

# **The role of Initial Teacher Education in the formation of adult literacy teachers' beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading**

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Mia and Peter Schwab, and all those others who had to start life afresh in a new language.

# Declaration and word count

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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May 2017

# Abstract

This qualitative study investigated adult literacy teachers' beliefs and pedagogic practices in relation to teaching reading, and considered how these were shaped by their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and by the realities of the context in which they were working. The issues were explored through interviews with, and observations of, 12 adult literacy teachers in two Further Education (FE) colleges in inner London. The fieldwork took place between December 2013 and October 2014.

Findings showed tensions between the teachers' strongly held views about learner-centred pedagogy and their employment context in which the focus on exam success demanded a content-centred approach. Furthermore, the superdiversity of the multicultural and multilingual learner cohort challenged traditional notions of adult literacy learners and their learning needs.

The dominant discourse of their various ITE programmes was of a socially situated pedagogy which draws on learners' Funds of Knowledge and their everyday literacy practices. The teachers enjoyed their ITE and found it useful but struggled both to recall theories and relate them to their current context. Examination washback affected all aspects of teaching reading, including a move away from literacy as social practice towards a skills-led approach. The exigencies of exams also led to a concentration on the subskills to be assessed rather than reading for meaning. Additionally, adult literacy teachers had mixed feelings about addressing the language needs of multilingual learners, and used a variety of approaches.

The findings further suggest amendments that could be made to teacher education programmes to reflect the realities of the learner cohort and the current FE context. The thesis concludes with some implications for teacher education and contributes to a deeper understanding of literacy teachers' learning and development.

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# Reflective statement

I have frequently been asked why I chose to embark upon the EdD, an enormous undertaking, as I draw to the end of my working life. Indeed, in my darker periods, I have wondered this myself. The answer lies in seeing education as what Freire calls 'praxis' (Freire, 1972); it is through praxis (action and reflection) that transformation occurs. As a lifelong learner, I am seeking both personal transformation, arising from a deeper understanding of the world in which I live, and professional transformation in which I am able to work with a higher degree of awareness and understanding.

## *The taught modules*

I well remember my sense of excitement as I started the first module, Foundations of Professionalism (FOP). There were, perhaps, 24 of us, from all areas of education with a huge range of professional experience. Our discussions were exhilarating and encouraged me to think about what it means to be a professional in terms of my own work as a teacher educator and in relation to the trainees I teach who are entering the profession. My field of adult literacy has seen extraordinary changes since the Moser report first raised the issue of adult literacy and numeracy with Government and the public in 1999 (DfEE, 1999). In my FOP assignment I explored how these changes impacted on the professional identity of literacy teachers, and the role of initial teacher education (ITE) in developing that identity.

In Methods of Enquiry 1 (MOE1), I designed a small scale qualitative research project to explore teachers' and learners' perceptions of how best to use the Internet to teach reading in adult literacy classes. My own experience of observing teachers had raised this as an issue to be investigated and my review of the literature showed that this was generally an under-researched area. In Methods of Enquiry 2 (MOE2), I followed this idea through by undertaking a small-scale qualitative enquiry researching what adult literacy learners read online and how their teachers support them. I interviewed five teachers (individually) and 39 learners (in focus groups) to analyse their perceptions and understandings. This gave me insights into how far the teachers were meeting learners' digital needs and interests and some ideas about how that might be improved. In

particular, I was concerned with the possible role of ITE and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in this process.

My chosen initial specialist course was Post-Compulsory Education and Training and Lifelong learning (PCET). I elected to investigate the place of workplace learning in the development of adult literacy teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector in England. Using my own course (the Institute of Education PGCE Literacy/ESOL) as a model, I applied Jacobs and Park's (2009) conceptual framework of workplace learning to it, and analysed how far each element contributed to the overall picture. I discussed the balance between formal and informal learning in ITE, showing how the process of becoming a further education (FE) teacher has to be a complex and integrated blend of formal and informal learning; both institutionally based and workplace based.

As one might expect, some clear themes run through these four areas of study: the training of specialist literacy teachers; curriculum development for adult literacy teaching and the identity and role of a literacy teacher in the lifelong learning sector- all core knowledge for my professional practice. However underpinning this is another, deeper layer of professional understandings which developed through those four modules and which interrelate, forming a complex matrix of comprehensions and interpretations.

For example, teachers are all aware of the increase in surveillance of their work and the stress this places on their professional identity where, as Ball notes, their values are challenged by the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003). I began to understand how what Foucault describes as the process of 'normalisation' (Foucault, 1977) leads us to accept this, and investigated how others had analysed and interpreted the phenomenon, trying to formulate a more informed and critical view of my own. I found some whose ideas resonated. Avis, for example, suggests building up a space for teachers to 'seize and utilize to develop new forms of expertise' (Avis, 1999, p. 260) and Honan proposes selecting a *bricolage* from various 'acts of creative resistance' (Honan, 2006, p. 79). These views offered a welcome breath of optimism and also proposed a way forward for the perpetual challenge faced by teacher educators, that of both

helping new teachers to cope with the culture of managerialism and performativity they find in the workplace, and also giving them the intellectual and critical tools to resist.

### *The IFS*

For my IFS, I returned to the ideas I had begun to explore in my MOE1 and MOE2. I chose a sample of 18 learners in two Entry level 2 literacy classes to investigate how beginning readers read on the Internet both inside and outside the classroom. My methods were in-depth paired interviews, observations of learners' reading and protocol analysis. I analysed their reading practices through a theoretical framework that drew on both the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital.

The fieldwork took place in late 2011/early 2012 when fewer people had personal access to the Web. Although these learners struggled with reading, they perused a variety of websites and had developed a range of creative and resourceful strategies to access and comprehend them, because of high levels of motivation. Many whose reading identity might have been that of a non-reader chose to look at digital texts, not even considering it to be reading. They recognised the cultural and social capital that could be gained through taking part in these practices. Because they saw it as 'computing' rather than 'reading' they felt less stigmatised and they were more willing to ask for help when they encountered problems. These findings had potential implications for teachers who could be encouraged to build on both the motivating factors of digital texts in the classroom and on the skills and strategies that learners had developed in order to read them.

### *From IFS to thesis*

My first idea for the thesis was to continue my work on online reading, with teachers as participants, and to explore the issue from their point of view, with the aim of identifying their development needs and providing for these through training. However, times had moved on. With the advent of smartphones and the rise of social media, I felt the issues were changing so rapidly that I was not sure I could keep up with more technologically savvy researchers.

In the meantime another issue caught my attention. I had noticed, during my observations of literacy classes as part of my role as a teacher educator, that literacy classes were changing. In the 1980s, in my work with the ILEA Afro-Caribbean Language and Literacy project, what concerned us was the many Afro-Caribbean learners in our groups and how attitudes to their language was affecting their progress. This work resulted in a number of publications (ILEA, 1990; Schwab, 1994; Schwab and Stone, 1986) and major changes in how we addressed the language needs of learners who used varieties of English that were not Standard English.

Yet, in spite of the undoubted benefits brought about by the Skills for Life strategy, attitudes to language variety in literacy teaching narrowed. It was scarcely mentioned in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (Basic Skills Agency, 2001) and Government policies began to stress the importance of Standard English to the detriment of other varieties.

In London, at least, literacy classes are now much more diverse, reflecting the superdiversity of the area (Vertovec, 2006 ). For a variety of reasons, literacy learners who have grown up speaking English are now in the minority. Research from the National Research and Development Centre (Simpson, Cooke and Baynham, 2008) showed both how random placement in literacy or ESOL classes can be. At the same time, in 2013, at the Institute of Education, we began to offer the new joint literacy and ESOL teacher ITE course and it seemed an opportune moment to think about how literacy teachers could respond to the superdiversity in their classes and how we as teacher educators could support them. So I began to contemplate a new proposal for my thesis and started reading and thinking afresh about the role ITE plays in developing teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching reading.

### *Doing the EdD*

I enrolled for the EdD in October 2008 and the first two years of taught modules flashed by. But then everything changed. As course leader for a specialist ITE programme which seemed to need revalidating annually, my workload increased exponentially; both my supervisor and I were hit by illness and bereavements and the EdD seemed to grind to a halt. Every interruption set me back and I needed to convince myself that it was worth

continuing and that I could take up where I had left off. At times, it felt as if it would never be finished.

In addition, throughout the EdD programme, I have struggled with new concepts that I thought I would never master, but I have also consolidated some ideas I had previously only sampled tentatively. I completed my first degree and my Masters in archaeology, a subject that seemed to hover uneasily between being an arts subject (historical views of 'civilisation'; tracing the development of objects through their styles) and a science (working only from concrete evidence; drawing on a number of new scientific disciplines). The approach taken then was strongly positivist and for this reason, when I first began to study social science, through my PGCE and, more recently, on the EdD programme, it took me some time adjust to the idea that 'there is no external reality independent of human consciousness; there are only different sets of meanings and classifications which people attach to the world' (Robson, 2002, p. 22). Now that this feels standard to me, I can truly feel that I am joining the ranks of social science researchers.

As someone who constantly gives oral and written feedback to students, it was enlightening to receive feedback on my own writing. The process reminded me of the importance of giving constructive feedback at the formative stage in a manner that can be absorbed, accepted and acted upon. It also told me that my strength lies in planning and carrying out actual research, more than in theoretical discussion, which makes me thankful that I chose to complete an EdD rather than a PhD.

On a practical level, the EdD has given me insights into areas of my work that I have been able to transfer to my own students; I now deliver sessions on professionalism, action research methods and multimodal literacy. More theoretically, the reading I have done has stimulated and engaged me and provided me with refreshing new perspectives on my work. After 40 years in my profession, it is exciting to realise that I have only scratched the surface of the subject and that there is so much more to learn about it. I am taken with the idea that the role of research is 'to create and refine theories and thus to contribute to the development of rules for practice- in some ways rather like trying out recipes to see if they work' (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002, p. 214).

During my EdD studies, I have written and published two books on literacy aimed at practitioners (Schwab, 2015; Schwab and Hughes, 2010). I have also presented my IFS and my thesis research at conferences and to my colleagues at UCL. Discussions with colleagues have persuaded me that some of the issues in this thesis are worth sharing on a wider scale and I hope to go on and publish aspects of the findings in academic journals. My primary commitment, however, is still to literacy practitioners. I would like to share the insights I have gained with teacher trainees and also disseminate to a wider range of practising teachers, by teaching and writing.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the study. First of all I outline the project and explain the rationale behind it, including my own background and why and how I became interested in the topic. Then I present the conceptual background that underpins the study, and set out the structure of the thesis and the research questions that directed the enquiry.

## 1.2 Motivation and rationale for study

This study is an exploration of the beliefs and practices of adult literacy teachers teaching reading in further education (FE) colleges in inner London and how their initial teacher education (ITE) has prepared them for the reality of their work in multilingual classrooms.

In order to answer the research questions, I talked to 12 practising literacy teachers in two FE colleges in inner London (Cliffe College and Hatton College)<sup>1</sup>, primarily in 2014. I interviewed each teacher twice and also observed them teaching literacy groups containing a diverse mixture of students with a variety of first languages.

Adult literacy teaching is often defined as the provision of reading and writing tuition for those who are native English speakers or fluent users of spoken English; English teaching for those who still need help with oral English skills (speaking and listening) is usually provided through English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. This conventional view might be appropriate for some parts of the UK, but in London the boundaries are more open and complex. In practice, in inner London in the 21st century, teachers are faced with the phenomenon of superdiversity, described by Vertovec as:

*A dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. (Vertovec, 2006 p.10)*

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<sup>1</sup> All names of people and places have been changed to protect anonymity.

Literacy groups in the areas covered by this study can consist of up to 100% learners who do not have English as their first language. In the small sample of literacy learners in my study, over 34 different languages were spoken and the learners' backgrounds were highly varied.

FE learners have to work towards recognised qualifications. At Levels 1 and 2, both Literacy and ESOL learners might be studying for Functional Skills qualifications; at Entry level, ESOL learners would probably be working towards ESOL QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework) awards and Literacy learners still Functional Skills. For a few students, mainly those with learning difficulties and disabilities, RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) is an accepted process of measuring progress.

Until recently, ESOL and literacy teachers undertook different training programmes but, since 2013, it has been possible to train in both subjects concurrently and receive a qualification -the Level 5<sup>2</sup> Diploma in Teaching English (Literacy and ESOL)- that covers both specialisms (LSIS, 2013). All of the teachers in this study were trained as literacy teachers; some were also trained as ESOL teachers either before their literacy training or simultaneously with it. I was interested to see whether this additional training made those teachers feel more confident in their ability to meet the learners' language needs.

### **1.3 My professional background and its relevance for the study**

My interest in this area stems from my professional role as a specialist adult literacy teacher educator. I have been working in the field of adult literacy for 40 years and during this time, I have moved from being a classroom practitioner to a manager and, currently, a teacher educator. Over this period I have worked with hundreds of literacy learners and trained several hundred literacy teachers and I maintain a belief that learners who are being given a second (or, in some cases, a first) opportunity for education in their adult life deserve the very best trained teachers.

When I started in the field of adult literacy education as a result of the national campaign fronted by the BBC in 1975 (Longley, 1975), I was one of the nearly 40,000 volunteers involved in teaching adults to read and write (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). I

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<sup>2 2</sup> For an explanation of levels, see Appendix 3

was set to work initially as a volunteer and later as a paid teacher at my local Adult Education Institute. I soon began to train other volunteers and when I moved into full-time literacy teaching I began to teach on a new specialist literacy teacher training course, the City and Guilds 9282. This was a short practical course, in practice very similar to the volunteer programmes I had run, but for those hoping for paid work in the field.

In 2001 the Skills for Life (SfL) strategy (DfES, 2001c) began as a Government response to the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999). One of the main planks of the strategy was the provision of high class specialist training for literacy and numeracy teachers (DfES, 2001c p.10). Every adult literacy teacher in the country was to be trained in the use of the new Adult literacy Core Curriculum (Basic Skills Agency, 2001) and I was among a group of people chosen by the Basic Skills Agency to deliver this training. In addition, in 2003, specialist content began to be added to generic FE Teaching Diplomas, Certificates of Education and PGCEs so that new teachers could be trained both in generic pedagogy and also in that specifically addressing literacy learning (DfES and FENTO, 2002b). This was the first recognition that teachers of literacy needed to have not less but more training than other teachers of adults and young people in colleges.

I was involved in writing these courses from the beginning in 2001, first in an FE college, and later at the IoE (the Institute of Education, now the UCL Institute of Education). The courses were written to standards which changed over the years (DfES and FENTO, 2002b; FENTO, 1999; LLUK, 2007a; LSIS, 2013). The programmes also changed and developed, but from the very beginning our courses were unusual (although not unique) in that they offered the specialist training fully integrated with the generic training. The training offered at the IoE was also atypical in that ESOL and literacy cohorts were trained alongside each other and shared some aspects of the training. From 2013, for the first time, trainees were allowed to qualify in both subjects jointly (LSIS, 2013) and again our team took up this challenge and rewrote the course to incorporate the new standards.

So, teaching adult literacy in FE colleges today, we might find teachers who have been trained in a variety of ways: they might have a joint literacy, ESOL and generic teaching

qualification; a PGCE or Diploma in which they have trained in literacy together with generic teaching skills; separate generic and literacy qualifications or separate literacy, ESOL and generic qualifications. Many teachers received their training piecemeal: at different times and in different educational institutions, often over a period of several years. In this study I have tried to draw on the experience of teachers who have had their initial training in some of these different ways to explore similarities and differences and how they might be reflected in the teachers' practice.

However, unlike the training of teachers of literacy in schools, the training of adult literacy teachers is still in its infancy and has been developed 'on the hoof' in a number of institutions, by trainers with a variety of experiences of the subject (Lucas *et al.*, 2004). The point of this study is not to compare institutions or to make judgments about the quality of training in different institutions, but to look more generally at what type of training seems to support teachers best; that, in the teachers' own views, is able to provide them with the ideas, skills and confidence to assist their learners and help them to progress.

Since the introduction of the FENTO standards (1999), the field of post-compulsory education has been a growing area of interest (Avis, 2006; Bathmaker, 2006; Lucas, 2004; Nasta, 2007). Language teacher education, because of its worldwide field of interest, has long had an extensive knowledge base, but now increasingly there are studies of language teaching from a sociocultural perspective (Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Hawkins, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, 2009). However, adult literacy teacher education is still an underdeveloped field. Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) for adults has done pioneering work in the field of bilingual literacy teacher education (Vinogradov, 2013) and there have been some studies of the new specialist Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) ITE programmes set up under Skills for Life in England (Fisher and Webb, 2006; Lucas, 2007; Lucas, Casey and Giannakaki, 2004; Lucas *et al.*, 2004; O'Leary and Smith, 2012) but little looking beyond the demise of Skills for Life and the inception of Functional Skills in 2012.

## 1.4 Conceptual Background

The field of literacy research and practice has been something akin to a battlefield over the last 50 years (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Hillier, 2009). Literacy education for both adults and children has been a hotly contested field. Because literacy is so closely connected with identity (Bartlett and Holland, 2002) and because it is seen as a foundation for the acquisition of so many other skills, policy makers, teachers and researchers naturally want to 'get it right'. But 'getting it right' is not straightforward despite the view of some politicians. One's approach to literacy education depends largely on one's view of literacy itself. UNESCO (whose own definition has changed several times over the years) has defined it as:

*The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (UNESCO, 2004 p.13)*

This definition gives a sense of the plurality, the complexity and the all-embracing nature of literacy. It also defines literacy as reading and writing, omitting orality, a view which is not shared by all. In fact the national SfL strategy used a broader (but more functional) definition 'the ability to read, write and speak in English [...] at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general' (Basic Skills Agency, 2001, p. 3). In this study, although I have focused on reading, I do make some reference to speaking, listening and writing as these are significant factors in multilingual learners becoming confident in their use of English.

Some points of nomenclature here. In this thesis, I sometimes employ the term *literacies* in recognition of the variety of literacy practices and the multimodal nature of texts, but I also use *literacy* with an awareness that the plural can read awkwardly if used all the time. So here, both terms can be taken to imply a concept of literacy as a multifaceted phenomenon. I have also decided to retain the title of the subject as literacy, rather than following the current Government lead of retitling adult literacy provision as 'English' which I feel is confusing, both because adult literacy is not the same as school English

teaching and because it becomes indistinguishable from ESOL classes which are also called English.

A term for students for whom English is not their sole language is also necessary. Again, this is a complex issue. One aspect of superdiversity is that there are no binaries about language use. People may have more than one first language and different languages or language varieties can be used for different purposes perfectly adequately, if not perfectly fluently. I use here the term, *multilingual*, in recognition that learners may have one or more additional languages, which they may use in different domains of their lives.

In common with many other researchers, I see literacies use as a form of social practice in which it is always enacted within a particular context, for a particular purpose and with a particular audience in mind (Barton, 1994; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1984). As seen by NLS, it is an integral part of our society rather than a set of skills to be acquired, a distinction identified by Street (1984) as the ideological model of literacy 'located within broader social and political contexts' (Street and Lefstein, 2007, p. 35) as opposed to the autonomous model, where literacy is a discrete set of skills entirely separate from other aspects of daily life. This view of literacy (Barton, 1994; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Street, 2003) regards it as multifaceted (New London Group, 1996); multimodal (Kress, 2003); dynamic and in a constant state of flux (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009) as well as historically, socially and culturally situated.

The theory of literacy as a social practice also frames a perception of teacher education. Hawkins argues that the field of teacher education is experiencing a paradigm shift, moving from the view that teachers need to acquire specific skills and practices towards a focus on critical teacher education, 'a view of teachers as transformative agents, whose responsibilities include ensuring equal educational access for all students' (Hawkins, 2004 p.5). As a form of social practice, teacher education must necessarily relate directly to trainees' social contexts and be formed by the social and cultural environment of the classroom and the learners who are to be found within it. As stated earlier, the learners in a literacy class in this age of superdiversity are most commonly multilingual, with language as well as literacy needs. So from a social practice theoretical

point of view, an ITE course that takes account of the context of learning must also take account of this new generation of literacy learners.

## 1.5 Research Questions

One key question that could be asked of any teacher education course might be: is it fit for purpose? This in turn might evoke another question, namely what is the purpose? And how would you know if it was fit for it? The purpose of teacher education is a multifaceted one but it might include: providing teachers with knowledge, practical experience, confidence and a theoretical basis for their practice (Morton, McGuire and Baynham, 2006). How we decide if it is fit for purpose might depend on who is asking the question and by what standards they are judging it. If we look at it from a range of perspectives, we might seek the opinions of learners, teachers, managers, policy makers, teacher educators and researchers from a variety of contexts. In this research, in addition to the evidence from my own observations, I shall draw on one main perspective, the teachers themselves. I am investigating the beliefs that underpin teachers' choice of pedagogy and their perceptions of the ways in which their teacher education prepared them to teach reading in an FE college in inner London in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To this end my research questions are:

- *What is the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their pedagogic practice?*
- *What are the main pedagogical approaches used by adult literacy teachers to take account of superdiversity when teaching reading?*
- *What is the influence of ITE on adult literacy teachers' beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading?*
- *What are the main challenges that adult literacy teachers experience?*

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

This chapter has established the field of study and my interest in it stemming from my professional background. It has outlined the aims of the research project and introduced the research questions. The next chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study and explores some of the relevant literature on the topic in more

detail. Chapter 3 describes and reviews the methodology used for this research, including the sample, the methods chosen and ethical considerations. Chapters 4-7 presents the research findings, analysing and discussing these in the light of the literature explored in Chapter 2. The final chapter draws conclusions from these findings and explores the professional implications for specialist literacy teacher education.

## 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study and outlined my interest in the topic. I have defined some terms used in the thesis and outlined why there is a need for a study such as this. The next chapter will explore what is known already about the topic and review the current state of research in this field.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Orientation and Literature Review

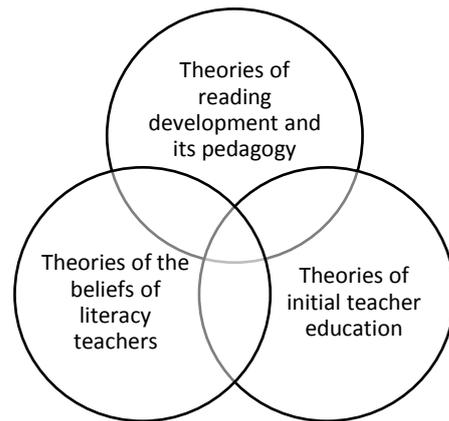
## 2.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter explores the literature on the practices and beliefs of adult literacy teachers, the role of their ITE and the challenges they encounter in their work. I outline the major theoretical frameworks for adult literacy teaching and investigate what current research has to say about what works in teaching adult literacy, focusing on the teaching of reading.

The chapter is divided into eleven sections. After the introduction, the next section outlines the theoretical field in which the research is situated, followed by an overview of the state of research in the field of adult literacy and its pedagogy. Section 2.4 is concerned with research on literacy teachers' beliefs and knowledge. In 2.5 I explore the extent to which teachers' beliefs can be accommodated within their practice. Moving from beliefs to practice, in section 2.6, I interrogate the idea of 'good practice' and how this relates to teaching reading. Section 2.7 covers current research on teachers' pedagogic practices in reading and the next section explores what research has to say about teaching reading to those whose first language is not English. Section 2.9 considers how teachers gain essential knowledge through ITE and explores the literature on the influence of training on teachers' practices and beliefs. The penultimate section is concerned with the effects of performativity and managerialism on teachers and how they meet these challenges in their practice. The chapter ends with a summary of its contents and my conclusions on the research to date.

## 2.2 The theoretical field

The theoretical field of adult literacy pedagogy lies in the sphere of adult education. My interest is in both how adult literacy practitioners teach reading in the 21st century to linguistically diverse learners and in how far their approach to teaching fits with their beliefs about pedagogy. As a teacher educator, I am concerned about the place of their ITE in the formation of their beliefs and practices. These overlapping theoretical fields are illustrated as follows:



**Figure 1: Overlapping theoretical fields**

The empirical field is that of post-compulsory education in FE colleges, specifically two inner London colleges selected as sites for this study. Within this field is the domain of adult literacy provision and the college lecturers teaching reading to diverse groups of learners.

### 2.3 Theories of literacy and its pedagogy

It is recognised today that literacy is not a single, static subject with an agreed pedagogy but a constantly evolving, lifelong, lifewide set of practices in multiple life domains, used for multiple purposes (Duncan and Schwab, 2015). Even professionals do not always define it in the same way; in a recent glossary of terms, we see six different official definitions from the last 12 years (Brooks and Burton, 2016). While this study is concerned with reading development, one aspect of literacy learning, this should be considered in the context of general theories of literacy. I have chosen to use the definition of reading used by PISA (OECD, 2013) as one which recognises the breadth and depth of the reading process.

*Reading literacy is understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and potential, and participate in society. (OECD, 2013, p. 61)*

This definition recognises that the reader's primary purpose is understanding (comprehension); that readers 'use' texts (they read for a purpose); that they reflect on what they read to create meaning (reading is an interactive process) and that they

engage with texts (reading is motivated by interest and/or enjoyment). Reading is active, purposeful and functional, potentially fulfilling both personal and participatory goals.

While this definition might not be controversial, how to teach reading is highly contested (Lemann, November 1997). This, in part, is due to two different perspectives on literacy, namely the *autonomous* and the *ideological models* (Street, 1984; 1995). Street distinguishes between a view of literacy as autonomous, an individual and neutral skill, and an ideological model which sees literacy practices as 'inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society' (Street, 1995, p. 161). Street's view of literacy has been highly influential in the formation of the NLS, in which literacy is seen as socially situated and linked to processes of power and domination (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2012).

The autonomous model is associated with a psychological or skills view of literacy in which readers are portrayed as engaged in individual mental processes. In the ideological model, readers are engaged in social or cultural practices, where written language is integrated with all the other practices taking place within that context, namely oral communication, thinking, acting and interacting and maybe using tools and technologies (Gee, 2010). Discourses around skills tend to focus on students' deficits, rather than the practices that they already engage in successfully. A discourse of literacy as social practice can lead to enhanced views of students' capabilities and higher expectations by teachers and by the learners themselves (Ackland, 2013; Miller and Satchwell, 2006).

The notion of literacy as a skill to be learned and used individually or as a practice which operates in a particular social context affects not only how people see literacy, but how it is taught and learned. The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001b) exemplifies literacy as sets of skills which need to be developed before a learner progresses to the next level. From this perspective, skills are acquired through individual cognitive processes; these therefore are matters of concern for teachers. School literacy policy in England (Rose, 2006) has been significantly influenced by skills-based studies, such as that on synthetic phonics (Johnston and Watson, 2005), based on psychological studies with young children.

In contrast, a social practices approach to literacies does not see literacy as a single monolithic 'thing' which can be learned (or not) but as something that we do differently for disparate purposes in the various domains of our lives. It cannot therefore be learned in the abstract but only in relation to particular contexts which require different literacies, (Baker, 2010; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). Much research influencing the social practice view of literacies is ethnographic, for example, Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) study of the language development of children in two neighbouring US communities at home and at school, or the study of reading and writing in the everyday lives of a community in Lancaster, UK (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). A socially situated pedagogy involves embedding literacy so it is always learned within a context (Cara *et al.*, 2006); starting from the learners' own literacy practices (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009) and taking a critical view of how language is used (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001).

There are those who refute the view that literacy is political, arguing, perhaps rather disingenuously, that while politicians are concerned about the nation's literacy, the learning of reading is value-free (Gough, 1999). There have also been criticisms of the social practices approach which, because of its origins in ethnography is seen as concerned with how people use literacy rather than how they acquire it (Snow, 2000). The focus of the social view has been primarily on everyday literacies rather than those in educational institutions. Even Papen, who is a proponent of the NLS, wrote, 'To be frank the social practice view of literacy has not yet developed a theory of learning that would fit its understanding of literacy as social practice' (Papen, 2005, p. 138). However, more recently, researchers and practitioners have paid increasing attention to how an understanding of literacy as social practice can be applied to teaching and learning in schools and colleges and the results demonstrate how students' vernacular literacy practices can be used as a rich resource to enhance learning (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009).

Ivanic *et al.*, considering learning more broadly than just literacy, view it as 'consisting of three components: the cognitive, the practical and the communicative' (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009, p. 18). While their research is particularly concerned with the third of these, which is often marginalised in vocational courses, they accept a cognitive element is required. They are among a growing number of academics and practitioners concerned with the

learning of literacy, who accept that some focus on skills need not be in contradiction to a notion of literacy as socially situated (Green and Howard, 2007; Purcell Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004).

As a practitioner and teacher educator, my view is that literacies are dynamically and inextricably situated within their social, political, cultural and historical contexts, yet I am also aware that learners need some skills in order to progress. Recognising and valuing learners' current uses of literacy is a first step towards developing these through a learner-centred pedagogy (Reder, 1994; 2009). For me, nesting the skills development within an overarching sociocultural discourse is a powerful argument. Amalgamation of the two paradigms offers the benefits of both to the learner (Green and Howard, 2007; Purcell Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004). Newcomers can move towards full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community as they acquire skills and build confidence (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

## 2.4 Theories of teachers' beliefs and knowledge

### 2.4.1 Entry Motivations

Teachers' beliefs about literacies and teaching start long before they enter the profession. Personal educational experiences (and those of their parents and children) and their context-specific cultural and socio-political background have an effect.

Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000), in their study of undergraduates' reasons for choosing school teaching as a career, concluded that there were three main motivations: altruistic, linked to a social justice agenda, wanting to help people and improve their lives; intrinsic, such as enjoyment of teaching or love of the subject, which lie within the job itself, and extrinsic reasons, relating to material benefits such as long holidays, pay or status.

There has been little work on adult literacy teachers' motivations. Kendall and McGrath's study of eight literacy and ESOL teachers in the West Midlands found they had diverse trajectories into teaching, but often foregrounded their love of the subject, an intrinsic motivation (Kendall and McGrath, 2014). The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) Teacher Study recorded that just over

70% of respondents mentioned intrinsic reasons influencing their decision to teach; 41% of their sample of 1027 Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) teachers had altruistic reasons for joining the profession and just under a quarter gave extrinsic reasons (Cara *et al.*, 2008). However, in regarding these figures, we must consider that some people have more than one motivation for their actions and that motivations to begin something are not necessarily those that encourage continuation.

#### 2.4.2 Teachers' beliefs and knowledge

Evidently, what teachers do has a crucial effect on learning (Hattie, 2012). It has also been shown that what teachers think about teaching has a great effect on what they do (Wray *et al.*, 2002). It is proposed that teachers' beliefs have an enduring and significant effect on how they learn during their training and on their subsequent classroom practices (Phipps and Borg, 2007).

Alexander *et al* (1991) raised the issue of the multiplicity of terms for teacher beliefs which have continued to proliferate. Whatever the terminology, we are referring to what teachers think, what they believe and what they know. In this study, I intend to take Borg's lead and distinguish between individual teacher's cognitions, which he calls *beliefs*, and a more general *knowledge*, shared within the profession (Borg, 2006).

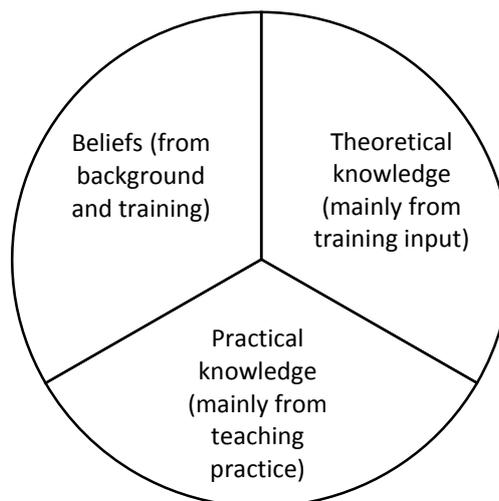
Theorists identify different types of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, in a range of ways. Shulman (1987) defined seven different types of teacher knowledge, differently acquired, but he distinguishes areas of knowledge that I believe overlap and coalesce. In this study I simplify this to only two, which I define as follows:

- *Theoretical knowledge* is structured, explicit knowledge, formally acquired. Although they are not all exactly comparable, similar understandings are sometimes called *received knowledge* (Phipps, 2006; Wallace, 1991); *vertical discourse* (Bernstein, 2000); *formal or codified knowledge* (Eraut, 2000a).
- *Practical knowledge* is implicit knowledge, acquired informally, also called *experiential knowledge* (Phipps, 2006; Wallace, 1991); *horizontal discourse* (Bernstein, 2000) or *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi, 1967).

A trainee teacher needs to acquire and process both types of knowledge simultaneously. Theoretical knowledge can be acquired through a course, training classes, mentoring, reading, watching videos etc. It will be assessed, probably in writing, before the trainee teacher is awarded a qualification. Such knowledge is likely to be mostly context independent; it is for the teacher to apply it to the work context.

Trainees already have and will acquire further practical knowledge, possibly as planned and deliberate formal learning, possibly also implicitly, or somewhere in-between on the continuum (Eraut, 2000a). By its very nature, such practical knowledge or 'that which we know but cannot tell' (Polanyi, 1967) is not subject to the same assessment regime as theoretical knowledge. One of the teacher educator's tasks is to assist the trainee to make this practical knowledge explicit and accessible for critical discussion.

It appears then that teachers' understandings have three main sources:



**Figure 2: Model of teacher knowledge, adapted from Phipps (2006)**

These knowledge types relate to everything the teacher does. Here we are particularly concerned with knowledge and beliefs about literacy and its development.

### 2.4.3 Beliefs and knowledge about literacy

Poulson (2003) notes that the 'subject' of literacy draws on a range of disciplinary knowledge. Duncan (2012) likewise stresses its multidisciplinary nature, citing five fields

of reading expertise: psychology and neuroscience, literary theory, social history, social practice theory and education.

Maggioni *et al* (2015) reviewed beliefs about reading by primary school teachers who saw reading from one perspective only: 'the cognitive, the affective, or the social dimension is viewed as the single factor that defines the reading experience and drives the pedagogical effort (p. 363). Depending on the teachers' viewpoints, beliefs about what reading is and how it develops varied. These teachers' perception of reading was described as 'more a soliloquy than a conversation between a reader and a writer' (p. 364).

Individualistic views of learning also affect teachers' own practice. In a study of the knowledge needed to teach literacy successfully, Poulson (2003) found teachers' knowledge often appeared to be interactive, collaborative and contextualised rather than individual. Strong coherent personal philosophies also guided these teachers' selections of approaches and materials (Poulson, 2003; Wray *et al.*, 2000; Wray *et al.*, 2002). They were purposeful in seeing literacy as the creation of meaning using text and so placed a strong emphasis on helping learners understand texts; using authentic texts and focusing on engagement with a range of textual forms and structures. However, Maggioni *et al* (2015, p. 356) found confusion about what induced text comprehension, noting that some teachers had an 'overwhelming belief that *assessing* comprehension (through questioning and reviewing) was a way of *providing instruction* in comprehension.'

In Kendall and McGrath's (2014) study of adult literacy and ESOL teachers, they did not particularly see themselves as teachers of reading and had no working definition of reading. They associated reading with print-based rather than digital texts, seeing these as 'what counts' (p. 66) thus aligning their view of reading with the values they had been brought up with. People's beliefs can be intransigent. Maggioni *et al* (2015) also found some teachers clung to their original beliefs about reading even when it was inconsistent with what they were studying, a view commensurate with my own experience of trainee teachers. ITE courses need to provide opportunities for reflection

and discussion of beliefs if real change is to be effected (Harkin, 2005; Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003).

## 2.5 Cohesion between theory and practice

Johnson (1992) studied the relationship between beliefs and practices of 30 English language teachers while teaching literacy and found that most teachers' practice was consistent with their beliefs. However, contextual factors can influence teachers' behaviour in many complex ways and may cause them to act against their stated beliefs, for example to fit in with learner expectations or to maintain classroom order (Phipps and Borg, 2007).

Maggioni *et al* (2015) also found that teachers' beliefs influence pedagogical choices, although the effects are often modified by contextual factors, for example, a belief in learner-centred education is one that is often challenged by policies in operation in colleges today. Teachers can feel that they are positioned in a learning culture that favours the needs of outside interests (Government, college management, employers) over those of learners and they have to find a way of operating within this system, even if it conflicts with their pedagogical beliefs (Black, 2010; Clow, 2001; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Hodgson, Edward and Gregson, 2007; Honan, 2006; Shain and Gleeson, 1999; The Literacy Study Group, 2010; Tusting, 2009). So although a teacher may hold strong beliefs about what will best promote learning, other factors may take priority, causing them to change their practice. This tension is discussed further in section 2.10.

## 2.6 Research on 'effective practice' in teaching reading

What pedagogical practices are considered effective? 'Best practice' or even 'good practice' are contested terms. Coffield and Edward (2009) note how the stakes are continually being raised and how policy makers have moved from striving for 'good practice' through 'best practice' to 'excellent practice' without clarity on what these terms mean or how they differ, let alone how they might be transmitted to the field. According to Alexander (1997), good practice is always situated within specific contexts and is a dynamic and constantly changing concept. Hattie shifts the discourse by arguing for 'what works' as proved by evidence-based research on what promotes the greatest progress in learning (Hattie, 2008; 2012) and, more recently on collaborative

institutional development rather than individual expertise (Hattie, 2015). Therefore, what counts as effective practice cannot be decided on an individual basis, but within our shared repertoire of routines and concepts developed by communities of practice within the workplace (Wenger, 1998). What we understand by the term 'effective practice' can only be framed in terms of its particular context.

Consequently, the research on 'good practice' in reading must be viewed as provisional in that the contexts of previous research studies are different from those of my study. Much of the research deals with children or adolescents rather than adults (Fletcher, 2014; Wray *et al.*, 2002); it is situated in other countries (Benseman, Sutton and Lander, 2005; Fletcher, 2014; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010) or other parts of the UK (Brooks *et al.*, 2007); deals with ESOL learners only (Baynham *et al.*, 2007; Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009; Roberts *et al.*, 2004) or took place at an earlier time (Kruidenier, 2002; NRP, 2000). Recent research with adults in multilingual metropolitan UK cities is lacking.

## 2.7 Literacy teachers' pedagogic practices

Literacy teachers' practice, like theory, is a complex and contested area. I have divided the literature on pedagogic practices related to teaching reading into two sections: those which might be seen as generic pedagogy, although applied to teaching reading, and literacy specialist pedagogy for teaching reading. I have focused on those practices most relevant to this study.

### 2.7.1 Generic Approaches to Teaching Reading

#### *Motivation*

The National Reading Panel's (NRP) definition of reading includes 'a motivation to read' as one of the essential elements of the reading process (Kruidenier, 2002, p. 2).

Recommendations as to how this should be achieved include using contextually relevant and adult texts (Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010); paying attention to the affective aspects of teaching and learning (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012) and creating a classroom culture that nurtures literacy motivation by integrating choice, collaboration and relevance into literacy tasks (Gambrell and Morrow, 2015). Fletcher (2014) also notes the importance of promoting intrinsic motivation (driven by an interest in the task

for its own sake) rather than relying on extrinsic motivation (driven by external forces or a desire for reward).

### *Teaching approaches*

Some pedagogic practices labelled in the literature as useful for literacy might be seen as good practice in teaching any subject, for example: collaborative approaches, independent learning, flexible groupings, a greater proportion of class time on topic, using a range of teaching approaches, which include those based on new technologies and multimodal texts.

Collaborative learning is seen as an effective approach to building confidence and independence (Fletcher, 2014; Gambrell and Morrow, 2015; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). Progress towards more independent learning may also be established through peer feedback (Brooks *et al.*, 2007; International Reading Association, 2000).

Making use of a flexible range of groupings- whole group; small groups and pairwork, is seen as effective practice in many studies (Brooks *et al.*, 2007; Fletcher, 2014; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010; Wray *et al.*, 2000). This can be seen as linked to building a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), or as a pragmatic and practical way of engaging and motivating learners to collaborate and support each other.

Lesgold and Welch-Ross (2012) note that only about a third of adults make reading gains equivalent to a US grade level during a year's classes (usually 100 hours or less) whereas research has shown that 3000 hours are needed for so-called mastery of reading (Chi, Glaser and Farr, 1988). Learners with additional language needs and those with learning disabilities are likely to need longer (Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). It follows that the more class time that is focused on reading development tasks, the more likely students are to progress.

Some studies also stress the need for a 'toolkit' of teaching approaches to provide variety and maintain interest and engagement in the learning programme. (Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009; Fletcher, 2014; IRA, 2012). People learn in different

ways and what works for one person might not be appropriate for another. Where learners have not learned through previous approaches, trying alternatives might be more successful, including those based around new technologies and multimodal texts.

## 2.7.2 Specialist approaches to teaching reading

### *Skills-based approaches*

Both the Literacy and ESOL core curricula cover the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing although the ESOL core curriculum places a heavier focus on speaking and listening (Basic Skills Agency, 2001; DfES, 2001a). Oral skills can be seen as learning goals in themselves but are also key to developing the 'print' skills of reading and writing. NRDC research used the maxim of 'talk is work in the ESOL classroom' (Baynham *et al.*, 2007, p. 70; Roberts *et al.*, 2004, p. 14). This could be equally valid in the literacy classroom as discussion clarifies concepts, arguments or vocabulary in reading matter.

For learners to talk more, the teacher has to talk less and provide opportunities for discussion, (Fletcher, 2014; Gambrell and Morrow, 2015). Kamil (2003) suggests guided reading (small group reading circles of learners at a similar level, supported by the teacher); Lesgold and Welch-Ross (2012) advocate extended reading combined with instruction, a similar process but more individualised. Duncan (2012) has shown reading circles to be effective for building confidence and developing independent reading skills.

The four elements of reading outlined in the NRP: decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are mentioned frequently in the literature (Besser *et al.*, 2004; Kamil, 2003; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012; McShane, 2005). Comprehension, the most crucial and complex of the four components, is often broken down into strategies which enable readers to monitor their understanding of a text and repair comprehension when it breaks down. Good readers do this automatically; emerging readers need to be taught how to use these strategies (Keene, 2002; Kruidenier, 2002; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010; McShane, 2005). The NRP identified eight strategies with 'a firm scientific basis for concluding that they improve comprehension' (2000, pp. 4-5): comprehension monitoring, co-operative learning, graphic and semantic organisers, story structure, question answering and generating, summarisation. Most effective was seen to be the

combination or two or more of these strategies, as for example, through Directed Reading Activity (Betts, 1946) or reciprocal reading (Palincsar and Brown, 1984; 1986). Brooks *et al* (2007) noted reciprocal reading was among several approaches suggested by the literature to be effective but rarely seen in their research.

Most of these strategies, excluding story structure, appear in all the adult studies, perhaps illustrating the dearth of fiction reading in adult classes. Conversely, absent from the comprehension strategies list, but mentioned in other studies as effective, is schema activation, drawing on what the learner already knows about the topic or similar texts (Kamil, 2003; Keene, 2002; McShane, 2005). Linked to this is the genre or text type approach, whereby an understanding of text organisational structure, format and language as related to particular purposes and audiences helps readers to identify and understand those texts (Kamil, 2003).

### *Socio-cultural approaches*

A social approach to reading includes features uncommon in the literature around effective literacy teaching which tends to focus on skills. Examples include linking learning with learners' outside-college literacy practices; authentic texts and tasks, a critical reading approach and contextualisation of teaching to the lives and interests of the learners.

Advocates of the social approach see engagement in literacy practices rather than the development of skills as a defining factor. Involvement in a broader range of literacy practices would not necessarily be assessable by examination, although it may well result in greater achievement (Green and Howard, 2007; Miller and Satchwell, 2006).

Purcell Gates *et al* (2002) explored authentic literacy activities instruction. Their research with 83 adult literacy classes in 22 US states reported that in programmes with more authentic activities, learners increased the amount and complexity of their reading and writing in their lives outside the classroom.

Reder's longitudinal research with about 1000 randomly selected people examined the nature and impact of literacy and numeracy across the lifespan of those who had dropped out of high school in Portland, Oregon. He found that participation in a literacy

programme leads to 'increased practice engagement that, over time, leads to the very gains in proficiency currently valued by policy makers.' (Reder, 2009, p. 35). He developed the term Practice Engagement Theory (PET) to refer to these gains in literacy proficiency shown by engagement in literacy practices (Reder, 1994).

Critical reading and analytical thinking is another mainstay of the social approach (Alvermann, 2002; Luke, 2000). Parris and Block's (2007) research with 70 teachers of adolescent literacy learners across all 50 of the US states stressed the importance of a pedagogy that allows students to use critical thinking skills, problem solve, participate in decision-making and become more independent learners.

One of the tenets of the NLS is that there are different literacies associated with different domains of life (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). Different literacies are practised at home; in the workplace and in leisure activities. It follows that what is learned in the classroom is not necessarily relevant or directly transferable to another domain. Each context has its own discursive practices. Embedding literacy tuition into vocational study enables entry into that discourse community and provides motivation for those who might not see the point of studying literacy discretely (Latham, 2010). Research across 79 vocational programmes in 15 FE colleges and one training provider in England showed improved retention and success rates for learners on programmes with embedded literacy (Cara *et al.*, 2006).

Many people now read more on screen than they do print particularly due to time spent on social networking (Gillen and Barton, 2010; Jewitt, 2006; Jones and Hafner, 2012; Kress, 2003). A social view of literacies takes into account these more informal, vernacular uses of literacy and teachers may incorporate them into their practice.

An adult literacy teacher has to be able to respond to the diversity of learners' individual needs. The NLS posits that reading and writing are always situated within specific social practices operating within specific discourses (Gee, 2012). Academic discourse can be confusing and alienating for those unaccustomed to its norms and requirements.

There is a strong pedagogical argument for the incorporation of out-of-school cultural practices and experiences and bodies of knowledge, called *Funds of Knowledge* (FoK)

(Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005; Moll *et al.*, 1992). Making uses of learners' FoK is particularly important when working with adults both because they have such a wealth of experiences to draw on and to counteract a previously imposed deficit view of these. Research shows how an alternative view of learners' practices can benefit their in-college learning. When teachers focused their attention on the literacy practices that learners engaged in outside college, they gained a more positive and inclusive view of the students, which in turn led to higher attainment (Miller and Satchwell, 2006). There is evidence to suggest that a pedagogy that values and builds upon learners' FoK contributes to effective practice. In a study of courses for NEETS<sup>3</sup> in 11 FE colleges in the West Midlands, Smith and Wright (2015) concluded that student-centredness and the use of situated literacies were among key approaches that led to a worthwhile educational experience for these young people. Condelli *et al* (2009) call this approach *Bringing in the Outside*, noting that students in classes where teachers made connections to the outside or real world obtained more growth in reading development.

The pedagogical literature on diversity tends to focus on differentiation for learners who learn at a different pace. Diversity of race, ethnicity, culture and language or of those whose status in this country might be precarious, are rarely mentioned, except in general terms, for example, effective teachers 'help children who are having difficulty' (IRA, 2000, p. 1) or provide 'differentiated literacy instruction specific to needs (IRA, 2012, p. 8). This may reflect the sites of such research being in more monocultural areas.

Whilst here I have separated out elements of skills and practices approaches to literacy education, in practice, provision is rarely one or the other, but an amalgam of the two. However, in observing teaching, one can usually notice an accentuation on one or the other, generally driven by the beliefs of the teacher and/or the institutional values and imperatives creating harmony or tensions between them.

### 2.7.3 The reality of teachers' pedagogic practices

Most of the literature is concerned with what teachers should be doing in the classroom, according to what is termed 'effective practice', rather than what they are actually seen to do. Between 2003 and 2005 NRDC researchers observed 47 teachers of 59 literacy

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<sup>3</sup> NEETS refers to young people 'not in education, employment or training'

classes through four observations of each class in an attempt to correlate learners' progress in reading and changes in their attitudes with their teachers' strategies (Brooks *et al.*, 2007). The classes were spread across the UK (although not in London) and the learners largely came from white, English-speaking backgrounds. Frequently observed teaching strategies were: giving immediate feedback; discussion of vocabulary during reading; other word study (eg word lists, puzzles, word searches) and using a dictionary to find word meanings. The report notes that several approaches suggested by the literature to be effective were rarely seen. These were work on fluency; reciprocal reading; explicit comprehension strategies; accurate phonics teaching and language experience approaches. It should be noted, however, that what is viewed as effective here, is seen very much from a skills perspective.

## 2.8 Teaching literacy to bilingual/multilingual learners

### 2.8.1 Issues for multilingual literacy learners

Adult literacy pedagogic practice is under-researched; teaching literacy to multilingual learners, even more so. What exists is mostly concerned with beginner language learners not literate in their own language. Unlike English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, who are often well-educated, many ESOL learners come from countries where they have experienced war, oppression, poverty and/or gender discrimination, which have denied them the opportunity to become literate. Certain languages have no written form or one that has only recently been developed. In these cases, it is not just the English language that is unfamiliar but the whole process of reading.

In the UK, beginner English language learners who are not literate in their own language are likely to be found in ESOL classes. As they progress towards oral fluency, they might join a literacy class. Indeed, some language learners see ESOL classes as marginalising and argue to be placed in literacy classes which they see as the mainstream and a route to progression into vocational, further or higher education (Simpson, Cooke and Baynham, 2008).

Where English is not spoken at home, students are living between two language systems. How each learner uses the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), in what circumstances and for what purposes is complex and individual. Teachers can only

know by talking to the learners and getting to know their backgrounds. Although those in a literacy class will generally have reasonable spoken English they may not have a background in using reading and writing in either English or their other languages.

Students using Caribbean Patwa are rarely recognised as language minority students, but many also will have significant language needs when learning to read and write in Standard English (ILEA, 1990; Schwab, 1994). Likewise, the language needs of Deaf students who have British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language are often underestimated. BSL has grammar and syntax that is very different from English and a more limited vocabulary, so as with ESOL learners there may be many words that are unfamiliar to them. Deaf learners may have additional difficulties in learning to read and write as theirs is a visual language and they may have no written or spoken language on which to base their second language learning.

### 2.8.1 Pedagogy for teaching literacy to multilingual learners

There is little literature on teaching reading to multilingual learners in a literacy class, but there is some on teaching beginner literacy to those in ESOL classes (Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009; Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006; Vinogradov, 2013). Spiegel and Sunderland (2009) list a number of challenges for learning to read in another language: educational background, another script, the vagaries of English spelling, discourse organisation, different schemata and grammar. New teachers often focus on issues of grammar but the other challenges can be just as consequential.

In general, good practice in teaching reading to multilingual learners is seen as similar to effective literacy teaching approaches with monolingual learners, including top down and bottom up approaches, varied activities and different interaction patterns, contextualisation and 'bringing in the outside '(Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009). However, multilingual learners need additional language work in order to access and interpret texts. This involves a particular focus on oral communicative activities as an end as well as a means (Baynham *et al.*, 2007), vocabulary, cultural issues that might hinder understanding of texts and multimodal instruction (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012).

Vocabulary, one of the NRP (2000) four elements of reading, is naturally more challenging for those who are still in the process of learning the language. For a reader to be able to make sense of a text independently and without strain, the vocabulary needs to be 98-99% familiar (McShane, 2005). Vocabulary instruction that is 'explicit, systematic, extensive and intensive' is needed (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012, p. 225).

Another important issue for reading comprehension is cultural knowledge and background (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). Learners raised in a different culture may be unfamiliar with some of the references in a text which are key to its comprehension and these need explaining by teachers.

Condelli *et al* (2009) conducted a study of ESOL Literacy students in 38 classes within 13 adult ESOL programmes across the USA. Several instructional strategies were found to be related to growth in student literacy and language learning, the most relevant to this study being 'Bringing in the outside'. Students in classes where teachers made connections to the 'outside' or real world had more growth in reading basic skills development. The process engaged learners and enabled them to link new learning to what they already knew.

Lesgold and Welch-Ross (2012) have various suggestions for appropriate pedagogy: task-based learning, explicit teaching, formative feedback, rich and elaborated input, together with literacy instruction that is contextualized. They stress that language learners need to continue learning and using the language outside the classroom, which enables them to interact with English speakers and maximises their exposure to the language in a variety of venues. Technology is seen as a useful vehicle for this too.

## 2.9 Initial Teacher Education

Following a move to introduce compulsory teaching qualifications in the FE sector (DfEE, 2000), as part of the SfL strategy, all literacy teachers were also required to become qualified by gaining appropriate subject knowledge, understanding and personal skills. What was deemed appropriate was laid out in a set of standards, initially called 'subject

specifications' and separate from the generic professional standards (DfES and FENTO, 2002b), later revised as the 'application of the professional standards' (LLUK, 2007b).

Teacher education courses were validated by their adherence to these standards, so teacher educators had to comply with the view of the subject perpetrated by them. These programmes were doubly scrutinised; the input by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) (audited by Standards Verification UK (SVUK)) and the output by Ofsted, to ensure they were delivering the 'subject' as specified in the standards. What teacher educators viewed as appropriate subject content was not pertinent as they had little say over course content and were obliged to accept what had been sanctified through what Bourdieu calls 'a legitimised mode of expression' (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 58).

McDougall *et al* (2006) argue that standards disempower teachers because they lay down a view of the subject (in this case, literacy) that is fixed and not open to critical review. By definition this excludes other interpretations of the subject and alternative views of what teachers need to learn about it.

The new specialist LLN teacher education courses set up through SfL were analysed and evaluated in detail (Cara *et al.*, 2008; Fisher and Webb, 2006; Lucas, 2007; Lucas *et al.*, 2004; Morton, McGuire and Baynham, 2006). They differed from generic ITE programmes because participants did not start with a qualification in their subject, but were learning the subject concurrently with learning to teach it. Different models were offered that separated or integrated generic and specialist knowledge and provided teaching practice in different ways (Casey *et al.*, 2007; Lucas *et al.*, 2004). My colleagues and I have argued for an integrated approach to pedagogy and subject knowledge (Hughes, Paton and Schwab, 2005), but contextual factors often made this impossible for other providers.

During the period of SfL (2001-2010) education reforms meant that funding was available as never before for literacy teaching and literacy teacher education. However, it can be argued that this came at a price. Ball (2003) argues that three interrelated *policy technologies*: the market, managerialism and performativity, are key elements in the reform package and these technologies offer 'a politically attractive alternative to the state-centred, public welfare tradition of educational provision' (Ball, 2003, pp. 215-

216), replacing the older policy technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy and aligning public sector organisations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector.

With the demise of SfL, funding for adult literacy rapidly decreased, but national and local policies based on marketisation, managerialism and performativity continued to dictate the context of teaching, promoting competition with the private sector, regulating and monitoring teachers' practice and micromanaging their activities. Despite deregulation of teacher education following the Lingfield Review (Lingfield, October 2012), standards remain which continue to define 'effective practice' in education and training, although no longer specifically around the subject of literacy (ETF, 2014b).

While it is possible now to view the subject more flexibly, the issue of theoretical and practical input and how much to provide of each during training continues to be a longstanding and complex one, partly due to the lack of theory that is specifically related to the post 16 sector. What research exists is often contradictory. Coffield noted the lack of a coherent set of theories for post-16 learning and how the different traditions 'do not so much argue with as ignore each other' (2004 p.142).

Teacher educators are generally agreed that theory is needed even if they disagree about what it might be and how to teach it. The issue is not just about the provision of theory for the novice teacher, but about making it relevant and accessible. Loughran (2010) makes the point that not all theory is useful; teachers need to be clear about the benefits. A major LSDA<sup>4</sup> project in 2001 worked with 10 FE colleges and 2 HEIs to explore FE teachers' perceptions of their ITE. One finding was that theory is perceived, remembered and used differently by different teachers. Participants found it hard to recall any in detail. They tended to view theory as what had been published and did not regard their own theory, developed through reflective practice, as significant. Theories

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<sup>4</sup> Learning and Skills Development Agency.

sometimes made them feel hostile or guilty and these feelings were not limited to those with fewer academic qualifications (Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003).

One of the problems, Harkin argues in a later article (2005), is that different courses offer different fragments of theory and teacher educators may interpret theories differently. There is a lack of clarity about what theory is important, so trainees can have difficulty relating it to their practice.

Practical knowledge also has its problems. By its very nature, experiential theory is often not generalisable and Loughran (2010) found that, as such, it is low status and often undervalued by trainees. It is not just tacit but also difficult to talk about. Harkin (2005) notes that new teachers will try out different ideas; if they work, they become invisible as theory; if they do not work they become irrelevant.

A proposed solution lies in reflective practice (Harkin, 2005; Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003; McKenzie, 2015). The process of reflective teaching supports the development of expertise in teaching and learning over the course of a teacher's professional life. The notion of reflective practice originated with Dewey (1933) who contrasted 'routine action' (guided by tradition and/or authority) with 'reflective action' whereby teachers systematically consider everything they do as a professional practitioner, engaging in rigorous self-appraisal and development.

Hillier explains that there are two primary reasons for practitioners to develop reflective practice, firstly to determine practices that create effective and enduring learning opportunities and secondly to critically examine hegemonic views of education and learning (Hillier, 2002). For these reasons during the last two decades it has become an indispensable element of teacher education (ETF, 2014a; FENTO, 1999; LLUK, 2007a). However, as Collin *et al* warn, the term suffers from a multiplicity of definitions and its effectiveness as a tool has never been effectively appraised (Collin, Karsenti and Komis, 2013). They maintain that although it has been seen primarily through the lenses of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), there are wide disparities in the way it is perceived and used in teacher education programmes. This lack of clarity about the essential nature of reflective practice, means there is a corresponding lack of understanding about how to teach, evidence and assess it (Beauchamp, 2006).

On an ITE course, evidence is generally provided by a journal which trainees are required to sustain throughout their training. However the purpose of promoting reflective practice in training is intended to be its establishment as a tool to be used throughout a teacher's professional life. As Beattie argues 'the construction and reconstruction of professional knowledge is a career-long process not a single event. It is always a work-in-progress' (Beattie, 1997, p. 126). However, it has been shown that the keeping of a journal during ITE is not always the most conducive way of supporting a lifelong reflective process.

If theory were linked to reflection it would be more meaningful for trainees, but Harkin (2005) notes that in ITE reflection tends to start where people are and leave them there so it is not always as formative as it might be. McKenzie (2015) found that reflection was generally valued by teachers and seen as contributing to their development but was often avoided through lack of time. This was particularly the case when reflection was seen as keeping a journal.

*Although journals can provide an effective means of supporting the reflective process, it is apparent that for some individuals they are, at best, of limited value in promoting reflection and, at worst, a hindrance. (McKenzie, 2015, p. 660)*

She argues that a repertoire of different approaches needs to be offered so teachers can choose what suits them. Some prefer to think alone (with or without a journal); others prefer to collaborate, not necessarily with anything written down. Teachers need options to fit with their preferences and these might change as their career diversifies and develops. Options such as these offer a way of engaging with reflection which is sustainable beyond training and which can offer a tool for critiquing both individual personal practice and the 'legitimised' discourses around teaching and learning whether subject specific, for example, synthetic phonics, or more general to the sector, such as a focus on targets and achievement, and the impact they may have on teaching. Through this, teachers might be able to find their own spaces for resistance and maintaining values

## 2.10 Challenges facing literacy teachers

A survey of 1027 LLN teachers 2004-7 found that most were dissatisfied with the time they had to spend on administrative tasks. Other areas of dissatisfaction, although not among a majority of teachers, were salaries, job security, career prospects, and work-life balance. These were particularly issues for part-time teachers. With regard to the then newly introduced national tests, teachers were broadly in favour, considering them to be beneficial to learners. However, they felt the tests were a curb on their own teaching with classwork focusing on passing the test (Cara *et al.*, 2008). The move from the National Literacy Test to Functional Skills qualifications has not alleviated this situation.

The impact of examinations on practice, known as *washback*, can be seen as beneficial or harmful. Schellekens argues that many learners enjoy the challenge of preparing for an exam (Schellekens, 2007). Others refer to the narrowing of the curriculum to those areas most likely to be tested (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Cheng, 1997; Lam, 1994). In a detailed study of the phenomenon, Spratt suggests that washback can affect curriculum, materials, teaching methods, feelings and attitudes, and learning. However, she concludes, 'washback is not inevitable and [...] it is malleable' (Spratt, 2005, p. 23) and lies within the teachers control, even though it can cause severe disjunction between teachers' beliefs and practice in their teaching.

Another anxiety is the increased emphasis on accountability; not in itself a cause of concern for teachers, who mainly agree that quality assurance is important and necessary. However, the Ofsted inspection regime is viewed negatively by 75% of LLN teachers, perhaps reflecting the increased pressure that it brings along with few perceived benefits (Cara *et al.*, 2008). Interestingly, the students themselves and the challenges they bring such as lack of motivation or low levels of language and literacy, were not seen as issues, maybe because learner needs were always seen as paramount. Meeting learners' needs has always been viewed as central to the literacy teacher's role (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Hodgson, Edward and Gregson, 2007) and anything that affects their ability to put the learners first is seen as challenging.

Dissonance between how teachers see their role and how they are expected to fulfil it by their management is likely, according to Korthagen, to cause problems (Korthagen,

2004). How teachers manage this and other situations depends on their professional identity, a complex concept that is viewed and defined differently by researchers (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004).

Sachs (2001) argued for the recognition of two types of professional identity, an *entrepreneurial* identity which fits with the managerialist discourse of efficiency, accountability and competition rather than collaboration; and an *activist* identity which has a concern for social justice, is reflective and democratic, believing in collective problem solving. Teachers with an activist identity experience conflict when working within a managerialist context. Tension exists between the need to satisfy management and teachers' desire to best support their students. Despite misgivings, they have to find a balance that enables learners to access and progress through programmes (Hamilton, 2008).

Hamilton and Hillier (2006) identify student-centredness underpinning all three of the main approaches to adult education (liberal, radical and vocational) since the 1970s. The conflicts between this ideology and current policies of managerialism, audit regulation and employment-oriented pedagogy have been well documented.

Tusting's (2009) qualitative study of eight LLN teachers confirms their stressful situation: caught between their commitment to learners and the need to meet the ever-increasing demands of targets, paperwork and assessment. She concludes that the teachers' response is not so much located in resistance to change but is a principled response to a system which challenges their philosophy about the role of teachers. Black (2010) reveals a similar situation in Australia where he describes the pragmatic response to the prevailing managerialist culture as 'working the interstices' - the small spaces that still exist to do what is considered to be 'good' teaching while still satisfying, albeit minimally, the requirements of various audit procedures.

Although many of these qualitative studies rely on relatively small samples, this lack of trust for teachers' professionalism and the resultant degrees of strategic compliance or resistance has been identified by others in identifiably larger studies both in the LLN field (Hodgson, Edward and Gregson, 2007; Lucas, 2004) and in the field of FE generally (Bathmaker, 2006; Nasta, 2007; Spours, Coffield and Gregson, 2007). Particular issues

arise for LLN teachers due to the rapid changes instigated by the SfL strategy which were not accompanied by more employment stability, pay and career prospects.

As a low status and fragmented workforce, literacy teachers are doubly challenged. Within policy documents students are seen as 'an inadequate mass in need of help' (Hamilton and Tett, 2012, p. 46), which also defines how the teachers are viewed, as technicians rather than skilled professionals. Hamilton and Tett argue further that this view leads managers and policy makers to determine that there needs to be a strong, predetermined framework to ensure effective learning as teachers' judgments cannot be relied upon.

The infrastructure professes social inclusion, but in fact seems to aim for a skilled workforce and active consumer rather than a critically conscious citizen. The change of title from *Skills for Life* to *Functional Skills*, seems to represent a move towards perceiving the curriculum in terms of human capital, enabling 'individuals, enterprises and nations to become more productive and competitive in the globalised economy' (Yasukawa and Black, 2016, p. ix). Literacy teachers committed to promoting social justice and social inclusion are likely to face severe disharmony working within infrastructures that do not support what they understand by good practice.

Honan (2006) uses the term *bricoleurs* to describe how literacy teachers make small adjustments to their teaching, thus adapting policies to fit their practice. She sees this as an active process rather than passive resistance to change. Her view is that *bricolage* involves engagement with theory and involvement with a community of practice as a way of resisting being positioned as passive implementers of policies that do not recognise the value of their work.

Thus we see that through subterfuge and pragmatism, resilience can be maintained by finding a place to operate along the continuum of resistance and accommodation to the prevailing culture. This position has been described as 'strategic compliance' by Shain and Gleeson (1999); 'working the interstices' by Black (2010); 'eclectic pragmatism' by Hamilton and Hillier (2006) and 'underground working' by Hodkinson (2008). These practices seen to be based on the teachers' sense of professionalism grounded in their relationship to learners

Yasukawa (2010) turns to the initial building of resilience during ITE. She believes that for this, teachers need to have a robust sense of purpose in their work and to be able to imagine new possibilities. The mandate that universities have to promote open and critical inquiry in their teacher education allows them to take risks and create risk-taking educators. Universities can provide:

*...spaces and places for them to examine what they know, to ask questions and to create new understandings and knowledge through critical inquiry with other practitioners. (Yasukawa, 2010, p. 84)*

It may be that within this climate of collaborative critical enquiry literacy teachers can develop their capacity to become more resilient and a build a sense of their own agency.

## 2.11 Summary and conclusions

The literature informs us that teachers' beliefs and knowledge have a powerful effect on what they do. Some beliefs are formed long before the teacher starts their training where their beliefs might change or be reinforced.

The position of teacher educators is complex; they need to offer trainees theoretical knowledge on which to base their practice and practical knowledge so that they can fulfil their professional role. While theoretical knowledge will be explicitly taught, practical knowledge is also acquired and because this knowledge is often tacit, it needs to be made explicit so it becomes accessible for critical discussion. Reflective practice is one way to do this, but we have seen that reflective practice itself is often unclear to students and may not be taught in a way that makes sense to them or helps them develop their teaching.

But much of teacher education is predicated on an ideal world. As trainees move into employment they have to cope with challenging environments. Policy for FE has moved towards increasing regulation of what is taught, while deregulating the profession. Newly qualified teachers are faced with low paid, low status jobs, with little career structure. Yet they are expected to meet strict targets for achievement and retention with fewer resources and a regime of managerialism and accountability that requires ever-increasing documentation. The literature highlights how the tension between what

is believed to be 'good practice' and the situation that teachers meet in reality can cause a disharmony between their beliefs and their practice which has to be managed in some way if they are to maintain their professional identity and integrity.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the process of generating and analyzing the data to form a coherent narrative relating to my research questions. I give an overview of the research design and the epistemology behind it. I then describe the methodology I employed, giving details of the research sites and the participants in the study. I outline the different methods I used to generate data and explain how this was subsequently analysed. I conclude by considering ethical issues involved in this project.

### 3.1.1 Overview of research design

The fieldwork for this small qualitative research study took place between December 2013 and October 2014 across two inner London FE colleges. The flexible design generated qualitative data through four sources: in-depth interviews with 12 adult literacy teachers; observations of each practitioner's teaching; a short biographical questionnaire, and the documentation relating to the teaching sessions (scheme of work, lesson plan and materials). Each teacher was interviewed twice; initial interviews to set the context, gather general data about their theoretical views and perceptions of their practices and then an interview as soon as possible after the observation to discuss the session. Additionally, a limited amount of data was gathered from a number of informal conversations with other stakeholders (e.g. learners during the observation, managers, teacher educators) in a variety of different settings and these were recorded in my field notes; in many ways these resembled the 'conversations with a purpose', used by Burgess (1988) in his research.

### 3.1.2 Epistemology

This was a small qualitative study, positioned within a constructionist paradigm. My aim was never to find any objective truth from which to construct meaning but rather to draw on participants' perceptions in order to build up a picture of literacy teachers' beliefs and practices within a particular context which I judged to be typical of an early 21st century metropolitan area. My own perspective aligns with Crotty's assertion:

*There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of*

*our world [...] meaning is not discovered, but constructed.* (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9)

This qualitative interpretive study had a flexible design, characterised by Robson as having 'an evolving design, the presentation of multiple realities, the researcher as an instrument of data collection and a focus on the participants' views' (2002, p. 166). Within this epistemology, my theoretical perspective is interpretivist. This paradigm is a social creation, 'constructed in the minds of people and reinforced through their interactions with each other' (Crotty, 1998, p. 18). My task as an interpretivist researcher was to understand 'the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge' (Robson, 2002, p. 27). In this study I explore how literacy teachers make sense of their world by focusing on their beliefs and practices around teaching literacy. I am concerned with their lived experiences, subjectivities and interpretations.

### 3.1.3 Rationale

I chose a qualitative flexible design because the study fitted with Friedman's (2012) characteristics of qualitative research. Specifically: this open enquiry did not start with a hypothesis; it was inductive, the aim being to build a theory from detailed study; it was naturalistic (the participants were in their everyday contexts and taking part in their normal activities); it was descriptive and interpretative, as I tried to build a rich description of teachers' perceptions and activities within a setting and then interpret the significance of these phenomena within that context; it incorporates multiple perspectives, of the participants as well as my own; it had a cyclical rather than a linear format with initial analysis of the data shaping the next phase of data collection; the context was a key aspect of the research and the lens through which the data could be understood, and it was small scale.

## 3.2 Methodology

### 3.2.1 Research context

Adult Literacy classes take place in a variety of contexts within the Lifelong Learning Sector. Recent figures are lacking, but a snapshot survey in late 2006 showed that nationwide 49% literacy teachers were working for Further or Sixth Form Education providers, although in Greater London the percentage was much higher with 62% in

Further and Sixth form education<sup>5</sup> (LSU, 2007). It is likely that, since then, Government policy on GCSE retakes has increased this proportion. Whilst in sixth form colleges, English classes are provided for young people who did not succeed in gaining a grade C at GCSE, most of those over 19 studying literacy (or English) do so in FE colleges, so this is where I sited my research.

I decided to concentrate on two settings, offering the option of adding a comparative dimension to the study. The colleges were selected from those who have been our partners in the provision of ITE for a number of years. They are easily accessible, offer highly rated literacy provision<sup>6</sup> and serve a similarly diverse local community.

Both colleges offer a range of literacy provision for adults and young people (16-19). The classes for adults are mostly discrete<sup>7</sup> but young people usually continue their literacy learning in the context of studying for a vocational qualification. However, as the teachers in this study report, these boundaries often break down and they find themselves teaching mixed groups of varying ages. All students are assessed through national qualifications, except for a few non-accredited special classes for vulnerable learners.

Cliffe College has four main sites with 25 additional smaller sites and community venues. It offers programmes in all sector subject areas except agriculture and horticulture. The college is based in an area rated as the sixth most deprived of 354 local authorities and 53% students describe themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group. At the time of its last Ofsted inspection, Cliffe College had 8090 adult students, mostly studying part time.

Hatton College is smaller, based on one main campus site (again with additional community venues) and offers a broad curriculum. In 2014 there were nearly 4000 adult learners in the college. The ethnic makeup of the college is 70% ethnic minority

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<sup>5</sup> Others worked for local authorities, UFI Directly Funded Hubs, the secure estate and the private and charitable sector

<sup>6</sup> According to Ofsted

<sup>7</sup> Discrete classes offer literacy on its own; embedded literacy classes offer English in the context of vocational study

with the largest groups being of African, Bangladeshi and Caribbean heritage. Most students come from the 10% most disadvantaged wards in the country.

### 3.2.2 Research sample

The participants chosen for this study were a non-probability sample. I was not expecting my sample to represent the wider population of teachers or even literacy teachers, but I wanted to select from a group who were trained at a particular time and now worked in a particular context and focus on their experiences and impressions, and so my sampling had a purposive element.

I decided that 12 participants working in two different colleges would give me a fair spread across the field. I asked the curriculum managers at both colleges to recommend teachers trained since 2007, currently working at the college, who might be interested in taking part. I stated a preference for teachers who were reasonably confident and experienced, so that they would feel comfortable being observed and discussing their lesson with me. I was given a list of names by each manager, from which I chose 12 to contact by email. I intended to focus on teachers who had done their ITE post-2007, under the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) regime of new professional standards (LLUK, 2007a; LLUK, 2007b). In fact, although most participants did complete their ITE after 2007, some had started much earlier because post-compulsory ITE has traditionally been split up and compartmentalised. Later it also transpired that two participants completed their ITE before 2007. This seemed not to significantly affect their views of ITE, so they have remained participants.

As the majority of teachers working in the sector are white, middle-aged and female, so also was my sample. However, I aimed to get as wide a sample as possible that was representative of recently trained teachers. So, from the limited range on the list given to me, I was pleased to be able to involve one male (white) and two black (female) teachers.

I also noted the three main types of ITE training to be represented, so chose teachers who had completed:

- a generic qualification with an additional separate literacy specialist qualification

- an integrated generic and literacy specialist qualification
- an integrated generic and joint literacy and ESOL specialist qualification

My carefully chosen sample of six from each college went somewhat awry as some on the list proved unavailable. After some juggling, I ended up with seven participants from Cliffe and five from Hatton. Eight of the teachers had done all or part of their training at UCL/IOE, although I personally had tutored only two of them. However, as this is such a small field, I already knew ten of the participants, although none of them were close colleagues. The 12 teachers represent a range of experience and teaching contexts representative of those in the two colleges.

### 3.2.3 Profile of teacher participants

Most statistics on the workforce are dated and often relate to the whole SfL workforce (Cara *et al.*, 2008; LSU, 2007; NRDC, 2010). Details showing how my sample compares with the general workforce in England and Greater London and how the two colleges compare with each other can be found in Tables B and C in Appendices 4 and 5. My sample is broadly similar to the national profile and comparable with the London profile, but is slightly older than the norm and contains no full-time staff. There are few full-time staff in these particular colleges, and those that exist are mainly managers. No significant differences between the colleges were noted.

Short biographies of the teacher participants can be found in Appendix 7.

### 3.2.4 Participants

Ten out of the 12 participants were white of British, Irish or mixed ethnicity. Half were aged between 50 and 59. All except one were women. Participant details are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Research participants**

Teacher	Age	Gender	Ethnicity (self-defined)
Anna	Over 60	F	Afro Caribbean
Alan	50-59	M	White British
Caroline	50-59	F	White British
Grainne	Over 60	F	White Irish
Jess	40-49	F	British Black African
Jodie	50-59	F	White British
Justine	40-49	F	White British
Karla	50-59	F	White British/Swedish
Kathleen	50-59	F	White British
Kay	50-59	F	White British
Maggie	40-49	F	White British
Maureen	30-39	F	White British/Irish

### *Training and qualifications*

All participants were fully trained with both a generic and a subject specialist qualification, sometimes completed simultaneously as part of an integrated programme. Three teachers had undertaken joint literacy and ESOL training integrated with a generic programme. Some participants started their training at an FE college, but all completed it at a university (Greenwich, London South Bank University or UCL/IOE). Most participants had no qualification in English higher than Level 2 (GCSE or 'O' level) although two did have a degree in English. This too is typical. The NRDC Teacher Study found that over a third of literacy teachers had no higher qualification than Level 2 in English and less than 20% had a degree in English (Cara *et al.*, 2008). However, 'A' level English and English degrees mainly concentrate on literature rather than language study so the lack of such a qualification would not necessarily detract from their subject knowledge. In any case, all would have had some input on English during their specialist training. Also interesting is their own experience of learning another language; nine had some experience of this, although only one had attempted to learn a non-Indo-European

language. Trainees often report they have gained a better understanding of how language works from learning another language than from studying English. For full details, see Table D, Appendix 6.

### *Employment status*

Most participants had been working in their current role for a fairly short time, although some had considerably more experience in previous jobs. They all taught a range of literacy levels.

**Table 2: Teachers' employment details**

Teacher	College	Contract type	Length of time teaching in college
Anna	Hatton	Fractional	25 years
Alan	Hatton	Fractional	19 years
Caroline	Cliffe	Fractional	5 years
Grainne	Cliffe	Fractional	10 years
Jess	Cliffe	HPL	3 years
Jodie	Cliffe	Fractional	3 years
Justine	Cliffe	HPL	2 months
Karla	Hatton	Fractional	13 years
Kathleen	Cliffe	HPL	1 year
Kay	Hatton	HPL	1 year
Maggie	Hatton	HPL	9 months
Maureen	Cliffe	HPL	1 year

### *Classes taught*

The basis of the choice of classes to observe was mainly to represent the full range of levels<sup>8</sup> but was also dependent on times that suited my availability and the teachers' preferences. As well as observing different levels, I selected both daytime and evening

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<sup>8</sup> For an explanation of levels, see Appendix 3

classes; a 'literacy for vocational skills' class and a class for learners who were mental health service users.

**Table 3: Classes observed**

Teacher	Class observed <sup>9</sup>	Day/Evening	Time of class	Type of class	Number students attending
Anna	E3	day	1.00-3.00	Adult literacy	7
Alan	E2/E3	day	9.00-10.00	16-18 Literacy for Catering for students with MLD	7
Caroline	E3	day	9.30-12.00	Adult Literacy	11
Grainne	L2 (GCSE)	eve	6.00-9.00	GCSE English for Adults	14
Jess	L1/2	eve	6.00-9.00	Adult literacy	10
Jodie	E2	day	9.30-12.15	Adult literacy	10
Justine	L1	eve	6.00-8.30	Adult literacy	15
Karla	E3	day	12.00-2.00	Adult literacy	7
Kathleen	L1/L2	day	9.30-12.15	Adult literacy	17
Kay	E2	day	10.00-12.00	Adult literacy	4
Maggie	E1/E2	day	3.00-5.00	Adult literacy for mental health service users	8
Maureen	L1	eve	6.00-8.45	Adult literacy	23

<sup>9</sup> For the meaning of class titles, see Appendix 3

### 3.2.5 Profile of learners involved in the study

In these 12 classes, I observed 133 learners. The class sizes (those attending on the day I visited) ranged between 4 and 23. The classes at Cliffe College were generally larger than those at Hatton.

#### *Learners' age, gender and home languages*

Apart from Alan's class, which was for 16-18 year olds, all were adult literacy classes, although within these there was a small proportion of 16-19 year old students. The vast majority of students (82%) were in the 20-40 age range. (See Table E in Appendix 8 for full details).

Female students outnumbered male students (71% : 29%) as is typical in literacy classes (Rhys Warner and Vorhaus, 2008). However, in the classes observed, the proportion of men to women in Hatton College was considerably higher (45% men). (See Table F in Appendix 8 for full details).

At least 34 different home languages were represented in these 12 classes. The actual number is likely to be larger as some teachers were unsure about the specific languages of certain students. In three of the classes no learner had English as their home language; in all but one of the others it was used by 50% or fewer students. There was a considerably larger range of languages represented in the Cliffe College classes (31 languages) than the Hatton College classes (13 languages). (See Table G in Appendix 8 for full details).

## 3.3 Methods

The main methods were fourfold:

1. Brief questionnaires to gather personal information about the participants
2. Observations of the practitioners teaching one of their own classes
3. Individual interviews with teachers which focused on both the observed lessons and the teachers' professional experiences, particularly in relation to their ITE.
4. Lesson plans and materials relating to the observed lessons

**Table 4: The structure of the study**

<b>Methods</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of methods</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Data yielded</b>
1. Questionnaire	Dec 13- May 14	15 item questionnaire to each teacher	To gather factual information about the teachers	Information about teachers' demographics, qualifications, experience and current teaching
2. Interview 1 with teachers	Dec 13- May 14	Interview with each teacher	To understand the teachers' perceptions of literacy training and teaching	Teachers' perceptions of their early influences , training, career aspirations and beliefs about practice
3. Observation of teaching	May 14-Oct 14	Observation of literacy class in action	To observe teachers' classroom practice	Information about teachers' classroom practice
4. Documentation relating to taught lesson	May 14- Oct 14	Lesson plans, schemes of work, teaching materials and group profiles	To understand the planning process and examine material relating to observed lessons	Information relating to choices made in planning observed lesson
4. Interview 2 with teachers	May 14-Oct 14	Interview with each teacher	To discuss with teachers their classroom practice and how it fits with their beliefs	Teachers' reflection on observed lesson and dialogue with researcher about lesson

### 3.3.1 Questionnaires

Before the first interview I gave each practitioner a short questionnaire to complete with biographical information and data on their qualifications and experience (see Appendix 9). The 15 items involved box ticking, table completion and closed questions. I felt it unnecessary to take time in the interview to elicit this purely factual information.

Conversation while they were filling in the relatively simple questionnaire enabled me to learn a little about the participants before the more formal interview and it also helped participants to relax.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

Each of the 12 teacher participants was interviewed twice for this study. The first phase of interviews took place between December 2013 and May 2014 and were wide-ranging, covering influences, training, career aspirations and their practice as a literacy teacher. This included views on the curriculum, the learners and the challenges faced in their professional roles. The interview length ranged from just over half an hour to one and a half hours, with three quarters of the interviews lasting over an hour. Interviews took place at a site of the participant's choosing, usually an empty classroom, but occasionally in a deserted staff room or local café.

The second phase of interviews, between May and October 2014, was focused on the lesson I had recently observed and took place as soon after as was practicable. The interviews involved each teacher reflecting on the lesson they had taught, discussing issues such as their rationale, classroom organisation, teaching approaches, language and resources used, together with a consideration of the learners and their needs and the extent to which all of this related to their ITE. They lasted between 20 minutes and almost an hour, with 11 of the 12 interviews extending beyond 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded, with the participants' permission, on a digital recorder. They were transcribed at a later date and the transcriptions forwarded to the participants with an invitation to comment or amend any errors. No-one took up this offer.

Semi-structured interviews like these are widely used in flexible, qualitative designs such as my own. There are many advantages to a semi-structured interview, chief among them its flexibility in allowing the interviewee to respond in their own words and lead the discussion into new directions. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 350) explain, 'The interview is a social encounter, not simply a site for information exchange.' This type of dialogue can provide rich and insightful material, including that provided by non-verbal cues. I had a schedule of questions (see Appendix 8) but also allowed participants to direct the conversation, for example, the challenges facing them in their

working lives. The first two interviews conducted in December 2013 were pilots and the questions changed very slightly after these, but as the responses covered the same ground as later interviews, I felt that they were valid enough to use in the final analysis.

While I was carrying out the fieldwork and creating data and also later during the analysis stage, a great deal of reflexivity on my position was necessary.

Mercer (2007) notes that the extent to which any researcher can be considered an insider is not dependent on any one characteristic but depends on the intersection of many different characteristics, some of which are inherent (for example, gender) and some of which are not (for example, professional experience or status). The relationship between researcher and participant is not static and can change according to time, place or topic. Deutsch claims we are all 'multiple insiders and outsiders' (Deutsch, 1981, p. 174) and I felt my position here was somewhere along the Mercer the continuum of insiderness-outsiderness that Mercer proposes in opposition to any idea of a binary of difference.

My standpoint as both an insider and an outsider inevitably had an effect on the study. I had had some limited contact with ten of the participants already, either as colleagues when I taught at one or other of the colleges, or because I had been involved in their ITE. This was an advantage in that I knew how to interact with them and we already felt comfortable in each other's presence. However, I did not know them well enough to predict their views on the topics we were to discuss. Our previous relationship may have meant there was more trust between myself and those with whom I was acquainted, but there was no way of knowing whether this led to more honest responses. During the time six participants had been on their ITE course at the IOE, I could be seen as having had a position of power over their future, but they had all passed the course and no longer had any reason to feel it necessary to please me.

Another issue was that they had known me in one role, as a teacher educator, or in some cases, as a teacher, and I was here appearing in a completely different role, as a researcher. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded them that, in this case, I was a researcher requesting their honest perceptions and they should not worry about being critical about, for instance, their ITE, even if I had been involved in it. Although, in

general, they were very positive about their ITE, I did not feel this was put on to impress me, and indeed, they also had genuine and valid criticisms, which I recorded.

### 3.3.3 Observations of teaching

Between May and October 2014, I observed one class taught by each of the 12 teachers and noted what strategies and techniques were used and how far the teacher took into account the learners' needs.

Before the observation, each teacher was requested to prepare a lesson incorporating a reading activity, preferably involving the use of a newspaper. They were advised that any activity, with any part of any newspaper would be appropriate. I wanted to be able to see how teachers devised activities using authentic materials that could be relevant to the learners' interests. My rationale was that this was a closed enough brief to allow me to form comparisons between classes, but open enough to allow the teachers to make their own choices about materials and tasks.

Simpson and Tuson (1995) suggest observation has three key advantages as a method for gathering data. It gives direct access to 'live' social interactions; it can enrich and supplement the data gained from other sources (such as from interviews); and the techniques of observation are highly varied and flexible. Mulhall (2003) adds that it can capture the whole picture of interactions, placing them within their natural context. Whilst I cannot claim to have captured the whole picture, I believe it gave me a wider lens with which to interpret my observations. An additional benefit was that of being a 'reality check' between what people say they do and what they actually do (Robson, 2002, p. 310).

However, researchers, have to be conscious that observation data is more open to interpretation than interview data. They have the freedom to choose what they observe, how they filter that information and how it is subsequently analysed, which also means that as a method it is susceptible to observer bias. Additionally we have to take account of the Hawthorne effect, the alteration of the participants' behaviour due to their awareness of being observed (Mulhall, 2003).

In terms of participation in the situation observed, Gold (1958) proposed a typology which ranges from complete observer (no interaction, concealed role) to complete participant observer (involved in all activities). Bearing in mind that this is a continuum, the nearest in this typology to the role I chose is *observer as participant*. According to Robson (2002), someone in this role takes no part in activities but whose status as a researcher is known to the group. I made my position clear at the lesson start when I introduced myself, explained why I was there and invited questions. I did not take part in activities (it would have been odd for me as a fluent reader to be completing worksheets) but I sat alongside learners, discussed their work with them and occasionally assisted them with it, when asked. The role I took varied according to the lesson, who I was sitting with and how far it felt appropriate to intervene. Because my participation varied, my role also varied between *observer as participant* (or participant as observer) and *marginal observer* (Gold, 1958; Robson, 2002). Thus, unstructured observation seemed more appropriate to the situation as my intention was not to remain objective, but to interpret what I observed. Recording the sessions felt too intrusive, so I took field notes, handwritten in a notebook and on a proforma.

I took full and detailed field notes during the lesson (Appendix 11 shows an excerpt), noting as far as I could, the exact words of the teacher and learners where these seemed significant. I also sketched a map of the classroom so that I could consider the physical and environmental context. The notes were primarily descriptive, although upon re-reading them I sometimes added personal reactions, interpretations and ideas in the margin. They contained both description and dialogue, which according to Mulhall (2003) is particularly enriching. Recording dialogue helped to allay some of the inevitable observer bias as it contained less of my interpretation of events and allowed participants to speak for themselves.

While observing, I had to be aware of two key factors that might affect the data; one was the extent to which my presence changed normal proceedings in the class. However slight my participatory role, it was bound to impact on classroom interactions. Additionally, I had requested some adjustment to the intended scheme of work, even though my brief could be incorporated into whatever work was planned. I have extensive experience visiting classes and hope that this allowed me to fit in as

unobtrusively as possible. Students and teachers are accustomed to having observers in their classrooms; there are frequent visits by managers, inspectors and teacher trainers so hopefully it was accepted as fairly normal procedure.

A second issue, raised by Mulhall (2003), concerns familiarity with the field. I had taught in both these colleges, knew some of the staff involved and was familiar with the local context. Labaree discusses in detail the issue of insider-outsiderness in terms of his own study of an organisation of which he was a member. He notes the values of 'shared experience, greater access, cultural interpretation, and deeper understanding and clarity of thought' as benefits for the insider researcher (Labaree, 2002, p. 105), but also raises the issue of over-familiarity leading to a lack of distance and objectivity.

Another challenge is due to the multiple identities brought by the observer to the research setting. While she might see herself as an insider, this view is not necessarily shared by the participants, a complex dilemma, which as Labaree notes, requires a sophisticated understanding of the insider 'as both object and subject within qualitative inquiry' (2002, p. 117).

I saw myself primarily as a researcher during this study and was aware I was visiting classes to describe what I saw rather than judge; a position different from the one I held as a teacher educator. This was not an easy stance to maintain and I had to be constantly aware throughout the process of observing and later also of analysing the data and writing up, that my role was not to evaluate or even to support the teachers, but to attempt dispassionately to observe and understand what was going on. However, I was conscious that my view of this role was not necessarily shared at all times with those in the classes I observed. The learners I sat with, quite naturally saw me as someone who could offer help and, when asked, I made a decision that it would be unreasonable not to provide the support that was requested. However, there were also occasions when the teachers asked for help, and in those cases I chose to decline as I felt it would affect the validity of data.

It is impossible for me to know how far these decisions altered the data and I felt all I could do was to maintain a position of reflexivity on the researcher-practitioner dilemma. To avoid taking anything for granted, I formulated a proforma to use as an

aide memoire (see appendix 12), reminding me to note down certain observations which I might have missed due to over-familiarity. The headings were: classroom organisation, learners, teacher, language and communication, resources, differentiation lesson planning, power and control. Each section also contained prompts. A certain amount of observer bias is inevitable and I reflected on this as I wrote up my notes after each session, in an attempt to, at least, raise my awareness. I also discussed my observations with the teacher involved as soon as possible after the observation. In these conversations, the teachers were able to give a rationale for their actions, put their point of view and dispute any bias that they noticed in my comments.

#### 3.3.4 Documentary evidence

Before the observation, I asked the teachers to provide me with documentation relating to the lesson to be observed. This would be normal practice before an observation when similar documentation would be requested by a visiting manager, inspector or teacher trainer. I stressed that this was not for purposes of judgment, but merely to add to my research data. All the participants provided lesson plans, some more formal than others, and copies of materials they planned to use in their lesson. Some also gave me group profiles and schemes of work. These were used to explore how teachers planned learning and the extent to which they were drawing on authentic materials and practices.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of the data generated was both a deductive and inductive process, although the majority of themes evolved from the data. It involved what Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 12) describe as three concurrent 'flows of activity' – data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

The 24 interviews were transcribed (see Appendix 13 for an excerpt) and logged together with my observation field notes and the collated documentation. As my analysis needed to be systematic and rigorous I chose to loosely base the analytical process on Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) six stages of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Generation of initial codes

3. Searching for themes
4. Review and refinement of themes
5. Defining and labelling themes
6. Writing up

I decided to use a hybrid approach, involving both *a priori* codes and also an empirical process using *a posteriori* codes gained inductively through scrutinising the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Ryan and Russell Bernard, 2003).

Braun and Clarke's first stage is immersion in the data. I knew my transcribed notes well already. The others I had to read and reread to fully familiarise myself. There were 36 files altogether- one set of observation notes and two interview transcriptions for each teacher. Entering these files into the QSR NVivo data management program, I began to think about how they might operate in relation to my research questions. Braun and Clarke's second stage involves generating initial codes. There were 35 *a priori* codes (listed in Table 5), derived from my interview schedule, which in turn was constructed from my research questions.

**Table 5: A priori codes**

Background to becoming a teacher	Initial Training	Teaching reading
Career aspirations	Language knowledge	Training - practical teaching
Challenges at work	Links with life	Training benefits
Challenges for literacy teachers	Literacy curriculum	Training limitations
Changes in curriculum	Literacy Learners	Training Literacy & ESOL
Changes in learners	Literacy teaching	Training on teaching reading
Choice of place for training	Mentor	Training-ideas for improvement
CPD	Observations in training	Training-motivation
Demands on teachers	Reason for choosing literacy	Training-not useful
Generic learning theory	Reasons for teaching adults	Training-organisation
Ideology	Subject knowledge	Use of theory for practice
Influences on becoming a teacher	Teaching other subjects	

As I scrutinised each source repeatedly, I generated more codes (named *nodes* in NVivo) which were emerging from the data. NVivo was relatively new to me and I did not want to miss anything, so I also marked up the data in hard copy. The results from the two methods were remarkably similar. By the end I had a list of 98 *a posteriori* codes, which were added to the 35 *a priori* codes, making a total of 133 (for a list of the *a posteriori* codes see Appendix 12). The third stage was a process of categorization in which I searched for themes by placing the codes into families. In this, I was conscious of Gibson and Brown's (2009) three aims for examination: commonalities, differences and relationships. Again, I operated both electronically through NVivo and using paper, post-

its and flip charts. The next stage involved reviewing the families, collating or collapsing some codes and deleting others to finalise the organisation of the data under four overarching themes, which related to my four research questions.

I used these headings to structure the presentation of my findings in Chapters 4 to 7.

**Table 6: Themes emerging from the data**

<b>Literacy teachers' beliefs</b>	<b>Pedagogical approaches</b>	<b>The impact of ITE</b>	<b>Challenges faced by literacy teachers</b>
Motivation	Planning for superdiversity	Benefits of ITE	Funding methodology
Core beliefs	Reading development	Impact of ITE on teachers' beliefs	Assessment
Origins of beliefs	Language learning	Impact of ITE on teachers' practice	Deprofessionalisation
Core theoretical viewpoints	Resources	Impact of ITE on teaching reading	Demotivation
Cohesion between beliefs and practice	Diversity and inclusion	Limitations of ITE	
	Collaborative learning		
	Power and Control		

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

The research was carried out in accordance with BERA guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011).

#### *Voluntary Informed Consent*

All participants were asked to give their informed consent to participation. Initially, I contacted all 12 teacher participants by email explaining the study and attaching a copy of the consent form (see Appendix 15). I discussed it further over the telephone with any

who had questions. Before starting the interviews, I explained again the purpose and process of the research. All signed the consent form without reservation. Although knowing me might have put pressure on participants to consent, I stressed repeatedly that they did not have to take part and that if they would prefer not to, they could easily be replaced.

### *Right to Withdraw*

It was made clear to all participants both in the letter and in the consent form that they had the right to withdraw at any point (see Appendix 15). None ever expressed any interest in withdrawal.

### *Vulnerable young people and adults*

The participants and I took the view that merely having limited literacy skills and being in a literacy class did not mean that learners should be classed as vulnerable, or unable to make their own decisions. The vast majority of students at all literacy levels in the classes I observed were fully able to understand the purpose of the research and their role within it. The teacher participants talked to their students in the week before the observation, explaining that teachers were the focus of the study not students and that confidentiality regarding names and details would be observed. At the start of each observation I repeated this information to the group attending that day. No-one chose to opt out.

Nobody under the age of 16 was involved in the study. There was a small number of students aged 16-18 in the observed classes and also a few adults with mild or moderate global learning difficulties, with mental health issues or other vulnerabilities. Where I was aware of these, I took special care to explain carefully and ensure that learners understood what their involvement meant.

### *Privacy*

All participants, both teachers and students, were assured of anonymity. All names have been changed and the colleges involved have been anonymised. Participants have given their approval to publication the project findings, with the proviso that their details are not disclosed. All were sent a transcription of the first interview and no-one queried any

part. A transcript of the second interview was also offered but the offer was not taken up.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) all information connected with the project is stored on a password protected computer. It will be destroyed after the thesis and any subsequent publication is written.

### 3.6 Conclusion

I have used the evidence of my own observations together with interviews that present the teachers' perceptions. I also used the teachers' own documentation to compare their planned practices with those I observed in their classes. This gave me multiple points of reference for my findings. I have discussed my findings with some of the participants, with my supervisor and other colleagues at UCL/IOE and various specialists in the field, thereby using the lenses of researcher, participants and external individuals, suggested by Cresswell and Miller (2000).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 5) see an interpretive structure as a *bricolage*, a set of representations, constructed by the researcher in an interactive process, connecting the various parts to the whole. The following chapters will explore this bricolage in more detail as they present the main findings from my research, organised around the research questions. Chapter 4 is about Literacy teachers' beliefs and understandings; Chapter 5 covers pedagogical approaches used by literacy teachers; Chapter 6 is concerned with the impact of ITE and Chapter 7 explores the challenges faced by literacy teachers.

# Chapter 4: Beliefs about Literacy teaching

## 4.1 Introduction

The 12 teachers in this study were quite diverse in some ways (e.g. in ethnicity, class background and experience), but largely similar in terms of age and gender. All had worked in other professional areas before they decided to become literacy teachers, as for example, careers advisor, artist, counsellor, youth worker, lab technician, journalist, events organiser. However, these jobs had proved unsatisfying for various reasons and they had gravitated towards teaching as a career.

## 4.2 Motivation

I was interested to know more about their motivations to become literacy teachers in the hope that this would inform me of how they perceived literacy and those who taught it. My findings were somewhat different from those of the NRDC Teacher Study (Cara *et al.*, 2008) and Moran *et al.*'s trainee teachers in Northern Ireland (Moran *et al.*, 2001), both of whom found the greatest motivation for people to become teachers was intrinsic (i.e. enjoyment of the subject or of teaching it). In contrast, in my study the primary motivation was altruistic (i.e. a desire to help people). Those were both much larger studies and although it is not possible to generalise from it, my sample nevertheless matched the NRDC sample in terms of the participants' age, gender, ethnicity and experience. However, my findings were more analogous with those of Hamilton and Hillier who found a dedication to social justice and a desire for a job that fitted with family commitments were dominant motivations (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006).

I found it significant how many of my participants revealed that they chose literacy teaching because they wanted to make a difference and change people's lives. For eight of the 12, their choice to become a literacy teacher was a desire to help either individuals or society as a whole. In most cases this was a philanthropic ideal, but one teacher saw it more in political terms:

*I decided I wanted to do literacy because sort of, almost for political reasons, because I felt it was the most useful I could be [...], I think I'd tried to change the world in different ways on a big scale like working for a big*

*organisation, that sort of public service but then finding actually that maybe the way to do it is to be more personal about it. (Kay)*

All 12 had experience of work in other fields before they chose literacy teaching. Some deliberately wanted to move into a field where they could use their skills to help others, often because they had met people who needed help, leading them towards a social justice agenda. For example Anna had taught her mother to read; Alan had worked with young people with learning difficulties; Grainne had volunteered in a prison. They had witnessed first-hand how literacy might make a difference to people's lives.

The idea of literacy as a channel through which learners could become more independent underpinned several practitioners' views. Alan explained how, when training, he was horrified to see students with learning difficulties making tea with lukewarm water because they were not trusted with boiling water. He said this moved him to devise lessons that allowed these students more independence.

Some people's desire to change things was due to their individual life experiences. Their personal history made them determined to support others with similar experiences. In particular for Anna, it made her realise the need for black tutors not just to assist individuals but in the wider field:

*There was a need for particularly black tutors because there weren't any around and I felt that I had something to offer because I had sort of the grounding as such, personal experience, so that's why I did it and continue to do it today. (Anna)*

In terms of intrinsic factors, Jess said she gets bored easily and wanted a job that would stimulate her; several others pointed out their own love of reading made them very conscious that others were missing out on this pleasure:

*I think because I was always very strong with English; it was always my best subject at school, and, you know, it showed in exam results and just my pure pleasure in enjoying English, loving the word, and also recognising the value that society puts on having literacy that's acceptable and what a stigma it can be when you don't have it. (Grainne)*

Here, Grainne both celebrates her love of literature and wants to share it, and makes a political point about class and cultural capital.

Extrinsic factors were less obvious among this group. Jodie needed a local job because she had young children; Maggie was persuaded to train as a teacher because a bursary was offered to cover the costs. This did not mean that they did not also have more altruistic beliefs about their work, only that these were balanced with factors relating to their personal circumstances. As we saw earlier (Chapter 2) one type of motivation does not necessarily preclude others. Swain and Hammond (2011, p. 594) note how different motivations 'can reside within individuals at different times and in different places'. So, for example, while Maggie was persuaded to become a teacher by the offer of funding for her training, that is not what has kept her in the profession. Many people had more than one motivation and their reasons overlap and come to the fore at different times.

### 4.3 Core beliefs

With such a strong focus on supporting learners, one might expect these teachers to have a very learner-centred view of pedagogy. Indeed, all of them professed their commitment to their learners. Many of the participants had a view of pedagogy that was based on Humanist learning theory. For instance, both Anna and Maggie stated that learning should be holistic:

*The development of the whole person is something that I like to see because it's not just about the technical achievement. (Maggie)*

Jess recalls being impressed by Humanism on her ITE course; Jodie discusses Humanism being 'ingrained' in her work. Even if Humanism as such was not specifically mentioned, they all envision teaching as student-centred and they want to provide opportunities for learning that fit with the learners' needs and interests. However, they do not all have the same view of what it is the learner wants or needs.

Anna and Maggie feel that the teacher should not pressurise learners, so they do not provide materials or activities that stretch or challenge them. Maggie calls her class 'a low key, gentle thing', which she justifies because her class is for mental health service users, who are just starting to return to education:

*I see this as a stepping stone kind of class, you know the first thing is to get them, to keep them and make them happy. It's not happy is it? You want them to learn obviously. (Maggie)*

Anna mentioned individuals in her class who were also vulnerable, saying: ' She's got a lot of issues so I don't really put that kind of pressure on her'. This seems to me to be a rather deficit view of learners and their capabilities. Research suggests that high expectations lead to more successful literacy learning (Fletcher, 2014; Miller and Satchwell, 2006; Parris and Block, 2007).

Alan, on the other hand, who had a class of learners with moderate learning difficulties, is clear that if they are to lead independent and autonomous lives, he needs to push them gently to do more (often despite parents and others who want to over-protect them). Most classes have at least one student with additional needs, but the teachers made different decisions about how to work with them. Jess, for example, believes that independence is paramount and she pushes her learners to learn outside the class as well as inside it; she says of the learners:

*You've got to do some work yourself outside, especially if they want to go on to higher education, they've got to have study skills and be able to research and find things out for themselves rather than you just giving them everything. (Jess)*

Not all the learners in her class want to go on to higher education but she treats them all as if they do. Her idea of learner autonomy is 'trying to get them to think for themselves, try and work it out for themselves'

Maggioni *et al* found that educational interventions can affect teachers' beliefs, especially if they provide opportunities to put into practice what they learn on the course (Maggioni, Fox and Alexander, 2015). However, overall, theory did not play a strong part in the lives of these teachers. I deliberately neither defined theory nor emphasised it in the questioning but left it open to the participants to make their own meanings. I asked the question, 'In what ways have you been able to apply the theory you learned?' The responses showed theory was understood in different ways by different people. Three quarters, at least initially, interpreted theory as 'generic learning theory' mentioning such theories as reflective practice; Andragogy, Humanism; Maslow and barriers to learning; Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development or pedagogical techniques such as group work, collaborative learning, scaffolding or discovery learning.

Two teachers saw theory as understanding how language works, in particular, grammar rules and linguistic terminology. Phonemes and the phonemic alphabet stuck in their minds although both said they never used this knowledge.

Only one third immediately or eventually mentioned theory that could be termed specialist literacy theory, for example, literacy in a social context, fluency, Freire, language variety and techniques such as miscue analysis and reciprocal reading.

As noted by Harkin, most teachers did not see theory as their own theories-in-use, linked to reflective practice, but as propositional knowledge or published academic work, associated with study rather than practice (Harkin, 2005). That is not to say none found it useful. Jodie was one who relished the theory she had learned: 'Definitely, I don't feel safe without a bit of theory. I like a bit of theory' (Jodie). But she was in the minority. Others, like Jess, panicked at the question and had to dredge their minds to come up with something they thought would be an acceptable answer.

*Gosh, just theory. I know we did loads but I'm trying to just think to mind. I mean I know that obviously it has helped me because, just, you know, it has... (Jess)*

Yet, when I observed Jess teaching, her approach was carefully considered, based on her knowledge and understanding of the learner group and she was able to reflect thoughtfully on the lesson immediately afterwards. It was the word 'theory' that threw her into a panic and she was not alone in her consternation. Several people responded apologetically, saying they found the practical side of their ITE course more accessible. This was reminiscent of the findings of the LSDA Project where it was reported that codified theory makes FE teachers feel hostile or guilty (Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003). Harkin makes the point that ITE courses offer fragments of theory and different courses offer different fragments (Harkin, 2005). Some of these teachers had studied at two or three different institutions for their professional qualifications and theory may well have been treated differently in each. As teacher educators we need to consider how we can make theory more accessible and applicable to practice, so that it can be seen as relevant to a teacher's work rather than something that makes them feel inadequate.

#### 4.3.1 Origins of beliefs

Only one of the participants, Maggie, stated that although her training was important for her, it was her own background that formed the real influence:

*The way I like to be with people and what I want to offer them is nothing to do with my training as a teacher. You know, all my kind of beliefs are about, you know my passion for people's empowerment and you know, "It's your stuff and you can do it." You know, that's not my teacher training stuff at all, that's just my stuff, my background. (Maggie)*

The others felt ITE had determined their beliefs about teaching. It is hard to say how far this was about informal/non-formal knowledge and how far they were using formally acquired knowledge. On an ITE course, as well as formal input from trainers, tutors and mentors, trainees are working in literacy classes on placement or in training groups (or both) and observing what goes on there. Some knowledge will register immediately and some will not figure until a similar scenario or context occurs maybe months or years later. This was not a subject I broached with all the participants. Caroline was the only one who mused on it during the interviews but she probably spoke for many when she struggled with the concepts.

*But there's many times I've been conscious of not only memorable things that I've been taught, or learnt about, through reading and through being taught, but also in the way that I was taught by my tutors on the course, because in terms of models of good teaching practice there were things I observed and sometimes try and do myself as well. (Caroline)*

I asked how much of the knowledge she had acquired she had been able to put into practice and again she found it difficult to distinguish between various sources.

*It tends to be higher level strategies, and also everything around, well, as it's assessed in Functional Skills, the whole business of inferencing, Functional Skills and GCSE, inferencing, summarising, picking up key points and paraphrasing [...] Now how much of that I actually consciously remember from my training, and how much of it has just sort of come up through the process of teaching higher level, I'm not sure. Because we weren't specifically taught how to teach GCSE, that's something I've just recently taken on, and I've had to sort of do a lot of mugging up on that. (Caroline)*

Caroline is pointing out how contextual knowledge is. What is not relevant at any one time is forgotten or put to one side and then picked up again when it is needed. When

she was teaching an Entry level group she drew on certain theories and now she teaches GCSE she needs different insights and skills. Her ITE and her subsequent experience have given her an understanding of what works with learners at different levels and she is able to draw from the different sources of knowledge that she has acquired, both theoretical and practical, to take what is needed for a given situation.

Similarly, Justine explained that she did not need much of the reading theory at the time of her ITE course and so she did not take it in. Now she is teaching higher level classes, it is coming back to her:

*I think one of the reasons why my reading stuff is not so good is because I've been teaching E1, E2, so I've been doing a lot of the sort of bottom up and when I'm teaching Level 1 and Level 2 in the prison they are actually very capable. It's just now I'm finding a Level 1 group that's more of an E3/ Level 1 group that isn't nearly as capable of understanding, so I'm having to grapple with that a little bit more. So, I don't remember thinking there was a massive gap in what I learnt in reading, but I just probably didn't absorb the bits, I only absorbed the bits particularly that I needed at the time. (Justine)*

Her knowledge about literacy is embedded in its context; when the context is appropriate, she is able to draw on the theory she has at the back of her mind (Maggioni, Fox and Alexander, 2015). If knowledge is not immediately applied, it is forgotten or put aside until it is needed. As Phipps and Borg have shown, contextual factors need to be part of any analysis of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (Phipps and Borg, 2007). This will be discussed further later.

A social practice approach was mentioned by two teachers, but others clearly drew on its influence, even if they did not specifically name it. Jodie talked about the use of authentic materials; Justine mentioned Freire's view of empowering learners; Karla and Kathleen both stated that 'bringing the outside in' was important; Alan and Karla talked about contextualizing and embedding literacy learning; Caroline and Kathleen consciously drew upon learners' funds of knowledge.

Only one participant commented on issues relating to reading in a second language. Jess remembered covering working with bilingual/multilingual learners although she did not mention any specific knowledge she had acquired and was using:

*I'm thinking also because we have a lot of second language learners and I know we did a lot of work around sort of supporting, sort of second language learners in the classroom. That's helped, that's sort of helped a lot, looking at the different strategies for working with them. (Jess)*

What was not mentioned is as interesting as what was mentioned. Surprisingly little reference was made of creating meaning from texts, either through developing skills or by engagement with the content. Phonics was not mentioned at all although Maggie remembered an ITE session on 'you know, phonemes, and all these twiddly symbols.' Additionally, as noted in Maggioni *et al's* research (2015), critical reading did not figure strongly, although Jodie said . 'I really enjoy learners discovering that there's more than is on the page.' Only those who taught higher level classes (L1 or L2) talked about critical reading being an element of their teaching, and this was, at least partly, because it was required by the exam. Kathleen, for example, argued that students need to be able to read critically for the exam, so it is worth starting early.

#### 4.3.2 Core theoretical viewpoints

All the participants claimed that they believed in student-centred learning. Ideas such as looking at the whole person, giving learners a voice, using the student profile to determine what learners want, responding to learners and seeing people as individuals were all mentioned as important. No one specifically mentioned either the skills or the social practice paradigm, although Caroline hinted at social practice theory and Grainne, who has done a Masters in LLN, recalled social practice when prompted and claimed she predicated her practice on this theory. Promoting independence and empowerment was seen by several teachers as important. Justine cited Freire as a strong influence:

*The one theory, we didn't really cover it that much here, that's made more and more sense since I've been teaching here, is Freire, which is about, you know, empowering people. Because you can see in some of the deprived communities, that they haven't got a voice, they say they can't read and write, they can't change their own circumstances, particularly in terms of benefits and welfare, and you know, that, I can see where he was coming from much more now. (Justine)*

Phipps and Borg characterise core beliefs as those which are experientially ingrained, as opposed to peripheral beliefs, which are not embraced with the same amount of conviction (Phipps and Borg, 2007). Justine found that her understanding of the

importance of empowerment in changing lives was strengthened by her experience and thus its place as a core belief was also strengthened.

Reflection is a major part of most recent training courses. It is seen by teacher educators as a cornerstone of both generic and specialist courses (Beattie, 1997; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003; Korthagen, 2004; Ofsted, 2003), although its use has been criticised as excessive by some teachers (NRDC, 2010). One of the reasons for its near universal incorporation into ITE is that it is meant to provide a tool with which teachers can continue to link their practice with relevant theory in their professional life beyond the course. But there was little mention of it still taking place once this group of teachers was in post. Jodie was one who did continue to reflect:

*Because what happens for me is if I have - if something goes slightly wrong then I'll sit down and in my words "analyse," "reflect" and go back to "Okay, why didn't that work?" and then I start thinking about theories that I know and was I applying them? Maybe I was only half applying things that I knew or half remembered things so I sometimes go back and read some more. (Jodie)*

Jodie is using reflective practice in the way it was intended, to monitor and improve her practice. But Justine says although she recognises its value, she has no time for that now. For her, one of the advantages of a course is that it gives her an opportunity to step back from her everyday practice and reflect.

*And you are supposed to keep reading all the magazines and, I mean one of the things I wrote when I was thinking about this was - reflection, who really has time for it? And that is, I know you're reflecting unconsciously, but the whole CPD thing of are you really writing down what you've learnt, and considering it? No. So I think you just...which is why coming to do a course, like when I did the thing here, is so helpful, because you have to think about that. I felt quite refreshed by it, and then, you know, you plough back into it, so you are better equipped, but also you've got a better idea of things that are going on (Justine)*

Justine views reflective practice as something formal and separate from her own everyday practice. Others also viewed it as something they did while training but it does not have a place in their real professional lives. They might see it as a theory in itself rather than a tool for developing and actualising their own theory. Harkin concluded

that as theories move in and out of fashion, there needs to be greater clarity on ITE courses on what learning theory actually means and how it can be developed through reflective practice (Harkin, 2005).

#### 4.4 Cohesion between beliefs and practice

The dominant beliefs that came across from the interviews were about student-centred practice, fostering independence and collaboration. These are generic pedagogical ideas although they can be seen as particularly relevant for literacy teaching. Insofar as any specifically literacy specialist theories were acknowledged, contextualisation/embedding, using authentic materials, 'bringing the outside in' and reciprocal reading were the main theoretical ideas mentioned. I was interested to see how far these ideas made an appearance in their teaching. Although my observations were merely a snapshot of their work, I expected to see some signs of these core beliefs in practice.

##### *Student-centred practice*

All 12 participants claimed they believed strongly in student-centred practice. This could be interpreted in several ways, for instance, letting students decide the content of the session or giving them choices within the session (around materials and/or activities); building the session around student experiences and interests; letting student voices predominate so that students are talking more than the teacher. I observed little evidence of student choice in materials or activities. Where choice existed, the activity was often so open-ended that students were left feeling confused about the task. In one case they were asked just to 'have a look at a newspaper' (Anna); in another, the students were each given a paper as a precursor to a discussion that did not refer to what they had read in the paper at all. There was only one session (Karla's) out of the 12 that I observed where I felt that student ideas and experiences led the content in a meaningful way. In most cases, discussions were strictly controlled by the teacher who was using them for a predetermined purpose.

##### *Independent learning*

Five teachers (Anna, Alan, Caroline, Jess, Justine and Karla) all specifically mentioned their desire to promote independence among their learners. I observed some aspects of

lessons that seemed to support independent learning: Maggie directed learners to the library to find books of interest; Justine prioritised giving and feeding back on homework; Jess encouraged the learners to work together to spot their errors without her intervention; Karla tried to encourage one learner who had a LSA to do her own writing; At the beginning of Caroline's class, the students logged on to the VLE and working independently on exercises of their choice.

Although Alan made all the decisions in his class and the literacy aspects were carefully circumscribed, he did spend much time encouraging and supporting the learners to make their own burritos for the cafe. He made everyone practise folding and wrapping the burritos and they did the maths together on how many each would have to produce. His aim for promoting independence among his learners was broader than just through their literacy.

### *Collaborative learning*

Seven of the 12 classes were set up for pair or small group work; in two more, students chose to work collaboratively although this was not specifically organised by their teacher. It may suggest that they were used to working this way and had done so in previous sessions.

### *Contextualisation*

I saw limited evidence of contextualization: Alan, who was running a literacy session for his cooking group did everything in relation to producing a meal for the café that they were running. Although there was little actual reading and writing, what existed was all in the context of producing the meal. Learners read out the shopping list and wrote menus to be posted up around the college. Caroline chose her topic (fundraising for charity) because she felt it would interest the learners, Jess and Karla both sited their exam work within a healthy living context that the learners could relate to but there seemed to be no obvious context for the other lessons I observed, apart from exam preparation. Some of the newspaper articles chosen for the other sessions seemed randomly chosen, or chosen because of their level of difficulty or linguistic content. In fact, some newspaper content seemed particularly obscure- articles on summer music

festivals and computers powered by human thought seemed not obviously of interest to learners in those groups.

### *Authentic materials*

Having asked each participant to base some of their lesson around newspapers, I expected to see almost universal use of authentic, relevant materials, but this was not the case. Nine participants did use authentic newspaper or website articles but two of these were not from recent papers and a third was contemporary but not an article that seemed to interest the learners. In two of the classes, the teachers did not seem to quite know how to use their papers and just asked learners to look through them. Alan did not use newspapers at all and all the materials in his session were related to running the café. Two teachers used articles that purported to be from newspapers but were, in fact, inauthentic, having been written specifically as exam material.

### *'Bringing the outside in'*

As discussed by Simpson and Hepworth (2010), teachers vary widely in how far they 'bring the outside in' to their sessions. As noted above, I observed little evidence of students' outside experiences being validated by inclusion in lessons and little sign of real problems being discussed. In most cases texts and activities were geared towards practice for approaching exams.

There was, here, a gap between theory and practice, in contrast to Johnson's study, which found that most of the 30 teachers' practice was consistent with their beliefs (Johnson, 1992). Maggioni *et al* (2015) however, noted that the effects are often modified by contextual factors. The question to be asked then is what contextual factors might have affected these teachers' classroom practices to create such disharmony between their beliefs and their practices?

## 4.5 Conclusions

The participants described a number of factors that prevented them from doing as they wanted in the classroom. Chief among these was the need to prepare learners for exam success. Some teachers believed that exams were positive as that is what learners wanted; others thought that they were a negative force and that they prevented real learning happening; most concluded pragmatically that they just had to be tolerated.

Either way, the exams clearly affected what they did. As Kathleen observed, some learners were sitting six exams that year and time had to be spent preparing them for each. Many learners had never sat an exam before; others had only experienced failure in previous attempts. So a great deal of time needed to be spent in familiarizing learners with reading and understanding the rubric and questions; organizing timing; filling in answer sheets and building confidence. Only certain types of literacy skills are assessed in an exam, so these are the skills that needed to be practised. Other, perhaps equally important, skills were ignored because they were not needed to pass the exam. Kathleen was aware that in her class, it was the exams that drove the curriculum because funding was dependent on successful results:

*So therefore it seems that, you know, the driver is hanging on to our students and getting them through exams, and the exam results therefore become disproportionately important rather than the learning. (Kathleen)*

The pressure for successful exam results is immense. It presents a challenge for many of the participants whose core belief is in providing an education for adult learners that enables them to become independent and discerning citizens. But in most of these classes, students had no choices about what they were learning and no voice to select what they wanted to read or write. Karla, who had been teaching literacy in that college for 13 years felt indignant on behalf of the learners:

*Yeah, it feels a bit like they want literacy to be a course; you'd better take that course and get from there to there. [...] literacy, learning to read and write is not a course, it's almost a right if you like. (Karla)*

But she was also the only teacher I saw who was able to incorporate learner choice and use their funds of knowledge in the lesson I observed. This may be because of her long experience as a teacher or it may be because she had reflected and found a way of integrating what she believed with what was required by the college. She explained her view of this:

*I guess a good teacher can work that out, you know, you can work it out, oh God there's the test, I've got to work out how to do it. But the creative side, which you need time to think and like the idealistic stuff, surely that can then feed into part of it, of getting to the test. (Karla)*

Karla is an exceptionally skilled teacher. She was highly successful on her ITE course and she also has a great deal of experience. Her expertise has developed from both of these and also from her belief that whatever the circumstances, learners' needs come first. She says she spends time:

*... finding out what people are interested in, or what their aspirations are, what they are going to be doing in their daily lives, and marrying that to what you teach, is still really important. So obviously passing a test might be part of that. (Karla)*

The test becomes part of their goal rather than the entire focus of it. In this sense she is successfully 'working the interstices', the spaces that still exist to do what a teacher considers to be 'good' teaching, even in adverse conditions (Black, 2010).

This is perhaps an area where reflective practice could be of service to novice teachers. Yet, too many teachers see it as a chore, something that must be done on a course to please their tutors. A more informal and utilitarian approach to reflection could make it a relevant tool for exploring the tensions between beliefs and practice. Two things might support this: firstly, bearing in mind Phipps and Borg's notion of core beliefs as those that are experientially ingrained (Phipps and Borg, 2007), ensuring there is space on an ITE course (and beyond) for teachers to reflect on their core beliefs and how to embed them in their practice; secondly, making reflection more of a collaborative act would enable teachers to engage in dialogue within their community of practice about the tensions inherent in their work (Norton, 2005). Reflection could then become a catalyst for teacher learning and development rather than an imposed duty.

# **Chapter 5: The main pedagogical practices used by adult literacy teachers to take account of superdiversity**

## **5.1 Introduction**

We saw in Chapter 1 how London's population is increasingly characterised by superdiversity. As the population changes, so also does the makeup of literacy classes. I was interested to see how the practices of the teachers I observed took account of the diversity of the learners in their class.

In this chapter I examine the findings on pedagogical practices I observed in the 12 classes. I start with an examination of the teachers' planning, derived from their lesson plans, and continue with insights gained from observing the teaching and learning processes in each class. It is not possible to cover all the practices I observed so I have focused on the ones I feel are most pertinent to a diverse community of learners.

## **5.2 Planning for superdiversity**

Eight teachers arrived in the classroom ready to teach their session with a lesson plan, scheme of work and photocopied materials. Three had no scheme for differentiation in their plans; three had some notes, mainly extension activities for faster learners or support for those with disabilities. Fewer than half the teachers had differentiated in some way for students whose first language was not English. If differentiation was not on the plan, this did not necessarily mean that differentiation did not occur in the session; only that it had not been considered beforehand and built into the planned activities.

The majority of the sessions were planned to take into account learners' needs in terms of the assessment they would be taking, but it was less obvious how far they were planned to take into account learners' individual requirements, interests and language needs.

### 5.3 Reading development

Most teachers seemed to have pitched the lesson at an appropriate level for the learners in the group. Where individual students had difficulties, the teacher offered targeted support. However, in a couple of sessions, several individuals seemed to be struggling with comprehension, in some cases because the texts were about topics that were outside their personal experience, for example Kathleen's articles about computers operated by human thought. Students were not able to make use of prior knowledge or activate any schema on such subjects.

Of the four components of reading raised in the NRP (2000), I observed very little. In fact in these 12 sessions, I saw no phonic work and no fluency practice. A majority of the teachers (8/12) introduced work on vocabulary to aid understanding, particularly aimed at the multilingual learners, but I observed little other explicit instruction for comprehension beyond the word level.

The use of headlines to predict content was the only comprehension strategy offered in any session and this was used by only a quarter of the teachers. Texts were seen mainly as a tool for other purposes, for example, the analysis of presentation or linguistic devices. Comprehension was occasionally stated as an objective, but then help in understanding was limited to clarifying individual words. In fact, Jodie introduced that part of her lesson by announcing 'We are going to *do* a comprehension' as if it were an exercise for some other purpose, rather than the main aim of reading. This view of comprehension as a task was prevalent in all the classes. Where the meaning of the text was explored at all, it was largely through questioning, oral or written. Whilst questioning is one strategy that can be used to aid comprehension, the questioning here was for the purpose of checking learning rather than teaching. No other strategies were offered to enable learners to monitor their own progress in creating meaning.

All these teachers had received specialist training in teaching literacy. They had the requisite knowledge to teach according to research-based approaches, but it felt as if they were so focused on exam requirements that they had no space to deal with other aspects of reading, even something as fundamental as comprehension.

### 5.3.1 Creating meaning from texts

The participants had been asked to teach at least part of a lesson using newspapers. I did not offer guidance about how to do this as I wanted to see the choices they made when given a free reign. I deliberately chose newspapers as an authentic resource, freely available and with varied enough content to be accessible to all learners. I also knew from my previous study (Schwab, 2011) that many literacy learners enjoyed looking at the Metro. Nine of the 12 teachers used authentic articles in some way; most chose to build the use of papers into their work preparing students for exams. This could be seen as an authentic task in terms of the educational domain in which they were operating, but it did not represent an authentic practice that they might engage in outside the classroom. Students were asked to locate presentational devices, discuss vocabulary, answer comprehension questions, pick out arguments for and against a proposition, compare language use in a tabloid and a broadsheet and match pictures with a story. With comprehension the ultimate goal of reading (Kruidenier, 2002) experts agree that providing opportunities for rich discussions of the text may increase both understanding of content and general literacy outcomes (Applebee *et al.*, 2003; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012) but rarely were students asked to discuss the article's content or give their opinion about it.

Jodie, however, did facilitate discussion of the texts. She had asked learners to select and bring in an article of interest, and tell the group about their chosen text. A genuine discussion arose which included the learners raising issues of concern. For example one learner had brought in an article about the first womb transplant. One of the group asked what a womb looks like; another questioned whether transplants could transmit HIV. So the discussion was steered by the learners towards their interests. But this was unusual among the lessons I observed. In most cases, teachers concentrated on vocabulary or text structure and the content was ignored. Anna asked the learners to look at Metros she had brought in, warning that she would be setting questions, but they were expected to pick out an article without knowing in advance what they were going to be asked. Flicking through the paper could be seen as an authentic task, but skimming to prepare for unknown questions is not and the students approached it hesitantly and without much enthusiasm. Authenticity resides in both the texts to be

read and the purposes for which they are read; both need to be in place for an authentic literacy event (Purcell Gates *et al.*, 2002).

### *Using learners' experience*

A social practice approach to pedagogy draws on learners' everyday literacy practices (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009; Larson and Marsh, 2015; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Papen, 2005).

These teachers drew very little on the learners' experience in their teaching and often the contexts were obscure. For example, Justine chose a text about music festivals, asking learners which festivals they had been to. Most struggled to relate this to their personal experience with a guess at Carnival being the best fit.

The need to get on with work for the exam was so pressing in many cases that any personal response was put aside. In Grainne's class the group was reading about animal experiments. One student explained that she worked in a hospital and thus recognised the value of animal research. She was told by the teacher, 'Your job is to be objective'. Her experience was thus immediately devalued and the insights she possessed were rejected.

Karla was able to combine the need for exam practice with a focus on the learners' own lives and experiences. Her lesson objective was to practise writing. She began the lesson with a website image of different food types and used it to enable the learners to talk about their own dietary habits, moving on to healthy lifestyles and any exercise they did. She then used two case studies stimulating them to offer advice from their own viewpoint. The advice giving was turned into a writing exercise in preparation for the FS exam.

Most of these teachers had a clear idea of the learning they wanted to take place and were working towards achieving it but, in my opinion, the learning was incidental to the real purpose of reading to create meaning from the text. For example Kathleen's students read about computers being controlled by human thought. They discussed the language used, but they found it hard to relate to a topic so far beyond their own experience and knowledge. The small group discussions set up by the teacher were subdued because the text had no real meaning for them. They had no way of 'bringing in

the outside' which, according to Condelli *et al* (2009), enables learners to link new information to what is already known and thus engage them to create meaning.

In summary, I was surprised at how little time was spent on engaging with the content of the texts used in each session. Under pressure to get students successfully through exams, texts were often seen purely as material for tasks rather than as communicating meaning in themselves.

#### 5.4 Language learning

I was investigating whether any additional language work was offered to make texts more accessible for multilingual learners. In particular, support at sentence level, a focus on oral communicative activities, vocabulary and an exploration of any cultural issues that might hinder understanding of texts (Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). An additional factor, rarely mentioned in the literature, is the grading of language by the teacher

##### *Grading of language*

In ESOL classes, teachers are trained to use slow, simple spoken discourse and give clear instructions that might be backed up by pictures or a written handout. Not all literacy teachers agree this is necessary in their classes.

I was unfamiliar with these teachers' usual practice and observed them only once, so it was impossible to tell how far they had deviated from their normal oral language use. I felt generally that they used language appropriate to the level of the learners, although in some cases words or sentence constructions were used that the learners clearly did not understand. Sometimes the teachers noticed and explained; sometimes they did not.

In the second interview, all 12 of the teachers in this study were asked about how far they had graded their language in the class I observed. Nine of them said they did, at least to some extent but this was not a straightforward issue and a few of the teachers took a principled stand on it.

Alan was one of those who definitely did attempt to grade his language:

*I wouldn't use complicated words but the thing that I try to get out of, which is probably because of my Mancunian past, is speaking in the*

*vernacular, trying to get out of that, and not speak simplistically but clearly, and using words that I've got a fair understanding that they'll understand. (Alan)*

Caroline, on the other hand, saw it as a way to increase learners' vocabulary:

*If I use a word that I think they'll be unfamiliar with but I think it might be interesting to highlight and it might link with another word, or it might have a letter pattern that's similar to a word or something like that [... ] so if I'm using a word that I think they won't understand or if one of them questions the word I've used, and of course if they question words I've used in what I've given to them, then we'll discuss that and put it on the board. (Caroline)*

Several teachers noted that the ability to judge the level of language to use was developed with experience. Justine explained when she was speaking, she kept an eye on the learners, especially the ones who had the most difficulty understanding, and if she noticed incomprehension on their faces, she amended her language.

### ***Grammar***

In the observations, I looked out for the way language issues were tackled by the teachers. Only two teachers specifically chose to deal with grammar at sentence level and built tasks into their lesson plan. Karla organised some work around simple past verbs, which was a follow-on from the previous session. The learners were asked to place the verbs within a context determined by themselves and meaningful to them.

In contrast, Kay tried something much more complex and got into difficulties. She tried to cover both simple present and simple past together. The materials used were taken from an EFL coursebook and unrelated either to the learners' own experience or to the content of the lesson being taught. The decontextualisation made it particularly difficult for the learners and the purpose of using past tenses was not made clear until much later in the lesson.

The difference here is that Karla had used a simple exercise with a clear purpose, contextualising the grammar and making it relevant for anyone writing a narrative, whatever their language background. Although Kay was one of those who had studied both literacy and ESOL, she had become confused about her purpose for teaching

grammar and presented it in a way that was helpful to neither monolingual nor multilingual learners.

### *Metalanguage*

One third of the teachers (those working at the higher levels) did use grammar terminology: comparatives and superlatives; connectives; prefixes and suffixes; phrasal verbs and word classes. The students did not seem to have any problem with these and it may be that multilingual students were actually at an advantage here. ESOL teachers tend to teach the terminology explicitly alongside the concepts of grammar unlike in a literacy class where it is generally accepted that the students implicitly understand the grammar of the language (after all they speak it all the time) so it is not necessary, and may indeed be confusing, to use technical terms at the lower levels.

### *Vocabulary*

At word level there was a much greater recognition of the needs of multilingual learners. All but three of the teachers spent time on vocabulary development, in some cases, a great deal of time. Those who did not were teaching the highest level classes (Maureen and Grainne) or, unusually, had a very small percentage of multilingual learners (Alan).

It is generally accepted that learners with language needs are going to struggle with vocabulary issues more than those for whom English is their first language. There were several different approaches to teaching vocabulary. Anna Caroline, Kathleen, Karla used self study mode in which they provided, and encouraged learners to use, dictionaries. Caroline also suggested they use technology such as Moodle (the VLE) and Snappy Words (a web-based programme) to look up words. Some of them were enthusiastic about this; others ignored it. At times even the promoters of self-study explained words either to individuals or to the whole group.

Jess introduced new technical words into her lesson (blog, thread, forum, post) which she predicted would be unfamiliar to the learners. She planned the first 45 minutes of the session to introduce, discuss and contextualise these words so the students would be able to use them in the second part of the session. This was time well-spent as the students were comfortable enough with the terminology to write their own post on a forum.

Jodie, Justine, Kay and Maggie had not pre-prepared vocabulary work, but took their lead from the students, stopping to discuss any difficult or unfamiliar words. The help they gave varied from offering a synonym to morphological or etymological analysis. At no point did I see phonics used. Additionally, only Justine and Jodie explored any cultural meanings of words, for example, Jodie explained vocabulary items such as 40k and Internet troll. Maggie tried to avoid cultural references although it is arguable if this is possible:

*Yeah because if you talk naturally and then you realise you've used a word that might not be in common parlance or especially something that might be culturally relevant to, I don't know, say Sandra you know, might not be culturally relevant to a Muslim guy in his twenties who's been in England for five years. We might joke about, "Do you remember Dick Emery in the..." and they will go "What?" So you have to be more conscious of that.*  
(Maggie)

### *Talk is work*

One key technique for working with language learners is the concept of 'talk is work' (Baynham *et al.*, 2007). All the teachers used questioning to encourage learners to speak out but in some cases only between the teacher and individual students, limiting the amount and range of spoken discourse used. Most classes included some pair or small group discussions, where students discussed an aspect of the work and fed back to the larger group. In only one class did I see collaborative, task-based learning in which small groups completed a task together through dialogue and debate.

## 5.5 Resources

Resources are an important support for teachers, enabling a variety of activities and providing an important mediation between teacher and student. When teaching reading, the text used is, of course, a crucial resource, but teachers also draw on other key materials. These can be human (support staff, the students themselves) or material (paper-based print, technology, the environment).

### *Human resources*

In terms of human resources, most teachers made use of pair or small group work so that learners could offer peer support. This is good practice in generic as well as literacy specialist classes. Jodie however, was adamant that for her, the linguistically mixed

nature of the group helped support those with language needs. She claimed to 'use the native speakers as the teaching tool' and was clear that the learners themselves were a key resource to draw on.

### *Material resources*

Others saw resources more in physical terms. Jess was one of the most thoughtful about these, relating materials used inside the classroom to those that might be helpful outside:

*I sort of try and put a lot into thinking about the classes I've got and their needs and trying to build the resources that will help them and also trying to make them sort of self-sufficient as well because obviously it's outside of the classroom as well, not just what they do inside the classroom. (Jess)*

She maintained that resources should support the teacher's wider purposes rather than the teacher working round the resources.

The classroom environment is a key resource for teachers. Each room was equipped with an electronic whiteboard (IWB) which was used by all but one of the teachers to show pre-prepared slides, find images on the Net or access the VLE. I did not see learners encouraged to use their phones as dictionaries although some did. Clearly, technology was used, but generally as a teacher's aid rather than as part of any authentic literacy event.

Authenticity was not always a priority. Anna said that she doesn't use authentic materials in her Entry 3 class because they are not required by the exam at this level. Karla, on the other hand, also taught an E3 class and she felt that the learners should be looking at a variety of texts. The difference here is between someone who believes in the value of a range of texts because that is what will be encountered in real life, versus a belief that the students should be reading what will get them through the exam. This demonstrates a real tension between what teachers may understand as 'good practice' and a pragmatic approach to the criteria for success in their college. The requirements of the exams played a large part in the choice of resources for many of the teachers. Kathleen deliberately chose something neutral for her lesson on media texts, as GCSE preparation.

*I wanted to get away from anything in the context of celebrity around texts. I didn't want to get into anything too political. I didn't want to get anything too cultural and I felt that something science-based was quite neutral and would be of general interest, which I felt quite comfortable that it was. (Kathleen)*

In a culture like this, the dilemma for the teacher is always how to balance the needs of the learner for authentic reading practices with those demanded by the exam which requires specific ways of reading.

Selecting and making materials has always been a large part of a literacy teacher's job. For some, like Jess, it is a part of the role she enjoys, but for others such as Kay, who longed for a coursebook, it can be a burden not helped by a lack of confidence about whether she is on the right path. With time constraints pressing on teachers and the pressure to get good exam results, it is not surprising that they select those resources that have been tried and tested or recommended by exam boards rather than considering what will resonate with the learners' lives. Authenticity of tasks and texts was rarely a priority, even though it has been shown to expand learners' literacy practices outside the classroom and encourage them to read and write more complex texts (Duke *et al.*, 2006; Purcell Gates *et al.*, 2002).

## 5.6 Diversity and inclusion

The teachers in this study are working with some of the most diverse groups in their respective colleges, themselves sited in areas of great diversity. In the classes I saw, the students' ages ranged from 16 to 72; up to 14 different languages were represented in one group; many learners have been diagnosed with dyslexia and other learning difficulties (LDDs) and there were learners in some groups with visual, auditory and mobility impairments or mental health issues. In addition, as in any group, there are differences of education, background and motivation.

The focus of this study is on different language and literacy needs within the group but there are so many variables and so many overlapping issues of need that it is often hard for the teacher to know how to differentiate. The current financial situation generating cuts in the service results in additional challenges for the teachers

*Class sizes are going to increase, they are increasing, which means that you get a wider cohort in one group than you may have done. So you've got to be able to differentiate even more and make sure that everyone's learning. (Jodie)*

Jodie describes how in her group she has one student with a degree who still needs some help with reading and writing, but also another who has only an E3 ESOL speaking and listening qualification and who struggles to understand spoken English:

*By the time you have a chance to think about this student it's too late for her to go anywhere else. So you've got to get both of these people at these extremes learning. So that's a challenge. (Jodie)*

As well as diverse needs within the group, sometimes individuals have multiple different needs. Justine notes one student has needs that relate both to her language and her dyslexia. So differentiation becomes a complex activity of balancing a variety of needs. As well as dyslexia and other LDDs, there are students in the group who have sensory impairments which can mean major adjustments by the teacher and sometimes also the rest of the group.

Jodie has Deaf learners in her group and recognises their language needs which are as pressing as those of ESOL learners, particularly for those who have BSL as their first (or major) language. She needed to get to grips with both the specialist equipment and the strategies to support these learners and worried that it was an area of expertise that she lacked.

Many of the other teachers also had strategies to differentiate and integrate learners with additional needs. Support workers are vital for some learners' integration but once again, cuts mean that they are not always forthcoming. Jodie, with three Deaf learners in her group, complains that at times she has no signer or sometimes only one between all three. It is not impossible to work round, but requires ingenuity and commitment and means the disabled learners sometimes cannot be fully included.

*Work that some students in this group have really needed is not speaking and listening but phonic work and I've had to do it when the deaf learners haven't had a signer [...] If it moves on from spelling work that we've done, I'll set some grammar for the deaf learners to get on with because they need sentence grammar and then work with the rest. (Jodie)*

Grainne differentiated at the beginning of her GCSE course, but has dropped that by the summer term as students are expected to have caught up. She feels their language is then at a level where the need is less. Maggie saw her role of differentiating for ESOL learners primarily in the field of speaking and listening:

*Usually with native speakers you can do speaking and listening at a higher level than you can their writing, whereas with the ESOL learners, you've got to develop that. The speaking particularly, they might not have the confidence [...] A native born speaker will notice where it's wrong whereas an ESOL learner may not naturally notice where something's wrong because they might not have...they might think it is right. (Maggie)*

Caroline considered how her differentiation might change if the linguistic composition of the group was different. She thought she would still use 'diverse materials reflecting diverse cultures because if you've got one or two people who are not native born English speakers, then you have to do that,' but always there is a consciousness that there are exams to pass with never enough time.

*And so I suppose another way of doing it is to actually give them differentiated tasks. But then on the other hand it becomes complex when you give people different texts so I suppose what would make more sense is to devise different questions perhaps and to devise some more challenging questions, more about 'What do you think?' type questions, for example. And I'm afraid they just all got the one set that was based on the E2 Functional Skills. (Caroline)*

In addition, the prevailing FE culture of targets and performativity means that retention is as important as achievement. Caroline reflected on this and concluded that what was needed was group responsibility for integration and inclusion. The teacher can foster an atmosphere of tolerance and collaboration, but then the group has to accept and support those who are different in order for them not to become marginalised.

*I do want to try and keep students in the class all year and some of the students, [...] I think have been excluded from other classes, and [...] I'm trying to make sure that they still feel they have a place in the class. That means in a way a different kind of differentiation. It means a kind of tolerance. It means everybody has to be tolerant, which again is maybe something I hadn't appreciated as I was training which is how important the dynamic of the group is in terms of being a sort of collaborative group or at the very least, a tolerant group, and a group that will accept that one person is going to do something different [...] The rest of the group then has some sort of responsibility for trying to ensure the success of the*

*whole and that might include someone that's a bit difficult, who may not be joining in. (Caroline)*

Learning how to foster a sense of group responsibility for its own success is difficult to teach on a course. A trainer can remind trainees of its importance, but to make it work they need attributes like the empathy and sensitivity exhibited by Caroline. In some classes, I could see that type of collaboration happening, especially those I observed later in the year when the group had grown accustomed to working together. But it does not necessarily happen naturally and teachers have to work at it, sometimes in the face of student opposition. The diverse nature of the groups and the emphasis on exams means the potential for friction is always there, but some teachers have achieved a supportive and collaborative environment which thrives on diversity.

## 5.7 Collaborative learning

Almost all teachers organised their classes with a variety of different groupings. Some of the teachers saw group work as a practical teaching technique. Jess saw it in a more ideological way and she recognised that by encouraging learners to support each other, she was building their autonomy and making them less reliant on her presence to be able to learn.

*I think that's changed for me because before, I probably was doing a lot of the talking [...], but what I try and do now is get them to learn from each other and even if I get them to come up to the board, OK, you tell the class, you help, like they did with the spelling when they realised, I think it was Maria had spelled something wrong and they were able to help her [...], they were able to say to her without me pointing it out, "Oh, you've missed." (Jess)*

Karla talked about the women in her group supporting each other, but in Jodie's class there was also some male bonding. In this case, the support of a few men in the same circumstances was crucial in making a reticent learner comfortable enough to stay in the class. His easing into education was facilitated by a sensitive teacher who was able to recognise that he was bringing some skills and knowledge and that his embarrassment would be alleviated somewhat by the support of his male peers.

*Well they don't [all sit together] but they try to. They tend to sit along the back row in the horseshoe and I think that's okay because they're quite encouraging of each other. Colin has only just joined the course. Colin was*

*very nervous and reticent. In fact I met him on the street once and he was asking me about the course and I said "No, come along, come along," and when he came to admissions he didn't write anything. He didn't answer anything. All he wrote on his paper was "I don't understand". And luckily I was there and because I'd spoken to him and they were saying "He's not ready, he shouldn't be here." And I said, "No, put him in my E2s, I think he will be fine." And because he's got the support of the other men, he's settled in really well, so I do let them work together because I think it works well. They went for the back because Gary likes the air so he always goes to that corner and opens the window. So there are all these little quirks that go on. (Jodie)*

Teachers had different views on how to group or pair up learners. There is no one right way, only different options for different contexts. Karla opts for pairing like with like:

*I'd make sure there were people with similar issues together so that they can share and identify learning-that sort of peer learning thing. (Karla)*

Peer marking is a proven strategy for formative assessment (Marshall and Wiliam, 2006) and a couple of the participants initiated it with their groups. It was particularly noticeable with Grainne's group and she talks about it as a rich resource, informing me how they do it habitually now, even if she has not asked them to.

*But the peer work is because they are being piled up with so much and there just isn't the time for marking everything and giving it back as well as doing the controlled assessment work and the admin for the GCSE at the end of things. But they are used to it [...] and I'm aware enough to know who needs a little bit of stronger supervision and I will select odd ones to check and ask them. If I think it's really good, I'll ask them to share with particular people. And that has worked quite well for them. And they know now not always to just share with the person beside them or their mate or whoever they become friends with. [...] and I say make sure you look for somebody whose work you haven't seen. Because I think it's a great way of learning and they were very resistant at first but they've gradually recognised how rich that is. (Grainne)*

Maureen has an ideological view of collaborative learning, seeing it as a way of relinquishing the teacher's power and enabling students to learn from each other in a more equitable environment.

*I think working in pairs and groups is important because it's not just about me and them because there's obviously...you know, it's a power thing isn't it. I'm asking the questions and they're answering, whereas in a group they're all equals and they've got to work in partnership and communicate with each other in an effective way. So I think that kind of*

*work helps and I think it helps them appreciate each other more, that you know, their skills and what they have to offer and what other people have to offer so I think that kind of works. (Maureen)*

## 5.8 Power and control

Freire argued that for adults to learn, they needed to have control over their learning, to be able to make choices about what to learn and how to go about learning it (Freire, 1972). This has been a major concern over time underpinning ideology, in England in the 1970s and 1980s (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Schwab and Stone, 1986) and, more recently, in Scotland (Crowther and Tett, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2005). However, the emphasis on assessment in most of today's classes militates against student choice as it is the teachers who are the experts on the assessment requirements.

In most cases a learner will have chosen to attend a literacy class, but it is unlikely that they had any choice about which class to join. Initial assessment will have assigned them to a curriculum level and they will join whichever class at that level runs at a time they can attend. Every class has a qualification aim and, except in special circumstances, learners joining that class will be obliged to aim for that qualification. Where there could be choice is in the texts that are used and the way that reading is taught. Freire used texts that had resonance in learners' lives so that they were able draw on their own experiences to create meaning (Freire, 1973). For this study, I looked at how far students were able to make choices about the materials that were used and how far they had any control in the learning situation.

The majority of the teachers treated the learners as adults, listened to what they said and valued their comments. Occasionally, when they needed to manage the class, they fell back into a school discipline mode, for example in Anna's group, one learner had finished his work and was sitting chatting to another.

*Anna You're not finished*

*L Yes I am*

*Anna No, you have to do your corrections*

*L I've done them*

*Anna No, you have to do another draft. Gina, don't encourage him please. If everyone was like Ahmed, it would be a good class. Let me look at what you've done.*

Only one teacher gave the learners an open choice of selecting texts to read. Anna ostensibly offered one, but her phrasing made it feel as if there was no choice at all: 'I've chosen an article for you to look at, but if you aren't keen on that, you can choose your own'. Her unfortunate choice of words made it appear as if they would be ungrateful to choose their own and, naturally, few did. In all other lessons, the teacher chose the texts to be read, sometimes because she thought they would interest the learners, in other cases because they exemplified some aspect of the texts they would face in the exam.

None of the lessons were driven by what the learners chose to do. This is not to lay blame on the teachers who had to concentrate on getting learners through exams. There is little space for independent thought or action when time is limited and teachers are conscious of how much has to be done to get through the exam:

In summary, the power in the classes I observed was very firmly in the hands of the teacher. This was not necessarily their choice but inevitable in a system that puts such a high priority on passing exams. Both teachers and learners are aware that the expertise in exam success lies with the teachers and therefore they need to lead learning that will result in achievement.

## 5.9 Conclusions

The 12 teachers I observed were recommended by their managers as skilled practitioners. I saw them teach only one lesson. There were practices that they told me about in interviews that I did not see in action, so I could only take a snapshot of the range of pedagogical practices they had at their disposal.

Clearly they felt differentiation had become more difficult in a time of cuts, as they had fewer resources to support their teaching. It appeared that they were better at managing to include the needs of some students more easily than others. They did not always have strategies to support those with language needs whether they were speakers of a variety of English, BSL or another language. In some cases, the teacher had

some awareness of the need but only dealt with it at word level; in other cases, she deliberately chose not to attend to language needs as the learners were in a literacy class.

Most teachers fostered collaborative work, and organised their class with a variety of groupings. One went further and promoted inclusion by creating group responsibility for integration and inclusion.

Half the observations took place in the summer term; the other half in the Autumn term, but washback from examinations as Spratt has described (2005), could be seen in both sets of classes. My observations were particularly focused on the teaching of reading and I did witness a range of skills being taught that were needed for exam success. However, there was little focus on learners' everyday reading practices with authentic texts and activities around texts, even though these have been proven to support reading (Duke *et al.*, 2006; Purcell Gates *et al.*, 2002). Despite multimodal texts being a feature of life in the early 21st century (Kress, 2003), only one teacher used an authentic web text and spent time on the image alongside the words. Questioning was the main strategy used for comprehension of texts, but although it was employed frequently, it appeared that most questions were aimed at testing understanding rather than teaching it, a phenomenon also noted by Maggioni *et al* (Maggioni, Fox and Alexander, 2015).

In these lessons there was little scope for learners to have any control of the content, or even choices about how or what they were learning. The overwhelming focus on exam success puts expertise and power into the hands of the teacher. The knowledge and experience of the learners has little place in this world, despite these teachers' strongly held views on learner-centred education.

# Chapter 6: Initial Teacher Education

## 6.1 Introduction

As we have seen, these teachers valued their ITE and felt it had given them a strong basis for their practice. In this chapter I examine their perceptions of their training in more detail, looking at how it has impacted on their beliefs and their practice and, in particular, how they feel it has influenced their teaching of reading. Participants were invited to critique their ITE and the chapter ends with an overview of the limitations they perceived.

## 6.2 Perceptions of the benefits of ITE

All 12 participants, regardless of where they had studied, thought their ITE had been useful. Indeed, some found it hard to think of any negatives, although, on reflection, they did offer some criticisms which I explore later in this chapter. They felt it prepared them well for work in the sector, provided an element of professionalism and offered both the theory and the practical experience they felt they needed. Grainne summed up what it meant to her:

*It was the feedback, and starting to believe that I could do it, so self-belief as much as anything. And I think the personal satisfaction, the fulfilment, which has always been quite important to me. (Grainne)*

Before they entered training, five participants had experience as paid teachers; three as volunteer teachers and four had no previous teaching experience. Although Anna and Karla already had years of experience in the field, they still felt that they had benefited extensively from their ITE. Karla acknowledged that it had given her confidence that what she was already doing was right; Anna, who had not engaged in formal study before, felt that it put her on the same level as those who already had qualifications. Both felt it provided them with more professionalism in their work.

*I needed the professionalism about it. It was all sort of very informal and I needed a structure that I could sort of use, you know, and so training gave me that structure [...] Some within my department didn't do it, but I needed to do it because I didn't have any other qualifications that would put me there. (Anna)*

For those who had no teaching experience before they started training, one important factor was seeing how their trainers approached teaching. This stood out as having had a significant impact. They observed how trainers modelled a variety of teaching techniques and believed it offered them examples of ways they might want to act as a teacher. For example, although she had previously only experienced very traditional educational methods, Grainne noted that seeing the different styles made her realise she wanted to be a learner-centred teacher.

*The different teachers on the course, they had their own methods; some of them were very kind of static and teacher-centred, but it was when I was in the environment when it was more learner-centred, it was more us. That was what was so thrilling. (Grainne)*

Grainne found experiencing a learner-centred environment 'thrilling' as for her it was a novel experience and it immediately resonated; it was also the beginning of the creation of her professional identity just as Shain and Gleeson (1999) argue that it is through commitment to students that such an identity is formed.

For Maggie, seeing teachers in operation was the most important benefit. She explained that how she was taught was more important than what she was taught, even if she did not end up teaching like any of her tutors. Many others believed that when they observed their tutors it was a learning experience in itself, regardless of the content. What they were formally intended learn may or may not have been remembered but what they did recall was how they were learning, a sort of non-formal learning within a formal learning situation or acquisition of tacit knowledge (Eraut, 2000b). It demonstrated the toolbox that teachers have at their disposal, and let them choose what might be appropriate tools to use. Additionally, it allowed them to form their own unique professional identity as a teacher, based not on past experience (although inevitably there would be some influence) but on personal choice.

### *Peer learning*

They were able to develop their ideas and beliefs from watching and listening to their trainers, but they also learned from their peers. Being on a course allowed them to mix with and learn from others in various situations. Collaboration and peer support was important and differing levels of professional experience seemed not to matter.

Discussion and peer feedback helped to clarify their own ideas and learn from others' conceptions. Jodie said feedback from others helped her focus; Karla felt that explaining her ideas to others and having to defend them helped her to be clear about what was important to her; Anna noted how she had learned from colleagues on the course who were working in other contexts; Justine felt she actually learned more from her peers than the trainers on one of her courses; Maureen was also strongly in favour of collaboration: 'It's all sharing and talking and discussing'. Several participants talked about learning from students on teaching practice, in their placements and training classes.

*And even the training class initially I thought "Oh my gosh, this is going to be....what have I got to learn from this?" Because obviously I'd been teaching for a number of years, but I actually really enjoyed the training class. I found it really useful even looking at my, you know, inexperienced colleagues and how they sort of like picked up and it was really, really good. (Jess)*

The training class was an important lesson in helping teachers see the value of collaborative learning and, as with the techniques they saw modelled by their tutors, they were able to transfer this knowledge to their own teaching situation.

*It's trying to find a way of making the group support each other and I suppose actually teaching, you learn more about that [...] by the very example that you give us in terms of our own learning on that course, where we team up and we collaborate. (Caroline)*

### *Types of knowledge*

All the participants had completed both generic and subject specific training, sometimes separately and sometimes on the same course. I was interested to know which aspects of their ITE were most important to them. I ran through the different types of knowledge with each of them- general pedagogic knowledge, subject knowledge, language knowledge, knowledge about the learners, classroom management. About half the participants thought general pedagogic knowledge had helped them most; the majority of the others considered the specialist subject knowledge to have been the most helpful; Alan alone believed his most significant gain had been developing an understanding of the learners. However, those who started their training with no previous experience were more likely to see the importance of general pedagogic

knowledge than those who were more experienced teachers. Justine explained why she felt that she needed generic knowledge before thinking about the subject.

*For me, certainly, having experienced very, one type of teaching at school, to learn that that wasn't really the way people did it any more, I needed to learn that quite quickly really. (Justine)*

Her beliefs about teaching had been formed long ago during her own early education and it was an important lesson to learn that she needed to be a different sort of teacher from those she had known in her youth. Grainne also stressed that pedagogic knowledge was important; for her, understanding the nature of the learners was the first step to thinking about how best to teach them.

*They live very useful, purposeful, responsible lives, and so I always felt it really important not to patronise and to, you know, to recognise that. (Grainne)*

But for Grainne, once she had understood the importance of listening to the learners, she needed the tools to be able to provide them with the education they were asking for. The specialist literacy training then became more important and 'that was, I think key to feeling, you know, I knew better, I felt better equipped to do what I was doing'.

Surprisingly, only two people felt that developing an understanding of language had been important to them. Caroline has a degree in English and so already knew something about language, but had no experience in teaching it. Being in a classroom and learning the basics about how people learn language was crucial for her, although it was 'probably reigniting stuff I knew rather than being completely novel.' Karla, as an experienced teacher, also felt that learning about language had been significant because it gave her more confidence in helping learners working at the higher levels. From having only taught at Entry 1, a better understanding of how language works gave her the confidence to take on work at the higher levels.

Alan, who works on a vocational course for young students with moderate learning difficulties, clearly felt that the most important knowledge he had acquired from his ITE was to understand the learners and to prioritise relevance and application to their own learning goals. He has learned the importance of focusing on learners' everyday literacy practices outside the college in line with social practice theory (Barton, 1994; Ivanic *et*

al., 2006) and thinks his ITE taught him to disregard what is irrelevant to students' lives, for example teaching unnecessary spellings:

*To just really get them to understand what they can apply in their life because by that I think they'll use it rather than – because you know I really tried things like with spellings and that, but lots of the words that they've been trying to spell, they're not going to use really. They've never really done. You know we could – you know, trying to get them to, I don't know, learn how to spell courgette. It's not the end of the world if they can't spell courgette. They know a courgette, they can say it. They don't really need to be able to spell it. (Alan)*

I have outlined above some key knowledge that most of these teachers felt they had acquired on their ITE course. This can be summarised as:

- Observing their trainers modelling a variety of techniques which alerted them to new approaches they could use
- Gaining generic pedagogical knowledge and specialist knowledge about language and literacy
- Formation of a professional identity through gaining confidence in their chosen approaches to teaching
- Valuing and learning to employ collaboration and peer learning techniques
- Understanding adult learners- listening to what they had to say and taking account of their literacy practices outside college; being able to pitch teaching at the right level for them

Whilst recognising that these are important aspects of a teacher's development, it is also significant to note what most omitted to include, for example, generic learning theory and theories of learning to read and write. The practical aspects of the course seem to have had a greater lasting impact than the more formal, theoretical knowledge.

### 6.3 Impact of ITE on teachers' beliefs

Although three universities and five colleges were involved in these participants' ITE and they completed a range of different courses, the views disseminated by trainers on all programmes were likely to have been around learner-centred practice, as that is the current norm for adult literacy education, although it was new to some participants who had not previously experienced this in their own education:

*I'd been brought up in a very traditional [way]; any schools I was at was always very kind of humdrum, teacher lead, teacher at the centre of the room, or the front of the room, rather than this opportunity to, almost like sports really, you know, here's the game, play it. And that's what was really interesting. [...] It was more a priority amongst all the teachers that it would be learner-centred teaching, and that was evident. (Grainne)*

Grainne, educated in an age of more traditional, formal pedagogy, had her perceptions of what it is to be a teacher totally changed.

The notion of drawing on learners' vernacular literacy practices as resources for learning in order to provide an educational experience that is relevant and positive is a mainstay of a sociocultural pedagogy (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009). Only one participant, (Grainne), referred to social practice theory by name but the ideas inherent in a sociocultural approach to education were there for many. For instance, Alan underlined the importance of linking literacy with the learners' needs and interests in life and work; Karla was concerned with working closely with the vocational teachers to provide literacy education that was embedded in learners' vocational practices.

All the participants were asked to consider the extent to which their ITE had influenced what they did in the lesson I observed. Jess reiterated her belief in learner-centred practice and how that stemmed from her training.

*Normally when I do lesson plans I really try, more so since having the training, really thinking about the learners and what it is that they need to achieve by the end of the lesson and looking at the resources that I've chosen to use and if they're going to do that job. (Jess)*

Karla explained how even though she is not strictly providing embedded literacy, she tries to contextualise the work to fit with what might interest the students in her group. On her ITE course, she had learned to use the group profile to get a detailed picture of the learners, their background, their interests and their uses of literacy outside the college, which she still finds invaluable.

*I really work hard on the group profile if I can. And really think about where they are going, and what they need, and not be afraid of working on that, rather than just general how to read and write, or how to read, I think, and it's really important to read things that you are interested in and have some sort of meaning, and you know, it's just motivation. And a*

*lot of my students go to health and social care, so I've worked really hard on bringing texts in for them to read that are related. (Karla)*

#### 6.4 Impact of ITE on teachers' practice

As noted above, a key impact on practice seems to have been the influence of the trainers' different styles of teaching. Some, such as Alan, explained that they liked the trainers' style and wanted to emulate that. Others felt that having a variety to choose from was most important (Grainne and Maggie) as it allowed them to consider a range of different styles and select the one that fitted best with their notion of the sort of teacher they wished to become.

*I learn more from observing. I know that, I'm not one of these get stuck in necessarily, you know that activist stuff. I actually quite like watching other people and thinking, would I have done that like that? No, I think I might have done that differently. Why have they done that? So I think that I quite like analysing other people's practice to see would that be congruent for me to work like that? Because it's not just about nicking other people's techniques, you got to be yourself. (Maggie)*

Alan talked about how it gave him the confidence to be flexible, to move away from his lesson plan if circumstances demanded it. He explained how his ITE tutors 'just kind of gently changed it and moved it around [...] without you really being aware of it too much.' That gave him the confidence to do the same with his own students:

*Now if I've got a lesson plan and it's saying I've got to do this for forty minutes but it's not working, I wouldn't squeeze every last bit out. So at forty minutes they may have done it, but it's been agony. I can't see the point in that really. [...] I would probably say, "Look scrap that, scrap that," you know, "let's clean the cookers" or something. I'd just change it totally. You know, and I don't think I would have thought like that as much if I hadn't done that course really. That is – it is legitimate, if something's not working, just because you planned it and it's not working, you don't have to stick with it [...] You've got X amount that you need to get out of them but you don't have to kind of crush it to get it out of them. (Alan)*

Participants saw observation as a key element in their training to be literacy teachers. They valued both their observations of others (trainers, mentors, other practitioners and peers) and being observed by trainers, mentors and peers. It was the key area for them in linking the theory they had learned with actual practice. For those without previous experience in teaching, this was something quite new:

*I was very pleased with the whole experience, and I thought the conjoining of theory and practice worked very well, the idea that you work alongside experienced teachers. You had your opportunity to observe them, they observed you. This business of observation was completely new to me, from the sort of corporate IT background. (Caroline)*

It could be a stressful experience, even for those who had experienced being observed before, but they recognised that the stress was generally worthwhile because the process of feedback helped to improve their teaching.

*I know it's a kind of teacher nightmare, someone sat in looking at you, but I think I would have appreciated that more. You know someone looking at your own practice and saying "Well that's alright but have you thought of this?" or "You keep doing that, why don't you change this?" or, you know, just someone else looking at what you're trying to do rather than you thinking, "Oh God, what are they going to say?" You know, I'm not perfect. (Alan)*

Some of the participants had been involved in training groups during their ITE. These involve several trainees working together to plan for and teach a group of students and to have a session of peer feedback with the training class teacher afterwards, where they offer constructive criticism of each other's' teaching. Justine remembers this as stressful at the beginning but also that it meant trainees were able to support each other and work collaboratively. In the long run, this was recognised as being better than just relying on mentors and trainers.

*Someone who is not your superior sort of thing but actually observing you and pointing things out is really, really much better. (Anna)*

Mentors were seen as people who could offer support, advice and reassurance. They were not tutors so they had no power over passing or failing the course and this made them more approachable. They were seen merely as more experienced peers, but they were instrumental in new teachers forming a professional identity, representing models of roles they could take up. Mentors also had the advantage of having current, context-related knowledge which was highly valued and, because they were more like equals, their advice was more easily accepted.

## 6.5 Impact of ITE on teaching reading

Interestingly, whereas most participants remembered learner-centred pedagogy from their ITE, few remembered how this might actually be offered through literacy teaching. In general, they recalled only how to develop skills; only Karla and Alan mentioned drawing on learners' everyday reading practices.

Four participants discussed approaches they had learned for using diagnostic assessment techniques to find out learners' reading skills as a preliminary to preparing work for them. Caroline and Jodie remembered miscue analysis as being a useful tool for assessing learners' strengths and areas of difficulties in reading. But theories of reading development were recalled differently. Alan was concerned with knowing when the learners are 'reading' and when they are 'guessing' based on textual images, although a multimodal view of reading would see the use of such cues as legitimate ways of interpreting the text (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003). Alternatively, Caroline views the process of reading aloud and determining miscues as supportive rather than judgmental.

*And since then, sort of being aware of different types of miscues and the whole business of supporting students when they are reading aloud and not rushing to correct them, shutting everybody else up so they don't rush to correct them. (Caroline)*

Supporting students and helping them develop their reading is certainly seen by the teachers as part of their role. I was struck by the fact, however, that although most teachers were keen to develop reading skills, they rarely mentioned creating meaning as a basic purpose, despite its prominence in the literature (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Kruidenier, 2002; Wray *et al.*, 2002). Explicit strategy instruction is generally accepted as the way to teach comprehension, and reciprocal reading, as a way of combining strategies, is seen as one of the most effective strategies (NRP, 2000). In fact, reciprocal reading was the strategy most commonly remembered; four participants mentioned it as being a technique they particularly remembered from their ITE (although one said she had never used it).

Others remember learning about strategies such as prediction, questioning, summarising but seem to see them more as learning objectives in themselves than as a

means to an end (the end being comprehension of the text). Questioning was one of the few approaches that was mentioned more than once. In my observations, I did see oral questioning used, for example, as a way towards finding the 'right' answer i.e. the one that the teacher deemed correct. Occasionally, it was more open and exploratory, but it was more usual to see questioning as a method of defining words rather than moving towards understanding the text as a whole. Maggie was typical in this. She used it as a way to include multilingual learners and ensure they were not left behind in their understanding of the text by those who understood more vocabulary.

*Well, I think firstly I look for words that they don't know. If they can't pronounce them, we've definitely got a problem and then if you pronounce it and then the lightbulb goes on, you think OK they did know the word, they just didn't know the printed version of it. Sort of questioning, well what do you think that meant? Or how would you put that another way? And sometimes people really struggle with finding different ways of saying something. (Maggie)*

However, comprehending a text is much more complex than just understanding the individual words within it. Comprehension is 'understanding a text that is read or the process of constructing meaning from a text' according to the NRP (2000, pp. 4-5). In order to construct meaning, one must actively engage with the whole text. The main function of the oral questioning I observed was to clarify vocabulary; the main function of the written questioning was to assess understanding. It was not being used to teach learners how to construct meaning from a text.

Only Justine seemed to worry about teaching comprehension and felt it to be problematic, although it may be that comprehension was at the back of everyone's mind and they just thought it too obvious to mention.

*I still don't think I'm very good at teaching comprehension generally, and getting people to think about what, certainly Level 1 and Level 2 is what I'm struggling with at the moment, these people, they read something and then you say, "What was that about?" and they have absolutely no idea. So my questioning skills need to get better on that. So I'm not sure I think I've got enough understanding of that one. (Justine)*

Other aspects of reading skills: vocabulary, fluency, word recognition/phonics, skimming and scanning, presentational features, were occasionally mentioned by individuals but were not put into a coherent framework of the skills involved in reading and

understanding. They seemed to come out as random processes, remembered from training, but not incorporated into any theoretical framework or ideology. Maureen remembered more than most and she was still quite hazy on the details of reading development.

*On reading...I think it was, I mean apart from reciprocal reading, I do always remember [...] the importance of breaking text down when students are reading. So I remember that instruction in the sense that, yeah, just making it easier for learners. I'm sure there's a lot more about reading because reading is really my, you know, what I enjoy most really. (Maureen)*

Only two participants, Karla and Alan, seemed to have a sense of the learners' literacy practices outside the class which they say they learned from their ITE course. Karla talks about the impact of this on her practice:

*There probably are lots of things, I just, yes, I think something to do with um...highlighting or discussing different literacies, all of that I found really interesting, not different language but different literacies, you know, the way people communicate, and things that you read on how, it's that purpose of text type thing, but done in a bit more depth. [...] Yeah, the different reading skills involved, you know, for example for young people, and it has been amazing to me how young students, how they do switch from, you know, mates' language and reading and formal, it's amazing, they do kind of get it. It's older students that don't get it so easily. But also, you know, reading football results and then reading a book. I just think it's quite fascinating that students are presented with all those different kinds of literacy [...] And all those things about how people, what people read in the home, I suppose I didn't really sort of think about that so much [...] I've tried to do that a bit more, tried to relate what we do more to real life. I know we are supposed to, we are supposed to anyway, but maybe it felt more isolated and now I'm really trying to, without it being boring, but trying to bring in things. And really think about where they are going, and what they need, and not be afraid of working on that, rather than just general how to read and write, or how to read. (Karla)*

Karla consistently tried to link what the learners were reading to their own lives and experience. The discussion in her class was lively and the learners were able to relate their reading to their lives outside class. That is not to say that others might not do it at other times, but for Karla it was so integral that it played a part in her work even when the exam was only a week away.

## 6.6 Limitations of ITE on teachers' practice

All 12 teachers were very positive about their ITE, generally feeling that what was taught was useful, but inevitably they also had some criticisms.

Some individuals mentioned what were clearly burning issues of the moment for them, but which were not necessarily important for everyone. For example, when I observed Maureen's class, an incident arose with one of the students' behaviour. After class she told me that she would like to have had more input on classroom management and dealing with challenging behaviour in her training; Karla, faced with possibly having to teach a group of 16-19 year olds, wanted more on dealing with younger students; Kay, who was worried about her students wanting her to teach more formally, would have liked input on dealing with student expectations; Maggie, who had never been formally introduced to the adult literacy core curriculum on her ITE, felt that was a gap she would like to have seen filled. These were individual concerns. As a teacher educator, I have to bear in mind that teachers' needs are so varied and complex that one course is never going to be able to cover them all, and additionally, people's needs change as their circumstances change. However, some enduring issues were raised by several participants and can be grouped in four key themes:

- Dealing with diversity
- Language teaching
- Administration
- Personal support

### *Dealing with Diversity*

The increase of diverse classrooms, class sizes and, consequently, of learners with varied additional needs means that teachers have to deal with ever more differentiation in larger groups. For these teachers, working with students with mental health needs was the highest priority, followed closely by learners with global or specific learning difficulties, Deaf and blind learners and others with special needs. These seemed to cause more anxiety to teachers than learners with language needs, although, of course, there are many learners who have more than one additional need, language included. Kathleen is one example of a teacher who still feels frustrated at her lack of expertise

and her inability to provide more targeted and specific help to every learner who needs it.

*Working with students with additional levels of need. So, dyslexia, I have every class I teach, I either have students who are dyslexic or who have some characteristic that I, in my ignorance, may think is linked to dyslexia but they are either on a waiting list for an assessment or they work and therefore they're unable to come for assessment or support. So if I, what I would love, what I'm desperate for, are more understanding and better strategies to work with those learners in class. And that's just for dyslexia. There will be...you know there will be students with other levels of need and I'm getting sort of better at understanding where a student has got an additional level of need because of something potentially other than their literacy need. But it's, you know, it's fairly hit and miss. So, understanding, so more on that I would, I would really have valued.*  
(Kathleen)

Caroline, who feels a similar frustration, accepts that needs such as these are often very individualized and it might be difficult to offer generalized training on a course, especially in the light of current cuts. Kay notes that when vulnerable students get upset, she gets emotional too and would have liked training in how to manage her emotions.

Teachers felt they receive varied amounts of support in their workplace; sometimes they were able to discuss these issues with their colleagues, but at times struggled to know how to provide for individual needs while still maintaining group cohesion.

### *Language teaching*

All the participants were teaching classes in inner London that had a highly diverse makeup. One of the key elements of diversity was the number of different languages spoken by the learners; in one class of 15, there were 14 different mother tongues. Of the 12 participants, eight had been trained in teaching literacy only. Four of these (and one who had trained in both literacy and ESOL) wished they had had more training in teaching ESOL. They believed that they managed linguistic diversity with varying degrees of competence, but they also felt a lack of confidence and a concern that they could be doing better by their students. Mostly they dealt with problems faced by multilingual students by spending time on vocabulary. They defined words or elicited definitions

from the group but felt they did not have enough knowledge about English grammar and lacked the expertise to teach it.

Furthermore, students who have come into literacy classes by way of several years in ESOL provision know the metalanguage to talk about grammar. They understand tenses, know about word classes and can often identify them in a text. Many of these teachers were educated in that period of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when grammar was not taught in schools. So they did not learn about language in their own education and neither did they receive as much input on it in their training as ESOL teachers. Jodie was one of those who felt the need of more input on both language itself and the metalanguage:

*I'm thinking maybe a bit more on the metalanguage of grammar because we have so many ESOL students you feel that you're one step behind them all the time because the way that we discuss language in teaching literacy and the parts of language is different to those coming from ESOL so maybe a little bit more that melds the two together would be useful.*  
(Jodie)

In a metropolitan area like London ITE courses have a role in enabling new literacy teachers to respond appropriately to the challenge of the changes in the student body that come with superdiversity.

### *Administration*

Another limitation to the training, again felt strongly by half the participants, was the issue of administration which plays a large role in the teachers' working life. Many of the teachers gave me detailed explanations of the administrative tasks they were expected to do and how they had not received the requisite training for this. Caroline was concerned with tracking learners as this was a college requirement; Jess was worried about entering students for exams; Maureen felt uneasy with electronic registers and Justine thought that if she only understood the funding methodology, it would help her with the paperwork for the exams. The reality of working in FE was not brought home to these teachers until they started their first jobs after training.

Maureen spoke for many when she stated that teaching practice should have included practical administrative tasks:

*I think it was more the fact on placements, and this was something personal that I felt. I really wanted to know more about the admin and the process and procedures. Because I think when you, when you come in to work, it's a shock. It's a real shock and it's never-ending. It would have been nice maybe to maybe have a go at maybe taking a register, an electronic register; maybe doing some phoning around students. I know that involves parting with sensitive information like their address, so maybe that isn't the right approach, but it might have been nice to just maybe delve in to the admin a bit and it might just make it a little bit, a bit more understandable. Maybe get a taster. (Maureen)*

Teacher educators generally assume that training new teachers in this aspect of their role is the job of their employers as administrative procedures are different in each workplace, but these teachers were adamant that they would like to have known more about the full role of the teacher before starting teaching.

### *Personal Support*

In recognition that training to be a teacher can be a life-changing experience and also very stressful, a few of the participants felt they did not receive enough personal support on their ITE. Two were already practising teachers and had their own class, so did not get a placement and therefore also did not get a mentor. A third (Maggie) had a placement but no mentor.

Maggie also noted that another support mechanism, tutorial time, was not fully utilized except for course administrative purposes. She saw her tutorial as a box ticking exercise; her tutor used the time to check that all the administrative processes connected to the course were in order.

*There wasn't enough time for tutorials. I mean they were very much, how many observations have you had? Good how many of these ticked off? So there was a lot of paperwork, ticking. And that's fine because it has to be done and I appreciate she's got to get through x number of pupils. So I think more of that would have been nice. (Maggie)*

## 6.7 Conclusions

It is clear from this group of learners, that their ITE was highly instrumental in forming their identity as the teachers they are today. They valued what they learned about the students and their contexts; how to operate in a literacy classroom and organise work for a diverse group. Even the parts of the course some of them disliked, namely, writing

a reflective journal and doing assignments, they recognised were valuable to their development as a teacher. As Anna said after the class I observed:

*I think the training is the basis. I mean how to get the students motivated and interested, that is picking it up from as I went along, but the really solid bit is from the training. I wouldn't have been able to just do it. (Anna)*

Getting the students 'motivated and interested' was part of seeing the classroom from the point of view of the learners; understanding that in this sort of classroom, one could not stand at the front and talk (as some of them imagined teaching would be like) but that they had to build their teaching around the needs and interests of the learners and they had to start from where the learners were. This was a lesson that they all seemed to have taken from their ITE and it stayed with them, even when other theoretical perspectives had fallen away. They all stated that the learners were their primary focus, and that they were aiming to teach a learner-centred lesson rather than a content-focused one. This was not entirely what I observed. As noted in previous studies (Black, 2010; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Hodgson, Edward and Gregson, 2007; Maggioni, Fox and Alexander, 2015; Tusting, 2009), literacy teachers have to work within a social and political context and the current context of FE makes it difficult to adhere to their principles. These contextual issues are very real challenges for teachers attempting to teach in the way they believe is right.

The next section of the findings looks at some of the challenges that participants perceive they are currently facing in their working lives.

# Chapter 7: Challenges faced by Literacy teachers

## 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, we looked at some of the factors that prevented teachers from acting on their beliefs. They strongly believed in learner-centred pedagogy but this was often circumvented by the need to help students succeed in exams. Thus, a learner-centred curriculum often had to be replaced by a content-centred one in which students were prepared for as many as six exams in one year because college funding depended on the number of successful passes and, at least for the hourly paid lecturers (HPLs), their jobs too.

In this chapter I consider the impact of challenges on literacy teachers and the effect on their practice and their morale. As well as exam pressure created by the funding methodology, there are also anxieties about how they are being systematically deprofessionalised through the weight of managerialism and performativity, and the problem of demotivation – affecting both learners and teachers.

## 7.2 Pressure created by funding methodology

The FE funding methodology in 2014, when this research took place, dictated that retention and achievement were the drivers for college funding (Skills Funding Agency, 2014). Colleges needed to enrol as many students as possible; retain them throughout the year and enter them for exams in which they had to succeed. This system appears logical and fair; more students need more money spent on them and everyone wants learners to progress and succeed. However, the system has inherent problems for literacy provision which cause pressure on both learners and their teachers.

Literacy is not a finite subject. One cannot learn to be literate and then be literate. Literacy is integral to all learning and is lifelong and lifewide; we are all developing our ability to read and write throughout our lives (Duncan and Schwab, 2015). Learners enrolling for a literacy class may have had little or no previous education and may not have a clear concept of what they will be learning or how it will take place. While some might be keen to get a qualification and a job, this is not true for all learners. There are

no figures for how many people specifically desire a qualification, and indeed, people's motivations change as they engage in education, but there are many reasons for learning (Appleby, 2010). Learners may wish to help their children or grandchildren; they may want to take part in religious, community or family events that require literacy; they may wish to make changes in their lives that involve reading or writing documents; or they may merely wish to get the education that was prohibited to them earlier in life. In many cases, accreditation will not help them achieve these aims and, in fact, it may hinder them as they will not be learning what they want or need to learn if the curriculum is geared towards what is needed to pass the exam.

In addition, some students may progress very slowly. Those who have not previously experienced formal education might need to learn how to study. Some will have jobs (often more than one job and frequently involving long and unsocial hours); some will have children or dependent relatives; some will have other responsibilities that take them away from study. Many literacy students have additional language needs that make learning a slower and more difficult process. Sometimes people who struggle with their literacy have physical, mental or emotional issues that make learning difficult for them and others have specific or global learning difficulties. For these students, getting to the standard necessary to pass the exam within an academic year may be untenable.

In my experience, a literacy teacher will have a mixture of students in her class. Some of those likely to struggle at their assigned level can be identified at initial assessment, but as the year progresses, the teacher will build more awareness of the different skills and motivations within the group. The participants informed me that classes may get closed if they do not recruit enough students and then those class members are reassigned to other classes. This means that classes get bigger and more diverse still, requiring more differentiated teaching. In one class there will then be an increased range of student skills and experiences; a greater range of languages and competences in the English language; a wider range of ages, with 16 year olds in the same class as retired learners. Many of the classes I observed were still quite small but several teachers remarked on how their classes were getting larger. Maureen's group of 23 barely fitted in the room provided.

Teachers learn how to differentiate in their ITE. But super-diversity requires super-differentiation in the classroom and this takes much skill, time and effort to organise. It is almost certainly not practicable to get all members of a group through all the exams successfully, especially bearing in mind the emotional and practical preparation needed, as well as the skills to be learned, across a range of up to six exams in a year.

### 7.3 Pressures from assessment

The participants outlined a number of factors that prevented them from doing as they wanted in the classroom. Chief among these was the need to prepare learners for success in exams. All the teachers recognised that some learners were keen to get a qualification and, for them, assessments were beneficial. For the rest, some participants believed pragmatically that exams were inescapable and just had to be dealt with; others thought that they were a negative force and that they prevented real learning happening. Whatever the teachers' feelings, the exams clearly affected what they did. Some learners were sitting six exams that year and time had to be put aside to prepare them. Many learners had never sat an exam before; others had only experienced failure in their previous attempts. While six in one year was perhaps unusual, time was needed to familiarise learners with reading and understanding the rubric and question types; organising timing; filling in answer sheets and building confidence. Only certain literacy skills are assessed in an exam, so these are the skills that needed to be practised. Other, perhaps equally important, skills were ignored because they were not needed to pass the exam. Learners' practices, by their very nature, individualized, context dependent and associated with life outside the classroom are totally ignored by the exam system. A national system of accreditation must assess what can be learned and it must be accessible to the widest possible number of people (Caldwell, 2014). It can only assess skills which can be learned, and must provide texts to read that are as neutral and uncontroversial as they can make them, so that they do not offend anyone. In the attempt to make these texts upset no-one, they may end up also appealing to no-one.

The phenomenon whereby exams drive the curriculum, described as washback, (Cheng, 1997; Spratt, 2005) is well-known in EFL where exams have a longer history. Kathleen, in common with other participants, was aware of it happening because funding is dependent on successful results:

*The driver is hanging on to our students and getting them through exams and the exam results therefore become disproportionately important rather than the learning. (Kathleen)*

National exams like GCSE are now also within a literacy teacher's remit and many learners, particularly those who aspire to progress to Level 3 or higher level study, are keen to acquire a GCSE in English. Maureen taught GCSE English for a while before her present role and found it presented particular challenges:

*I think the GCSE gives them a sense of thinking that little bit deeper. It does promote more higher level thinking skills. But [...] some of them just can't, they can't stretch to that or they don't want to stretch to that or they think they can't stretch to it, and I think that's the thing with teenagers. You can't drag them. You can't make them do things that they don't want to. So that's what I found and they also have the pressure of their vocational course as well. (Maureen)*

She is raising the issue of demotivation of young people who have failed GCSE at school and, under Government regulations, are compelled to retake it until they get a grade C. She further showed concern whether GCSE English, with its focus on literature and specific types of writing, is the most appropriate form of assessment for these young people.

#### 7.4 Deprofessionalisation

Several participants talked about how they felt they had been deprofessionalised. They had trained for their role, sometimes over a long period, were committed to their learners and their institutions and were building up a body of experience. Yet, they saw themselves as somehow always perceived in deficit. HPLs, who are not part of the establishment of the college, felt especially undervalued. Their hours may add up to the same as those taught by a full-time teacher, but they are not paid for holiday or sickness (although it is argued that a proportion of their pay covers this); they can lose work if their classes do not enrol and they may have no desk or locker to work from. Maggie was particularly vocal on this. When I arrived at the college and asked security to direct me to her, she was not on their list of staff members, even though she had worked at the college for nearly a year. She was unsurprised to hear this, 'because I'm just a floaty in, floaty out person'. Yet, she recognized as she said this that the way into an established job at a college is still through working for years as a part-time worker, just

as it had been when I started work in the 1970s, adding: ‘but then it’s almost like you’ve got to do your time as a VT<sup>10</sup> before you can aspire to anything like a permanent position’.

This feeling of not being valued professionally was heightened by the increased amount of surveillance and monitoring experienced by the participants. Alan, working with young learners who have moderate learning difficulties, recognises that the emphasis on safeguarding is inevitable in the wake of the Victoria Climbié tragedy<sup>11</sup>. However, he believes that this has led to a general atmosphere of distrust of professionals and a belief that unless they are closely watched, they will not do their job properly.

*You’re far more monitored. Even if it’s kind of only, you know, electronically, and probably it’s a lot more kind of, you know, verification of what you’re actually saying. If you say that a student’s good, someone will come, “Well you’ve got to prove to me.” (Alan)*

The lack of trust means an increased volume of paperwork for teachers to add to their rising load of administration and also a feeling that however much extra work they do, their word will still not be trusted. Their standing as a professional is constantly being challenged and there is little that they can do to redress the balance.

*It just seems to have changed into something else, but the bottom line, certainly in that area, is – which I think and I think other colleagues, is that they don’t believe you. You need to write it down. It seems to be that management or whoever’s inspecting this, it’s almost like it’s so ingrained in it being evidenced that they just can’t say, “Well, I believe you.” I don’t need that portfolio with 55,000, you know, plastic leaves in it. (Alan)*

This is all taking place in an age of austerity, cuts and marketisation. Publicly funded colleges are competing against private institutions for contracts and this has an effect on job security, pay and conditions of employment. Alan described an organisation parallel to his college that is growing increasingly powerful and replaces teachers with trainers, paid £10,000 less for the same work. Justine recounts how, in one place where she works (neither of the colleges in this study) run by a private company, staff were asked

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<sup>10</sup> VT is a visiting tutor, another name for hourly paid lecturer (HPL)

<sup>11</sup> Victoria Climbié was an 8 year old Ivorian girl who was tortured and murdered by her guardians in 2000. Her death led to a public enquiry which produced major changes in child protection in the UK, including the ‘Every Child Matters’ policy.

to retrospectively create paperwork that did not exist to draw down more funding for the organisation. She felt extremely uncomfortable doing this as she felt it was, at best, unprofessional and, at worst, fraudulent.

With these worries about competition, and the threat of decreased funding putting jobs at risk, teachers feel they have no option but to work in ways they might normally repudiate:

*I'm not stupid enough to think that paperwork will never exist, and finances, and Skills Funding Agency, it's all there and we have to deal with it, but I think the balance is wrong, really, at the moment, so the emphasis is on the paper and not on the teaching, and certainly not on quality, it really isn't on quality, it's on "Do the City and Guilds unit, get the people in and out quickly." And even in the college, there's so much financial pressure on them to keep people on learning aims so that they get through, even if they weren't put on the right learning aim in the first place, and things like that. So your judgment gets all clouded by that.*  
(Justine)

Maggie concludes, like many others that their jobs depend, not on the quality of their work, but on their ability to retain students, get them through exams and raise the profile of the college so it is able to compete in a market economy.

### **Administration**

The focus on exams also brought with it an increased burden of administration: recording attendance, entering learners for different exams, tracking and recording progress, making exam access arrangements for those with special needs, setting exam practice questions and marking them with feedback. The teachers report that their workload is becoming ever more onerous with paperwork named as the biggest challenge. They say they either have to take time out of classwork for this or do it in their own time. Few want to use up precious class time as they already find teaching time is under pressure, so they use their evenings and weekends for administrative tasks. HPLs cannot claim back this time. Already in 1999 Shain and Gleeson raised the issue of casualisation having an effect on FE teachers' workload, with the threat of redundancy meaning that staff felt unable to argue for improved conditions of work (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

Grainne mentions administration and also the extra support needed for learners who understandably feel nervous facing national exams.

*We've increasingly had a huge burden of administration to deal with. And I'm sure that's true across the sectors but I feel, I mean I've spoken to other teachers who've taught both at secondary and at university level, and they say there's nothing like the level of burden of admin, coupled with the support that you need to give to students. (Grainne)*

All these extra tasks mean that there is pressure on teachers' time and this detracts from the quality they would like to provide. This is especially true for HPLs such as Jess, who is conscientious and wants to do her best by her students:

*So it's...you kind of feel you're rushing them through and I do feel that sometimes when I'm in the classroom and I think "Okay you've got to fit in tutorials." You just feel like you're kind of pushing them through and not having time to explore things as much as you would like to and I'm sort of thinking back to things I did last year and I'm thinking "Oh gosh I haven't done that yet" and I think "Oh my gosh, where's the time to do it?"[...] Yeah. I don't have that freedom. I don't think you have the freedom to be creative enough because it's like, "Okay, got to move on now."(Jess)*

Each teacher had their own tale to tell of time constraints, extra duties and increasing workload. It was not the teaching that weighed them down but all the extras that they were required to do. Because these teachers all cared about their students' progress they did not argue with the workload, they just accepted it (but not without grumbles).

### *Inspection*

Inspection plays a major part in determining a high profile for the college. Both colleges were expecting imminent visits from Ofsted. The participants were nervous about this for different reasons. At the last visit, one college had done very well and their management was keen to retain their high ranking; the other college had not done so well, and their management wanted to ensure a better result. In both cases, pressure was shifted from higher management to middle management to classroom teachers, who seemed to regard Ofsted with fear and distrust. This was partly institutional because the outcome of a three day Ofsted inspection could have such a huge impact on a college and its staff for years to come, and partly personal, due to the pressure for individual good grades.

Kathleen said she was happy to be observed. That was no problem for her:

*You know, this is how I teach. You're very welcome. I welcome criticism. I welcome constructive feedback, fine.* (Kathleen)

However, she has experience of inspection in her previous job in local government and was shocked by the college attitude towards what she called 'the sword of Damocles that is Ofsted'. She felt the amount of time and effort spent on preparing for Ofsted was disproportionate and a distraction from the real work of the college, maintaining that 'if we have one more inspection readiness session, I'll scream!' Her criticism of inspection was based on her previous experience:

*It's because there's so much riding on it and you know, as soon as you give a badge or a label...you know, the worst thing we ever did with inspection was give scores and badges and labels.* (Kathleen)

A good Ofsted result means a great deal to a college, from large scale effects such as raising its profile in the local community, so it recruits more students and is therefore able to claim more funding, to smaller effects like becoming eligible for taking trainee teachers on placement.

Ball's view is that 'the technology of performativity appears as misleadingly objective and hyper-rational' (2003, p. 217). Every teacher accepts that their career will encompass a series of judgments about their competence made by a range of people with varying degrees of knowledge and experience in their field. During their ITE, every trainee teacher is observed many times and given detailed feedback, sometimes also graded. When they start work, they continue to be observed by managers, again usually graded. Some like Kathleen accept this is part of being accountable and just carry on with their normal routine; but some less confident teachers dread being judged because the implications of a bad result have, potentially, such serious ramifications.

Jess felt that the pressure caused by this expectation was very heavy, both within the college and when job-hunting elsewhere. As an HPL, what she really wanted was a full-time or fractional post, but she felt that the goalposts were constantly being moved:

*I mean some people didn't have any qualifications and were teaching and obviously they tried to sort of make it more professional, you know, and even looking at jobs now,[...] obviously you have to have a degree, PGCE,*

*literacy specialism, and also a lot of places now are saying you must have outstanding teaching. So they're expecting you to constantly have grade ones and twos. (Jess)*

Ball argues that the policy technologies of performativity, marketisation and managerialism do not just change organisations but also change what it is to be a teacher. These reforms, he warns, change one's social identity, what he calls 'the teacher's soul' (Ball, 2003, p. 217). In the light of this, it is unsurprising that almost all the practitioners in this study experienced low morale and demotivation.

## 7.5 Demotivation

Participants saw their work changing in many ways, almost all of them detrimental. Many explained they had chosen this work because adults were highly motivated and well-behaved in class, resulting in more time for teaching, rather than on class discipline.

However, in an age of austerity and service cuts, such choices are no longer possible. Classes that do not recruit sufficient numbers of students are terminated and the learners redistributed. HPLs may lose their jobs; even if they do not, when their class is closed, it disturbs both the teachers and the students. A class of adults might suddenly become a mix of teenagers and adult learners, satisfying neither the adults nor the young people, and maybe alienating both. Cuts in support staff mean that many learners will be denied the extra support they need and might struggle more. Teachers are faced with larger and more diverse groups with varied needs, mixed levels of motivation and, sometimes, disgruntled students:

*...so half the group want to be there and half the group don't want to be there, you know, and we are used to having students that do want to be there, and then you've got half, suddenly you've got these students who really don't want to be there. They come but they don't want to be there and they don't see the point, and they are doing it because they have to, but they don't really want to learn, they don't really want to. (Karla)*

She feels that the disaffected learners just want to pass the course without doing any work; they almost feel that it is their right to get the qualification just by being in the room. This makes it difficult for other students in the group and challenging also for their teacher. Karla is an experienced and committed educator but she feels that the demotivation of her students has an effect on her own motivation to teach them.

*Because it's differentiation in some ways, but it's more; there's something else as well, and I guess that's what's happening everywhere more and more [...] and I feel like I'm put in this position where I've suddenly got to start being strict with people, and that is not part of my nature. Going back to the beginning, when I started teaching, the one thing I didn't want to do was start ordering people around and being strict. (Karla)*

Larger classes and less contented students means inevitably that more will opt to leave before the course is finished and bad retention is blamed upon their teacher.

This is a situation in which both learners and teachers could easily become demotivated and the one might easily lead to the other. The system has become more inflexible which makes it harder to act on a human level, thus alienating teachers with a social justice agenda, whose ITE drew them to believe in learner-centred pedagogy.

## 7.6 Conclusions

This seems a long list of pressures and worries. Yet, this group of 12 teachers was not atypical; I have heard many of the same concerns expressed in staff rooms all over London. Teachers are worried that the focus on examinations puts pressure on staff and students to perform in particular ways that are sometimes in opposition to their beliefs about learning. They are forced to 'teach to the test' which means less teaching and more test preparation in conditions where they know they have less time, fewer resources, and diminishing support mechanisms. With classes becoming larger and more diverse, these cutbacks have a serious effect on teachers who are coping with trying to balance institutional needs with their own views of education.

The burden of administration lies very heavily upon them. Even part-time teachers are expected to spend evenings and weekends completing paperwork. Teachers feel disillusioned; they are losing their creativity and are not teaching what they joined the field to teach:

*...because you've lost some kind of philosophy of the teaching about trying to help people change their lives, or whatever it might be, to a whole commercial get them in, get them out, and the heart's gone, and that's what I found quite difficult. (Justine)*

They feel deprofessionalised: their role has lost its value; they are not trusted as professionals to do their job properly; they are constantly under surveillance by management and the inspection regime. The implications of being judged and found wanting naturally cause stress and anxiety.

Additionally, they do not even have material rewards to look forward to. HPLs know that they will have to endure maybe years of poor pay and deteriorating conditions before they are able to access a permanent position; full-time and fractional staff are aware they cannot get higher pay without taking on a management role, taking them out of the classroom. Half of these teachers were HPLs and although they were just as committed as the other half, who had fractional contracts, they felt exposed and vulnerable. In a recent report, UCU, the FE teachers' union, declared 34% of college lecturing staff are employed on precarious contracts (UCU, 2016).

As Korthagen stated, these issues cause dissonance between the way teachers see their role and how, in practice, they are expected to fulfil it (Korthagen, 2004). Managing this disharmony might mean developing a professional identity that is activist (Sachs, 2001), grounded in a relationship with learners (Yasukawa, 2010) and reflective (Korthagen, 2004). These teachers could be seen to be all of these. Most of them do not want to be removed from the classroom. They came into the field because they wanted to make a difference to people's lives and they see teaching as their way of doing this. Most of them still enjoy teaching and some extol its stimulating challenges.

It could be argued that they are 'working the interstices', trying in a pragmatic way both to do what they consider to be 'good' teaching and also to minimally satisfy the requirements of the various audit procedures (Black, 2010). But as Ball states, 'The policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space of an autonomous or collective ethical self' (Ball, 2003, p. 226).

While they can still find ways of enjoying what they do, and fulfilling their ideas of social justice they are prepared to comply with institutional obligations, but this takes its toll and it is difficult to say whether in the end they will endure the pressures or leave the profession.

In the final chapter I return to my research questions and consider how they have been answered by my research. I draw some conclusions and explore the implications for my own professional practice and for the field of literacy ITE.

# Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The aim of this study was to explore literacy teachers' beliefs and practices in the teaching of reading and how their ITE has impacted on these. The previous chapters have shown literacy teachers have strong beliefs but struggle to maintain and act according to these within a culture that prioritises accrediting learning over learning itself. In this final chapter I return to my research questions and consider my conclusions about each. I then summarise the key findings of the study and explore the implications for teacher education. In the final three sections I consider the contribution to knowledge made by this study, the implications for my own professional practice as a teacher educator and further research issues raised by this study.

## 8.1 Meeting the aims of the study

### 8.1.1 Research Question 1: What is the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their pedagogic practice?

These 12 teachers started their career in education as mature adults. They came from a variety of backgrounds but the majority saw literacy teaching as a way of doing something worthwhile and improving or changing the lives of those who came to classes. The majority believed that they could do this by providing lessons that were learner-centred, holistic and collaborative, which developed learners' independence and maximised their potential. A strong belief in Humanistic pedagogy where the teacher facilitates rather than imposes learning, was understood to be an effective way to achieve their goals.

What I observed in this study, which confirms what I have noted in my observations as a teacher educator, is a system that is not attuned to this type of work. The lessons were overwhelmingly content-driven rather than learner-centred. The focus on exam preparation, made both teachers and learners acutely conscious of time limits. As a result, the teachers' knowledge assumed more validity than the learners' knowledge and experiences. The teachers had to focus on the content or skills needed to pass the exam, and there was not time to consider learners' everyday practices, or even, sometimes, to

relate it effectively to their lives. Students were in the class because they wanted to learn; if they had previously been successful in the examination system, they would not be in a literacy class, and so they were reliant on the teachers' expertise to get them through. Accordingly, far from facilitating learning according to Humanistic principles, the teacher controlled the texts, the tasks and activities used to support learning. They focused on subskills of reading and tended to ignore the major goal of reading, creating meaning, which relies on the ability to link the text to one's own worldview and life experience. Although authentic materials were suggested for this study, many of the texts and/or tasks chosen were inauthentic, devised for assessment purposes rather than relating to learners' everyday literacy practices.

However, some teachers were able to work within their stated pedagogical belief systems: Karla was able simultaneously to prepare the learners for exams and provide a learner-centred lesson and in portions of some other lessons teachers related learning to students' experiences. Many practitioners promoted collaborative learning opportunities through paired and small group activities and peer assessment and there was some development of independent learning. However, generally, these teachers felt they were not free to teach in their preferred manner and this implies cohesion between their beliefs and their practice was limited by the context in which they were working.

#### 8.1.2 Research Question 2: What are the main pedagogical approaches used by adult literacy teachers to take account of superdiversity when teaching reading?

Teaching reading in the context of superdiversity involves the teacher drawing on a range of knowledge and skills. She needs to comprehend the research on effective practice in teaching reading and apply that to a group of learners with varying experiences of reading, disparate aims and purposes for reading and learning to read, and different amounts of control over the English language. Social practice theory argues that reading is concerned with creating meaning through linking the text with one's experience of other texts and experiences. Reading is always contextual and situated in a social and cultural context. It is embedded in different domains of life and is ideological and multiple (Barton, 1994; Wallace, 2003). Within this paradigm, we would expect the teaching of reading to offer tuition that links with learners' everyday reading practices and the texts that interest and engage them. Texts are not neutral objects so

reading should encompass a critical approach to texts (Wallace, 1992). However, within this social practice approach, there is an established case for nesting the teaching of skills and strategies so that learners can benefit from both paradigms (Green and Howard, 2007; Purcell Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004).

The teachers I observed were recommended by their managers as skilled and committed practitioners. The types of reading subskills to be assessed in their accreditation were well-covered: skimming and scanning, using an index, differentiating fact and opinion, identifying linguistic and presentational devices were taught and practised as appropriate at different levels. What was not addressed was reading for meaning, except as a task. Students read texts and were asked questions about them but the questions merely assessed understanding; they did not teach a learner how to create meaning if they had not already done so. Questioning as a strategy to create or monitor meaning making was not evident. I observed no comprehension strategies being taught, beyond use of headlines. Learners were not encouraged to use their funds of knowledge to make meanings and links with what they already knew about the world (Moll *et al.*, 1992). And even at the highest literacy level, critical reading was neither taught nor even encouraged. It appeared as if understanding and critical engagement with the texts being read was unimportant compared with whatever subskill was necessary for the exam.

Meeting language needs also appeared low on the agenda, even for teachers who had trained in both literacy and ESOL. For some, this was deliberate; they saw their role solely as a literacy teacher. These teachers chose not to grade the language they used in giving instructions and explanations and they offered very limited support with pronunciation, grammar or cultural references. Others tried to support language learning, but lacked the confidence and skills to offer much beyond help with vocabulary. Whilst I did observe some use of 'talk as work' (Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009; Roberts *et al.*, 2004), there was less than expected in an ESOL class. Some teachers were conscious of learners' needs extending beyond what was needed for the exam, but they were also aware that time was short and the implications for their jobs meant that teaching had to be pared down to what was essential for exam passes. The tension between pedagogical and ethical imperatives was pervasive, but

studies show that exam washback is not inevitable and it is possible to devise strategies for dealing with it (Spratt, 2005).

### 8.1.3 Research Question 3: What is the influence of ITE on adult literacy teachers' beliefs, and practices in the teaching of reading?

For a teacher educator, it was reassuring to see how much these practitioners valued their ITE. Less comforting was the realization that much of the theory that we had thought crucial was apparently less relevant to most of them. What they considered most significant was not what had been taught but how it had been taught. Witnessing different pedagogical models was inspiring for those whose own education had not exposed them to a range of teaching styles. Using 'loop input' strategy (Woodward, 2003) which aligns the process and content of learning enables trainees to reflect on their experiential learning and has been shown to work on ITE courses (Hughes, Paton and Schwab, 2005).

Practitioners also appreciated the practical teaching experience on their ITE. Good mentors had been influential and, as identified in NRDC research (Casey *et al.*, 2007), training groups played a particular role in the formation of a personal pedagogy.

I met these teachers a year or more after completing their ITE. They recalled different aspects of their training but it appeared that the skills paradigm remained clearer in their minds than the one for social practice. The tensions experienced through exam washback have a strong influence on this, but there could be more awareness of the beneficial effects of a social practice approach and how this can be integrated with a skills approach (Green and Howard, 2007; Purcell Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004). ITE courses may need to address this in the way they present discourses about literacy learning.

### 8.1.4 Research Question 4: What are the main challenges that adult literacy teachers experience?

The teachers were broadly in agreement about the challenges facing the profession. Chief among these was an FE funding methodology which focused on retention and achievement rather than on learning in a broader sense. When progress is judged by success in formal accreditation, teachers, concerned for their jobs, will have to adjust

their preferred pedagogy towards a focus on assessment. Adjustments such as these, namely strategic compliance (Shain and Gleeson, 1999) raise the issue of the nature of professional identity in an age of managerialism, performativity and marketisation in education (Ball, 2003).

Another challenge to the role of literacy teacher is the administrative burden. The value placed on paperwork is representative of the audit culture that has become ubiquitous in FE, and of which Ofsted is an example. Whilst the maintenance of quality is important, the concern is that teachers must bear the responsibility, and that perfect paperwork is the key to success rather than excellence in teaching and learning. Teachers feel that there is a deficit view of their skills and that, especially if they are HPLs, their jobs are dependent on factors outside their control.

## 8.2 Key findings and implications for practice

### 8.2.1 Diversity and inclusion

A diverse classroom offers a range of opportunities for peer learning and interactions. However, it is also a group of individuals with a range of backgrounds, interests and learning needs. As well as the large number of different languages used by learners in a group, there are differences of age, gender, rate of learning, learning disabilities and differences, sensory impairments and mental health issues to take into account when planning learning.

NRDC research reveals that both 'personalising learning as far as possible' and 'encouraging the development of a community of learners' are key to encouraging persistence (NRDC, 2008, p. 4). Teachers need both to address learners' individual goals and motivations and enable them to work collaboratively. The teachers I observed tried hard to differentiate and personalise learning but two factors stood out as challenges: integrating learners with mental health issues or neurodiversity, and dealing with learners' language needs.

#### *Inclusion for learners with mental health issues and neurodiversity*

While the teachers were committed to full inclusion in their classes, they had a rather negative view of those with mental health issues and neurodiversity, and worried about

their ability to manage classes containing these learners because of perceived effects on collaborative work and group cohesion. Although they had covered inclusion issues on their ITE and were familiar with Access for All (DfES, 2002), they still found it difficult to reconcile individual and group needs. While an ITE course cannot possibly cover in detail all the issues that a teacher might face, it needs to give teachers tools and strategies to manage diversity, both through group management techniques and through personalisation of the curriculum, using knowledge of learners' individual backgrounds and motivations.

### *Language teaching and learning*

I see two key issues connected with the teaching of language in literacy classes: some teachers believed that in teaching a literacy class, their role was to concentrate on literacy rather than language issues; others recognised language needs but felt unconfident in their ability to teach what was required, especially grammar. It may be that the latter notion, even if unacknowledged, gave rise to the former as a way of self-protection or self-justification. Several of the teachers admitted that their own understanding of grammar was limited and they were aware that, in some cases, the learners had a greater knowledge of the metalanguage than they did, especially those who had attended ESOL classes.

One might expect practitioners, trained jointly in literacy and ESOL would be more prepared for this than those who had only trained to teach literacy. However, they seemed to see their current role of literacy teacher as all-embracing, eclipsing any previous training and experience as a language teacher.

The problem begins at the point of screening or initial assessment. In some cases, a potential learner is clearly suited for either a literacy or an ESOL class, but for some multilingual learners, especially at Entry 3 or above, it can be somewhat arbitrary whether they end up in a literacy or ESOL class (Simpson, Cooke and Baynham, 2008). I am arguing that teachers need to consider the interests, goals and motivational needs of whoever is in their class, regardless of what the class is titled. The college might need to differentiate between literacy and ESOL classes due to funding requirements, but teachers should be encouraged to use their skills and knowledge to provide whatever

support is necessary in their class, whether it is labelled literacy, English or ESOL.

Teacher educators can play a role here in encouraging trainees to take account of the context and the learners rather than the title of the class.

Novice teachers also need to recognise that an understanding of the English language is part of basic subject knowledge, necessary for teaching both language and literacy. CPD could have a role in this as often the need is not fully recognised until employment has started.

### 8.2.2 Assessment

The demands of assessment in these colleges overrode every other aspect of learning. The washback effect from exams as noted by Simpson, Cooke and Baynham (2008) is stronger the more the exam is distant from the language and literacy learners use in their daily lives and the closer classes get to the exam date (Shellekens, 2007). When learners face six exams in a year, as in Cliffe College, the washback is practically continuous.

Ideally assessments would be related to learners' everyday uses of literacy and learners would be afforded a choice about whether to enter formal exams. However, the current system is unlikely to change in the near future. If teachers are to reconcile their pedagogical beliefs with pragmatic considerations, they need to start with learners' literacy practices and consider how they might be integrated into activities that prepare them for assessment.

Social practice theory teaches us that we must take account of the contextual nature of learning. Teacher educators therefore need to incorporate the reality of current teaching contexts into their training programmes. ITE can give novice teachers examples of how learner-centred work can fit with exam preparation. Lesson plans, transcripts of lessons and, ideally opportunities to observe such lessons either in real time or through video clips would help with this, providing material for discussions about how good practice can be maintained in challenging circumstances.

### 8.2.3 Power and Control

As Brookfield notes, in the field of education, we cannot avoid societal power relations:

*Power is already there [in society and in adult education], that one is never 'outside' it.... The omnipresence of power means we have to accept that all of us, at all times, are implicated in its workings. We must accept that power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network. (Brookfield, 2005, p. 130)*

Tett and Maclachlan argue that this 'social body' constructs hierarchies of knowledge as well as people, with certain codified knowledge valued more highly than other knowledge types. The teacher maintains a position both in the structural hierarchy and as a holder of valued knowledge, thus embodying two types of power (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008). The power relationships which exist in all educational settings are especially pervasive in LLN education because the dominant discourses around LLN are constructed on a deficit model of the learners. Rios Aguilar *et al* also make links between funds of knowledge and social and cultural capital, with non-activation of these leading to lack of educational achievement (Rios-Aguilar *et al.*, 2011 ). In this case, the capital that is valuable is knowledge of assessment processes, and here the teachers' expertise is paramount. The 12 teachers in this study believed in equality and social justice, yet I saw little practice that empowered or gave choice to learners. Exams tend to be an unknown quantity for literacy learners so they were reliant on the teacher to guide them through the system.

The Curriculum Framework for Scotland took a social practices approach and its premise was to devise learning goals through teacher and learner dialogue (Scottish Executive, 2005). While it has been criticised for not fully achieving these aims (Ackland, 2014; Tett and Maclachlan, 2008), it set out a blueprint for learner self-determination. Teacher educators could learn from the Scottish example about how to build a dialogue with learners about approaches which allow them more informed choice.

Maxted believes that FE can still be a site of transformative education and she argues that educators can reclaim space for alternative views 'through determined collaborative action supported by theoretical analysis' (Maxted, 2015, p. 46). She sees critical pedagogy as the key to maintaining spaces for dialogue, for engaging in critical thinking and for encouraging students to question everything they hear and read. We saw in Chapter 6 how powerful modelling teaching techniques are to trainee teachers; a

classroom teacher can also be a powerful model. A teacher who sees beyond the word to the world is likely to be a model to learners. Freire states 'Reading is not walking on the words; it's grasping the soul of them.' (Freire, 1985, p. 19). Teacher educators can help novice teachers formulate this praxis by embedding critical pedagogy into their own practice and by inviting trainees to continually critique what they observe and read.

#### 8.2.4 Employing a social practice approach to teaching reading

##### *Using a social practice approach*

A teaching approach based around learners' social practices is seen as benefitting all ages of literacy learners (Barton, 1994; Larson and Marsh, 2015) and all FE learners whatever their subject (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009). No-one would deny that skills are necessary too, but studies have demonstrated the benefits of seeing these as nesting within a social practices approach (Green and Howard, 2007; Purcell Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004) and Weiner gives concrete examples of this in various literacy programmes (Weiner, 2006).

Although the 12 teachers had certainly been exposed to both skills and practices approaches on their ITE courses, it was clear that most of them had not acquired a socially situated pedagogy relevant to their current context. Their lack of understanding of exactly what it comprised is a sign that it had not been clearly enough explained on their ITE so they had either not understood its significance or had not seen its practical relevance. The lesson for teacher educators is that we need to find a way of making its practical relevance clear and explicit. While FE teaching operates within the current assessment-based hegemony, skills will always be seen as the answer to exam success, and thus teachers are likely to choose a skills model over a social practices model. Teacher education must take on this challenge and show how the two models can be integrated to benefit learners' progress more broadly, not just through exam success.

##### *Learner-centred pedagogy*

A learner-centred pedagogy starts with the learners' needs and interests rather than those the teacher, institution or Government policy think is best for them. Hamilton and Hillier see it as the underpinning theme of LLN practice (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). It is likely that getting a qualification is right for some learners; indeed some will be

attending classes for this reason. But it will not be what all the learners have chosen. From my discussions with learners throughout my professional career, I know that they have many reasons for learning to read. A qualification is not necessarily their priority and time spent preparing for exams can be irrelevant. A learner-centred education would provide texts and activities based around their current or aspiring practices. Yet, if teachers are forced by the system to teach towards gaining qualifications, they have to find a way of reconciling their belief in a learner-centred practice with this work context. It can be done, as evidenced by Karla in this study. If the expertise of such teachers could be shared with novices, they would not have to choose between a learner-centred curriculum and a content-centred one; they would be enabled to integrate the two. Teachers such as Karla could be encouraged to become mentors and, eventually, trainers themselves. While not every college has teachers as skilled as Karla, if she, or equally skilled teachers, would agree to be videoed, then their practice would be available to be seen by every new literacy teacher.

### *Learners' practices*

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme's 'Literacies for Learning in Further Education' project explored how learners' everyday literacy practices could be harnessed to support their learning in college (Ivanic *et al.*, 2009). The project demonstrated that pedagogical changes which engaged with these everyday practices tended to increase students' capacity for engagement and recall, and their confidence. These adjustments were reliant on the teachers' professional expertise. Some teachers already had such expertise; others had to acquire it. There is a role here for either ITE or CPD or both in helping teachers to explore the options.

### *Authenticity*

Functional Skills exams use texts that have been specially written for assessment purposes. These tend to be unlike the texts learners meet in everyday life and they are often on subjects that hold no intrinsic relationship to their lives (eating out, pets, holidays). Because these texts have no obvious readership or purpose beyond their use for assessment, it is also hard to use them for critical reading (Wallace, 1992).

Purcell-Gates *et al's* (2002) study showed how the use of authentic literacy texts and practices had a statistically significant effect on change in students' own literacy practices and Reder (2009) also noted this in his longitudinal study. Teacher educators need to introduce this research to trainees to raise awareness of the importance of authenticity and to demonstrate how authentic texts and literacy practices can be used in the classroom.

#### 8.2.5 Teaching reading

Most of the teachers in this study already knew how to help learners develop sufficient reading skills to pass the FS reading exam. In almost exact replication of the results of the NRDC study on reading, I observed frequent use of giving immediate feedback; discussion of vocabulary; use of dictionaries, but a lack of attention to decoding and fluency (Besser *et al.*, 2004; Brooks *et al.*, 2007). I also observed work on comprehension but this seemed to be focused on answering questions that assessed how well the text had been understood rather than ones that encouraged the learners to monitor their own comprehension. I witnessed limited use of strategies to teach comprehension, such as those outlined in evidence-based research (Kamil, 2003; Keene, 2002; Kruidenier, 2002; McShane, 2005). There was little use of comprehension monitoring and none of using graphic organisers, story structure, question generating, summarization and multiple strategy instruction (although a few teachers did say they had used reciprocal reading in their practice) .

Most often texts were given out with an accompanying worksheet with questions to answer. Talk about 'doing a comprehension' encourages learners to see it as a task to be successfully completed, not as the aim of reading. The questions tested understanding but did not teach a strategy for gaining an understanding if the learner did not already have one. Feedback informed learners whether they were right or wrong but not how to go about creating the meaning they had missed. In other cases, I observed the teacher orally eliciting the answers she was searching for and moving on to elicit more until the answer she wanted was provided. This type of questioning is like an exam; there are correct and incorrect answers but the significance lies in knowing the reason for success or failure. Making an error is a learning experience only if you are aware of where and why you went wrong. This is summative assessment not formative assessment and it is

not a strategy for learning. In assessment *for* learning, a student needs to know where they have gone wrong and what is needed to get it right (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Marshall and Wiliam, 2006).

Teacher educators need to ensure that they cover techniques of formative assessment on the course and that trainees are clear about the difference between summative assessment (of learning) and formative assessment (for learning). They also need to clarify the distinction between teaching and testing. Teacher educators again have a role to play in differentiating between tasks that assess reading and strategies that enable learners to develop their reading comprehension skills. Learners need to be taught strategies for creating meaning in texts that they read and they need time to discuss the interpretation of possible meanings and critical interpretations of texts.

#### 8.2.6 Support on the ITE course

Some teachers felt that their ITE had failed them in terms of providing personal support. Attending such an intense course was stressful, especially for those who were new to teaching. They felt that not enough recognition was given to their feelings of anxiety and pressure. Tutorials which could have been used for support sometimes ended up being a box-ticking exercise, purely for administrative purposes and did not offer the personal and educational support required.

Teacher educators could bear in mind the pressure of changing careers and rapidly needing to acquire new information, some of which might challenge existing understandings without necessarily providing acceptable alternatives. Using tutorials to engage in dialogue with trainees about these challenges would enable their concerns to be heard and might help them to devise practical ways of managing the process.

#### 8.2.7 Professionalism

Teachers, who are highly trained, in many cases to Level 7, can find themselves used as glorified (and expensive) administrators. The marketisation of FE and competition with private training organizations also puts a strain on teachers' job security and the lack of career progression opportunities is demotivating and leads to a high rate of teacher attrition.

Teachers can perceive a tension between the way their professionalism is seen by management (someone who will provide the results needed to keep the college financially viable) and the way they see themselves (as purveyors of a social justice agenda). Within the many constructs available, they need to find their own definition of professionalism that enables them to operate in what can be an alienating workplace culture. Honan's idea of literacy teachers as *bricoleurs*, actively resisting being positioned as passive implementers of policies by making small adjustments to their practice to fit with policy, seems relevant here (Honan, 2006).

In addition to this *bricolage* of pedagogy, trainee teachers need to be introduced to the range of bureaucratic processes required in their professional role before they embark on employment, so they have a full understanding of what that role involves. Teacher education courses can assist by engaging teachers in discussions about the nature of professionalism in their field.

### 8.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study adds to the knowledge about adult literacy pedagogy, and also makes a series of more unique contributions to this field and its development through ITE.

There have been many studies of effective reading pedagogy for primary school literacy teachers (NRP, 2000; Poulson, 2003; Wray *et al.*, 2000; Wray *et al.*, 2002); teachers of adolescents (Fletcher, 2014; Kamil, 2003; Keene, 2002; Parris and Block, 2007) and adults (Alamprese, 2008; Brooks *et al.*, 2007; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012). Additionally, there has been research on ESOL learners who also have literacy needs (Condelli, Spruck Wrigley and Suk Yoon, 2009). However, apart from the NRDC research study (Brooks *et al.*, 2007) all the work reported above with adolescents and adults has been carried out in the USA, so there has long been a need for more UK based studies.

There have not been, as far as I am aware, any studies of adult literacy teaching and learning practices in a superdiverse, multilingual, multicultural urban community such as the context of this study, where learners are likely to have English as an additional language rather than their first language. Although some of these studies take into account teachers' views and opinions, many take a neutral observer's viewpoint. It was

important to me that practitioners' voices were heard and this study uniquely represents the views of a small cross-section of adult literacy teachers working in an urban multilingual context.

Where research has been done in the UK, it was generally within the context of the SFL initiative when funding for adult literacy was at its highest. In the post-financial crash era the neoliberal and austerity-oriented Government views on literacy provision are predominantly around employability and the circumstances of adult literacy provision are very different. Ball's three policy technologies: marketisation, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003) are key elements in post-compulsory education, and impossible for any teacher working in the field to ignore. National and local policies based on competition with the private sector, micromanagement and constant surveillance of teachers' work make the teaching context a very different place from what it appeared to be a decade ago. This study highlights the disjuncture between the 'good practice' advocated on ITE programmes and the real world that practitioners face in the classroom and the wider environment of FE. It shows what teachers are able to take from their training and what gets lost when they face a college culture where learning is prescribed by the need for exam success. While many practitioners find their own way of dealing with these pressures, ITE can help to build resilience by introducing new teachers to the realities of the teaching context and engaging them in a dialogue about ways to create their own professional identity, grounded in their relationship to the learners and to their fellow professionals.

This study also examined current adult literacy teachers' beliefs, finding that those deemed most significant on their ITE are primarily humanistic and learner-centred, yet it found that in the current landscape of FE, these are difficult to maintain in practice. Washback from exams tends to preclude this type of pedagogy unless the teacher is highly skilled and experienced, creating a disharmony between beliefs and practice. The lesson for teacher educators is that they must practise what they preach around social practice theory and not forget the real-life context that trainees will move into on completion of their course. Novice teachers can learn to support learners towards exam success while, at the same time, build learning opportunities around learners' own funds of knowledge and the practices they engage in or aspire to engage in. In addition, while

for the time being, assessment through examinations might be inevitable in a literacy class, this might not necessarily always be the case. Studies such as this demonstrate to policymakers that there is a real need for more flexibility in what counts as achievement in literacy, with a greater range of assessment options to be included as acceptable indicators of 'success'.

My findings with adult literacy teachers endorse those found by Harkin and his colleagues with FE teachers (Harkin, 2005; Harkin, Clow and Hillier, 2003). Like them I found that theoretical knowledge can make teachers feel guilty or hostile if they perceive they cannot relate it to their practice. They are unlikely to maintain a commitment to reflective practice while it is seen as a task for training rather than a way of building their own personal theory integrated into their practice. This study underlines the importance of teacher education courses finding a way to engage prospective teachers in reflective practice which is sustainable throughout their professional careers. The teachers in this study found keeping a journal difficult to maintain and not always relevant to their needs, while collaborative and dialogic methods were favoured and deemed to be stimulating and supportive of reflection.

In terms of adult literacy pedagogy, this is the first UK study to explore how adult literacy teachers manage a superdiverse classroom and how their mindset can sometimes be too rigidly focused on literacy needs to also take into account learners' language needs. Teacher educators have a role to play in breaking down the perceived barriers between literacy and ESOL teaching, particularly on programmes where both are taught. Expertise in one subject can enhance the teaching of the other and trainees should be encouraged to draw on both disciplines when teaching literacy to multilingual learners, taking into consideration what learners want and need to learn, rather than merely following the Functional Skills exam syllabus. ITE courses can provide the underpinning linguistic knowledge and practical methods for language development at text and sentence level, as well as at word level.

This study also highlights the need for ITE to clearly define the difference between teaching and testing when developing learners' reading skills, particularly around the use of questioning. This is a neglected area in much of the literature on reading but

raised by Maggioni *et al* as an issue (Maggioni, Fox and Alexander, 2015). Teacher educators can play a major part in highlighting both the theory of teaching and assessing reading, and in demonstrating practical and effective ways of differentiating between the two.

The study also reinforces the work of Purcell Gates *et al* (2002) in emphasising the significance of authenticity in materials and activities and of Kruidenier (2002) in affirming the importance of developing strategies to create meaning from texts. These approaches can be seen as part of an overall social practices approach to literacy teaching.

This enquiry has clearly demonstrated the impact that ITE has on the professional development of adult literacy teachers. However, their beliefs were severely challenged by the context in which they found themselves when they started teaching. My findings demonstrate that teacher educators need to recognise that the real world of post-compulsory education in the early 21st century can be challenging for a teacher and very different from the ITE classroom or even their teaching practice. The teacher educator has a role to play in discussing and modelling practice appropriate for the superdiverse classrooms they will find themselves in, and in building capacity to maintain professional integrity within challenging policy contexts.

The results of this enquiry give much food for thought for teacher educators, and offers new and substantive ideas for those working on ITE programmes training specialist teachers for literacy and ESOL.

#### **8.4 Implications for personal professional practice**

As a teacher educator, in a university offering a specialist literacy and ESOL ITE course for around 40 trainees a year, I have a professional interest in providing the best possible training for new teachers of literacy. When we set up the course in 2003, there were, for the first time, regulations on what subject matter had to be included in the course (DfES and FENTO, 2002a; DfES and FENTO, 2002b; FENTO, 1999). Since then, the regulations have changed with alarming regularity until finally, following the Lingfield Review (Lingfield, October 2012), qualification for FE teaching was deregulated.

Although we still have professional standards to adhere to, the content of the PGCE qualification is up to the individual institution to devise. While my own institution has been judged to provide high quality teacher education (Ofsted, 2008; Ofsted, 2010; Ofsted, 2013) there is always room for improvement. I have already discussed my findings with colleagues at work and we have agreed that we can implement some of the recommendations immediately. Examples of changes we are making include:

- Blurring the boundaries between literacy and ESOL teaching methodology by avoiding, where possible, separate approaches to use with literacy or ESOL classes. We will aim to offer inclusive approaches for learners according to their particular needs and motivations rather than according to the programme designation.
- Recommending a variety of approaches to teaching language whether the learner is in an ESOL or a literacy class
- Increased emphasis on critical reflection in all aspects of the work
- Further encouraging trainees to consider ways of incorporating social practice approaches in their teaching so it is not just a theory but a key part of their practice
- Making explicit the teaching techniques we are modelling by drawing attention to the methods we have used in a session, for example where we have drawn on trainees' experiences and knowledge
- Making more use of transcripts, lesson plans and video clips (where these exist) to model and discuss pedagogic practices
- In sessions on developing reading skills, draw more attention to the difference between teaching and testing and emphasising the importance of teaching strategies to develop comprehension
- Discussing ways of promoting learner-centred practice within an assessment-driven syllabus and encouraging trainees to be creative in their approach
- Analysing exam papers to explore how preparation for these could fit in with learners' everyday literacy practices
- Highlighting how the role of a teacher includes administration and pastoral support, which can take place outside teaching times

- Offering more personal support for teachers in training by ensuring that tutorials always make time for a discussion of any concerns or anxieties they have

## 8.5 Further research

While I believe this has been a valuable study, much work remains to be done. Adult literacy continues to be an under-researched area and there are many questions still to be explored. We could look more closely at the content of ITE courses, particularly in the light of deregulation. At the time these 12 teachers were training, the national regulatory system ensured that all literacy teacher training had similar content. To what extent have courses changed since deregulation and how might this have affected new teachers' knowledge, understandings and practices?

These 12 teachers are resourceful and skilled. Some of their skills and knowledge clearly comes from their ITE but where does the rest emanate from? How far does CPD fill the gaps and meet teachers' needs and to what extent do they learn 'on the job'?

There are also other points of view from which we could approach the efficacy of teacher education, for example the learners' experience. What types of pedagogy do they find most engaging and helpful? Barone and Barone's (2015) work with US fifth graders suggests that engagement with real books was a strong motivation over and above other factors such as digital literacies but it would be interesting to compare their results with those for UK adults.

There is also a place for a much larger quantitative study of specialist literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers to find out how much of their ITE (specialist and generic) has been useful to them and how they have applied it and, perhaps, also a longitudinal study of how literacy teachers' beliefs and practice change as they get further from their training and have to adapt more to different working situations.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Glossary and Abbreviations

BSL	British Sign Language
C&G	City and Guilds (an awarding organisation)
CELTA	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DELTA	Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
FOK	Funds of Knowledge
FS	Functional Skills
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IRA	International Reading Association (now the International Literacy Association)
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
IWB	Interactive Whiteboard
K-12	Kindergarten to school-leaving age in the US school system
LDDs	Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
LLN	Language, Literacy and Numeracy
LP	Lesson plan
LSA	Learning Support Assistant (in FE)
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSU	London Strategic Unit for the Learning and Skills Workforce
Moodle	A VLE used in some colleges
NLS	New Literacy Studies

NRDC	National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy
NRP	National Reading Panel
PET	Practice Engagement Theory
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)
RARPA	Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement
SfL	Skills for Life
TA	Teaching Assistant (in a school)
TP	Teaching Practice
UCL IOE	University College London, Institute of Education (after the merger)
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

## Appendix 2: Key to transcripts

[text ] Background information

[. . .] Extracts edited out of transcript for sake of clarity

. . . Pause

T= Teacher

L = learner

## Appendix 3: Explanation of levels

Table A: Comparison of levels

QCF levels	Functional Skills levels	National Curriculum levels	Typical qualifications
Level 8			PhD EdD
Level 7			Masters' degree IOE PGCE Literacy and ESOL course
Level 6			University degree
Level 5			Foundation degree; HND Post-Compulsory ITE courses
Level 4			HNC
Level 3			'A' level
Level 2	Level 2		GCSE grades A*-C;
Level 1	Level 1	National Curriculum levels 4 and 5	GCSE Levels D-G;
Entry level 3	Entry 3	National Curriculum Level 3 (Key Stage 3)	Functional Skills
Entry level 2	Entry 2	National Curriculum level 2 (Key stage 2)	Functional Skills
Entry level 1	Entry 1	National Curriculum Level 1 (Key Stage 1)	Functional Skills

## Appendix 4: Comparison of sample in my research with the general workforce

**Table B: Comparison of sample in my research with the general workforce**

<b>Variables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LSU report Entire workforce</b></li> <li>• <b>Data collected Nov 2006</b></li> <li>• <b>Greater London</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LSU report SfL workforce data</b></li> <li>• <b>Data collected Oct/Nov 2006</b></li> <li>• <b>England (literacy only)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NRDC Teacher Study</b></li> <li>• <b>Data collected 2004-7</b></li> <li>• <b>England</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NRDC report LLN in FE</b></li> <li>• <b>Data collected 2009 (from 07-08 ILR)</b></li> <li>• <b>England</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>My research</b></li> <li>• <b>Data collected 2014</b></li> <li>• <b>Inner London</b></li> </ul>
Gender	78% female (literacy 82.7% female)	73.2% female (literacy)	77% female	74.3% female	91.6% female
Age	Literacy: 7.8% under 30 41% 40-49 18% 50-59	Literacy: 7.4% under 30 7.4% 30-39 39.8% 40-49 30.0% 50-59 4.7% 60-64	LLN 10% under 30 35% 40-49 28% 50-59	LLN 7.5% under 30 20.2% 30-39 38.0% 40-49 29.2% 50-59 4.7% 60-64 0.5% 65+	Literacy: 0% under 30 8.3% 30-39 25% 40-49 50% 50-59 16.7% 60+
Ethnicity	22.9% BME	7.4% BME	13% BME	19.9% BME	25% BME (inc Irish)
Contract	27.9% FT 41% HPL	FT 36.1% 23.2% fractional 38.4% HPL 2.3% Agency	31% FT 21% fractional 46% HPL	28.1% FT  19.1% fractional 52.8% HPL	50% fractional 50% HPL

## Appendix 5: Comparison of variables across the two colleges

The table below shows a comparison of variables between the two colleges. Actual figures are given as the numbers are too small for percentages to be valid.

**Table C: Comparison of variables across the two colleges**

Variable	Total	Cliffe College	Hatton College
<b>Gender</b>	12	7 f    0 m	4 f    1 m

Variable	Total	Cliffe College	Hatton College
<b>Age</b>	1	30-39	1    30-39
	3	40-49	2    40-49
	6	50-59	3    50-59
	2	over 60	1    over 60

Variable	Total	Cliffe College	Hatton College
<b>Ethnicity (self described)</b>	7	white British	4    White British
	1	White British/Irish	1    White British/Irish
	1	Irish	1    Irish
	1	Black Afro-Caribbean	1    British Black African
	1	British Black African	1    Black Afro-Caribbean
	3	White British	3    White British

Variable	Total	Cliffe College	Hatton College
<b>Contract type</b>	6	fractional	3    fractional
	6	HPL	4    HPL

## Appendix 6: Participants' training and qualifications

**Table D: Participants' training and qualifications**

Teacher	Date of training	ITE	Site of training	Highest qual	Highest qual in English	Other languages learned
Anna	1998-2004	Generic Cert Ed L4 Lit subj specs	CityLit LSBU	L4 Subject specs	Level 2	none
Alan	1995-2002	Generic PGCE C&G 7207 with literacy	Greenwich HCC	BA Art	Level 2	none
Caroline	2007-2009	PGCE with literacy specialism	IOE	BA English	Level 6	French
Grainne	2006-2008	Generic PGCE Additional dip Literacy	CIC HCC IOE	BA English MA LLN	Level 7	none
Jess	1999-2009	C&G 7306 Literacy specialist PGCE	Barnet College IOE	L7 PGCE	Level 2	French
Jodie	2010-2011	PGCE with literacy specialism	IOE	L7 PGCE	Level 6	French Spanish German
Justine	2007-2011	C&G 7407 Lit and ESOL DTLLS Additional Dip Literacy	HCC KCC IOE	BA Geography L7 Postgrad Cert	Level 2	French
Karla	2008-2009	PGCE with literacy specialism	IOE	MA Art	Level 2	Swedish
Kathleen	2011-2013	PTLLS PGCE with literacy and ESOL specialism	IOE	L7 PGCE	Level 3	French German Latin
Kay	2011-2013	PGCE with literacy and ESOL specialism	IOE	MA Devt studies	Level 2	French Italian Chinese Serbo-Croat
Maggie	2011-2012	PGCE with literacy specialism	Greenwich	BA Counselling	Level 2	French
Maureen	2011-2013	PGCE with literacy and ESOL specialism	IOE	PGCE PG Dip Guidance	Level 2	French

## Appendix 7: Teacher biographies

### *Anna*

Anna is a teacher in her early 60s of Afro-Caribbean origin. She has been teaching in Hatton, her local college for 25 years and is now on the point of retirement. She has a fractional post. She came into teaching in her late 30s, seeing the need for black tutors and felt she had something to offer because of her own experience as a black woman in London and specifically having taught her own mother to read. No-one else in her family and none of her friends were teachers (although her sister was a nursery nurse), so she was seen as a trail-blazer in her family. She had never had any education beyond GCSE herself and the literacy training she did was her first experience of higher education. She picked up work quite quickly and was encouraged by her manager to do some initial training. After that she did more short training courses throughout her career until finally Government policy required all teachers to be certificated and she completed a formal L4 subject specifications course. She was happy to do it because she felt she needed the professionalism and structure. Everyone around her had been trained and she felt she needed to raise her standard to their level to feel more secure. Then she was confident about being able to pass it on to others, which she did by becoming a mentor to trainee teachers, a role she found stimulating.

### *Alan*

Alan is a man in his mid 50s who has been teaching for nearly 20 years in Hatton College. He has a fractional post. He originally qualified with a BA in Art and worked in a variety of odd jobs in his youth before trying his hand at teaching art. He did not enjoy this and switched to working with learners with SEN which he found he loved doing. He knew no other teachers apart from his sister who was also a college lecturer. He is a strong believer in independent living for learners with SEN and when he realised that being able to write would mean more independence for these learners, he decided to move into literacy teaching. He chose to do the specialised training because he wanted to deepen his knowledge. He knew the trainers in the college and admired them. He thought it would be worth doing to get experience and also because it was part of his job.

### *Caroline*

Caroline is a white woman in her early 50s. She came late to teaching having had a previous career in IT where she rose to a senior position. When she was made redundant in her late 40s, she decided to change career. She was thinking of librarianship when a friend suggested numeracy teaching, but because she has a degree in English, she thought English would be preferable. Teaching sounded attractive because she wanted something creative, worthwhile, with a closer connection with people and their lives. She had done some volunteer work listening to children read in her daughter's school, and regarded the teachers she met there with the greatest respect, but did not want to teach children. In her family, her great grandmother and great grandfather had run a village school in Northern Ireland but she did not know them so they did not influence her directly.

### *Grainne*

Grainne is an Irish woman in her early 60s. She has a fractional post at Cliffe College. After a successful career in the third sector, at 52, she decided to become a prison volunteer. She wanted to be useful and to give value to others. She also joked that they couldn't run away. She found she needed more structure so decided to get training; at the same time, she was offered paid work by the prison. Although she had gained a degree in English, her own experience of education had not been positive. However, she became inspired by her literacy teacher training. She had never known any teachers before; in her own family only a cousin in Australia had been a teaching monk. She initially just wanted a short training course but found herself on a one year course specialising in literacy teaching at Cliffe. Although such an intensive course had not been her intention, it was close to home. She was thrilled with the course in spite of the intensity and heavy workload.

### *Jess*

Jess is a black woman in her mid 40s who works as an HPL at Cliffe College. She did not go on to university after school but went into science work. She claims to get bored easily and although she enjoyed science, found she needed a new challenge. At the age of 30, she was offered a job teaching English and maths to young people, which she enjoyed because she could motivate them and see them progress so she decided to get

trained to do it properly. She had not considered teaching before and did not want to teach science. Her mother's cousin was an English teacher in a secondary school but Jess did not relate to her and she was not an influence. Until she started teaching, she had no friends who were teachers. She taught young people for 10 years before starting her formal training, which she did part-time while working. Then she moved to another job and did her generic training alongside her specialist literacy training. She is currently working on an MA.

### *Jodie*

Jodie is a white woman in her 50s. She has been working at Cliffe College for 3 years and now has a fractional post there. She had the idea of becoming a teacher in her early 30s but did not pursue it until she was 42 as she was waiting for her children to grow up. She felt that teaching was a career that one could pick up in later life and one's experience in life would be valued. She did her English degree as a mature student and wanted to go on and do teacher training to teach English, but could not find the right course and it was only two years later that she found a course that suited her requirements. She did not want to teach English at a high level because that would mean moving, so she chose a career in FE to be local. She liked the idea of literacy because she enjoys problem solving. Eventually she found information about specialist literacy training on a Government website.

### *Justine*

Justine is a white woman in her 40s who works part-time for a number of different organisations, including Cliffe College. She had a job in the commercial sector, but after doing a course in development studies, decided she wanted to change careers. She did various jobs in the voluntary sector, among them working with homeless people and found many of them could not read or write. Friends told her she was good at explaining things and patient, so she decided to become a teacher. She had no friends who were teachers but found out later that her mother had once wanted to become a primary teacher. She did a number of courses, starting with a volunteer literacy course and moving on to more specialist training. She found work in a prison, and was sponsored to train at the college which had the prison education contract. She gained all the official

qualifications but felt she was still lacking the knowledge she needed so moved on to do a Masters course.

### *Karla*

Karla is a half Swedish, half British woman aged in her early 50s. She was trained as an artist and worked as a painter and decorator in her early life to support her artwork. At the age of 36, she saw an advert for a literacy tutor to work in a homeless hostel and liked the idea. Literacy teaching did not have the 'caring' reputation that put her off working with children; working with adults seemed like teaching to her. She was shy and liked working on her own, 'making my own mistakes'. Her mother was a primary teacher and her father taught music in a secondary school. He would have preferred to be a musician rather than a teacher and Karla felt the same about art and teaching. However, she thought the work sounded interesting and feasible. She did a short introductory course at one college and then saw an advert for training at Hatton College and immediately got a place. It was a new specialist course which she found useful. She was then obliged to go on and do a full PGCE as it was required by the college.

### *Kathleen*

Kathleen is a white Scottish woman in her early 50s working as a HPL at Cliffe College. She started work as a librarian, was made redundant and moved into local government, eventually working as an inspector. She was made redundant again and wanted to do something worthwhile. She believed that access to literacy would enable people to achieve their full potential. She had friends who were teachers of children and a cousin who was a university lecturer, so she had some role models. She started her training with one organisation but that was closed down so she moved to another university. She started to specialise in literacy, but then on being offered the opportunity to train for both literacy and ESOL decided to do both as she had done some ESOL in year 1 and found it fascinating.

### *Kay*

Kay is a white English woman in her mid 50s. After doing some TEFL work in China, she became a journalist and worked with the BBC for many years. At the age of 48, she made a political decision that she wanted to do something useful to make changes in the

world. She decided she did not want to go from one giant organisation to another so looked for something more local. She had a number of friends who were teachers and although they did not talk much about their work to her, she saw teachers as 'good' people. However, she is clear that it is not people who influenced her decision but it was a political move. She had tried to change the world through public service but now wanted a more personal approach. She felt those without literacy were being excluded and wanted to help them have more control over their lives.

### *Maggie*

Maggie is a white woman in her 40s who works as an HPL at Hatton College. She left school at 16, worked in the civil service and eventually trained to be a counsellor. However, she had not found counselling work when she was made redundant from her job and looked around for work. Teaching had appealed from an early age and she returned to the idea at this point. Three key events led to training as a literacy teacher: redundancy from her administrative job; a bursary was available for those in training (she had heard fees were about to go up to £9000) and her counselling agency closed down. She had no friends or family who were teachers, but she had been a school governor and knew she did not want to work in a school; she disliked how primary teachers behaved. She felt in FE she 'could be more herself'. She actually wanted to teach ESOL but there were no bursaries available for ESOL so she went into literacy. In fact at the university she chose, both literacy and ESOL were taught together, so she felt it was a good compromise, even though she did not get an ESOL qualification. She chose that university because she had done part of her counselling training there and knew it well; it was also easy to get to.

### *Maureen*

Maureen is an Irish woman in her 30s who decided she wanted to become a teacher at the age of 18, but instead became a careers advisor after she finished her degree. She considered teaching RE but did not feel ready at that point. She worked with young people and loved being in colleges. She felt she would like to do more with students over the age of 16. She was made redundant which was a catalyst for change. In her role as careers advisor, she had helped students with CVs and forms and was shocked at how difficult some had found the writing. She had found it interesting to help students with

this and so decided to move into literacy and ESOL teaching. She had quite a few teacher friends and came from a family of people in the caring professions, but she was the first in her family to take up teaching. She decided that if she was going to do it seriously, she had to get trained so she applied for the PGCE in literacy and ESOL. She chose her university because of its reputation and because she liked the feel of the place having attended short courses there

## Appendix 8: The learners

**Table E: Age of learners**

Teacher	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Anna		3	2		2		7
Alan	7						7
Caroline		3	5	2	1		11
Grainne	1	6	4	2	1		14
Jess		3	2	4	1		10
Jodie		1	5	1	1	2	10
Justine		5	5	5			15
Karla		1	4	1	1		7
Kathleen	2	9	6				17
Kay			1	3			4
Maggie		4		3	1		8
Maureen	2	9	7	3	2		23
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>133</b>

**Table F: Gender of learners**

Teacher	Female	Male	Total
Anna	4	3	7
Alan		7	7
Caroline	9	2	11
Grainne	12	2	14
Jess	8	2	10
Jodie	7	3	10
Justine	10	5	15
Karla	7		7

Kathleen	13	4	17
Kay	3	1	4
Maggie	4	4	8
Maureen	18	5	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>133</b>

**Table G: Home languages of learners**

	An	Al	Ca	Gr	Je	Jo	Ju	Kar	Kat	Kay	Ma	Ma	To'l
	7	7	11	14	10	10	15	7	17	4	8	23	133
English		6	3	5	2	2	1		1		4	5	29
Somali	1		3	2	1	1	1		3			3	15
Caribbean Anglophone Patwa					1	3	1	1		1	2	1	10
Nigerian languages	1		1		1	1	1	3					8
Spanish		1		2	1		2		1			1	8
Portuguese			1				1	1	2			1	6
Turkish	1			2	1			1				1	6
Kurdish							1		4				5
Congo French			1							1		2	4
Ghanaian languages	2						1	1					4
Amharic												3	3
Tigrinya			1			1						1	3
Peshto									3				3
Bulgarian				1	1				1				3
Polish							1					1	2
Arabic					1							1	2

Indian languages						1				1			2
Albanian					1		1						2
Igbo									1				1
African languages											1		1
Italian							1						1
Krio							1						1
Thai							1						1
Frafra							1						1
Caribbean Francophone patois										1			1
Lingala			1										1
Farsi				1									1
Slovakian												1	1
Vietnamese											1		1
Dutch									1				1
Bengali												1	1
Romanian				1									1
American Sign Lang												1	1
British Sign Language						1							1
Unknown	2												2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>133</b>

## Appendix 9: Teacher Biographical questionnaire



Name..... College.....

### 1. What initial teacher training did you have? (tick all relevant qualifications)

#### Generic

- Generic Cert Ed
- Generic PGCE
- Generic DTLLS

#### ESOL specialist

- Specialist ESOL PGCE
- Specialist ESOL DTLLS
- Additional diploma ESOL
  
- Other qualification (please state)

#### Literacy specialist

- Specialist Literacy PGCE
- Specialist Literacy DTLLS
- Additional diploma literacy

#### Joint specialist

- Joint Literacy and ESOL DTLLS
- Joint Literacy and ESOL PGCE
- Joint Literacy and ESOL additional diploma

.....

2. When did your training take place? .....

3. Where did your training take place? .....

4. How long have you been teaching in this college? .....

5. Have you taught any other subjects apart from English/Literacy?

.....

6. What is your highest level qualification?

.....

7. What is your highest qualification in English language?

.....

8. Have you ever learned any other languages? Which?

.....

9. Are you? male  female

10. What is your age? 20-29  30-39  40-49  50-59  60 or over

11. How would you describe your ethnicity? .....

12. What English/Literacy teaching have you done since gaining your initial qualification?

Dates	Subject	Level	Hours p/w	Age of learners	Days	Times

13. What classes are you teaching now?

Dates	Subject	Level	Hours p/w	Age of learners	Days	Times

14. What further subject specialist training have you done since your initial training?

Dates	Training	Number of hours

15. Did you choose to do that training or was it provided by the college?

.....

## Appendix 10: Interview schedules

### Schedule for First Interview

#### Questions for first interview (aim to take about an hour)

##### Early Influences

- At what age did you decide to become a teacher?
- What made you want /decide to teach literacy?
- Were there any key influences in your decision?
- Were there any key events in your decision?
- Are there any other teachers in your family? Or did you have friends who were teachers?
- Did you do any teaching formally or informally before training to be a literacy teacher?

##### Training

- What made you apply to train to be a literacy teacher (at IOE or wherever applicable)?
- How well did you feel it prepared you for work in the classroom?
- In what ways have you been able to apply the theory you learned?
- Did you have a mentor? What effect did they have in terms of developing your practice?
- What aspect of the training did you find most useful in terms of your current practice?  
E.g. Subject knowledge? General pedagogical knowledge? Language knowledge? Knowledge about the learners? Classroom management?
- Was there anything that the training covered that was unnecessary or that you haven't needed to use?
- What did you have in your training you'd like to have had more of?
- What would you like to have had in your training that you didn't have at all?
- What do you remember about your training in teaching reading?
- How much of it have you been able to put into practice?

### **Career aspirations**

- Where do you see your career going in the field of English teaching?
- Where do you see yourself in a year's time? In 5 years? In 10 years?
- Do you see a career path for literacy practitioners?
- Do you expect your aspirations to be fulfilled? What might be the challenges?
- What further training would you like to have to help you develop your role?

### **Your practice**

- Has the curriculum changed since you started teaching? In what kinds of ways?
- Do you think the learners have changed since you started teaching? In what kinds of ways?
- Do you think the demands on teachers have changed since you started teaching? In what kinds of ways?
- What do you think are the main challenges facing teachers in this job? (think in terms of inside the classroom; the college; nationally)
- In the light of this, what do you think should be involved in a training programme for future literacy teachers?

---

### **Schedule for Second Interview**

#### **Questions for second interview** (aim to take about 30 mins)

- How do you think it went?
- On reflection would you do anything differently? Why?
- In the session I observed you did xxx. What were the reasons behind that?

#### **Classroom management**

- On what basis do you organise your class?

**Learners**

- How many bilingual/multilingual learners were there in the group? (Can maybe get this from group profile if they have one)
- What were their first languages? (group profile)
- How did this lesson relate to the learners' ILPs?
- What, if any, speaking and listening needs have you noted?
- How do you integrate speaking and listening development with reading and writing development?
- What sorts of things do the learners need to learn to develop their reading skills?

**Language and communication**

- Do you find you have to make any changes to the language you use to meet the needs of the bilingual learners in the group? Can you think of any examples of when you did this?

**Resources**

- What was your rationale for choosing the resources you did?

**Lesson planning**

- On what basis did you plan the lesson I observed? Why did you choose those particular activities? What was your rationale for xxxx?
- Did you find you needed to differentiate between learners who were English mother-tongue speakers and multilingual learners? In what ways?
- In what ways might you do things differently if you had more or fewer bilingual learners in your class?
- Thinking about what you did in that class, can you say how much was based on your initial training and how much you picked up your expertise from other sources (eg experience, CPD, observing/discussing with other teachers)

.....

## Appendix 11: Excerpt from field notes for observation of Justine

**6 May 2014**

L1 class room Room 1.11 FP site 6.00-8.30

17 sts on register: 14 attended

	<p>Starts class just before 6.00, handing back homework and making verbal comments. If you have any queries why I've underlined anything and you aren't sure why I have, just give me a shout.</p>	
6.00	<p>-OK its 6 o'clock</p> <p>Shows what going to do on the IWB. Tonight we are going to do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commas</li> <li>• Reading and understanding a text</li> <li>• Presentational features</li> <li>• Writing a letter of complaint</li> </ul>	
6.01	<p>6sts in room.</p> <p>- All I need you to do in these sentences is put commas in where they need to go</p> <p>2 women on back table discussing ws</p> <p>Greets latecomers</p> <p>3 women on back table working together</p> <p>Teacher circulates and checks /monitors learning</p> <p>- So we don't put a comma in that situation</p>	
6.05	<p>Greets latecomer 2.</p> <p>- How are you?</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good</li> </ul> <p>Goes to her and discusses h/w</p> <p>Draws sts attention to error</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What about this here? Ah, so you are treating red-orange as one word?</li> <li>- - When you add a bit of extra info, you add a comma at the beginning and end of that info</li> <li>- - table 3, sorry what you have to do is put commas in the sentences</li> <li>- -so here this is good. That's right. Do you know why?</li> </ul> <p>they try to explain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don't worry, we'll talk about it later</li> </ul>	<p>doesn't tell, draws their attention to error and asks them to explain</p>
6.12	<p>Sits at console and looks for ws electronic version</p> <p>writes up on IWB-comma use</p> <p>continually circulates to all tables</p> <p>latecomer 3 comes in and greets all</p>	
6.14	<p>latecomer 4 (m) enters and immed leaves. Teacher talking to sts on table 1</p> <p>Kathleen knocks on door and says st outside</p> <p>T goes out to see him but he is not coming in</p> <p>T re-enters with another m</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lets look at them together and decide where they go</li> </ul>	
6.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what do we call it when we have several things- Soraya?</li> </ul> <p>Soraya- a list? separating items in a list</p> <p>Nominates Safiya and Gloria for no 2</p>	<p>nom pairs</p>



## Appendix 12: Proforma for observation of teaching sessions

Name.....	Date.....
College .....	Class level .....
No. students.....	Class times.....

<b>Classroom organisation</b>	Arrangement of tables and seating Who sits with who (gender, ethnicity, language, age) How far is it organised by the teacher What is on tables (dictionaries etc)
-------------------------------	---

<b>Learners</b>	Interactions with each other Interactions with teacher Is everyone included? Motivation and engagement
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<b>Teacher</b>	Classroom management Communication Management of group work Timing and pace Teaching of vocabulary, grammar Awareness of cultural issues Checking learning Subject knowledge
----------------	---

**Language and communication**

Grading of language  
Questioning  
Seeing talk as work  
Meta language used  
Feedback on errors

**Differentiation**

Language work

**Lesson planning**

Opening  
Setting up tasks  
Managing any problems  
Instructions  
Differentiation  
Closing

**Power and control**

Decision making

## Appendix 13: Excerpt from Interview transcription (Kathleen Interview 1)

K: At the time, I didn't. Because I did it over two years, the first year I actually applied to do the PGCE in literacy.

I: Oh right, yes. I'd forgotten about that.

K: But then having had the introduction to ESOL through our first year because we were...we were in your feeder colleges so I was at Tower Hamlets, and having had the opportunity to do the training class in ESOL, to work with ESOL experts within Tower Hamlets because one of our teacher trainers was an ESOL expert, Belinda? It just felt, that equally felt fascinating. And so when the opportunity to do the joint PGCE was offered to us it seemed foolish not to, to take that opportunity.

I: Yeah. So thinking now of the whole course, of year one and year two, I suppose and the PTTLS too, how well did you feel it prepared you for work in the classroom? The work that you're doing now?

K: Umm, [pause] yes. I would say, I would say that for work in the classroom it prepared me very well. It gave me enough of an academic introduction to the subject to be able to understand strategies and techniques that were available so that I could begin to draw on some of those but balance that with practice as well. The first year felt very practical, very hands on which for me as a complete novice both to teaching and to the subject, was the right...it worked really well, it was the right approach. So that academic introduction and the practical side, for me worked extremely well. What I was completely unprepared for is the world of further education. Which I have to say I find insane and I say, I say that with no disrespect to my colleagues and no disrespect to an organisation that I thoroughly admire and cherish and feel very, very fond...I mean, I'm very fond of Cliffe for all sorts of reasons. You know, they believed in me when I was just starting out. They were prepared to pay me money to stand up in front of people who are vulnerable. And where they have...college have expectations as to what we would deliver and they trusted me to fulfil that so I'm endlessly grateful and endlessly encouraged by their approach. But I do find further education rather insane and I find Cliffe rather insane.

I: Okay, could we unpack that a little then please?

K: Okay. So I come from local government, thirty years in local government. I understand how local government works. I understand the structure, I understand processes, I understand decision making, I understand funding. So I was transferred from a very political environment in to another political environment. But a political environment that seems to be built on ever shifting sand. So in, in my sort of very simplistic way, it feels as if funding is a surprise when it comes, when the final award comes. So that colleges are constantly predicting what might happen, what their success rates might be so that they can plan future programmes. But actually funding now only comes through attainment.

I: Not retention any more? It used to be retention and attainment.

K: I'm not sure, I'm not sure. I could be completely wrong on that but it app – so therefore it seems that, you know, the driver is hanging on to our students and getting them through exams and the exam results therefore become disproportionately important rather than the learning. Now that's my maybe rather naïve approach to a career that I decided to go in to. But how colleges are then supposed to work out their establishment in terms of teaching and support staff numbers, how they're supposed to design programmes to recruit the people that they need to have and hang on to sufficiently in advance so that...it's, it's just constantly shift, shift, shift, it feels to me.

I: So the pressures from funding bodies, government, whatever on FE make it sort of...is what makes it insane? So then are you saying Cliffe in particular?

K: Well Cliffe is my only...

I: Or Cliffe as representative of an FE college?

K: And that's my only experience. You know, others may be worse, others may be better. I have nothing to base it on but then Cliffe's approach is they have to manage that... those external pressures which then translate in to internal pressures with, and I could give you a small example...

I: Please.

K: This year we've...we enrolled students in September to do a Foundation English. Their qualifications that they were seeking to achieve were going to be AQA Level 1, Level 2 in the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. That's what the students came for, that's what they enrolled to. So throughout the year we built...we snuck in some additional Ascentis qualifications, also in reading and writing but we included grammar and punctuation and spelling, which present their own challenges. That was done for funding reasons because the AQA qualifications weren't going to bring in enough money. Understand that. And then the talk in the second semester, and this talk started in the second semester, about introducing a further Ascentis qualification but in employability, which was to be delivered in the summer term. And I went to the introductory training on those materials last Thursday.

I: Right, okay.

K: So the view would be that after half-term we would then have four weeks remaining of this term and for the foundation English students who I see twice a week, not only would they have to do another two Ascentis exams in class but we also have to deliver two courses, guided learning hours of 40, in fifteen hours. This is not going to happen.

I: You mean the course is... requires 40 hours but you've only got 15?

K: Yep.

I: So how does that work?

K: Precisely, it doesn't. So the view is that this now will not happen for the foundation. Not just my foundation class, because it's an evening class I've got additional pres... additional challenges of colleges closed one evening for the student awards ceremony. So I lose one, you know, one whole evening class. We have an enrolment session that students are supposed to attend. I'm now going to have to bring them in on another evening so that they can do their progression enrolment etc, etc. So why did I start saying this? I started saying this as an example of things feeling somewhat chaotic by the time decisions are translated in to the reality for teaching staff in the classroom.

I: Are there others who won't be able to complete the 40 hours too?

K: Oh yes, yes.

I: Lots of places?

K So the whole of the foundation English, all of the classes, are not going to do it because it's impractical for us to do this. And on reflection, wasn't it always? Because by the time the learning materials had been created and then staff are trained and then we have to look at the logistics and also they have to do... be done in computers rooms with access to IT, there's another challenge. So in reality haven't we just created this monster that we didn't have to?

## Appendix 14: *A Posteriori* codes

Assessment

Assumptions about learners

Background to becoming a teacher

Beliefs

Career aspirations

Career path for literacy teachers

Challenges for literacy teachers

Changes in learners

Changes to curriculum

Chat with students

Checking learning

Clear instructions

Collaborative learning

Comprehension

Contextualisation

CPD

Critical reading

Cultural issues

Decoding

Deficit model

Demonstration

Developing reading skills

Developing vocabulary

Developing writing skills

Dictionary and reference use

Differences between NS and NNS learners

Differentiation

Discrete literacy

Discussion

Embedded literacy

Engagement

Exam preparation

Formative assessment

Function of language

Funding driven work

Gaps in training

Grading of language

Grammar

Group language profile

Group organisation

Identity

Impact of ESOL training

Impact of experience

Impact of life experience

Impact of literacy training

Impact of training

Inclusion

Independent learning

Integration of numeracy

Keeping order

Key influences - people

Key influences-events

Key influences-family and friends

Key influences-ideas

Lack of engagement

<b>Language work</b>	<b>Praise and encouragement</b>
<b>Learner motivation</b>	<b>Process writing</b>
<b>Learner needs</b>	<b>Pronunciation</b>
<b>Learner opinions</b>	<b>Provide help when needed</b>
<b>Learner-led teaching</b>	<b>Punctuality</b>
<b>Learning difficulties</b>	<b>Purpose of lesson explained</b>
<b>Learning support</b>	<b>Purpose of task explained</b>
<b>Lesson aim</b>	<b>Questioning</b>
<b>Lesson evaluation</b>	<b>Rationale for lesson</b>
<b>Lesson observation</b>	<b>Reading aim</b>
<b>Lesson planning</b>	<b>Reason for choice of literacy</b>
<b>Lesson reflection</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>Linguistic devices</b>	<b>Response to individual learners</b>
<b>Link to previous learning</b>	<b>Revision</b>
<b>Link with future learning</b>	<b>Room layout</b>
<b>Linking theory with practice</b>	<b>Scaffolding learning</b>
<b>Literacy and ESOL</b>	<b>Self study</b>
<b>Literacy training - reasons</b>	<b>Sensory impairments</b>
<b>Management</b>	<b>Sentence level work</b>
<b>Mental health issues</b>	<b>Speaking &amp; listening needs</b>
<b>Mentor</b>	<b>Speaking &amp; listening teaching</b>
<b>Modelling</b>	<b>Spelling</b>
<b>Morphology</b>	<b>Student choice</b>
<b>NNS learners</b>	<b>Study Skills</b>
<b>Non exam work</b>	<b>Subversion of system</b>
<b>Organisational features</b>	<b>Summarising</b>
<b>Peer feedback</b>	<b>Support in training</b>
<b>Phonics</b>	<b>Teacher circulates</b>
<b>Plan lesson in manageable chunks</b>	<b>Teacher feedback</b>

**Teacher-led teaching**  
**Teaching experience**  
**Text types**  
**Theory**  
**Training choices**  
**Training groups**  
**Training in teaching reading**  
**Training- negatives**  
**Training-ideas for improvement**  
**Training-limitations**  
**Training-observations**  
**Training-reasons**  
**Types of reading**  
**Unclear instructions**  
**Unclear purpose of task**  
**Use of technology**  
**Varieties of English**  
**Vocabulary work**  
**Volunteering**  
**Worksheet**

## Appendix 15: Letter to participants



6 February 2014

Dear Alan

I am an adult literacy teacher trainer at the Institute of Education (University of London) where I am also doing a research degree. My research is on the practices and understandings of English (literacy) teachers in relation to the initial training they received. The ultimate aim of this study is to improve our training of English/literacy teachers.

The research will take place in two colleges in inner London during the academic year 2013-2014 and I am looking for English/literacy teachers to participate in the study. This will involve

1. Taking part in two (or possibly three) interviews over the course of the year. I would like to find out about your path to becoming a literacy teacher, the role of your initial training; any further CPD you have undertaken and your perceptions about your training and work as a teacher.
2. An observation of your teaching. This will not be to judge your competence in any way, but to observe what goes on in your classroom in order to describe how literacy teachers work. The second interview would be based on this observation, where we could discuss aspects of the classroom interaction.

I can assure you that all information gained as part of this study will remain confidential and all participants and places will be anonymised in the final report. If you choose to join the study, you are free to change your mind and withdraw at any point.

I am happy to answer any of your questions about the study.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irene Schwab'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Irene Schwab

Institute of Education  
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020 7612 6311

## CONSENT FORM

If you would like to be involved in this research, please PRINT your name here:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please confirm that you understand and agree by ticking (✓) each statement and signing at the bottom of the page.**

I have read the information sheet and I understand that this research is to improve our training of English teachers	
I can stop taking part at any time.	
I do not have to tell the interviewer anything that I do not want to.	
All information given by me will be treated as confidential.	
My name and the name of the college will never be used.	
I agree that the interviewer will be able to record what I say in the interview	
I am happy for the report to be published for other teachers and researchers to read.	

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_