for alternatives for people deemed to have special educational needs or disabilities [SEND].

One way is to procure the support of family to help traverse the quagmire of employment selection and recruitment processes. Yet while it's clearly not unusual for parents to facilitate their child's access to early employment opportunities – I think of my own Saturday jobs and paper rounds - beyond a certain point (or a certain age?), it is less typical for families to remain involved. However, this is frequently the case for people with learning difficulties. As P1 explains:

> My parents helped me to find jobs, either through people they knew or by asking about opportunities they'd heard about. I worked in a card shop, a supermarket and a couple of care homes but none of them lasted very long.

Often though, familial help, hopeful at first, proves otherwise. P1's parent expands on the problem finding the right opportunity:

> 'S/he couldn't keep up with the workload. And when s/he was in the supermarket, it was problems with the lifting and things like that … I don't know why they didn't put (P1) on the tills over here. Obviously they didn't think - because s/he had learning disabilities – s/he could cope with it'.

Already feeling a little uncomfortable, family involvement also elicits the question of whether Mum or Dad are best placed for the job development role. Of course we know our children well, but we don't know everything about them. Because of the job I do, I have reflected often on the role I have played in my own children's journey to work. It is a rare moment when we can watch our children without being present to influence their behaviour - to see them as others do. Ours is a nurturing, caring and protective role and I suspect we do not manage risk well. Perhaps this is why the provision of travel training has been identified as one of the most influential factors in changing parental minds regarding the perceived employability of their children (Beyer, et al., 2014). More importantly though, others may well spot the talents and abilities that we miss and the opportunities such insight presents.

Others turn to the local college in search of employability courses and work experience. I have already troubled the applicability of the employability complex in terms of transforming employment opportunities for disabled people. Yet employability continues to

foreground the college experience of many disabled people. If they are lucky the curriculum focus on qualifications - English, Maths and the so called functional skills – will not distract the college from building programmes with the individual learner in mind (Preparing for Adulthood, 2016) and developing a comprehensive range of work placement opportunities to facilitate the development of a broad range of employment aspirations among students. Too narrow a range results in an inability to align individual vocational interests with available placement opportunities. P3's words are suggestive of what happens when this is the case

'I worked as a waitress for three weeks, it wasn't really good and didn't work out'

For the unlucky, employment support will be limited to the development of CV's and interview skills and the revolving door of life skills and preparation of work initiatives (McTier, et al., 2016) that ignore the need of many people with cognitive, memory, or processing challenges to learn in the work place rather than through pre-vocational training courses taught in the classroom (Department of Health, 2011). Remember, supported employment's place and train model holds that the best place to learn a job is in the job precisely because it is much harder to learn a set of tasks in one context and be expected to perform them in another.

The arrival of supported internships certainly provided a boost to the older college employability courses by introducing job coaches to work alongside tutors (Department for Education, 2014). However, although this helped shift the focus away from the classroom and into the workplace (Preparing for Adulthood, 2018), entry remains limited to those under 25 and considered able to meet numeracy and literacy criteria (Dearing, 2021). Moreover, although some internship programmes have increased the number of people entering paid employment (Kaehne, 2016), there is such variation between programmes, that not all operate in ways that adequately counter the creeping preconception of what people with learning difficulties can and cannot do. While little continues to be said about disrupting the way work is arranged, the sole focus on employability risks concentrating on work preparation at the expense of developing new ways to think, act and feel (Allen, 1987; Giroux, 2010).

5.2.2. The swindle of fulfilment?

Perhaps this is a good place to pause for a moment, to trouble my framing of work as a key part of the transition to adulthood. Fundamentally, my work involves supporting people with learning difficulties into, and through, paid employment and the development of more and better options to do so. Indeed my frustration in our collective inability to construct evidence-informed support structures, learn from our previous actions and properly consider the barriers people with learning difficulties face when considering work has, in part, prompted this research. Yet doing so rather assumes that work should always be considered a good thing and that its pursuit prioritised at all costs. An automatic and uncritical acceptance of this, however, risks foregrounding a neoliberal vision of the future where paid work is increasingly uncertain, insecure and casual (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010). Although the desire for a greater alignment of education and work was forcefully laid out in the 1970's with Callaghan's Ruskin Mill speech (Callaghan, 1976) and that ever since, key UK economy and education policy has sought to cultivate a productive workforce able to 'take advantage of opportunities emerging from the new flexible market economy' (Jones & Iredale, 2010, p. 9), it is clear that work is not always good. Indeed there is an increasingly large body of evidence that suggests how very bad it can be and that in fact it might be sensible to stop thinking about life, liberation, and fulfilment in terms of work, but in terms of a post-work world (see - Weeks, 2011; Benanav, 2019; Stronge & Harper, 2019). Although, in theory at least, we have long since moved beyond the Keynesian economic project of meeting everyone's absolute needs (Suzman, 2020), the reality remains for many disabled people that the 'rationality of market rule' (Soldatic & Chapman, 2010, p. 142), its ableist standards (Dearing, n.d.) and prioritisation of autonomous, flexible and productive workers, act only to limit community membership to those with the individual capacity to work in this way. Work may be good in terms of fulfilment, remuneration and social connection, but it is not always so. Perhaps one of the best ways of inviting the acquisition of good work is through supported employment's persistence in establishing the right job, working for the right employer, in the right workplace. Work is relational and, befittingly, involves employers.

Yet inviting talk of the needs of the employer, requires a move beyond the time and motion study or statement of Corporate Social Responsibility (Ferrandis & Lago, 2021) to link more

directly to the employer's operational requirements. At least in the main, employers want to focus on making their widgets and providing their services and are generally keen to welcome any employee that will enable that to happen. This is the capitalist dream, of course, so any description needs to be cognisant of the grander mechanisms of (especially) late capitalism, the erosion of some workers' rights, conditions and security and the exclusion of others. Although in the UK, grander attempts are made to influence recruitment and employment practice, either through equalities legislation such as the Equalities Act (2010) or employer engagement strategies such as the Disability Confident Campaign (Department of Work and Pensions, 2014), many in the supported employment sector feel these have done little to change the employment landscape for people with learning difficulties. Despite the Equalities Act (2010) offering protection against discrimination for disabled people and a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure 'workers with disabilities [sic] … are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs' (UK Government, 2021), flat-lining learning difficulty employment rates (Hatton, 2018), make it hard to submit legislation has been particularly valuable. Likewise, the Disability Confident campaign has long been criticised for its ineffectiveness (Pring, 2019) and the ease with which employers can sign up with little or no scrutiny. Although such criticism has, at least in part, led to the promise of review in the 2021 National Disability Strategy (Department of Work and Pensions, 2021), many supported employment practitioners continue to rely on illustrating the business benefits of employing people with learning difficulties (Burke & Bates, 2019; Beyer & Beyer, 2017) rather than focusing on the inclusionary origins of their practice and it's important pedagogical leanings. Yet doing so risks framing those leanings in the social relations of capital that confuse inclusion with assimilation (Sardoč & McLaren, 2006) by welcoming anyone as long as they can play the game. For those unwilling or unable, another way must be found.

For Freire, problem posing education was primarily about social transformation rather than individual liberation and is therefore inseparable from the wider project of class struggle and revolutionary social change. However, by facilitating the advancement of individual liberation and challenging the neoliberal 'swindle of fulfilment' (Giroux, 2019) it also surely seeks radical advancement and social transformation through the empowerment of learners to comprehend their world and change it (Lister, 1994) and for educators to 'think

otherwise in order to act otherwise' (Giroux, 2010, p. 719). In doing so might we reasonably challenge the idea that preparing for adulthood should always equate to employability? Or perhaps it is not work per se that is the problem, but the way it has evolved and the values we place on it. It appears we tolerate only a narrow definition of remunerated work and exclude other forms of labour that come without the neoliberal shadow of mandatory productivity. Certainly with its foundations rooted in the collective struggle of oppression through the plea for a 'radical transformation of the social structure' (Gerhardt, 1993, p. 447), a problem posing education might unsettle the automatic assumption that to work is to achieve; especially while so few people with learning difficulties are enabled to do so.

5.2.3. The wrong match

Yet whether choosing freely or having that choice imposed, many people with learning difficulties still profess a desire for employment (Emerson, et al., 2005) and supported employment appears to offer the solution. As the literature considered in chapter 2 established, supported employment is profoundly educational in nature, but not formal, offers the objective eye of the outsider, an individualised programme of support and training, a personalised curriculum and expert tuition (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018). Furthermore, while the practice of training a set of tasks in one location and expecting the learner to be able to perform them in another has proven unhelpful to some people with cognitive, learning or memory impairments (Department of Health, 2011), supported employment attends to the premise that for many, the best place to learn the job is in the job. This 'place, train and maintain' stance (Beyer & Robinson, 2009, p. 8) pitches the job coach or other trainer alongside both jobseeker and employer in a proclamation of partnership (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018) that seeks a match between the worker's skills and the employer's needs (Beyer, et al., 2010). The question that remains intact however, asks whether supported employment is a well-meaning intervention or something that can challenge, change and disrupt; something to provoke a reconsideration of human worth.

My experience of the employment support world indicates that it is possible to glimpse how supported employment in general, and the job coach in particular, might sidestep the risk that, in a very real sense, education 'always presupposes a particular notion of future'

(Giroux, 2011, p. 6). But, I do not get the sense that the right match has been found for P1 and P3 and I am not at all sure about P2. Instead, what resonates through the stories of their earlier experiences is that individualised employment pathways have been set aside in favour of provision that finds work, but not necessarily work that suits. I chose the word *provision* because this is how it comes across. Support that was "provided" and training "delivered" - a banking system of education. Services. By craving the surety of safe employment outcomes, the neoliberal appetite for productivity is satisfied by establishing pre-defined vocational comfort zones within which people with learning difficulties might function. Certainly, a quick search for vocational programmes available at many colleges, confirms an overabundance of courses for people with learning difficulties that concentrate on catering, horticulture, art and crafts, while others describe the deadly 6 'Fs' of disability employment to represent a confinement to jobs related to: food, flowers, filth, filing, folding, and fetching (Griffin & Hammis, 2007). As P1 and P3 remind us, the predetermined employment support and training available can fall short of that which is helpful and, despite the alluring promises, there is clearly a fine line between facilitating equality and delivering sameness. Perhaps this is of little surprise given the outcomes driven systems within which we operate, where employment support is measured by the number of jobs, not the number of good jobs.

Of course, we all have to start our careers somewhere, and our dream job is rarely our first, but do those early attempts to support P1 and P3 into work consider only certain types of work to be suitable? It would appear to be the case - entry level jobs and poor prospects for the perceived unemployable (Humber, 2014) perhaps. Education can never be neutral (Giroux, 2010), but through dialogue can be transformative and empowering (Allen, 1987), not only for the individual, but for all (Freire, 2017). Supported employment offers pedagogical change and, accompanied by the contention that, with the right job and the right support, everyone who wants to work, can work (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018), it surely contains an attractive proposition. Indeed, I too have suggested frequently that when the right support is offered to people who want to work and their skills, interests and aspirations matched to the needs of employers, good outcomes ensue (Bates, 2020). This way, the employer gets the right worker and the jobseeker gets the right job. That's a win: win right?

Yet glib statements require refinement and for all the alluring headlines, our data does not provide the consistently wholesome picture required for this to always be the case. Being interested in finding work is not just some notional fascination with employment generated in a classroom, but surely demands a deeper sense of growing up, believing not only that work is a possible but that it is desirable. This is not just an educational objective but a life story involving family, friends, employers and community - it takes a village to raise a child and all that. Employment shouldn't only happen when the job coach comes, but when it is assumed, expected and aspired to by everyone. Developing skills and interests is not just about training, but feeds hermeneutically back and forth with the experience of life. To be told one cannot do or cannot be something, however the message is transmitted, will surely impact on what one thinks is possible and available. Let's not forget P1's words:

> P1: they was telling me I couldn't work because I got learning difficulties

Perhaps a little surprisingly, all three collaborators enter with the premise that work is assumed and steps to secure it intensified through the logic of support. Yet that logic is flawed and stands on the premise that employment is but a bit of training away and that all job seekers need to do is muster the energy and learn the rules - everyone can work if they try hard enough. Yet while employment is arranged in terms of the surplus value that can be produced by the workforce, decisions about who is admitted becomes a matter of productivity and 'value as a central form of mediation between human beings' (Sardoč & McLaren, 2006, p. 47). The early experiences of P1 and P3 demonstrate well how value is echoed across the workforce and amplified, perhaps, by jobs that are ill-suited or ill conceived. Yet worryingly, the inability to find and, more importantly, keep a job is internalised, justified only by a wearisome acceptance that employment opportunities may be beyond reach. In P3's terms:

> P3: Everything happens for a reason.

Yet P2's upbeat reminder of the importance of being assigned a contributory role skews my desire to problematize work further:

> P2: I've always been fascinated doing like retail work

Far from the grateful acquiescence I anticipated, P2's story is a study of how a part time job in a local supermarket fulfils a long term ambition. This appears to represent a good match and while weaknesses and inconsistency in provision are apparent (Greig, et al., 2014), we might be reassured that attempts to assist disabled people achieve ordinary and valued lives plays out in new and interesting ways. Supported employment may be about jobs and the support and training required to get them, but its values draw on an important pedagogical construct which 'implies teaching by discovery … rather than by instruction' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 91). Supported employment embraces the challenge for education to be both liberating and problem posing (Freire, 2017) and perhaps is where employment support and training starts to speak to Freire's contradictions.

The Conscious entrepreneur

Beyond the earnest appreciation of push and pull factors, there appears another influence, central to the identification of entrepreneurs learning difficulties; one that might reasonably be grounded in a belief in the art of the possible. For Freire, progressive education is conceived as an inspirational process through which:

> the educator seeks to mobilize the educand with a dream; a pedagogic practice through which the impossible, by virtue of the strength and conviction with which it is dreamed and announced, becomes possible (Webb, 2010, p. 336)

I had been drawn to the Freirean ideas around educational contradictions and indeed, my decision to interview/include support workers in part originated in the student: teacher contradiction. Although that decision may not have constructed data, it likely privileged some data over others. All three entrepreneurs describe an experience of enterprise facilitation; a stimulator to assist the development of thought that holds self-employment as a possibility. 'Enterprise facilitation works because it encourages more people to think seriously about entering the business arena' (Sirolli, 1999, p. 109) and although each entrepreneur experiences facilitation in a different way, as it interacts across formal and informal support networks, access to the potential of self-employment has been accrued externally. Here the role of educator blurs as these stories of support and training suggest something that moves beyond services; something that emerges from relationships with other - trainers, mentors, peers and support workers - allies on the entrepreneurial journey.

The 'right support' needed for those good outcomes? This no longer feels like Freire's banking education, but rather something shared.

But the awkward concept of "right support" also invites interrogation because of its implied tautological nuance. Is support is only right when it leads to good outcomes or are outcomes only good as a result of the right support? In supported employment terms outcomes are interpreted in terms of paid work and the construction of support and training mechanisms that enable it to be achieved and sustained – of *doing* employment and *being* employed. P1, P2 and P3's earlier experiences remind us that support isn't always "right", but each tells a story of later support that implicates colleagues in the act of change. For P2 it was the association with an innovative learning difficulty organisation that proved fruitful in seeking refuge in entrepreneurial activity. P2 was invited to become Artist in Residence for a local charity. It was then that the idea of using P2's artwork as a way to make money first came about.

Similarly, P3 gained knowledge and access through their support worker:

> P3: my key worker told me about a course that was about to start which was about helping people to set up their own business.

Although P1 rejected an earlier invitation to join the enterprise, it was her/his social care support network that later facilitated her/his involvement:

> P1: I was asked if I want to join and I said no because I didn't know if I would be able to the job'.

> P1: soon after it was set up, I was asked to join and invited for an interview.

But this is no passive facilitation devoid of educational direction. Freire (2017) warns against replacing one system of oppression with another and urges hopeful dialogue in which people 'perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting' (Freire, 2017, p. 58). But is this job coaching in a different form or something else? Freire acknowledges that liberating educators need to be both directive and facilitatory (Pouwels, 2019) and recognises the prior knowledge in their possession (Shor & Freire, 1987; Freire, 2017). However, as Pouwels (2019, p. 3) contends:

The central conflict in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire is inequality, the power conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed: the domination by the oppressors. The result of the oppression is an alienation to humanity which affects both the oppressed and the oppressors. The task of a revolutionary pedagogy of the oppressed is to confront domination and dehumanisation (alienation) and fight for liberation and humanisation.

As P1 relates, the disappointment experienced as a result of the relentless endeavour to find work was only alleviated by exposure to the opportunities made available within the enterprise:

> P1: For a few months, I worked on a different contacts as I learned what needed to be done. It was OK and I enjoyed working with the others but it wasn't really the best job for me … so the support worker suggested that I try working in the office doing admin. This was much better and suited me much more. I had to organise the company meetings, take minutes, work out the finances and pay the wages.

> P1: My support worker helped by encouraging me and making me feel at ease. As I got more confident, I was able to learn new skills and take an NVQ. It was really important to have good support and to be able to have a job that suited me. That was one of the best things about running our own company.

With this in mind, therefore, educators and students must walk side by side in open dialogue as each learns, in harmony with the other, to understand the limits of their situation (Lister, 1994). But this is no individualised conflict and moves to consider the material circumstances of both student and teacher and the ways in which the actions of the latter are frequently constrained by their organisational position. Perhaps this is why there is little symmetry in the organisational origins of support for P1, P2 and P3 and that it is individual support workers who seem critical to the crystallisation of entrepreneurial endeavours. Interestingly, P3's support manager presents the desire to break free of pre-determined employment pathways itself as a display of entrepreneurial spirit:

> P5: when I started it, this was considered, oh, it's a vanity project for her/him. S/he's always wanted this, but it's something that s/he wants to do, but it's not really real. And I think it's only just starting to change now. And I think it takes a long time to change. The culture, I've had a lot of thoughts about this is, most employment

consultants cannot become what I would call this sort of entrepreneur facilitator. Most of the employment consultants are very good at working with the candidates and the employers and building plans around them. But they've worked in a safe environment themselves. And it's very difficult to get, you hear people talking about an entrepreneur spirit. Well, you've got to have that to some degree to actually realise that other people may also have that also.

In this way the experience of self-employment liberates the educator from the furore of fixed employment arrangements. To do so opens up alternative sites of exploration through which the jobseeker may understand more about themselves and their situation, challenge the insufficiency of options placed before them and, in Freire's terms (2017), become more fully human. Freire (2017) does not reject the individual but rather the concept of an 'independent autonomous self … which has no foundation in the reality of the human condition' (Allen, 1987, p. 221). In this sense, the experience of enterprise facilitation aligns with an ambition for education to be both political and active and adheres to Freire's claim that it should include a 'necessary reinvention in different settings through 'critically reflective action and critical reflection based on practice action' (Gerhardt, 1993, p. 452).

But these are not isolated individuals. As P2 reminds us, the ability to imagine self-employment as a possibility was also influenced by the stories of others who themselves became regulators of aspiration:

P2: And people run their own workshops, like, bit like, (name), he designs some carpentry work, and then just send it off to the customers and I just felt like, how they do that in different places. I could do it myself.

As Crowther and Martin ask whether 'liberation can ever be facilitated' (2018, p. 8), we can witness examples of how a more distributed take on autonomy (Graby & Greenstein, 2016) circumnavigates a wholesale adherence to Freirean thinking and invites the adaptation of his ideas around individual circumstances (Gerhardt, 1993). In this way the sense of a collaborative approach to a re-written future is foregrounded by P2:

P2: It's bit like having a filing cabinet. You go through your filing cabinet and it's absolutely packed and you feel like I can't open it. I can't get information to come out. It makes you feel like I need a new filing cabinet, I need a new story.

The extent, of course, to which these words can be considered that 'radical transformation of the social structure' (Gerhardt, 1993, p. 447) is of course questionable, but there is something interesting happening. Self-employment feels different. What comes across so strongly in these experiences of enterprise is the sharing of possibilities and an ability to visualise a different future beyond the tedium of the given - a sense of hope.

Contained within their account of entrepreneurship, each entrepreneur confirms their vision of an alternative future. For P1, this is about articulating the significance of providing more opportunities for people with learning difficulties, a factor which proved compelling in her/his decision to join.

P1: I really liked the idea of joining because the company was run by people with learning difficulties and created paid jobs for people who could not get a job anywhere else.

But this is no quiet revolution. The tensions that emerged earlier, between researcher and collaborators, between anonymity and celebration, were illustrative of the entrepreneurs desire to use their stories not only to get more business, but to fundamentally ensure the key message gets out that other people can do this too. P3's concern that their work leaves a footprint is telling:

P3: I don't want anyone to feel like they can't apply when they actually can do something. Because it happens to a lot of people with special needs and I don't want them to feel like they're not capable of doing anything and that they can't achieve anything when they actually can.

P2 too celebrates her/his role as influencer and seems well aware of the responsibility it carries for changing the way people think:

P2: it makes them see me as an icon.

This is important stuff that places any consideration of self-employment beyond the confines of individual achievement to ensure others may access the hopeful opportunities it represents. Setting hope as the 'pursuit of completeness' (Webb, 2010, p. 329), P1, P2 and P3 inviting others to see the sprigs of optimism established in their stories, is an important part of the way each entrepreneur values the contribution they make as inspirational actors.

Hope is not presented here as a solo pursuit, but rather in its collective conceptualisation. As Jacobs (2005) helpfully explains, there is a difference between individual desire – *hope-for*, which emerges from personal wants - for a job, a car or new shoes and the collective offering - *hope-in,* that is propelled by the 'web of social relations each of us inhabits' (Jacobs, 2005, p. 785). That these stories offer promises of an alternative, conveys hope as a central pedagogical instrument and recognises interconnectivity as an essential human condition evoking elements of both critical and transformative hope (Webb, 2013). Critical hope appears through the appearance of a dissatisfaction with the way things are - a 'future-oriented longing for that which is missing' (Webb, 2013, p. 402) and is contained within journeys that start with the 'experiences, discourses and relations within which students are embedded' (p. 403) – of disability, unemployment and exclusion. Yet while such exploratory rejection of the formulated conjures no pre-determined version of self-employment, the stories rejoice in the relationship between entrepreneur and support worker through the dialogical exploration of ideas and action. This is transformative hope, emanating from a shared vision of the possible that is 'grounded in a confidence in the powers of human agency' (Webb, 2013, p. 409). Hope, in these stories, exude Freirean consciousness and 'pedagogic practice through which the impossible, by virtue of the strength and conviction with which it is dreamed and announced, becomes possible' (p. 410). Thus the consideration of the "what if", born of Freirean praxis, becomes the invitation to the otherwise' (Giroux, 2010). As P2 puts it:

> P2: But I really feel like if I can break down these barriers between unemployment, and employment, and we can take these unemployed people out of homes, off the streets and get them into a really good job when they can, like, do the (trade), do the business side of it. Try and create an army of learning disability (tradespeople) and get them to do things to help other people.

Consciousness invites action and these stories continue to inspire both those close to the entrepreneurs and those further afield. But there is a risk that this obsequious focus on the academic belittles the importance of the very real circumstances faced by disabled people. Talk of interdependent autonomy might relinquish the focus on unitary individualism and promote support for not only 'aspirations which fall within current conventions but also for those which are still outside' (Graby & Greenstein, 2016, p. 246), but to be fascinated by a subject does not facilitate change. Self-employment might be spoken of as a possibility but it is still infused with more than a trace of normalcy so we must also confront the neoliberal ideal of what a business is.

5.3. The enterprise - Plugging in the market – ideas, customers and viability

5.3.1. Business idea generation

> There are lots of different ways to get a good business idea. Some people spot an opportunity or have an idea out of the blue. Others have a particular skill, interest or talent that they want to use. It might also be possible to develop a hobby or pastime. Your idea may be a new product or service or it might be a different way of doing something that other people already do. However it is important to make sure that the idea fits your skills and interests (Rapid Enterprise Development, 2020, p. 6).

Of crucial importance to building self-employment opportunities is the identification of a decent business idea. Many enterprise trainers urge participants to think about solving problems, exploiting assets or converting hobbies. Some talk of legislative change, environmental factors or shifts in social attitudes as important drivers of business idea generation. The move from product development and innovation to the emergence of a service industry has been incessant and the appearance of those tech giants (as yet largely devoid of profit) presents the notion of business idea generation in a whole new realm. As (Lawrence, 2013, p. 48) puts it, idea generation is:

> no longer just a matter of land, labour and capital. The entrepreneurial role has been enhanced by diversification and sophistication, especially in relation to such imponderables as segmentation, niche identification, service origination, and the reconfiguration of existing industries.

For many non-disabled people, the route to self-employment frequently passes through a salaried position where opportunities to develop competence and understanding within a particular sector, learn the ropes and develop networks are available. Such a progression

facilitates an understanding of the minutiae within a given sector or business area from which ideas for change, improvement or expansion might be cultivated. Every sector has a set of 'options and constraints. Things you have to do, challenges and problems peculiar to the industry, together with choices and alternatives' (Lawrence, 2013, p. 213). The invention of genuinely new products remains pretty rare though and it is often the stoic application of endurance that enables the identification, research and testing of new market opportunities. Detail wins the day. Yet with the route to other forms of employment so often unavailable for many people with learning difficulties, and access to the insider view through salaried employment, the starting point to business becomes an assessment of individual skills and interests; often considered irrespective of their commercial potential. This makes it harder to develop enterprise opportunities in unusual and niche markets leaving people with learning difficulties with the familiar arena of catering, horticulture, arts and crafts from which to carve opportunities.

However, both P2 and P3 navigate this space expertly by subverting the over adherence to traditional business custom and combine skills with disability to create commercial relationships. In a sense there is something of themselves in what they sell. For P2's enterprise, the opportunity to practice and develop skills is what underpins the enterprise – from there, products emerge, but only those that are of interest:

> As her/his artistic skills developed and her/his own distinctive style started to emerge, P2 was invited to become Artist in Residence for a local charity. It was then that the idea of using P2's work as a way to make money first came about.

P3 is similarly enmeshed in her/his enterprise:

> P3: Before the course, I had sold some of my designs to relatives and people I knew from my church. My challenge was to reach out to people I didn't know. At first I was nervous but once I started doing it, I felt good inside which was a big relief. My mentor helped me to think about my product and suggested I kept working on my designs and to think about what the customers want. That was really important as it really boosted my confidence and built me into a stronger person.

There is something interesting in the way P2 and P3 powerfully engage themselves and others in their enterprises. P2 was initially attracted to art as a calming strategy, but this led

to trouble as s/he drew on walls. Yet with the guidance of others, her/his skill was distilled into commercial value and is central to her/his entrepreneurial offering. At once uncomfortable and liberating, such assignation again displays something of Goodley and colleagues' (2017) Dishuman quality to it as the entrepreneurs turn traits, skills and interests that might otherwise be considered part of their disabling condition, to commercial advantage. Earlier I considered how a Dishuman positionality ponders the 'deep-rooted stereotypes of the archetypal human and neoliberal citizen' by celebrating 'the disruptive potential of disability to trouble these dominant notions' (University of Sheffield, 2021). For P2, the very behaviour that had come to symbolise her/his difference is now sold back to the non-disabled world as a marketable product. This troubles differentiation and exclusion on the grounds of disability while simultaneously demanding inclusion on humanist terms.

At the same time, although the individual experience of P1 is less concerned with a direct Dishuman application, it is apparent here too. Her/his entry through an existing array of contracts at once holds conventional business relations to the fore while offering alternative renditions of entrepreneurial activity. Here, the focus on enterprise growth is in order to provide more opportunity. As s/he moves between jobs in search of the right match between individual skill and organisational need, the company plays out a commercial role while disrupting organisational convention in its aspiration to create employment opportunities, specifically, for people with learning difficulties.

> P1: doing the admin helped me to really understand how the company worked and what we had to do to get more contracts and employ more people.

This conflagration of extended possibilities creates a channel through which P1 is able to influence others about what it means to think otherwise:

> P1: We were invited to different conferences and training events, talking to people about how the company worked.

> P1: Sometimes I was the only disabled person at the conference and so I think what I said made a big difference to the people there.

We do not know the extent to which these enterprises trade on endemic notions of disability, but P2's designs do invite increased interaction between disability and society by

facilitating connectivity between the two through her/his creativity. But is s/he "**dis**-ing" traditional forms of enterprise by doing so? It would certainly seem that such interconnection between disabled creativity and conventional enterprise requires an alternative reading of what it means to be in business.

But these prosaic dances with the market are all underpinned by the need to have something that others values and are willing to pay for. With business ideas on the 'table', conventional wisdom suggests the next step is to consider whether the ideas are viable. For this, entrepreneurs, disabled or otherwise, turn their attention to the external – the market.

5.3.2. Customers and consumers

All enterprises need customers and consumers. Sometimes these are one and the same, at other times separate. Whether one is customer – the purchaser of a product or service, consumer – the user, or both will influence how, when, what and how much is spent. My decision to buy a chocolate bar for myself (I am customer and consumer) will involve a completely different set of motivations, considerations and choices, including how much to spend, to those involved should I buy a box of chocolates for my partner. In the former value resides in the weight of chocolate, my preferences, knowledge of alternative confectionary and ease of access. However, in the latter I am customer, my partner consumer, and the chocolates now represent a gift, an expression of love, appreciation or apology. Value is measured differently, now perhaps more about packaging, money spent and another's taste preferences. My chocolate bar is unlikely up be to that job. Incidentally, we see the same arrangements play out within the ever increasing marketization of support. Throughout this thesis, I have referred to "job seekers" to describe those in receipt of support. These are the consumers in a world that tries to adequately explain the relationship they have with the customer - the commissioners of service (McLaughlin, 2009).

None the less, this is standard business stuff. The need to understand what it is that an enterprise offers and the headaches it solves, links directly to the customer profile - where they live, what they do, what age they are – and the competition, providers of same or similar products and services. P1, P2 and P3 understand their enterprises well, but it is enterprise as an unfaltering extension of themselves that is of interest:

P2: My talent is different compared to other creative designers. I'm my own unique person. When I design stuff it is different to the way other people do it. I have a vision that I follow.

The confluence of self and enterprise is what is then exposed to the market in a realisation of disabled potential to rework the images of incapability and dependence. Some, especially in the social enterprise world, have questioned both the ethics and value of "trading" on disability (Baker, 2004) but I don't think this is the same thing. This is not the charitable application of sympathy to evoke pity for the needy but rather a rewritten story that reshapes human capacity from that which is considered a statistical outlier (Goodley, 2017) to something more emancipatory. But will the idea work? Next to test and measure.

5.3.3. Viability

I am thinking about enterprise when I spot a BBC News report sharing concerns about the rise in the COVID-19 rates as a further 43,738 cases are reported (BBC, 2021). A quick check online reveals that the NHS Confederation are calling for restrictions to be reintroduced amid concerns that the increase in numbers might lead to "unsustainable pressure" on the NHS during the winter (Shearing & Lee, 2021). Yet the News also reports concerns that to do so would damage the viability of many businesses in the hospitality sector. Viability.

Viability - The quality or state of being viable; capacity for living; the ability to live under certain conditions. Also transferred: now esp. feasibility; ability to continue or be continued; the state of being financially sustainable (OED Online, 2021b).

The business world holds viability as one of the cornerstones of enterprise. To be viable is to be successful, sustainable and profitable (Murray, 2020). But viability also carries hints of isolation, of independence and singular vitality - there is no corresponding unity and interconnectedness in the concept of viability. To be viable is to stand alone. Although it might indeed appeal to common sense notions of business - that businesses need to make more than they spend - its application seems unequal. I think about viability and the narratives of enterprise presented here. Each is involved in business, but at no point is viability discussed. Each describe *doing* business but not being *in* business. Yet all appear to conceptualise enterprise in terms of its parts.

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P3: I learned business and our target marketing and all of that stuff. I planned my business plans also to help me get started up and that really help so much.

P2: We started meeting once a week in a cafe for an hour or so to talk about my business, check emails and plan things. I designed a logo and got business cards printed. We also designed a leaflet and I bought my own computer. We set up a support group to help me develop my self-employment and to get new contracts.

P1 expertly summarises what the function of enterprise was for them:

P1: what we had to do to get more contracts and employ more people.

When P1, P2 and P3 describe important aspects of business, income, customers and market, they retain a focus on the individual importance of their enterprise. This is not profit and growth nor some capitalist dream, but a reflection of the exclusionary experience of disability. That their self-employment is not considered in these terms should be of no surprise given that, interestingly, business success does not appear to be important in definitions of self-employment. Indeed, in the UK it is essentially by agreement with HM Revenue and Customs [HMRC] that (self) employed status is determined using a range of indicators to help work out what that status for tax and employment purposes might be. According to HMRC (2021), an individual is likely to be self-employed if they:

- are in business for themselves, are responsible for the success or failure of their business and can make a loss or a profit
- can decide what work they do and when, where or how to do it
- can hire someone else to do the work
- are responsible for fixing any unsatisfactory work in their own time
- use their own money to buy business assets, cover running costs, and provide tools and equipment for their work
- can work for more than one client

Remarkably no mention of viability yet lots of talk of independence. The question that, of course, arises is whether the provision of support should be a considered a factor in any calculation of viability or consideration of self-employment. To put it another way, does the externalisation of support and training for people with learning difficulties render these enterprises unviable? It would certainly seem harsh given how many of the largest organisations in the world like AirBnB, DropBox and Peloton still fail to make a profit (Lisa, 2021).

I think about other enterprises and a recent conversation I had about support for an existing social enterprise. We had been discussing how this might be arranged in a new post-COVID era. For years, success for this enterprise had been conceptualised in terms of being able to fund its own support. I too had shared this vision and liked the idea of disabled people employing non-disabled people in a carve-up of typical roles. But in the conversation, another reading became apparent. Replacing a story of an enterprise with enough contracts to generate sufficient surplus to employ support workers, I imagined the story as disabled people on wages suppressed in order to afford a non-disabled worker. Much more uncomfortable.

It is not uncommon for small business owners to describe their enterprise in terms of success even after closure if it has provided income, choice and independence when needed (Kim, et al., 2008, p. 128), but I wonder the extent to which P1, P2 and P3's enterprise would be considered viable in purely market terms. Yet what comes across in these stories is a pride in the status of self-employment - the enterprises *give* to the entrepreneurs by demanding a reconsideration of what success looks like.

P4: s/he feels very proud. And he also feels a sense of responsibility that s/he is somebody who is promoting and celebrating the world of learning disability through art. And informing people about, you know, the issues that are involved with that.

This view of enterprise success is echoed by P3's support worker who advocates placing the definition of success in the eye of the beholder:

P5: I don't know, I mean, what is your parameter of what is a successful business? I mean, if it's just judged always on the money that you're bringing in, then s/he probably couldn't be judged as being that …, as successful. If you're judging it about.. is s/he actually doing what s/he wants to do, and actually being self-sufficient and self-survival, then yes, s/he is. So it's difficult... it's on what your idea is of what a real business is?

This is a really important point and replaces the definition of enterprise based on purely neoliberal market terms to one that involves self-valorisation - for some 'a vital component in the fight against capitalism' (Graby, 2015, p. 145) rather than the autonomous individual of the humanist ideal that belies the authenticity of distributing that autonomy (Graby &

Greenstein, 2016). Yet like many work-creation enterprises, these examples of self-employment do share characteristics (some quite uncomfortable) that blur the boundaries between a supportive welfare state and a ruthless market (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2014). Are we creating opportunities for disabled people or imposing exclusionary neoliberal principles even further? Are these enterprises just pretending to be businesses, but propped up by enthusiastic support teams?

The answer to these questions lurks in tensions that emerge between the development of the enterprise – business objectives and the pursuit of the individual – personal objectives (Hutchinson, et al., 2021). To prioritise the first may mean at some point a business decision has to be made that could run contrary to the best interests of the worker, whilst prioritising the second may lead a personal decision has to be made that runs contrary to the interests of the business. Either could be damaging to both business and entrepreneur yet each entrepreneur manages to sustain both business and personal goals. Note how P3 reveals a complex understanding of where the enterprise is (especially as a result of COVID-19), the opportunities it continues to offerher.him all the while retaining an eye on the future:

> P3: The business is quite small still and the pandemic has made things very difficult, especially when the wholesalers were closed, but I want to build up my business and keep making progress so I can keep on improving my skills. I have some regular customers who came to my stall and now I have some that buy my products online.

Surely another example of the inseparability of P1, P2 and P3 from their enterprise and further reason why it has been so hard to present meaning and significance in an easy tri-fold. Enterprise and personal interests work a wonderful entanglement and engage with support and training in meaningful ways to create opportunity and change. While Wry and York (2017) offer a distinction between single minded entrepreneurs, mixed entrepreneurs and balanced entrepreneurs to explain how enterprise workers balance their social and commercial interests, they recognise that 'actors may variably hold both role and/or personal identities that align with social welfare and/or commercial logics' (Wry & York, 2017, p. 454). Others draw on the difference skills innovators, entrepreneurs and managers offer social enterprises (Boschee, 2013) as they traverse the gap between commercial and

social interests. I wonder how many – or how few, of these skills are easily identified in people with learning difficulties.

But the hegemonic tenacity of enterprise credibility resides most fervently in the "how to" business websites that enlist the weight of common sense when conceptualising their perfect entrepreneur. These suggest the key entrepreneurial traits include having guts and determination (Griffiths, 2016), being able to overcome barriers (Daum, 2016), being able to spot opportunities (Wilkinson, 2015), tenacity (Hancock, 2021), feeling comfortable with ambiguity (Sandefer, 2012) and managing networks and relationships (MacRae, 2021). Are these not exactly the things disabled people have to develop to necessarily exist in an ableist world? Twenty five years ago I was described as a shadowy figure (Mencap, 1996) working in areas where 'independence, advocacy, support, advice, interference, trust, responsibility, confidence get confused' (Mencap, 1996, p. 7). But I am not sure I was. Rather, I think it was simply that my work was new and that the article merely conveyed a disquiet around what was felt naturally realistic, comfortable and safe.

Yet pure neoliberal entrepreneurship demands a fervent individualism that I do not see in the enterprises here. What appears instead is a commitment to inter-dependency, relationships and trust that simultaneously rejects the ableist logic of the successful business while adopting enterprise as the very vehicle of disruptive dialogue. This brings me to a final reflection. Although it feels rather late to raise it now, I have not previously touched upon what entrepreneurship actually means. Although I have consistently described P1. P2 and P3 as entrepreneurs, not all would agree. Over the years, I have had conversations with representatives of many of the formal UK business institutional structures, such as the British Business Bank and Innovate UK. These have always been convivial and interesting with the idea of people with learning difficulties running enterprise welcomed. But I have never had the sense that it is accepted. For the true nature of the late capitalist structure within which we all operate demands more - not quirky, well-meaning social projects, but growth orientated enterprise that hold a distinction between self-employment and entrepreneurship. Yet I think P1, P2 and P3 hold their own and alongside many of the socially constructed assumptions explored above, perhaps we need to redefine what these terms mean and consider how their use serves only to continue to dominate and domesticate.

The entrepreneur

According to the dictionaries, the word entrepreneur stems from the French word to undertake – entreprendre – and appears to have emerged in the 18th Century to refer to one who 'organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise' or 'a person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks' (OED online, 2020). With plenty to suggest its roots reach further into the annals of history (Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2016; Long, 1983), it was the economist Richard Cantillon who first placed notions of entrepreneurship into the realm of economic theory (Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2016). By describing entrepreneurs as any person without a fixed income (Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2014), Cantillon captured a broad section of the population that included many who operated outside of the law. Yet central to his depiction of those not in the direct employ of someone else, was the sense of uncertainty that Cantillon, and many that followed, associated with the term. The perception of risk encountered as entrepreneurs 'buy at certain prices in the present only to sell at uncertain prices in the future' (Long, 1983, p. 48) continued to be a major plank in the evolution of entrepreneurial theory that would later include innovation and novelty as an entrepreneurial mechanism to manage risk in the market economy (Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2014).

Like many terms, the use of the word entrepreneur attracts many temporal, geographical and cultural variations but, with manifestations identifiable in many languages, frequently carries denotation of action, creativity, a sense of freedom, responsibility and, sometimes, of disrupting the social order (Boutillier & Uzunidis, 2016). I rather enjoy the dalliance with other languages such as the links made with the Sanskrit word for self-motivation - anthaprerna (Hosono, 2012) and, although I do not here proffer incontestable evidence, I am taken by the etymological discussions at play and the consideration of how the term revolves around action, doing and intent. Yet, locating the entrepreneur amid an intention to 'do' surely invites an inevitable attachment of entrepreneurial activity to the definition – entrepreneurs are people who do entrepreneurial things. But what are these?

By placing entrepreneurs in the midst of business and enterprise, risk taking and uncertainty (Long, 1983), I continued to reflect on the application of such classifications to my research by wondering whether this entrepreneurial activity was the work of the entrepreneur or

whether entrepreneurs are the people who undertake entrepreneurial activity. I found such questions invited speculation that I had been focusing on the wrong thing and needed instead approach things from a different angle. To assist with my search for meaning, I turned to the OECD and their Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme (EIP) which was established to generate data on entrepreneurship and its impact on national economies (OECD, 2017). Rather than placing the entrepreneur centre stage, the EIP actually foregrounds entrepreneurship as the 'phenomenon associated with entrepreneurial activity' (OECD, 2017, p. 14) and, in doing so, shifts the focus away from the entrepreneur as the unit of study.

This somewhat tautological association between entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurship provided space for a broader sense of what each term means and with the OECD defining entrepreneurship as the 'creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets (OECD, 2017, p. 14), it is clearly imbued with strong links to the economy. Yet that idea of 'new processes' caught my eye as a possible link to this research as I explored the conceptualisation of entrepreneurship in the lives of people with learning difficulties. Few of the businesses I knew were linked to product innovations and most traded within existing markets, but nearly all sought new ways of producing or serving those markets and, in doing so, were being entrepreneurial. The term entrepreneur is clearly a moveable feast and experience conditions me to doubt full consensus, but armed with an understanding that it is imbued with intent, economic activity, risk and innovative ways or means to manage that risk, I am satisfied that I possess a decent understanding of the field. In addition, with the Entrepreneurship Indicators Programme further suggesting that it's actually not all about money and that their definition holds for activity 'related to increasing employment, tackling inequalities or environmental issues (OECD, 2017, p. 14), concepts of entrepreneurship can be broader still. Yet for the people I work with and for the purposes of this research, one last explanation (rather than definition) came to light which was that entrepreneurs 'pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control' (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1990, p. 23). This must surely be the most fitting place to stop.

6.   Conclusion

This has been something of a challenging journey. I have to admit that, to a certain extent, I wanted to undertake research in order to expose bad practice and shine a light on problems on my own terms - to give the system a bit of a kicking as it were. Wright Mills (1959) calls for such private troubles to be used as a gateway to public concerns, but I found myself being overwhelmed by the injustice, ineffectiveness and, in some cases futility, of what happens in the employment support world. The more I reflected it seemed, the more the limitations of my own work were exposed by the enormity of the social, economic and political subjugation endured by people with learning difficulties. I guess this'll be a familiar story to many researchers. Why, I wondered, is there continued commissioning of employment education, training and support that appears to run contrary to the research evidence? Why do we ignore such research and ply instead our trade of separation? Is it that the key messages fail to get through to the right people or is it an act of collective forgetting (Giroux, 2019) that invites the perceived inevitability of unemployment for people so labelled? After all, as Maclaren observes, 'capitalism anticipates forgetfulness, nourishes social amnesia … and paves the world with a sense of inevitability and same-ness' (Sardoč & McLaren, 2006, p. 53).

Yet my salubrious pessimism did not prevail, and I found the stories of enterprise offered by P1, P2 and P3 to contain wisdom, optimism and hope amid relationships that shared a vision of alternative futures. In the day job, I have often quipped that I have had to learn how to look like I'm doing what is expected so that I can get on with what actually needs to be done. But perhaps there is more to this than a flippant one-liner. The stories of P1, P2 and P3 reveal important human, pedagogical and economic relationships, but they also share a sense of "otherwise"- of people; alone and in groups, doing things differently. Self-employment appears to be a conduit through which this occurs. A tool used to subdue the attraction of the neoliberal market which seeks to exclude, individualise and isolate certain members of society. Curiously, the very darling of capitalism, entrepreneurship, seems to be being used as a force for change that offers one solution to the precarious lives (Bates, et al., 2015) that so many people with learning difficulties have to endure. But is it as simple as that? To (mis)appropriate the words of Jerome Bruner (2004, p. 691), I want to try

something 'that might not be quite ready'. Something that stems from my concern that self-employment may just be a distraction that simply serves to reinforce the prevailing organisation of things and that using enterprise to evoke change in the material relations - segregation, isolation and precarity - frequently experienced by people with learning difficulties, is fruitless.

6.1.   Jūjitsu master or just borrowing the master's tools?

When P1's humanity is removed at the artless hands of social officialdom, s/he replaces it with an entrepreneurial gusto that enables her place to be redistributed, reconsidered and reshaped. But does this undermine the social force from which such officialdom originates? After all, to explore self-employment is still an adherence to the same rules. Audrey Lorde's powerful observation that the 'master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 2019, p. 73) may emanate from her experience as a black lesbian feminist in the face of the heterosexual white bias (White, 2020), but it was also an anthem of difference. Perhaps a similar call is being made here. Although self-employment in the lives of people with learning difficulties may not be about to bring down then capitalist project, it is being offered as a call to outsiders to learn how to carve strength from difference in order to build a world better suited to all (Lorde, 2019; White, 2020). P1's reworking of his/her human position through enterprise at once shows a powerful re-rendering of what it is to be human, what it is to be connected and what is to be part of something bigger than us. Yet it is important to remember that this "something bigger" was built by others, for their purposes and that the extent to which it is wise, or even possible, for people with learning difficulties to gain full access must be continually questioned. Or perhaps there is an alternative reading.

Although Jūjitsu, the martial art, is considered by some to have originated as a peaceful, way for Buddhist monks to protect themselves while traveling (Greenwich Jujitsu Academy , 2018), it is commonly known as a fighting style adopted by Samurai warriors to combat heavily armed attackers (Century Martial Arts, 2019) and to disable, disarm or kill them (Rousseau, 2018). Deriving from the Chinese characters "jū" for gentle and "Jitsu" for art (Essential Jiu jitsu, n.d.), Jūjitsu offers a "gentle art" on terms that donate the bending or yielding to an opponent's direction of attack while attempting to control it (Augustyn, 2021).

Do I see enterprise in this light? I'm not sure. At my age I can no longer claim the position of "angry young man", but I do like the idea that enterprise offers a subversive twist and resistant possibilities (Bates, et al., 2015) despite the logic in which it resides. It does seem apparent that P1, P2 and P3 have used the power of capitalism in enterprise in ways that both subvert and distract. Are they too, I wonder, looking like they are doing what is expected so they can get one with what needs to be done?

6.2.   Q - How does employment support practice interact with ways in which people with learning difficulties engage in entrepreneurial activity?

The question of whether the supported employment world is the right place to locate support for self-employment for people with learning difficulties is mired with complexity. From a pedagogical perspective, some consider access and arrange training and support for enterprise in stand-alone programmes that invite people to opt in. These may well be attractive for funders, but such an approach requires all participants to know what self-employment is before signing up, a detail that may exclude the many disabled and non-disabled people who are not quite clear. Others offer a single gateway into employment support that initially concerns itself only with the art of the possible as disabled people explore all the routes available to them. This is similarly attractive, but may become subject to the narrow employment outcomes so beholden to the imagination of commissioners and the capability and capacity of the support agency. Self-employment demands more: to think about self-employment as a transformation, to identify business opportunities beyond the Cottage Industries, the Arts and Crafts, to adapt mainstream enterprise processes and to establish an infrastructure of aspiration that ensures support for the individual, the enterprise and the specifics of the sector (Bates, 2009). This involves others. Whereas an employer provides task lists, processes and routines, these must be recreated for the self-employed. Where this requires education, training, and support, mentors and business trainers pave the way. Yet we must think about how this is arranged and the ways in which people with learning difficulties may experience barriers to it. But I am not satisfied that this is different to any other potential entrepreneur. The term "supported self-employment" has started to appear – in good faith no doubt - but if self-employment always involves others,

we are in danger of creating another "special" category that serves to close opportunities or see self-employment itself as too much of a risk, a burden or "outside our remit". As, P4 explained, support for self-employment demands more:

> P4: you know, s/he used to meet [support] in McDonald's for an hour a week. And that, that would not have offered him/her what s/he needs to run a business.

The support of enterprise through familiar employment support mechanisms creates a tension between the obfuscatory idiom of outcomes based commissioning and the broader desire to explore self-employment as a possibility. For this, control has to be relinquished. Under most terms, supported employment locates the tiller very much in the hands of the job coach whose primary purposes is to apply her educational art (Apple, 1996) by defining the match that connects employer need with job seeker ambition. The vocational profiling and employment planning process conjures up the direction of travel, with employer engagement placing detail on the map. The employer identifies the tasks and dictates the order, quality and speed at which they are to be completed. Although job coach and job seeker work together to agree the "how", it is the job coach who owns the tools for this – task and workplace analysis, systematic instruction (Beyer, 2012), strategies and adjustments (British Association of Supported Employment, 2018). Once employer standards have been met, the job coach fades from the worksite and the employee is left to work independently (Collins, 2002; Wehman, 2012). Success is defined as the disabled person meeting the expectations of the employer, by fitting in and performing.

But self-employment is different and the outcomes less certain. No longer is it possible to define them in advance using the standard gauges of supported employment; to provide much detail to the map. Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) suggest that:

> the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification … It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation (p. 12).

Perhaps the self-employment map is always emergent. To define "successful" in normative ways is to propose a humanist application and we must be wary of doing so. Far more important is to offer the opportunity for the entrepreneur themselves to define what

success looks like. P1, P2 and P3 offer ample illustration that this involves relationships, connection and messages of hope; not quite revolutionary social change perhaps but significantly disruptive none the less. The introduction of another form – the enterprise – creates possibility and change, but this comes with ambiguity, perhaps at times, even disorder. For the service provider operating in the employment support framework, this presents a challenge. Enterprises, like jobs, may not last forever. Entrepreneurs, after all, solve problems and manage risks that are frequently not of their making. That is the nature of enterprise and although this can make it hard to plan, it does also usher opportunity. Of course, we can all inadvertently participate in practice that reproduces the ruling ideology (Belsey, 2002) and we must be suspicious of anything that suggests otherwise. But self-employment seems to allow interesting things to materialise when the enterprise, the individual and the training work together in certain ways, with imagination, collaboration and skill. This is surely an art not a science.

6.3. Q - In what ways do local employment agencies, families and others utilise more distributed entrepreneurial approaches?

With the enterprise "map" encompassing the entrepreneur, the support and the business, it becomes dynamic, relational and exploratory rather than fixed or amenable to being drawn beforehand. As a conversation I enjoyed recently concluded:

> 'Enterprise development is like following an A-Z. Only there is no Z, and we are not at all sure about A'.

This shift (of control? of power?), makes self-employment important. But it also makes it harder to maintain. Commissioning that seeks to support more people into work tends to focus the transition across a simple binary - unemployment to employment. But enterprise has a life of its own - sometimes to flourish, sometimes to wither, always to change. Within the pedagogical structures of formal education, of course, we need a name for things that do not go to plan. I have started to hear people talk about "productive failure", but perhaps it should not be read as failure at all, but considered progression to sidestep the same tired old meters of normalcy that define enterprise success in terms of viability, growth and independence. Every experience tells us something and I bear witness to enterprise

planning and development being engaged as an innovative vocational planning tool, a chance to find out about the individual; to inform the map. Of course it would be easy to offer the refrain about sensible use of public money and to suggest that funding the vagaries of exploratory self-employment was self-indulgent. However to do so would ascribe to self-employment a limit that would govern further possibilities.

P1, P2 and P3 all describe education and support arrangements that celebrate possibility, that open rather than close opportunities and that understand the limits of its own capability – seeking the support of others when specific personal or entrepreneurial input is required. Most of all, this has provoked a relational entrepreneurship that rejects the conventional wisdom of independence and replaces it with a celebration of interconnection, interdependence and collaboration – of distributed autonomy (Graby & Greenstein, 2016). It appears their enterprises not only adapt to provide space for the entrepreneurs to celebrate inclusion on their own terms, they allow and embrace – or rather enmesh - support into their very fabric. Families, support workers and others are embedded in the totality of enterprise, not as some isolated, autonomous and faceless apparatus, but as the embodiment of relational subjectivity. When starting enterprise development work with new support teams, I sometimes ask if they can envisage any circumstance in which they might advise someone not to become self-employed. Few are comfortable with this question as it evokes ideas of inequality and exclusion, but without support networks entrepreneurs are at a disadvantage (Caldwell, et al., 2020b). Yet the disadvantage is bidirectional, as without an enterprise, the education skills and training offer evaporates as well. Let's not forget that entrepreneurs with learning difficulties create jobs in support agencies too.

Perhaps self-employment provides the vessel into which education, support and training might be plugged to make the entrepreneur, and into which individual ideas, skills and interests might be plugged to create the support. Entrepreneurs are those who do entrepreneurial things so without enterprise, there is no entrepreneur. At the same time, remove the individual, and the support fades. Neither exists without the other. In her early review of micro-enterprises, Hogg (2005, p. 2) suggests that 'people with learning disabilities do not presently operate as self-employed (or as sole traders) in this country'. Times have moved on and many people have set up their own business and others are

considering doing so in order to create their own opportunities. For some, like P2, the attraction of self-employment co-exists with the routine of paid employment – the paid job provides a regular income while the enterprise speaks to the desire for creativity. Self-employment appears to facilitate change in people's lives in new ways - sometimes this is about employment, certainly, but sometimes it is about connection, wellbeing and ability - inclusion for the relational entrepreneur.

6.4.   Q - Who is the entrepreneur in the job coach – job seeker relationship?

Perhaps the question, "how do we spot the entrepreneur?" is the wrong one and should be replaced with a desire to understand what combination of entrepreneur, enterprise and support could work for an individual, to enable things to happen to them and to others. Richard Branson (2016) suggests that entrepreneurs need to be good story tellers, yet the stories of people with learning difficulties and enterprise remain near silent, or worse, couched in terms of special educational needs. The stories told by P1, P2 and P3 are not just designed to communicate a message to customers, in the manner Branson implies, but to relay alternative offerings of a different way of doing things - beyond the conventional enterprise for profit directive of others, beyond the forceful individualism of convention and beyond the simplicity of risk and reward. That these stories also are given voice by collaboration and relationships – a business circle here, a support worker there, family members, job coaches and mentors – only adds to their power and association with hope. This is where Freire's (2017) limit situations are identified and considered 'opportunities for action … as problems rather than as givens' (Jacobs, 2005, p. 791). Consistent, open and exploratory support took P1, P2 and P3 out of the failed training for work arena and into something else; something that that followed the A-Z with no Z.

As P5 demonstrates, this has involved moving beyond the standard "delivery" of support to a site of creativity, uncertainty and risk:

> P5: I would said when I started this, this was considered, oh, it's a vanity project for him/her ... it's something that s/he wants to do, but it's not really real.

Yet as long as the funding is pegged to employment outcomes and their opaque conditions regarding the number of hours, the type of work and the level of impact on welfare spend,

self-employment will remain limited by the logic of the business development guide and a narrow definition of employment success. To put it another way, it appears that the broader benefits of self-employment may be better obtained through alternative funding arrangements that can link to employment support and training if, not when, it is helpful to do so. A map that celebrates self-employment in all its many forms, rather than replicating entrepreneurship in the narrowest of ways, may open possibilities and invite hope.

P1, P2 and P3 each benefited from the construction of support that was responsive to the social barriers each faced - flexible and humble. Support that was built around the individual, without the assumption that the trainer knew best and spoke, in Freirean terms, to the teacher-student contradiction. Blurring the lines in this way allowed each to develop alongside the other as 'teacher-student with students-teachers' (Freire, 2017, p. 80) while both become entrepreneurs. But perhaps the bigger picture here is that any attempt to identify an entrepreneur in isolation, disabled or otherwise is futile. This is not to say that no one person can possess traits or characteristics that are conducive to entrepreneurial activity, but that the final analysis rests upon the existence of an enterprise idea successfully established. What appears to be helpful is education, support and training that is akin to Freirean action and reflection in praxis - critical pedagogy for the conscious entrepreneur. Hope-in.

6.5.   Limitations, contribution and next steps

Narrative research can only ever be provisional, partial and hesitant (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Riessman, 2000), and is 'more likely to present interim instead of definitive results' (Hyde-Clarke, 2016, p. 83). But as COVID continued to circulate in the community, the emergence of the Omicron variant and talk of mass rollout of vaccine boosters (Reuters, 2021) the talk continued to be of numbers, 'shots in arms' and daily rates. Yet each number conceals a story so I do not wish to apologise for presenting only three stories here as to do so would undermine the value of narrative qualitative research in the production of knowledge. At this time of COVID, faith in "science" endures in the claims of objectivity regardless of the clear variation in the way data is mined, processed and interpreted. But this too can only ever be presented as an interpretation of data. With researcher contamination inevitable and analysis always dependant on 'the extent to which the

researcher progressively imposes his or her "theory" upon the understandings of the participant' (Plummer, 1995, p. 9), I have placed myself at the centre of this research with connections to the participants and their stories. Does this render the research problematic? I do not think so. It does however, make me a co-constructor of knowledge as well as an analytical tool trying to make sense of the stories and facilitate their connection to wider scholarly and practice conversations – producer, coaxer and, no doubt, soon to be consumer (Plummer, 1994). Narrative inquiry is an important part of this; a place where truth, opinion and interpretation meet. Narratives help offer a voice to the participants and a chance for their stories to be heard in ways that foreground meaning and significance. What this research reveals are stories that are, on one level, ordinary and unremarkable yet at the same time extraordinarily inspirational and very much worthy of telling and retelling. But in what ways do they help?

This project set out to explore self-employment in the lives of people with learning difficulties through a collaboration between researcher, disabled entrepreneurs and their supports. In one way, it was always going to fail. There is no such homogenous group from which to extract generalizable data nor truth waiting to be "discovered". Yet what is offered are the experiences of self-employment relayed through the stories of 3 disabled entrepreneurs who talk eloquently about barriers to work, about expectations and assumptions, support, encouragement and determination. About relationships – good and bad – and of lives lived and lives told (Bruner, 2004). Research on disability by non-disabled people should always be questioned and I would certainly not describe this as participatory research or disabled-led (Chappell, 2000). Yet these stories were constructed through dialogue, exchange and negotiation and carved from collaborations that recognise that people with learning difficulties have a role to play in telling their story and have something important to say (Nind, 2008). That this thesis itself offers a narrative of that research journey means it too, can only ever be considered partial as choices made in its representation, the names changed and emphasis added, now written will become fixed. Validity and generalizability, contested beyond broader thoughts of transferability (Smith, 2018), are less likely to appeal, but I hope the process is considered trustworthy and credible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the stories considered believable, and most importantly, useful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Of course, it raises more questions than it answers, but its power lies in foregrounding the relationship between the individual, enterprise and support and the recognition that each changes in the shadow of the other. No doubt more needs to be done - to consider how the previous experience of enterprise facilitators impacts the size, shape and possibility of enterprise, to explore ways in which entrepreneurs have steered beyond sectoral patterns so familiar to people with learning difficulties or to reflect on how curriculum can interact with innovation and disability to create interesting and thought provoking ideas. So much more also needs to be said about the families – themselves often rendered silent, but yet often significant actors in the stories. And underpinning all, might be the need to further problematize the automatic allegiance to 'work as a social good and moral responsibility' (Graby, 2015, p. 133) in order to consider ways in which self-employment might provide an emancipatory alternative to productivity as the only purveyor of value and worth (Uwagba, 2021).

From a disability studies perspective, we might reasonably consider the merits of self-employment as a champion of disruption, a call to the social nature of disability and a way to reconsider how we view the interconnectivity of human-ness – how we think about what it means to be human (Goodley, 2021). Like that of P1, P2 and P3, my own story, frozen in chapter 2, has, of course, continued throughout. The contribution this study makes was never solely intended for others and my own practice has benefitted enormously. Thinking differently about self-employment calls for guidance to help commissioners, providers and practitioners understand what this means and my own "what next" declaration may well involve the development of an outcomes framework to consider self-employment on wider terms – wellbeing, inclusion, self-determination, health and quality of life framed 'as an ongoing process rather than as simply a static moment' (Caldwell, et al., 2019, p. 206). Those conversations with pedagogical and disability theory will only make that guidance stronger.

I hope this research adds to the growing sense I have that self-employment is beginning to be taken seriously, not only as an employment outcome, but as a story of life, of change and of challenge. The contribution it makes to knowledge and practice emerges from the conversations it invites, as pedagogical constructs come into contact with disability, and entrepreneurship - a productive tension felt most keenly in the context of supported

employment, but with far broader social relevance. With so little direct research that links learning difficulty and entrepreneurship, the pursuit of originality might seem uncomplicated but as Wellington (2013, p. 1502) suggests, the real question is whether it can 'potentially make an impact – or bring about a change – in thinking and to theory, policy, or practice'. I have shown that synthesising research on learning difficulty, employment and enterprise facilitates increased understanding of each and indeed, my starting point was to review research into both supported employment and enterprise in the lives of the wider population of disabled people. However, what is unusual here, is that this research is UK specific, experientially narrative and demands the conversation be held away from the standardisation of employment and the convention of enterprise. It is not about "what works?" but rather, "what does it do?" and, as a practitioner, I am especially keen for this to contribute to the way we think about, plan for and promote self-employment for and with people with learning difficulties. This way it might be possible to conceptualise enterprise for what it does, not what it is, consider traits and capabilities beyond the individual, present support as a journey, not a destination and uncover the story of Hope as Burke's (1969) instrument of change.

6.6. Q - What can entrepreneurship 'do' for people with learning difficulties?

Earlier I disturbed the automatic assumption that employment should be the mainstay of preparing for adulthood, that work is the only way to prove value or that 'work to ''earn a living'' is taken as part of the natural order rather than as a social convention' (Weeks, 2011, p. 3). This is a challenging position for someone who has spent that last 30 years trying to support people with learning difficulties into employment. But, as I was reflecting on the value of looking at life beyond working for someone else – regardless of their Disability Confident status (Department of Work and Pensions, 2014) - I happened, with almost serendipitous coincidence, across an old employment contract given to my Mother in 1974. At once old fashioned and quaint (and of enormous sentimental value) the contract warns that:

> small private [types of business] have been obliged to close in alarming numbers

and that:

> it is the proprietor's opinion that only the best (businesses) will survive.

It goes on to emphasise that:

> it has always been the policy … to employ only a superior type of person, to expect a high and conscientious standard of work interest and service in general. The pay must be earned.

Perhaps today's employers would be wary of including such wording in an employment contract, but many, I suspect, would applaud the underlying message – that diligent work is in everyone's interests and that it can 'transform subjects into the independent individuals of the liberal imaginary' (Weeks, 2011, p. 8). Yet, it is apparent that not everyone gets invited. Although P1, P2 and P3 started their journeys with a similar assumption, their reality compelled them to look elsewhere as opportunities to "earn a living" were withheld.

Despite the scarcity of dedicated research on the matter (Hutchinson, et al., 2021), interest in self-employment grows. Caldwell and colleagues' illuminating papers mine the experience of seven people with learning difficulties to unearth why they chose self-employment, how they go about it and the implications of doing so (2019; 2020a; 2020b). Thinking about what entrepreneurship does in the lives of people with learning difficulties is an important part of building a collective sense of "hope-in" (Jacobs, 2005) a different future – to think, and act otherwise (Giroux, 2019). Gaining a better understanding of how enterprise can interrupt ideas of autonomy and independence, disrupt notions of disability and ability and change the way we consider human-ness can help blur the lines between people and facilitate a move beyond the conventional, the impossible and the ordinary. Griffin and Hammis (2007) rightly ask if self-employment is a cop-out and a distraction from supporting people to achieve "proper" jobs. It is a good question and I suspect the answer is inevitably tied to the motivations, support and intention of those involved, of which we still know very little.

During a research tour of Malaysia a few years ago, I was asked about the UK experience of supporting people with learning difficulties into work. Uncomfortable with the idea that we had "the answer" to the perennially low employment rates for people so labelled, I found myself talking about how the UK experienced "pockets of good practice". I think perhaps that is also an apt way to describe the stories of P1, P2 and P3, especially in the face of the

many poorer experiences of employment support faced by people with learning difficulties. Yet to do so offers a particular emphasis on the construction and arrangement of support and says little about the entrepreneur and the enterprise. Perhaps it would be better to present these stories as pockets of resistance and usher an altogether finer focus on the role of individual entrepreneurs and their actions. Freire (2017) emphasises the importance of collective actions in the presentation of hope that is grounded in a consciousness very much anchored to the present. P1, P2 and P3 each articulate a clear understanding of the barriers they and other people face when approaching work. However in talking powerfully about how their experience of self-employment has impacted their lives, each express their desire to use that experience communally, to inform and inspire others. For them, waged employment options were limited and it was self-employment that became the alternative site of possibility that offered an awkward balance on the tightrope of human-ness – a partial sign up to the neoliberal ritual of productivity and contribution infused with a simultaneous disruption of all that it stands for. In terms offered by Goodley, Lawthorn, Liddiard and Runswick-Cole (Goodley, et al., 2017; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016), self-employment facilitated a dis-human perspective – respite for the conditional entrepreneur.

6.7.   A Ternary of Hope?

Ternary - pertaining to, consisting of, compounded of, or characterized by a set (or sets) of three; threefold, triple ... (OED Online, 2021b)

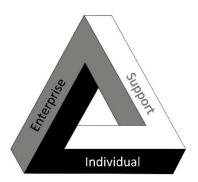*Figure 5 - Penrose triangle*
Tobias R. – Metoc - Own work, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2520370

Conceptualising the individual, the support and enterprise as a separated one-ness evokes something of a Penrose triangle (Penrose & Penrose, 1958) – the rotating illusion of impossibility that donates the importance of perspective and troubles the application of *a*

priori analysis (Blumson, 2010). If, like Penrose's triangle, the ternary of hope does not exist in our perception of a possible world, then perhaps we should turn to the impossible to see what is afoot. Saba Salman's compelling volume Made Possible (2020) is testament to how a different perspective can enable people with learning difficulties to 'lead not just ordinary and fulfilling lives, but extraordinarily impressive ones' (Salman, 2020, p. 31). That P1 was told his/her enterprise would never last is just one reminder of how renaming the impossible as the possible is an important part of what P1, P2 and P3 do with their stories. The individual, enterprise, and education, training and support can all exist as discreet entities. In isolation, we know enterprise through the lens of innovation, profit and loss and growth forecasts; entrepreneurs framed in a context of determination, motivation and tolerance of risk, while training and support is measured in terms of curriculum, "delivery" and educational outcomes. Yet brought together in an enmeshed intra-action (Barad, 2003), each takes on new properties – the enterprise as a vehicle for change, still connecting with customers and consumers perhaps, but shifting the basis of those interactions; the disabled entrepreneur presented as capable, competent and cogent, working in relational dialogue with support, constructed, responsive and conscious. Illusion or reality only ever depend on one's perspective.

Figure 6 - Penrose triangle with perspective
© Tomruen - Own work, Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73525211

Over twenty years ago I supported a group of people with learning difficulties to form their own company. This was newsworthy and, at the time, their story was repeated across the TV and the newspapers quite a bit. Years later, at a celebration to mark 20 years of trading, it was considered news that such an enterprise had survived. Yet none of the original members were still around while support workers had come and gone. Yet the enterprise itself had endured beyond the individuals initially involved with very little said about it during the intervening years - no media interest, no interviews and no sidebar story.

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Nothing to see here. Beyond the hype of the extraordinary, the company remained in dialogue with the ordinary, with contracts and timesheets, cash flow and customers. Is this not the ideal – moving from impossible to possible and on to the mundane? Surely so for the individual or small group. Yet to belong, to fit in and to blend might be a comfort, but to lose sight of the macro would be a mistake. The wider systems that prevail to ensure that such stories continue to be the exception, and not the rule, must be named.

The structures that segregate, the assumptions that are made and the funding that forces a focus on the easy wins and the need to cherry pick participants, all form part of the barriers to work experienced by people with learning difficulties. How often do people with learning difficulties miss out on opportunities for employment training, education and support because the focus is on outcomes rather than obstacles? Certainly a recent Department for Work and Pensions select Committee heard how providers were 'incentivised to support people who are most likely to find work, while neglecting people who are further from the labour market' (2021, p. 23). Indeed, the stories of enterprise might offer individual statements of resistance perhaps, but the individual, the support and the enterprise do not always arrive in equal parts, with equal respect or with equal enthusiasm. Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2009) consider the term "special educational needs" and how it serves only to maintain a focus on the individual while distracting attention from the 'barriers to learning and participation' (Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009, p. 13). I am tempted to agree that "educational rights" would be a more fitting description.

It appears, for some at least, that self-employment evokes a number of entrepreneurial identities to counter the continued conceptualisation of disability apparent in welfare, education and support structures. P1, P2 and P3 demonstrate well how the ternary of hope centres enterprise in ways that allow the conditional, conscious and relational entrepreneur to thrive and for entrepreneurship to offer new and liberating possibilities. As P2 explains:

> P2: Being self-employed means that not everyone knows I have learning difficulties. To them I'm just a creative.

Perhaps entrepreneurial activity should be described as a freedom rather than a job and considered another way to trouble disability, a proxy for self-valorisation (Graby, 2015) and a route to self-determination. Self-employment will not be for everyone, but it is clear from

the stories presented by P1, P2 and P3, that thinking with disability, support and enterprise opens up possibilities to turn 'attention away from the real or assumed functional limitations of people with impairments and onto the social organisation of mainstream employment and the meaning of work' (Barnes, 2012, p. 472). The nebulous unpredictability of enterprise and its refusal to be domesticated confirms, at least in part, the potential for self-employment to create opportunities to disrupt how we think about disability and how we think about work in the lives of people with learning difficulties. It seems entrepreneurship might well represent one way through which the individual, the idea and the support can coalesce to forge a vision of an alternative future.

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8. Appendices

The nature of entrepreneurship for people with learning difficulties.

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher Keith Bates

You are being asked to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what you will be asked to do. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1.   What is the research for?

Currently, fewer than 6% of people with learning disabilities are in paid work; a number that has remained stubbornly low despite a variety of efforts to support more people into employment. We know that people with learning disabilities can and do make hard working and enthusiastic employees, bringing new skills, talents and perspectives to their employers. We also know that when we give good quality support to people interested in work we can match their skills interests and aspiration to the need of local employers and get good outcomes.

However, far less is known about how that support relates to people interested in exploring self-employment opportunities despite the fact that a growing number of people with learning disabilities are using self-employment as a way into work.

This research seeks to understand more about the nature of self-employment for people with learning disabilities and the support mechanisms, approaches and values that have been helpful in facilitating it. It is particularly interested in how self-employment can make a positive contribution to people's identity and community standing and change the way we think about notions of ability and independence.

It is being conducted for my doctoral research at the University of Sheffield.

2.   Why have I been chosen?

I want to talk to people who have set up their own business or are self-employed and have had support from a job coach or employment support worker. In doing so, I am seeking disabled entrepreneurs, job coaches and other employment support workers who have had experience of supporting people to explore self-employment or small business ownership.

3.   Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact Keith Bates at Kbates1@sheffield.ac.uk

Please note that once your data have been anonymised and included within a large dataset, it will not be possible to remove all of your data from the study even if you withdraw from any on-going or future data collection.

4.   What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

You will participate in a one-on-one interview that will take place at a time agreed with you. You can be interviewed by telephone, Zoom, Skype, on Facebook Messenger, or over email if this is easier. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

This will be a semi structured interview with open ended questions. The questions will be about your experience of supporting people to explore self-employment and small business ownership. They will ask about the barriers and challenges, opportunities and successes, experiences and your views about what particular aspects have been helpful.

5.   Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis which may be used for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings

6.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not believe that participating in this project involves risk, but participants are free to withdraw if they have any concerns.

You do not have to answer every question in the interview and have the right to say no to questions if you do not wish to answer them.

7.   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that this work will increase our collective understanding of self-employment and how to support more people with learning disabilities to set up their own business

8.   Will you tell other people what I have said?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team.   You will not be identifiable in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. If you agree to us sharing the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your personal details will not be included unless you explicitly request this.

Where, due to the nature of the research, it may not be possible to safeguard the confidentiality of the data for example, safeguarding criminal activity or risks to public safety, I may be obliged to report these to the relevant authorities.

9.   What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.'

As we will be collecting some data that is defined in the legislation as more sensitive (information about how disability impacts the potential for becoming self-employed), we also need to let you know that we are applying the following condition in law: that the use of your data is 'necessary for scientific or historical research purposes.

10.   What happens to the data collected and the results of the research project?

Your information will only be seen by me and my two supervisors. Information may also be seen by transcription services after signing confidentiality agreements.

Towards the end of the research, the finding will be drawn into a research report. You will not be identifiable in the final research document or supplementary publications

You data will be securely stored for 2 years unless you have given consent for anonymised data to be made available to other researchers as, due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected useful in answering future research questions. With permission, anonymised research data (excluding audio data) will be archived on University of Sheffield servers for the long term future.

Who is organising this research?

This research is part of a doctorate research at the University of Sheffield and so no-one is funding my time.

An organisation called Boss Employment CIC may pay some of my travel expenses. They are interested in finding out more about how to support people with learning disabilities into employment. They will not have any say in how the research is carried out.

11.   Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

12.   Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

13. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research

If you feel something has gone wrong or would like to raise an issue or complaint, you are advised to make contact with my Supervisor
Dr Harriet Cameron (SFHEA)
Lecturer in Psychology and Education
The School of Education
University of Sheffield
Edgar Allen House
241 Glossop Road
Sheffield. S10 2GW
Email: h.cameron@sheffield.ac.uk

If you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with appropriately, you can contact the Head of Department at the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, Professor Elizabeth Wood, who will escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels:

Professor Elizabeth Wood
Head of School
The School of Education
Edgar Allen House
University of Sheffield
241 Glossop Road
Sheffield. S10 2GW
Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 8172
Email: e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

If your complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice:
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/dataprotection/privacy/general.

14. Contact details for more information

Keith Bates
The School of Education
University of Sheffield
Edgar Allen House
241 Glossop Road
Sheffield. S10 2GW

Kbates1@sheffield.ac.uk

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my research project

Self-employment for people with learning disabilities

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher – Keith Bates

You are being asked to take part in a research project.

Before you decide, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what you will be asked to do.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Ask if anything is not clear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1. **What is the research for?**

My name is Keith and I am interested in how we can get more people with learning disabilities into work.

Not many people with learning disabilities have a paid job so I want to find out if self-employment is a good way of creating employment.

If self-employed might changes people's lives in a good way.

And what support is needed to help more people to become self-employed.

Not many people become self-employed so I want to find out why this might be.

2. Why have I been chosen?

I want to talk to people who have set up their own business or are self-employed and have had support from a job coach or employment support worker.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether you want to take part or not.

You will be asked to sign a form.

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why.

If you say yes, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and consent form to keep.

4.   What will I have to do?

If you say yes, I will talk to you about your business and the support you have had to set it up. We can think about the best way to capture this so I could listen to it again

I would also like to talk to your support worker.

If you agree, I might spend some time with you at work.

I will talk to other self-employed people as well.

I will think about what everyone says and write my idea down.

I will show you what I have written and ask you to tell me what you think of it.

Afterwards I may ask some more questions.

I will then write a long report and a new short one for you to keep.

5. What will happen to the recordings of me?

If you agree I will record what you say.

We will use what you say in reports and articles and at meetings but only I will hear your voice

I will keep the recording safe on a computer with a password and destroy them at the end of the project.

6. What are the bad things that could happen?

Sometimes talking about difficult things like employment can make people unhappy so we'll need to have a plan of how to support you.

7. What are the good things that could happen?

I hope that your story will help more people learn about self-employment and how to support more people with learning disabilities to set up their own business.

8. Will you tell other people what I have said?

Everything you say will be confidential and your name will not be used unless you tell me you want it to be.

We will give you a pretend name so no-one knows it is you.

However, if you tell us something that worries us, whereby you are in danger or at serious risk, then we might have to share it with someone else; such as a professional or someone you trust. We will let you know if we plan to do this.

9. Are you allowed to keep my information?

Yes – data protection rules called GDPR say that this research is a ' task in the public interest'.

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice.

https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

10.   What happens to the data

Your information will be seen by me and my two advisors. It will also be seen by the person who types up the interview.

Other researchers might find the information useful for other research so I will ask if we can share this information but not your name.

I may talk at meetings and write reports about the project but I will not use your real name unless you want me to tell people about your business.

All your information will be kept safe for 2 years but then deleted.

If you allow it, information without your name will be kept by the University for a long time

11.   Who is organising this research?

This research is part of a research course at the University of Sheffield and so no-one is funding my time.

An organisation called Boss Employment CIC may pay some of my travel expenses. They are interested in finding out more about how to support people with learning disabilities into employment. They will not have any say in how the research is carried out.

12.   Who will check the data is looked after properly?

The University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information. They are called the data controller.

This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

13.   Who has checked that's the research is Ok to do?

This project has been checked by the Education Department's ethics review process at the University of Sheffield.

14.   What is something goes wrong?

You can talk to me about anything that worries you about this research.

You can also talk to Dr Harriet Cameron (SFHEA) Lecturer in Psychology and Education, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University of Sheffield, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW, Email: h.cameron@sheffield.ac.uk

If you are still not happy you can contact the Head of Department at the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, Professor Elizabeth Wood, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University of Sheffield, 241

Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 8172

Email: e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

For more information, please contact me at

Keith Bates

The School of Education
The University of Sheffield
241 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2GW

Kbates1@sheffield.ac.uk

07796053847

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read about my research project.

Appendix 3. Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in an interview that is being audio and video recorded.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I give permission for my interview transcript to be archived on University of Sheffield servers for the long term future so it can be used for future research and learning	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher [printed]   Signature   Date

Project contact details for further information:
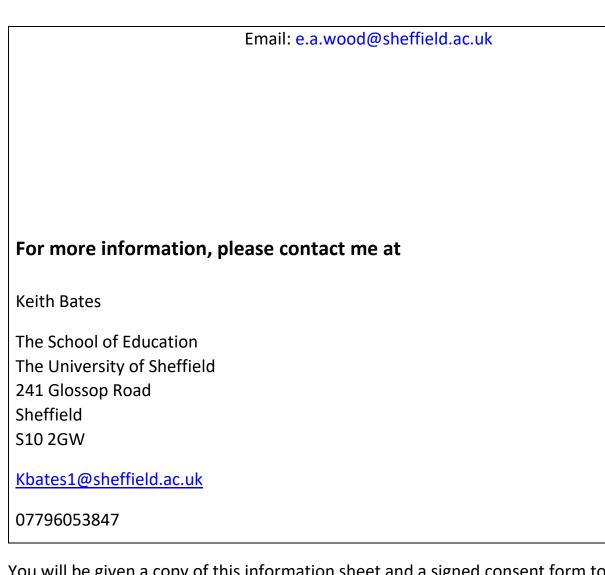If you feel something has gone wrong or would like to raise an issue/complaint, you are advised to make contact with Dr Harriet Cameron (SFHEA) Lecturer in Psychology and Education, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University of Sheffield, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW. Email: h.cameron@sheffield.ac.uk

If you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with appropriately, you can contact the Head of Department at the School of Education at the University of Sheffield who will escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels: **Professor Elizabeth Wood, Head of School, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University**

of Sheffield, 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW. Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 8172. Email: e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Self-employment for people with learning difficulties

This form is to tell the University that you agree to be part of the research.

1 - Taking Part in the Project

The project has been explained to me and I understand what it means.

I have read and understood the project information sheet dated or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	✔ ☐ ✖ ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	✔ ☐ ✖ ☐

	I agree to take part in the project	I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in an interview that is being audio and video recorded.	
	I know I can change my mind	I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	

2 - Using my information after the project

	I know my information will be kept safe	I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	
	My words may be used but my name will not	I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.	

		I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	❌ ☐
	Other researchers may use my information but only if they keep it secret too	I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	✅ ☐ ❌ ☐
	They might use it to speak at conferences	I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	✅ ☐ ❌ ☐
	My interview words can be stored by University of Sheffield so it can be used by others	I give permission for my interview transcript to be archived on University of Sheffield servers for the long term future so it can be used for future research and learning.	✅ ☐ ❌ ☐

3 - Making sure information you provide can be used legally by the researchers

The University Of Sheffield.	I know that Sheffield University will own the project and not me	I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. ✔ ✘

Consent ✔	Name of participant [printed]	Signature	Date
	Name of Researcher [printed]	Signature	Date

Project contact details for further information:

If you feel something has gone wrong you can contact **Dr Harriet Cameron** (SFHEA) Lecturer in Psychology and Education, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University of Sheffield, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW. Email: h.cameron@sheffield.ac.uk @sheffield.ac.uk

If you are still not happy you can contact **Professor Elizabeth Wood**, Head of School, The School of Education, Edgar Allen House, University of Sheffield, 241, Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW. Tel: +44 (0) 114 222 8172. Email: e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 5. Ethical clearance letter

Keith Bates
Registration number: 170249515
School of Education
Programme: N/A

Dear Keith

PROJECT TITLE: The nature of entrepreneurship for people with learning disabilities: an investigation into self-employment, autonomy and support
APPLICATION: Reference Number 034746

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 30/06/2020 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 034746 (form submission date: 26/06/2020); (expected project end date: 31/12/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1079147 version 2 (08/05/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1079148 version 2 (08/05/2020).
- Participant consent form 1079150 version 2 (08/05/2020).
- Participant consent form 1079149 version 2 (08/05/2020).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:
  https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:
  https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 6. Interview guide. Entrepreneur

Introduction (5 mins)

- I want to talk about your experience of setting up your own business so we can learn about what is needed to help more people with learning disabilities think about self-employment.
- Your identity will be kept strictly anonymous although someone who knows you might be able to work out who you are from the research. The research may use quotes but won't mention you by name or contain anything that could identify you.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can change your mind at any point.
- The interview will take around 40 minutes to complete.
- There are no right or wrong answers and I am just interested in hearing about your experience. If there is anything you don't wish to answer, it's fine just to say so.
- Check permission to record – just so I don't have to rely solely on taking notes. The recording will be stored on an encrypted area of our server. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the research project unless you give us permission to keep it.
- Do you have any questions?

Getting to know you and your business (5-10 mins)

1. Can you tell me about your business
    a. What do you do?
2. How long have you been self-employed?
3. What support do you get to run your business?
4. Who provides that support?

Experience (20 mins)

1. **What do you think are the best bits about being self-employed?**
2. How did your self-employment come about?
    a. Had you had a job before? Can you tell me about that?
    b. Whose idea was it to explore self-employment?
    c. Why did you want to become self-employed?
    d. Had a particular interest or because it was difficult to find work?
3. **How does it feel to be self-employed?**
4. **What difference has being self-employed made to your life?**
    a. **Has it made things better regarding**
        i. **Work**
        ii. **Money**
        iii. **Home**
        iv. **Respect**
        v. **Community**

Challenges

1. **What was the most difficult thing about setting up your own business?**
2. Does anything worry you about running your own business?
3. Have your hopes / aspirations for your self-employment changed as time has gone on?

Support / advice (10 min)

1. **What difference does the support make to you?**
2. What advice would you give someone who was considering setting up their own business?
3. Is there any support I can give you?

Close (5 mins)

- Is there anything else you would like to say on the subject of support for disabled people who are thinking about self-employment?
- Thank you very much for your time today.
- Would it be possible to talk to you another time to hear more about your business?

Appendix 7. Interview guide. Support

Introduction (5 mins)

- I want to talk about your experience of setting up your own business so we can learn about what is needed to help more people with learning disabilities think about self-employment.
- Your identity will be kept strictly anonymous although someone who knows you might be able to work out who you are from the research. The research may use quotes but won't mention you by name or contain anything that could identify you.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can change your mind at any point.
- The interview will take around 40 minutes to complete.
- There are no right or wrong answers and I am just interested in hearing about your experience. If there is anything you don't wish to answer, it's fine just to say so.
- Check permission to record – just so I don't have to rely solely on taking notes. The recording will be stored on an encrypted area of our server. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the research project unless you give us permission to keep it.
- Do you have any questions?

Getting to know you and your business (5-10 mins)

5. Can you tell me about your business
    a. What do you do?
6. How long have you been self-employed?
7. What support do you get to run your business?
8. Who provides that support?

Experience (20 mins)

5. **What do you think are the best bits about being self-employed?**
6. How did your self-employment come about?
    a. Had you had a job before? Can you tell me about that?
    b. Whose idea was it to explore self-employment?
    c. Why did you want to become self-employed?
    d. Had a particular interest or because it was difficult to find work?
7. **How does it feel to be self-employed?**
8. **What difference has being self-employed made to your life?**
    a. **Has it made things better regarding**
        i. **Work**
        ii. **Money**
        iii. **Home**
        iv. **Respect**
        v. **Community**

Challenges

4. What was the most difficult thing about setting up your own business?

5. Does anything worry you about running your own business?

6. Have your hopes / aspirations for your self-employment changed as time has gone on?

Support / advice (10 min)

4. What difference does the support make to you?

5. What advice would you give someone who was considering setting up their own business?

6. Is there any support I can give you?

Close (5 mins)

• Is there anything else you would like to say on the subject of support for disabled people who are thinking about self-employment?

• Thank you very much for your time today.

• Would it be possible to talk to you another time to hear more about your business?
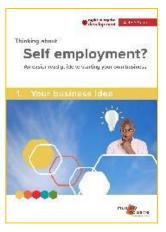
Section 1. Your business idea

One of the most important things when you are thinking about self-employment is to make sure you have a good business idea.

There are lots of different ways to get a good business idea. Some people spot an opportunity or have an idea out of the blue. Others have a particular skill, interest or talent that they want to use. It might also be possible to develop a hobby or pastime.

Your idea may be a new **product** or **service** or it might be a different way of doing something that other people already do.

However it is important to make sure that the idea fits your skills and interests.
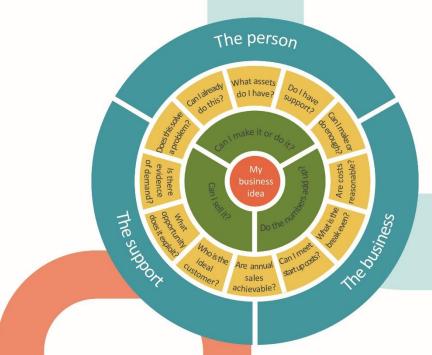
Thinking about
Self employment?
An easier read guide to starting your own business

1. Your business idea

Introduction

How to use these guides

1. Your business idea
2. Getting products
3. Money
4. Customers
5. Support

Section 1. Your business idea

What will you sell?

Appendix 9. Example practice guide – facilitating enterprise: Using break-even to assess the potential of a business idea.

Introduction

Supporting people with learning difficulties to think about self employment and small business ownership is hard. Judging the potential for their business idea is even harder. Will it work? Is it viable? How do we know if an idea is worth pursuing for the person we support?

In order to answer questions like these, it is useful to get a good sense of whether an idea is worth pursuing or not. To some extent the answers lie within what we call the Testing Cycle (see diagram below).

The Testing Cycle seeks to ensure that:

- an idea meets a person's employment goals
- the enterprise idea appears to be viable
- the person and their enterprise has the support needed to be a success

By calculating the point at which an enterprise reaches break-even, this guide offers a quick and simplified way of attending to the second of these.
.

BREAK EVEN

LOSS

PROFIT

Facilitating enterprise