EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL FOR EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS TO HAVE GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR LITERACY LEARNING

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of both early school leavers and their teachers when a group of eight young people were invited to have greater involvement in their learning. The study is based in a literacy programme within a youth service setting in rural Ireland. The research is situated outside the mainstream school system and this affords a unique chance to see how the young people managed when they were given the chance to have more involvement in their learning, once they had rejected mainstream education. My previous research within the organisation indicates that young people consider that they are capable of taking on more challenging curricula and are keen to pursue higher level qualifications. The study took place between September 2010 and May 2011.

The study aimed to develop and evaluate a new approach to a current literacy programme using constructivist teaching strategies which, while supporting increased learner involvement, also offered a higher level literacy certificate. An action research design was used and this thesis follows stages two, three and four of the first iterative cycle. Building on a conceptual framework which links the literatures of early school leaving and the learning theories of constructivism and self-determination, a qualitative analysis was undertaken comprising in depth interviews with young people and staff, field diaries, learner journals, questionnaires and participant observation.

Findings show that despite early school leavers having difficult backgrounds, they respond positively when they are offered greater involvement in their learning. This is further enhanced by teacher support and expectation. Findings also suggest that early school leavers have gaps in their literacy skills that need to be addressed when preparing for higher level qualifications. Along with the need for greater learner involvement, it is essential that teaching institutions provide these young people with access to higher level programmes and a structured route to achieving relevant and more useful qualifications. In this way, it is possible to instill the confidence needed to attain significantly higher levels of learning.

Declaration

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

Signed:

Date:

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Reflective Statement

The following is a reflection of my experiences of the EdD programme, and how it has shaped and influenced my professional development as a practitioner and manager in the education of early school leavers. It is also an account of my motivations for taking the course and how I have built my professional expertise, through engagement with various theoretical perspectives and academic literature. These reflections provide a context for the study and illustrate how the various taught courses have contributed to expanding my own knowledge and developing and honing my critical thinking and analytical skills. This statement also outlines how the EdD has developed my professional understanding and describes the implications it has for my future career.

Background

I have been involved in early school leaver education for over twenty-five years, principally as project manager of a literacy programme in a youth service setting but also in curriculum development and staff training. During this period, I have also participated in European Union programmes and in transnational youth exchanges with early school leavers from many countries. This has given me particular insights into early school leaving in other jurisdictions. My professional experience with young people who have become disillusioned with mainstream school raised many questions for me throughout this time. While I was aware that the school alone was not the sole reason for young people withdrawing from formal education, its negative influence on them was troubling. I was also involved in assessing the young people's literacy skills and in teaching the literacy programme. At times, the poor standards they presented belied their natural intelligence. Many exhibited good cognitive ability. So why were they leaving school and why were their literacy skills so poor? The low level of qualifications available within the Vocational Education

and Training setting, coupled with what I saw as limited future prospects for young people, provoked me into pursuing further study. I realised that I needed a theoretical basis for my concerns and I was ready for an intellectual and professional challenge. I set out to find a programme that would both teach me and make academic demands of me, rather than a straight PhD where I might not have the opportunity to be part of a larger professional/ practitioner community with whom I could debate issues and learn about new thinking and theories in education. When I applied for the course, I had not been involved in academic discourse for some time and I had burrowed away on my own in my professional work setting. I had not worked out what area of research I would undertake. I had an interest in looking at the impact of arts-based projects on early school leavers, but this was quite a vague notion. On reflection I now know that what I was really interested in looking at was what works with and for early school leavers, what inspires them, and to what types of curricula and experiences do they respond? This understanding developed as the taught courses progressed.

In undertaking the EdD, I did not commence with a set of significant targets to meet nor did I want to change career direction. Rather, I wanted to become more theoretically grounded and find a discourse for my current area of work. I was also ready to be stretched in terms of developing criticality in my thinking and in my academic knowledge. Not having access to an academic community in my work, I was conscious that I needed stimulation. As I was funding the course myself, it was imperative that the course have practical and personal outcomes, for my work but also for me in developing my awareness and skills in an area to which I had committed a lot of time, energy and passion.

The taught courses

The taught elements of the programme initially drew me to the EdD and were fundamental to developing my skills in both research and writing at doctoral level. I had very limited research experience since completing my M Ed some years before

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and online research and other aspects of theoretical foundations were quite new to me. The first two assignments were an exercise in provoking my thinking and structuring a piece of work at doctoral level, and afforded me the opportunity to examine my professional work setting from an objective standpoint. These assignments also laid the foundations for the challenges which lay ahead as the course progressed. The third and fourth assignments were most useful in honing my skills and in developing questions that were relevant to me in my professional work. I noted particularly throughout this period the challenges presented by course tutors who encouraged me to refine the skills required for a significant body of work. It was difficult to balance marrying the academic and intellectual developments which required attention and remembering that I had taken on the programme to improve my professional practice. Academic discourse has a language of its own and it took time to transfer this back to the training centre and the young people.

During this time, there were several youth suicides in the centre where I work and at times during the last two assignments I found it hard to focus on the content of essays and make sense of the academic discourse which seemed distant from the real world in which I was practicing. This was a feature of my professional work for the next two years, when youth suicide seemed to become an epidemic in Irish society. During my time on the EdD programme, seven young people with whom I had professional contact took their own lives. I raise this only to illustrate how complex this area of education can be.

By the end of the taught courses, my analytical and critical thinking skills had improved but I was unsure of what main area of research I wanted to concentrate on. A major area of learning for me was the range and variety of theoretical perspectives and the lenses through which these perspectives can be viewed and argued. I reflected during this period and out of this reflection and in discussion with my supervisor came the genesis of the Institution Focused Study and the final thesis. I was preparing to examine my professional practice from a critical perspective and despite being unclear about how I would design this, I was very

excited by the idea. My academic understandings and the vocabulary associated with these also improved during this phase and this reflected itself in my professional work. I had a clearer understanding of a range of research methods and what strategies would be appropriate for my own research interests. I also mastered the discipline necessary to meet course deadlines and balance the demands of work and the EdD.

The institution-focused study

By the time I began the IFS study, I had a piece of research in mind, one which interested me and which I knew would benefit the literacy project in which much of my work was based and, more broadly, my professional role as a member of the Youth Service management team. I developed an idea that would involve the learners who used the Service in an appraisal of what we were doing. I had been conscious for some time that the project needed to be evaluated, as both its practices and its methods had been in use for many years. Habits had undoubtedly built up over time and I wished to scrutinise these in a purposeful and structured manner. I considered that this account would be meaningless without the involvement of the key stakeholders, the young people, and so I would incorporate their perspective, and that of the teachers, as core to the research design.

I embarked on the IFS as stage one of an action research cycle, and engaged in a qualitative study underpinned by the learning theory of constructivism, models of literacy and a literature which explored the causes of and the discourse on early school leaving. I designed the study and established a series of focus groups with young people and 1-1 interviews with teachers on the project, with the aim of critically analysing the experiences of all the participants. This was a challenging piece of work as its scale was broader and more academically demanding than the taught courses. I was engaging with the literature and with critique of theories in the field. In effect, I was being challenged to find and express my own voice as an experienced practitioner and, at the same time, to position this within a developed

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critical understanding of academic theory, at doctoral level. To assemble this piece of research into a coherent argument with a supporting and well thought out theoretical framework against the backdrop of severe budget cuts and general uncertainty regarding the future of my work created its own tensions. However, by the end of the IFS I emerged as a more competent researcher, having gained confidence from the reading and analysis with which I had engaged. It is worth noting here that, despite the leap in academic rigour required at this stage, I was encouraged that my IFS outcomes were leading to a solid research proposal for the action research study, the final thesis.

The thesis

The experience of doing the thesis has been one of the most onerous tasks I have ever undertaken and has not been a straightforward journey. Writing up a coherent argument at this level does not occur in a vacuum. I found that data swirled around in my head at night and ideas popped up and lingered while I read endless academic papers which were both enriching and intellectually demanding. If anything, the work became harder as the thesis progressed. Juggling serious work and budgetary issues in the last eighteen months of the project meant that I was distracted at times from entering fully into the doctoral process and enjoying an experience I had challenged myself to complete. It was often difficult to make sense of complex theory and to develop and confidently present my own views of the research in an area in which I had extensive experience as a practitioner. Yet with disciplined supervision I found that despite the challenge of the study, I was developing my own authoritative argument. In the final months, I noted that somehow the six years were coming together for me, and from feeling out of my depth in the very early stages, I have emerged as a far more critical thinker and capable researcher. I have a strong theoretical foundation for my work and am a more articulate and effective practitioner. Finally, the EdD has been instrumental in affirming my commitment to developing better opportunities for early school leavers

and I look forward, with confidence, to making future contributions to this area of education.

Glossary

AR	Action Research
CTC	Community Training Centre
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DTEE	Department of Trade Enterprise and Employment
ESL	Early School Leaver
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
EU	European Union
EWA	Education and Welfare Act
EWB	Education and Welfare Board
FAS	Vocational Training Organisation in Ireland, meaning 'to grow'
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IFS	Institution Focused Study
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
IT	Information Technology
JC	Junior Certificate
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
NEET	Not in Education, Training or Employment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service, Ireland
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Development
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework, UK
QQI	Quality and Qualifications, Ireland
SEN	Special Education Needs
TGW	Thematic Working Group
UK	United Kingdom
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YP	Young People
YS	Youth Service

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Questions

This thesis is about early school leavers (ESLs) attending a literacy programme in a youth service (YS) setting in rural Ireland. Using an action research (AR) design, the study explores what occurred when eight school leavers were offered the opportunity to have greater involvement in their learning, through participation in a more challenging literacy programme than they had taken on before, and in which constructivist teaching methods were used.

Section 1.1 of this chapter outlines some definitions of early school leaving and the various government attempts at reducing its incidence across the European Union (EU). It also offers an account of the crisis in youth unemployment since the global economic recession in 2007. The established link between poor literacy skills and youth unemployment is also discussed and literacy provision for the ESL in Ireland is described.

Section 1.2 describes the setting and the professional context in which the study took place and presents definitions and understandings of literacy and learner involvement as applied in the thesis.

Section 1.3 outlines the research problem and the questions deriving from this, which are the focus of the work.

1.1 Background to the study

Definitions of early school leaving

What is meant by the term 'early school leaving'? Many international definitions describe it as the non-completion of compulsory secondary education. According to the Thematic Working Group (TWG) in the EU:

> early school leaving can be defined as a failure to complete upper
> secondary school, a failure to complete compulsory schooling or a

failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates (European Commission, 2013c, p.3).

In Ireland, the legal definition of an ESL is specified by the definition in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000:

non participation in school before a young person reaches age 16 or before completing three years post-primary education, or whichever is later (Government of Ireland, 2000).

Reducing early school leaving in the EU

Following the global financial crisis of 2007, the issue of early school leaving has become one of growing concern to governments, not only in Europe but across the developed world. The considerable personal, social and economic consequences associated with non-school completion are experienced in individual lives, in social cohesion and in economic competitiveness (Dale, 2010). Efforts to reduce the rate of incidence are now on both political and education agendas. The current EU education strategy aims to reduce rates to 10% by 2020 (GHK Consulting et al., 2011). Some success has been achieved in this regard. For example, recent studies report that rates across Europe have decreased from 17.6% in 2000 to 14.1% in 2010 and to 13.5% in 2011 (European Commission, 2012). While this indicates that the efforts of member states are beginning to take effect, rates vary across the EU, particularly since the global recession, and so the average figures are a little misleading. For instance, rates of early school leaving are particularly high in Malta (33.5%), Spain (26.5%) and Portugal (23.2%), and yet the share of ESLs in the EU now stands at an average of 12.8% (European Commission, 2013b). In Ireland, where this study is set, rates of early school leaving have remained relatively stable between 13% and 10% over the last ten years, (13% in 2006 to 11% in 2011; DES, 2011). This is a result of investment in interventions such as the Schools Completion Project (1999), the Home School Liaison Project (1990) and the establishment of the National Education and Welfare Board (2002). However,

annual numbers of ESLs remain relatively high. It is estimated that 9,000 YP out of an average of 55,000 leave school annually without completing the upper secondary exam, the Leaving Certificate (LC), equivalent to the A-level exam in the UK (DES, 2011).

ESLs and youth unemployment

The economic collapse has caused a sharp increase in youth unemployment. Figures from the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) indicate that youth unemployment rose from 7.3% in the OECD area in 2000 to 17.1% in March 2012 (OECD, 2012), illustrating the radical shift in unemployment before and after the economic crisis across all countries monitored by the OECD (European Commission, 2006; Eurostat Press Office, 2009; OECD, 2012). For example, Spain, Greece, Italy and Ireland all report a twofold increase in youth unemployment in the timescale between 2007 and 2012, while across Europe the rate of youth unemployment currently stands at 24% (Eurostat Press Office, 2013). In Ireland, where this study is set, the recent OECD preliminary review of Ireland's Action Plan for Jobs (OECD, 2014) cautions that Ireland had the fifth highest registered increase in YP in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) category (3.7 percentage points) since the beginning of the global economic crisis, after Estonia, Greece, Spain and Italy. The report also highlights the social and economic effects of poor qualifications and long term unemployment on YP and encourages the Irish government to take action for ESLs as follows:

> Where youth have experienced long periods of being out of work
> and out of school, they risk becoming permanently disconnected
> from the labour force and marginalised, potentially compromising
> employment and long-term career prospects. This underlines the
> importance and urgency of actions to encourage young people to
> acquire qualifications and experience sought after by employers,

and to reduce the number of early school leavers, as central elements of the Action Plan for Jobs (OECD, 2014, p.6).

In light of this current unemployment crisis, the unqualified ESL is severely disadvantaged.

Poor basic skills and the consequences for the ESL

If ESLs are to attain qualifications then clearly a good command of literacy skills is essential: the ability to read, write, speak, listen and think critically. Many ESLs leave school before acquiring these skills. Clear evidence of an associated link between early school leaving and poor literacy skills is found across the literature, the consequences of which are long term unemployment and its related social and economic implications (Bynner, 2004; Morgan, Hickey and Kellaghan, 1997; Parsons and Bynner, 1999). The definition of literacy used in the study is discussed in 1.2.

There are also civic and social correlates with early school leaving and poor literacy skills. Levels of literacy are linked to indicators of social inclusion such as civic, social and economic participation. Consequently, many nation states are working to ensure that levels of literacy rise in both child and adult populations (Bearne and Marsh, 2007). Research also shows that limited literacy skills can contribute to poor decision making abilities and in some cases have been related to involvement in petty crime and addictive behaviour. For example, an analysis of the 1970 Birth Cohort Study (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 1970)[1] documents that poor basic skills predict repeated offending (Clarke and Dugdale, 2008; Parsons, 2002).

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[1] *The 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) is a continuing multi-disciplinary longitudinal survey monitoring the development of babies born in the UK in one particular week in April 1970.*

Literacy provision for ESLs in Ireland

In Ireland, literacy provision for ESLs is part of the Youthreach (YR)curriculum, which is the two-year vocational and education training programme (VET), provided as a post school option for ESLs. YR is jointly delivered by two government departments: the DES and the Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment (DTEE). Training takes place at either YR centres (DES) or Community Training Centres (CTCs through Foras Aiseanna Saothair (FAS)). Literacy tuition (leading to certification in Communications) is part of this YR programme. The YR curriculum is largely vocational in nature and is prescribed by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, now incorporated under the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). ESLs are encouraged to work towards completing a General Education Certificate (GEC) at Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (see Appendix A).This is awarded when a YP completes eight individual modules, three of which are compulsory: Communications, Maths and Preparation for Work. Other subjects include woodwork, baking, metalwork, art, hairdressing and restaurant skills. The customary starting point for ESLs is at Level 3, on the NFQ: this is seen as similar to, but not the equivalent of, the DES Junior Certificate (JC) exam. (Levels 1 and 2 on the NFQ are designed as basic modules for those with very poor literacy skills). In comparing the UK and Irish awards systems, a Level 3 in Ireland corresponds to Level 1 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in the UK (Ofqual, 2013; see Appendix B).

As outlined, YP attending YR or a CTC take Communications at Level 3 on the NFQ, as part of the GEC. The literacy requirements of the Communications module are, according to the European Qualifications Framework comparison tables, equal to the UK GCSE Grades D to G and the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 1 (European Commission, 2013a). Tasks range from

carrying out a set of instructions, such as preparing a flow chart on how to boil a kettle, through basic map reading, to reading labels and timetables; in other words, it focuses on skills required to manage our daily lives. While the module offers a variety of reading with comprehension texts that require basic inductive and deductive skills and some free writing such as a postcard, there is limited scope for developing critical thinking to increase reading and comprehension skills (see Appendix C).

1.2 Setting

The literacy project and the CTC

The literacy project under investigation is based within a CTC for ESLs, part of a broader Youth Service (YS) involving mainstream and targeted Youth Work (YW), Youth Information and Youth Training. The CTC prepares ESLs for the Level 3 GEC certificate. Subjects offered depend on staff skills and scheduling and so module options available to the YP are limited. This CTC offers Metalwork, Woodwork, Catering, Personal Development, Numeracy, Information Technology, Communications, Art and Life Skills. Each learner has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) as part of his or her training programme. There is an emphasis on personal development and counselling and ancillary support services are available to the ESL, through professional staff in the YS or through external agencies. The CTC is based in the YSs main building, which also houses YW offices, Youth Information and administration services. A more detailed description of the literacy project will be provided later in this section.

The ESLs in the study

The ESLs attending the CTC and the literacy project range in age and background and normally commence training at sixteen years. Most live in housing estates in the local town, which has a population of approximately 25,000 people. Many of the ESLs come from disadvantaged and problematic backgrounds and this tends to affect their general attendance and overall

performance. The perception of these YP in the wider community is generally that of 'a crowd of wasters' or 'troublemakers' who are regarded as badly behaved, who cause trouble on the streets and are not generally fit for school or exams. Schools in the community tend to see the CTC as a last port of call for YP with whom they cannot deal and many referrals come from them when other avenues have been exhausted and when they are about to exclude the learner.

The eight YP who started out in the study had all left formal schooling in the previous three years without completing upper secondary examinations. Their average age was 17.5 years and they included six Irish nationals, two being members of the Travelling Community and two English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners from the Czech Republic; two females and six males. While reasons for leaving school varied, the majority of them reported a dislike of school and problems with teachers. All had successfully completed Level 3 Communications.

The literacy project

The literacy project has been in operation since 1988 and provides all Communications teaching and necessary literacy support to the YP who attend the CTC. I have worked in this area of education from that time. Funding is provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and is allocated to the YS under an initiative known as Special Projects for Youth-Disadvantaged Literacy (SPY).It is funded separately from the CTC and is therefore subject to DCYA regulations rather than DTEE. This allows for some independence in how literacy is approached and defined. The project is staffed by myself as full-time manager and two part-time teaching staff, one, a teacher and colleague on the research project to whom I will refer as Sinead. YP take literacy classes as part of their Communications certificate for the GEC. The literacy project aims to provide tuition and support to ESLs and deliver GEC Communications through curricula which are both interesting and relevant to the ESLs.

Definition of literacy

The definition of literacy used in the study is based on and drawn from two sources and two perspectives: literacy as skill (concrete skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening), drawn from The Irish National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and YP 2011-2020 (DES, 2011) and literacy as substance (what being literate includes), drawn from Hurry et al.'s description of what the substance of literacy should embrace (Hurry et al., 2010). The first source defines literacy as inclusive of the capacity

> to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication, including spoken language, written text, broadcast media and digital media (DES, 2011, p.7).

The second source goes a step beyond the DES definition and provides thoughtful and inspiring expectations of ESLs capacity to engage with literacy and learning:

> By substance we mean what you get out of being literate: reading a novel, a play, a poem which moves you; reading about travel in China or who said what about weapons of mass destruction or how to change a tyre. It enables us to communicate ideas, instructions, anger, despair, joy. These are the powerful reasons why being literate is so enriching. (Hurry et al., 2010, p.16).

The theoretical approach of the project is based on the view of literacy as social practice and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

There are two main strands of provision in the literacy project:

i)   literacy tuition leading to certification in Communications Level 3 on the NFQ.

ii)   literacy support work for struggling readers or those presenting with dyslexia, auditory and visual processing problems or those needing a boost to their literacy skills.

There are three staff involved in the programme[2]:

i)   Myself, as programme manager with responsibility for programme design, reading assessments and reports on all entrants to the centre. This involves an in depth interview with each learner on his or her educational and life history (family structure, health issues, interests, experiences of school, qualifications, self-assessment of literacy skills, any juvenile offences or addiction issues) and his or her reasons for attending the centre. Written reports which include assessment results and programme recommendations are prepared for CTC staff and contribute to the ESLs Individual Learning Plan. In this study, I teach three hours per week.

ii)   Sinéad, the Communications teacher and fellow teacher on the study, who teaches 12 hours per week and who has worked in the literacy project for ten years. She prepares YP for certified Communications programmes at Levels 3 and 4 on the qualifications framework.

iii)   Mary, literacy support teacher who works for 11 hours per week, has worked in the literacy project for five years, and provides support in one to one and in small groups in preparation for Level 3, with YP who are struggling with reading, auditory processing, or any expressive language difficulties.

The literacy project has an average annual intake of 50 YP, and operates according to the CTC enrolment dates, September and May. There is also an open door policy, as the CTC manager is regularly contacted regarding individual YP in crisis who need to be placed in a secure training environment. Normally these are court, probation or health service referrals. The literacy project is open

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[2] All names and places in the study have been changed.

three days per week, from 9.15 am to 4.00 pm. YP receive tuition twice weekly and sessions last from 45 minutes to an hour. Teaching methods are mainly didactic with only limited learner involvement. The project also works with a range of staff and learners in various other projects where YS staff request advice on literacy issues or support for individual YP.

Definition of learner involvement

It is useful to establish a working definition of what greater learner involvement implies, within the context of the thesis. My original interpretation of 'greater learner involvement' was based on constructivist principles, in which the learner is central to the learning process and is an active agent in his/her learning experience (Bruner, 1960; Duffy and Cunningham, 1996; Vrasidas, 2000). Knowledge is constructed by the learner rather than acquired and the role of the teacher is that of support and guide. As the study progressed, this constructivist position did not sufficiently encompass my idea of greater learner involvement for the ESL, whose experiences of education were largely negative and disempowering. It became clear to me that learner involvement would be more effective and meaningful for the learners if strategies which directly appealed to the YPs sense of ownership and control of their learning were employed. This included granting some decision making powers so that YP had a role in deciding aspects of their learning, how work was corrected and structured, the type of learning environment and agreed understandings of how they would work together in the literacy setting. Consequently, the definition of greater learner involvement included the ESLs in more than a constructivist learning experience. Chapter 3 offers a more detailed description of learner involvement.

1.3 Research problem

The model of teaching in the literacy project has been in operation for over 20 years. As project manager, I am concerned that how and what we teach is, in effect, similar to the autonomous model of literacy (Ogbu, 1990; Street, 2005, 2006)

which works from the assumption that literacy in itself-autonomously-will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. Introducing literacy to poor 'illiterate' people, villages, urban youth etc, will have the effects of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their 'illiteracy' in the first place (Street, 2005,p.1).

and that we might inadvertently limit the development of both the literacy skills and learning experiences of the ESLs. According to Street, this model implies that being in possession of literacy skills automatically provides opportunities in life, despite the presence of other social or economic challenges. However, a model of literacy which does not consider the impact of social and economic inequalities is inappropriate for and is likely to have failed the ESL.

Furthermore, the autonomous model, while it has implications for pedagogy, is not in itself a pedagogical model. It is a skills-based approach to literacy, autonomous from the learner's personal experiences and one which is associated with a narrow, knowledge transmission approach to education, at both school and higher levels (Lillis, 2001). I wished to explore how the project staff might embrace a more social model of literacy than the autonomous model. There are, however, certain challenges for the researcher/teacher in embracing a more social model. The ESLs have been taught in a particular way, largely rooted in the autonomous model. Pragmatics suggest that the autonomous model is embedded in the curriculum and expected by the students. Striking a balance between the pragmatics of teaching and the delivery of a more social model of literacy, using constructivist teaching methods, was a challenge for teachers, perhaps because both teachers and YP were being asked to engage in an approach which required them to be active participants and not passive instruments, in their learning.

I began, in 2009 as Stage One of a Four Stage Action Research cycle (AR), my Institution Focused Study (IFS), to examine critically both the methods and curricula used in the project to establish whether these met the needs of the YP who received literacy tuition. AR is a reflective process that allows practitioners to address concerns that are closest to them and over which they can 'exhibit some influence and make change' (Ferrance, 2005, Introduction). AR design will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. In my early teaching career, I had a keen interest in the learning theory of constructivism and felt the literacy programme would benefit from enabling more active learner involvement, thus leading to a more interesting and involved experience for the ESL. The key findings from the IFS indicated that:

i)   there were YP attending the project who would like more challenging
        work as part of their programme and
ii)   the YP felt that they had little or no influence over their own learning.

I was also aware from my experiences as interviewer and teacher that many ESLs felt disenfranchised and alienated by their previous learning experiences in school and I did not wish to replicate this experience.

I have found over the years that, despite the ESLs' complex backgrounds, many of the learners are of average cognitive ability and are interested in making progress.

It is against this background and following on from the IFS that I sought to carry out Stages Two (implementation phase), Three (monitoring and evaluation) and Four (reflection and recommendations) of the AR cycle, in order to change and then evaluate the approaches used in the current literacy project. My concerns were two-fold:

i)   Is what is being taught relevant to the YP and does it address their literacy needs?

ii)   Could the literacy project offer more challenge to the ESLs beyond that which it is currently providing?

Stages of the AR design

I chose to use an AR design in the study as I was aware that the four stage cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring/evaluation and reflection would be a highly appropriate and practical way to investigate the concerns outlined above. The timeline of the AR Cycle took place between 2009 (IFS) and 2012. The final writing up of the study took place from August 2013 to May 2014. The four stages are outlined below.

Stage One: IFS, planning stage of Cycle One, carried out from 2009 into 2010.

Stage Two: I conducted Stage Two of the AR cycle between September 2010 and May 2011.This implementation stage involved developing and implementing a new approach to a current literacy programme: teaching a higher level Communications module (Level 4) to a group of eight ESLs while applying the constructivist approaches of teacher as coach, of generative learning, and of self-directed learning to the process. The programme was discussed and agreed beforehand with the CTC manager who was very much in favour of the introduction of a higher level Communications module. There were two main challenges in this implementation stage. First, the literacy project and the CTC had never taught this higher level Communications module. Up to this point, YP exited the training programme with a Communications certificate at the lower level (Level 3) on the NFQ, which was the highest level of training available to them. Second, in offering this higher level challenge, we wanted to make sure the ESLs experienced success and enjoyment and achieved the qualification. It is

important to note that as teachers, we were bound by aspects of the curriculum, despite being concerned about its relevance and interest to the YP. We were also bound by certification rules and general CTC timetables.

Stage Three: This was carried out from June 2011 through 2012 and early 2013. In this stage, I focused on the monitoring and evaluation of the intervention with particular reference to the effects of the intervention on both YP and staff. This stage included presenting the Communications portfolios for examination, carrying out post-study interviews with YP and staff and reading and preparing the data for interpretation and analysis.

Stage Four: This was carried out from August 2013 to May 2014 and is a reflection on the previous stages in the study, including learning from the outcomes, writing up the study, and making recommendations for future practice.

The aim of the study was the development of a literacy programme for the ESL which maximises learner involvement and literacy acquisition. I was investigating the impact of a new pedagogical approach to a current literacy programme and what effects there are when we involve the learner in shaping his or her learning. This leads us directly to the objectives and research questions of this thesis.

The objectives of the study were:

Objective 1: To develop and implement a new approach to a current literacy programme, documenting the process of development and implementation.

Objective 2: To evaluate the effectiveness of the new programme with particular reference to the impact on literacy levels, learner involvement and staff participation.

Objective 3: To discuss the effects of the intervention, suggest changes and make recommendations for future practice.

The research questions are as follows:

i)   What are the effects on ESLs' literacy development when they have greater involvement in the learning process?

ii)   What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of ESLs when they have greater involvement in the learning process?

iii)   What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when learners have greater involvement in the learning process?

iv)   What are the effects of external circumstances on the education of ESLs'?

Constraints of the study

The constraints of a study in this type of setting, particularly on a local level, must be taken into account. The literacy project under examination is part of a wider training programme and is based in a YS building. The building is not purpose built and many of the teaching rooms are small. At any one time, there are eight module options being taught as part of the GEC training. Demands from other areas, shifting timetables, staff absenteeism, ESL absenteeism, individual circumstances or crises which arise regularly, are all part of the daily training centre experience and all affect the individuals ESLs' progress. This is the reality of working in the field. There are also some challenging contextual issues in the wider vocational training setting which compromise developments. These pertain to policy issues in Ireland and examples include changes to the certification process, pressure on staff to increase the number of ESLs who achieve certificates and constantly changing module requirements in all areas of the curriculum.

In carrying out this AR study, I felt it was important to see if the ideas and interventions have effect within this reality.

This chapter has examined the background to the study, referring to trends in early school leaving and the significant increase in youth unemployment across the EU. This situation particularly affects ESLs without qualifications and with poor literacy skills, the majority of whom have very limited representation or involvement in their learning or in deciding what might be relevant to them. The definitions in use in the study have been described, as has the background to the literacy project. The research questions facilitate a practical way of investigating how these ESLs might have greater involvement in their learning, in the literacy setting.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 provides the background to the study and presents the context for the research problem. Chapter 2 discusses the current literature on early school leaving, with particular reference to (i) the causes of early school leaving and the current discourse which links early school leaving to structural inequalities in society, (ii) second chance provision for ESLs, (iii) the standards debate in vocational education and training (VET), and finally, (iv) some theories of learning and literacy which contribute to our understanding of the ESL. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methodological approach used in the study (AR) and of my theoretical perspective, which is constructivism. Data collection and analysis are described, as are ethical considerations and my position as an insider researcher. Chapter 4 provides an account of the process of analysis used in the study, which is presented in thematic form, and Chapter 5 presents and interprets the key findings from the data. In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I discuss the findings from the research questions, the contribution of the study to knowledge and some insights into the relevance of the research for professionals involved in ESL education. I also make some recommendations for future work in this area. The thesis concludes with some final reflections on the study.

Chapter 2: Review of the literature and theoretical framework

Studies on early school leaving have examined the complexities in the field and the significant challenges involved in providing a coherent and effective response to ESLs. In this chapter, I discuss the broader academic context relevant to the issues surrounding early school leaving and to educational provision for ESLs. I begin in Section 2.1 with an exploration of the discourse on the causes of early school leaving, moving from perspectives which regard the individual ESL as the source of the problem to broader multidimensional views which have their origins in structural inequalities across societies. The role of the school is also discussed. I address the nature and characteristics of the ESL, how these YP tend to be perceived and some common factors working amongst them. Responses to second chance provision are largely based in the VET area and these are discussed in Section 2.2. I describe a range of VET strategies designed to combat early school leaving and I address some limitations of VET provision for the ESL. Section 2.3 follows with a critique of the recent standards debate in VET in the UK and I argue whether sufficient challenge is offered to the ESL who wants to receive VET. In Section 2.4, I explore theories of learning to attempt to provide an alternative pedagogy to the autonomous model of literacy for ESLs. My theoretical perspective draws on the principles of constructivist teaching (teacher as coach, generative learning, self-directed learning) and on other theoretical perspectives which informed the study as it developed. I examine the particular theories of self-determination and motivation in literacy learning and illustrate how these theories might provide a framework for developing our understandings of ESLs' requirements, when they return to education.

Introduction and context

I begin this review by contextualizing the literature available on the issue of early school leaving. Central to the thesis is the experience of the ESLs themselves in returning to second chance education. However, literature that reflects ESLs'

individual stories or perspectives is scarce. Studies indicate a fragmented approach to ESL education and suggest that, in addressing the issue, priority is given to implementing individual measures rather than comprehensive policies which might create effective and long term change. Furthermore, there is a limited amount of longitudinal studies on early school leaving and its effects over time. A critical review of the literature on school dropout highlights the limitations of current approaches and states that

> the greater part of the existing literature has described only one or
> some dropout determinants, has not provided an overview of, or
> clear connections to other dropout determinants, and has only to a
> limited extent been informative about studies on dropout prevention
> strategies (De Witte et al., 2013, p.15).

This gap in the literature perhaps can be explained by the perplexing nature of the problem, which is reflected in both policy and practitioner approaches to the issue, over the last quarter of a century.

Longitudinal studies, in particular, can provide concrete evidence-based results and recommendations for future practice, which I thought might contribute to and inform the study. However, I found that most of the longitudinal studies did not focus on ESLs, but instead focused on the YPs' experiences during and after their entry to secondary education, including the completion/transition stages of secondary school and subsequent entry into the labour market, including VET. The papers are mainly large-scale quantitative studies with an average of 12 to 15,000 YP aged between 13 and 18 years surveyed annually, in person or by telephone (Marks and Fleming, 1999). Examples include the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth, 1995 to 2009, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, US, 2004, the UK Next Steps, 2004 study and the Post Primary Longitudinal Study in Ireland (McCoy et al., 2014). These studies had a similar focus and scale (15,000 YP approximately) and methods included both surveys and face to face interviewing with YP and in the case of Next Steps, with YPs parents. While a

close up examination of these studies informed the thesis in terms of their scale and attention to detail regarding YP's activities, interests and entry to the labour market, I was struck by the absence of the YPs' perspective on issues pertaining to early school leaving.

A further constraint of these studies is the fact that few of them begin at an early stage in the YPs' academic life, therefore limiting what we can learn from previous performance. Furthermore, the studies rely on interview and/or survey data, with little or no information from other sources, such as observation, on-going learner diaries or learner involvement. Few studies include ESLs' perspective on VET and the opportunities and challenges it provides.

Against this backdrop, my study provides professional insights into a new approach in ESL education, one which gives greater learner involvement to participants and which questions the present state of affairs within the VET setting, in particular the standard of qualifications and the level of cognitive challenge offered to these YP.

2.1 Multidimensional causes of early school leaving

Perspectives on early school leaving

The literature on early school leaving affords a range of theoretical perspectives which attempt to explain how early school leaving occurs and a plethora of factual and informative reports on the social, emotional and economic costs associated with early school leaving. These perspectives have implications for how ESLs are viewed by educators and policy makers and how responses to the issue are framed. In many instances, these YP are seen as troublemakers or victims of inequality, social misfits who instill fear, dropouts or failures. Depending on the perspective taken, positive outcomes for the ESL may or may not be assured. Perspective is critically important in this debate.

General deviance theory, for example, places an emphasis on involvement in anti-social behaviour and drug or alcohol use as critical correlates of school failure (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000) while family socialisation theory posits that the ESL's school performance is affected by elements of the home environment such as divorce, family conflict and family bereavement (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Other theories focus on economic or cultural factors while some approaches place the source of the problem with either the learner or the school. School disengagement is also attributed to external circumstances outside the remit of education, such as poverty, social and economic circumstances or family breakdown (NESSE, 2010).

Social and economic factors influencing early school leaving

A detailed look at the literature illustrates the complexity of the factors which cause YP to finish their education prematurely. A combination of poor socio-economic background, long- and short-term parental unemployment, poverty, living in areas of deprivation, parental education levels (in particular those of the mother), difficult family circumstances such as violence or substance abuse in the home and limited literacy and numeracy skills are all associated with early school leaving (Alexander et al., 1993; 1997; 2001; Ferguson et al, 2005; Lally, 2012). Stokes' 2003 study established links between socioeconomic disadvantage and the preponderance of family difficulties, again, which impact on remaining in school or opting out (Stokes, 2003).

It is clear that the presence of several disadvantages occurring together increases the likelihood that some YP will not finish school. The incentive to remain on, to remain interested and even ambitious dwindles against the backdrop of living in poverty, in crowded conditions and in large communities lacking the practical infrastructures necessary to foster social inclusion. Furthermore, high unemployment rates and domestic issues also create uncertainty and YP are heavily challenged, often thrown into adult roles such as

minding younger siblings, dealing with financial worries or with parents who misuse drugs.

The negative effects on school completion and future employment prospects is evidenced by Barnes et al.'s study on intergenerational transmission of worklessness (2012). Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), the study investigated families who had teenaged children between 2004 and 2009 to determine if parental worklessness affects YP making the transition from school to work and to identify any intergenerational link between parental worklessness and the YP's likelihood of becoming an ESL. Findings showed that YP living in homes where unemployment is common (both long and temporary unemployment) are more likely to be NEET (Barnes et al., 2012).

More alarming however, is the evidence from the study that

> parental worklessness had a negative impact on YP's chances of employment, if a YP simultaneously faced many other types of socio-economic disadvantage, such as low parental education and being in poverty (Barnes et al., 2012, p.8),

underscoring the effects of the presence of multiple risk factors on the life trajectory of the ESL.

The lived environment is also a contributory factor in early school leaving. Evidence suggests that housing large numbers of poor families in areas of social and economic deprivation increases the risk of YP not completing secondary education:

> The clustering together of young people from poor families in communities with particular patterns of occupation, employment and unemployment ,of migrant and minority populations, with low community levels of educational achievement, produces a form of class and ethnic ghettoisation with increased risks of and

consequences for ESL (European Group for Research on Equity, 2005).

Cultural and social capital and the link with early school leaving

Apart from social and economic difficulties, ESLs also face barriers of cultural and social capital. Social capital relates to the social relationships and networks which enable the individual to enter and be successful in the dominant society. Access to cultural capital, such as being literate, and in particular using and understanding 'educated' language (Sullivan, 2002) is necessary to negotiate an increasingly complex society. Success at school is also associated with the possession of legitimate knowledge. According to Bourdieu, school success can be attributed to the amount and type of cultural capital inherited or transmitted through the family environment. He argues that a lack of cultural capital transmits and perpetuates social inequalities and that the innate abilities of the individual do not in themselves facilitate success but rather are superseded by the powerful array of competences which the individual must acquire in order to be successful (Bourdieu, 1977). This is a striking example of the impact of structural inequalities.

In addition, supporting literature notes that the presence or absence of cultural capital strongly influences school performance and is arguably a key indicator of success in school and in future life opportunities, affecting YP who do not draw strength from what Brofennbrenner describes as the interaction of micro and macro systems: the systems with which children interact, such as family, peer networks, the community and wider society (Bronfennbrenner, 1986; 1994; 2004). Reporting on prevention and intervention measures in tackling early school leaving in the Netherlands, a recent study found that ESLs with lower levels of cultural capital than their peers, are more likely to leave school early (Traag and van der Welden, 2008). The study, which drew on data from the longitudinal Secondary Education Student Cohort 1989 followed 19,524 students from a random sample of 381 schools who were in first year of secondary school

in 1989 and whose educational career has been followed since then. This is corroborated by the findings from the recent Irish study by the Joint Committee on Education and Skills involving 165 schools and drawing on data from the PISA 2006 study, which revealed that cultural capital is underrepresented in most ESLs' experience, in particular where cultural goods such as books or works of art may be limited, affecting school performance and aspirations (Joint Committee on Education and Skills, 2010). Limited social and cultural capital have clear links to the ESLs' experience of school and can affect how YP derive benefits from their education or prematurely end their relationship with it. These studies illuminate the often overlooked complex interplay among factors that influence early school leaving.

ESLs and school experience

Unsurprisingly, a significant body of research indicates that the school experience of the majority of ESLs is largely negative and is characterized by poor attendance, disruptions in schooling such as moving home or country, truancy, poor educational attainment and difficult relationships with teachers (e.g. Goodwin, 2003; Malone, 2006; Smyth et al., 2004). Other studies report that many YP leave the system because they do not feel school is working for them and record negative school experience as a key factor in their decision to leave (Murray et al., 1997; Natriello, 1984; Smyth et al., 2000; Taylor, 2009). We note from previous studies that this negative experience has been set in motion from the YP's earliest encounters with school and that there is an established link between school experience and academic results.

For example, longitudinal studies which look for predictors of early school leaving, such as those by Alexander and Jimerson, suggest that patterns of academic performance are established early and are strongly influenced by the influencing factors of parental views of education, the school climate, low expectations of teachers and a curriculum which is not relevant to the YP

(Alexander et al., 1993; 1997; 2001; Jimerson et al., 2000; Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002).

Jimerson's study examines the correlates of early school leaving and how, beginning at infancy, there is a proven association between demographic, family, individual and school performance variables and later high school drop out by age 19 (Jimerson et al., 2000).

A particular strength of this study is that it follows these variables throughout the YPs' educational development, from infancy through to secondary or high school, in comparison with other literature which only begins tracking YP at secondary school stage, unlike other research on ESLs.

As noted previously, research which documents school experience from the YP's perspective is scarce. One promising development, however, is the recent longitudinal Irish study, 'No Way Back: The Dynamics of Early School Leaving' (Byrne and Smith, 2010), one of the first studies to incorporate the perspective of the ESL. It is the first mixed methods longitudinal study carried out in Ireland and is unique in how it advances our understanding of ESLs, through detailed longitudinal data on personal and social characteristics of participants *before* they leave school. The study follows 1,000 students in 12 selected schools from post-primary school entry through to completion. Annual questionnaires focus on attitudes to school, school subjects and aspirations for the future while in depth life interviews with 25 ESLs gather detailed accounts and reflections of the YPs' educational and life experiences, reasons for leaving school and their post school plans and pathways. 'No Way Back' deepens our knowledge of ESL perceptions and experiences by concentrating on four aspects of early school leaving: the profile of the ESL, the school organization and process, insights into decision making and post school pathways.

Interviews with these ESLs show that all of them began to struggle academically either in the transition from primary to secondary or from the junior to senior cycle in secondary school. Experience at school in the latter stages was generally

negative and there were issues with teachers such as ESLs feeling unsupported if they found school work difficult and a feeling that teachers who perceived any resistance to learning were generally unhelpful, lost interest in the YP or had low expectations of them. This was reported by several of the 25 ESLs interviewed. According to the study, it was common in the interviews for the YP to feel that teachers did not listen to them. There was also a general experience of being unable to compete at the academic levels required by the school system. ESLs reported dissatisfaction with streaming and many of them were in very disruptive classroom settings. ESLs expressed themselves in a reactive way, becoming unruly or cheeky as a response to the feeling that teachers disliked them or had no interest in them (Byrne and Smith, 2010).

Overall, findings indicate that YP have a lot to tell us about their school experience and that some of what they report suggests that a high quality educational experience is not being offered to all. Additionally, the report highlights the need for a change in approach to ESLs who are presenting with behaviours which suggest they may be struggling with school work or experiencing difficulty. Without some change, unqualified YP continue to face early withdrawal from school. This does not seem equitable.

School climate and composition can influence ESLs

ESLs often feel alienated from school and many have poor relationships with their teachers. The school climate (ethos, spirit and attitude of a school) and culture (set of beliefs and common expectations) (Gruenert, 2008) all play a part in deciding whether YP will remain in education. Arguably, all YP have a right to a welcoming school experience with a convivial atmosphere and a mutually respectful relationship with teachers. Sadly, this is not always the case. According to Smyth and Hattam, the culture of a school has a powerful impact on YP and plays an important role in alienating or welcoming students:

In many respects, school culture is a crucial linkage between the aspirations and experiences of students and the decisions they make to leave school prematurely (Smyth and Hattam, 2002, p. 377).

Furthermore, other studies have found that a positive school culture mitigates the negative impact of the socioeconomic context on academic success while the quality of school climate contributes to academic outcomes as well as the personal development and well-being of pupils (Haahr, Nielsen, Hansen and Jakobsen, 2005; OECD, 2009). Lehr's studies on early school leaving also report the influence of school climate in YPs' accounts of their reasons for leaving school (Lehr, 2004). Other research reveals that the school itself and relationships with teachers, in particular teachers' expectations and support, are important factors which influence the propensity to drop out (Adams and Becker, 1990; Dalton, Gennie and Ingels, 2009; Dynarski and Gleason, 1998; Herbert and Reis, 1999; Schorr 1998; Williams Bost, 2004). It is clear that for some YP, school experience is not one of enjoyment and achievement in learning. They feel neither liked nor encouraged by teachers nor are they included, it would appear, in their learning experience. Is it any wonder, then, that some choose to leave?

Early school leaving and its links to social inequality

Thus far, the literature provides overwhelming evidence that early school leaving is linked to one's place in society and one's experience at school. Studies by Barnes et al. and others note that early school leaving occurs in the presence of complex and multi disadvantages and is linked to social inequalities across all societies (Barnes et al., 2012; Freeney and O'Connell, 2009). In addition, previous studies have clearly established the association between educational achievement, retention rates and the reproduction of social inequality (Greaney and Kellaghan, 1984; Eivers, Ryan and Brinkley, 2000; Smyth and McCoy, 2009;

Stokes 2003). A wider structural examination of the inequalities that cause some YP to leave school is long overdue.

In addressing the issue, Jones argues that social class alone is not responsible for the problems associated with early school leaving and suggests we need to see early school leaving within a 'dynamic model of inequality in youth which can reflect both societal and individual change' (Jones, 2009, p.112). In arguing that structuralist ideas based on social class are not enough to explain or to justify the levels of inequality present for these YP, she suggests that we do not yet have an in depth understanding of the structures of stratification, of which social class is one dimension, and how they 'combine severally or in combination, to structure disadvantage' (Jones, 2009 p.120). In other words, policy makers and educators have no clear understanding of how these inequalities relate to each other and tend to call them factors. This is similar to De Witte et al. (2013), who report that studies on ESLs treat contributory factors as causes that are unrelated to each other, thereby limiting our understanding of and strategic responses to ESLs.

More recently, there appears to be a shift in the debate on what causes early school leaving, to a broader assessment of the changing and different ways we understand the causes of inequalities in youth. This is not before time. Again, turning to Jones:

> Inequalities in youth arise and change because of a wider (and changing) structure of unequal power relations across the wider society. Since it is unlikely that young people would choose to be homeless or poor, it is the role of social scientists to understand how they got to be that way, and inform the policy makers who, with the political will to do so, might develop means of redressing structural disadvantage (Jones, 2009, p.114).

In reviewing vocational qualifications for YP, Atkins also argues that barriers for ESLs are rooted in structural inequalities:

Significant structural, social and economic barriers stand in the way of further educational progression. Associated with the low esteem placed on the occupations and life opportunities they may be able to access, this can only result in the creation of a cohort of young people who are perceived as non-valuable by government, wider society and themselves (Atkins, 2009, p. 29).

Undeniably, ESLs are seriously disadvantaged in the competition for educational credentials or for other opportunities in life. Indeed, we know that the factors which influence early school leaving persist into adult life and contribute to the continued intergenerational transmission of inequality and poverty. For example, research by Smyth and McCoy reveals that more highly educated adults have broader social advantages, including better health status (Smyth and McCoy, 2009), than less well educated adults. Similar studies such as that by Freeney and O'Connell carried out in Ireland with 1,133 JC students from 20 schools and a sub sample of 188 YP from five schools who were in their second last year at secondary school also found that the effects of early school leaving have ongoing implications for the individual's employment prospects, life choices, and social and civic participation across the life trajectory (Freeney and O'Connell, 2009).

2.2 The nature and characteristics of ESLs

Much of our understanding of these individual YP derives from literature which describes both the characteristics of the ESL (Natriello, 1984; Kritikos and Ching, 2005; Kendall and Kinder, 2005; ReStart, 2007) and the influencing risk factors which contribute to early school leaving. Commonly referred to as 'at risk' or 'disaffected' youth, alienated and liable to be troublesome, these labels implicitly confer a negative identity. This approach shifts the focus to the YP themselves, placing them at the root of the problem. Much of the literature tends to regard ESLs as a homogenous group. This is misleading, as my research shows.

2.2.1 Individual factors

What makes an ESL?

ESLs do not constitute a homogenous group. Of course, they have in common their age and the fact that they have left school early. There are, however, certain other identifiable characteristics which suggest some common factors among the ESL population. On average, the majority of ESLs come from a socially disadvantaged background or workless household, are male rather than female, live in areas of economic and social deprivation, come from vulnerable groups such as YP with Special Education Needs (SEN) or disabilities, have parents with low levels of education, come from minority or migrant backgrounds and have few if any qualifications and poor literacy and numeracy skills (Barnes et al., 2012; Eivers, Ryan and Brinkley, 2000; European Group for Research on Equity, 2005; NESSE, 2010). Single mothers also rank highly amongst ESLs (NESSE, 2010).

Gender in the ESL population: Male, female or both?

Numerous studies have found that ESLs are more likely to be male and to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with structural disadvantage (e.g. Hannan and O'Riain, 1993; McCoy, Doyle and Williams, 1998; NESSE, 2010; Stokes, 2003). In the EU, 16.9% of boys are early school leavers compared with 12.7% of girls (Dale, 2010). Existing research and analyses of studies in Ireland reflect the gender pattern in EU studies, and young men are consistently overrepresented in the ESL group (Byrne, McCoy and Watson, 2009; O'Connor, 2007).

Ethnic minorities

Many ESLs come from ethnic minorities and are overrepresented in ESL figures in countries such as England, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). In Ireland, the presence of foreign ethnic minorities is relatively new. A recent OECD report notes that, as there are no data collected on children

by their migrant or language status, it is difficult to assess the rate of ESLs in Ireland (Taguma et al., 2009). Interestingly, however, school principals report that many migrant children are generally well behaved and motivated and achieve at the same rates as their peers (Smyth et al., 2009). This suggests that rates of early school leaving might not be hugely significant within these communities, but it is too early to tell.

In contrast, the rate of early school leaving amongst the indigenous Traveller Community in Ireland is alarmingly high. For example, in Ireland, in 2008 only 50% of the school-going Traveller Community completed the JC exam while only 13% transferred to the Senior Cycle, the final two years of secondary school in Ireland (Lally, 2012). Completion rates are lower for males than females, again mirroring the overall trend of gender imbalance in the ESL population (O'Connor, 2007).

Poor literacy skills and school performance

Various international studies (e.g. Brooks et al., 1997; Marks, 2007; Pienaar, 2006) have established that poor academic performance and limited or poor literacy skills are common among ESLs. Other research has established the link between poor literacy skills and early school leaving (Department of Education and Science, 2005; Eivers, Ryan and Brinkley, 2000; Eivers, Shiel and Shortt, 2004; Marks, 2007).

Levels of parental education

ESLs are likely to come from homes where parental upper secondary or third level education is limited (e.g. Beekhoven and Dekker, 2005).

Special needs

Studies have found that a high proportion of ESLs come from vulnerable backgrounds and have Special Educational Needs (SEN), including physical and mental health problems. Studies in Ireland particularly highlight the relationship

between poor mental health and social exclusion, including low levels of educational attainment (DHC, 2009; NESF, 2009).

The literature reveals that the causes of early school leaving are multi varied and complex and that the effects of leaving are far reaching. To provide a positive educational experience for YP who are managing lives constrained by all these factors requires a different response from educators and policy makers. In the next section, we examine some second chance educational interventions for the ESL.

2.3 VET: Effective interventions for ESLs

In Europe, most second chance provision takes place in schools with specially designed support interventions, in VET centres, or in further education colleges. The main types of interventions are a) specialist transition services, (mainly in France, England and Australia) aimed at managing the transition between school and work, b) specialist vocational transition programmes (for example in Hungary, Austria and Denmark) that deal with the transition from school to work and c) interventions aimed at increasing participation in education and training programmes and which have a financial incentive attached to them, found in Australia, Ireland, UK and Denmark.

A recent case study peer review of seventeen of these interventions[3] identified several examples of good practice from a range of European programmes (Finn, 2007). While the review highlights what are considered examples of good practice, it does not indicate how these were arrived at or what criteria were used to establish their efficacy. Finn does, however, refer the reader to the full report on each intervention and while this is useful, there are limitations within the studies as to how they report the methods used to evaluate the interventions.

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[3] Requested by practitioners in the EU Restart programme.

Bearing in mind that this is a peer review on behalf of practitioners involved in the field, I elected to include it in my review as it includes information and examples of what is deemed by professional judgment to be valuable approaches in ESL education. I do, however, acknowledge the problems of subjectivity associated with such judgments. I briefly outline an intervention from each theme above as examples of recommended effective provisions in working with ESLs.

i)   Specialist transition services

The French programme, Les Classes-Relais, has been identified as having elements which positively influence ESL participation. It is designed for potential ESLs, in particular students who are severely disruptive and with serious behavioural problems. It uses strategies of individualised teaching and youth work support in alternative schools in an attempt to encourage YP to return to mainstream education. It is suggested that YP respond to the high degree of personal attention, the individualised flexible teaching style and the opportunity to gain work experience (Kritikos and Ching, 2005).

A limitation in the review of the programme is the lack of ongoing annual data which could provide information on retention rates as a direct result of the intervention. Furthermore, there are no data on how many students take up work experience and gain employment or numbers of certificates achieved while in Classes-Relais, or any other concrete measures to confirm the efficacy of the programme.

ii)   Specialist vocational transition programmes

Programmes which have received more critical appraisal in the review include the educational priority areas in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands and the Zones d'Education Prioritaire (ZEP) in France. These provide resources to disadvantaged schools and/or immigrant communities. However, according to

Bernardo and Nicaise (2000) and others, the implementation of educational priority policies in the Netherlands and Belgium has had mixed results, with variable effects on student outcomes (Bernardo and Nicaise, 2000; Mulder and van der Werf, 1997). The ZEP programme in France has been found to have no significant effects on student achievement and school completion within the second-level sector (Benabou et al., 2006).

iii)   Programmes aimed at increasing participation in education and training

In the UK, Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) were introduced as a pilot programme in 1999, as an incentive to ESLs to participate in further education or training. This is a means tested weekly payment for YP aged between 16 and 19 years. The scheme was extended nationally in 2004 and the UK government included two additional groups: YP described as NEET and YP in Jobs Without Training (JWT).The programme has been discontinued by the Coalition government, since 2010, although it still continues in Scotland and Wales. Similar schemes exist in the Irish context through the Youthreach (YR) vocational training scheme for 16-21 year olds but while the programme has been evaluated for its content and delivery, there is no evidence to indicate increased participation by YP as a direct result of the payment (Byrne, McCoy, and Watson, 2009). Payments have been significantly reduced since 2010 for all new entrants to YR or a CTC.

Some examples of international provision

Examples of international provision can be found across the USA and in Australia. Both countries have invested significant time and funding in developing interventions for ESLs but, again, there is little critical evaluation available. In the USA, a report to the legislature in the state of Washington notes this lack of critical evidence, stating that:

the available research studies do not give sufficient and clear evidence to compare among promising practices so we cannot quantify among the most promising programmes and practices (Shannon and Blysma, 2005, Executive Summary, p 5).

The report also identifies the lack of evidence-based research in the area of school dropout in the USA and notes that the What Works Clearinghouse, which declared in 2002 that high school dropout prevention was a priority in the work of the organisation, to date, has not completed reviews of high school dropout (Shannon and Blysma, 2005).

In Melbourne, Australia, the Parents as Career Transition Supports (PACTS) programme has gained considerable recognition as a model of good practice with ESLs, in assisting both parents and 'at risk' YP in the transition from school to work. A pilot project from 2002 to 2005, PACTS, delivered workshops to 598 parents in 12 secondary schools and has now been mainstreamed to secondary schools, local learning and employment networks. Using a range of mixed methods, Bedson and Perkins carried out an evaluation which reported that the key success factors of the programme were the provision of small and secure groups for attending parents and the use of trainers who were skilled facilitators. Other success factors included the links maintained with the school, regular telephone contact with parents and modifying workshop sessions on receipt of parent feedback (Bedson and Perkins, 2006). However, in common with most if not all of the research in this area, there were no comparison groups and therefore the possibility of quantitative measurement of success was severely limited. The PACTS programme is a resource intensive programme and requires further research to establish whether or not it is reaching the most disadvantaged YP and parents for which it was intended.

In summary, there is a lack of research into the long term outcomes of most interventions in VET and programmes appear to offer ESLs shelter from the

storm rather than a comprehensive and focussed pathway to further education. Furthermore, appraisals and evaluations of existing programmes lack credible scientific rigour. It appears that research in the area is fragmented, duplicative, and shows the great variety of attempts made to solve the ESL issue. In fact, this is very difficult terrain in which to gather conventional experimental data. Group sizes are small, making sample size an issue and making the delivery of the same intervention over different groups difficult. Attrition rates are high and responses rates are generally low. There is also the question of the extent to which a precise intervention can be designed and implemented, given the heterogeneity of the YP involved.

As well as models of effective provision, the literature on early school leaving enumerates particular *features* which are judged to contribute to good practice.

Features of effective provision

Lehr's review on ESL provision, which examined 45 prevention and intervention programmes, highlights the diversity of interventions available and singles out five of these which provide some evidence of effectiveness in preventing dropout (Lehr et al., 2003). The study selects five interventions, based in the domains of personal/affective, academic, family outreach strategies, interventions addressing school structure and work-related interventions. Examples used random assignment or comparison groups and findings support the notion that there is no single best programme in preventing school dropout. Outcomes used to determine effectiveness included academic/cognitive indicators, physical presence such as enrollment status, psychological indicators, social-behavioural indicators and support for learning. However, in the five examples provided, 71% of the weighting in the five interventions was in the personal/affective domain with only a 49% weighting applied to academics. This suggests that ESLs are not seen as players in academic programmes and that they need emotional support rather than academic challenge.

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Overall, Lehr's review found that almost all of the interventions with evidence of effectiveness had a strong emphasis on engaging YP in school and learning which, according to Lehr, has emerged as a key ingredient of effective dropout prevention (Lehr et al., 2004).Similar features are found in other studies such as Brookes et al., 1997; Curtain, 2001; Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; and Clifford, 2001. Thurlow and Johnson also note related features within prevention and intervention work which include a focus on student engagement and, in particular, creating enthusiasm for school and motivation to learn. In their research on critical considerations in dropout prevention, they note that factors critical to successful interventions include understanding that dropping out is a process, the role of context within the ESL decision to leave school (family, peer, school variables), alterable variables (behaviours, attitudes and family practices that can be changed) and a focus on academic and behavioural engagement (Thurlow and Johnson, 2000).

Similar recommendations are found in the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) review in the UK on Post -16 education and training provision for YP involved in crime. YPs' needs and interests are key in returning to learning, as are flexible approaches to teaching and materials (Brazier, Hurry and Wilson, 2010). According to this review, the key features of effective provision include the following:

- relevant and rewarding programmes directly linked to a qualification pathway;
- support services within the setting where ESLs attend training or education; continuity of and experienced staff;
- flexibility within programme design;
- small group ratios for teaching;
- literacy and numeracy supports and non-threatening environments. (Brazier, Hurry and Wilson, 2010).

Many of these features are built into this research project and will be further described in Chapter 3.

Overall, studies that discuss effective features of ESL education do not mention the need to challenge ESLs or aim to raise their or their teachers' expectations of them. I suggest that raising expectations of YP might go some way to reengaging them in a more confidence inspiring experience, despite gaps in literacy and communication skills. Furthermore, the lack of challenge offered to ESLs is not presented in these studies, despite this having been identified as an important concern in the education of YP not following the conventional academic route. It is to this issue we now turn.

2.4. Raising vocational standards: Some concerns emerging from the literature

According to EU strategy, the goal of VET is to strengthen vocational pathways for ESLs (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2010). Despite ongoing reforms in many EU states, the limited evidence available notes that there are particular negative features associated with VET: ESLs are more frequently in VET than in general education and the structure, image and social status that VET conveys does not attract the general learner. Furthermore, the route in VET is generally of a less academic nature than that available in formal schools. In a move towards creating a more equitable response to ESLs' education, the EU Commission Report suggests that VET programmes need to look at ESLs as individuals and examine their motivations and perspectives when entering VET programmes. While acknowledging the flexibility of the system, it recommends that VET must be high quality and high status, and offer relevant qualifications and extended meaningful work experience to participants (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, 2010).This type of thinking is central to creating change in ESL education and in increasing the challenges offered to the ESL.

Current critiques of VET provision, in particular the Wolf Report in the UK (Wolf, 2011), question the low level of qualifications on offer to ESLs and suggest curricular reform which is more focused on providing YP with standardised quality certification leading to a progressive pathway.

Wolf expresses concern that:

> the staple offer for between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort is a diet of low level vocational qualifications, most of which have little to no labour market value (Wolf, 2011, p.7).

In the UK, little has changed in provision since the 2005 White Paper, which evoked the following response from Hodgson and Spours to the deep seated academic/vocational divide in the UK. They suggest that the White Paper emphasis on GCSEs and A Levels make everything else:

> second best, 'other' qualifications. Vocational education is currently seen as the route for the school–weary and the less able, and the white paper does very little to challenge these assumptions (Hodgson and Spours, 2005).

For example, current levels of qualifications on entering training or education are neither recognized nor respected by employers (Atkins, 2009; Pring et al., 2009; Wolf, 2011). Qualifications at Level 1 in the UK, and its equivalent Level 3 in Ireland are ESLs' starting point on entry to VET. Such levels of qualification fail to enable ESLs to gain employment and reinforce social exclusion. In Ireland, while there is a national framework of qualifications, there has been no recent review of provision for ESLs and in reality the YP do not make any significant progress up the framework.

Studies by Green (1998) and McSkeane (2008) report an emphasis on achieving core competencies at VET level, in both the UK and Ireland. These competencies are not intellectually demanding. This suggests that the literacy requirements in vocational models of learning may not challenge the learner sufficiently and may

concentrate on low level literacy and numeracy skills rather than process or problem solving. Green's findings indicate that this is not the case in mainland Europe and internationally (e.g. Germany, France, Japan) where there is more emphasis on general education and higher thinking skills.

This emphasis on standards and targets has a direct effect on ESL education, pushing it farther into the margins and reinforcing the lack of esteem in which vocational education is held and, by default, its' participants (Armstrong and Mc Vicar, 1999; Atkins, 2009; Hodgson and Spours, 2005). Against this backdrop, it is of critical importance that ESL education provides sufficient cognitive challenge. This suggests a new approach to literacy teaching and an acknowledgement that learner involvement is a prerequisite for developments in ESL education, which this study attempts to introduce.

2.5 Theories of learning in ESL: Constructivism, self-determination and learner motivation in literacy learning

Models of literacy for the ESL

The autonomous model of literacy experienced by the ESL is an institutionally embedded model which has specific expectations and outcomes for the participant (Rockhill, 1994). Seen from this perspective, literacy is associated with school. It is seen as a set of competencies defined by and built into the pedagogic model of learning (Ogbu, 1990; Street, 2006), synonymous with academic performance and the ability to read and write. This model has often not been successful for the ESL and so we must examine new approaches with greater learner involvement, if a return to learning is to be successful. Perhaps *how* we are taught and *how involved* we are in our learning, rather than *what* we are taught, might make a difference to ESLs?

The theoretical approach to literacy in this study and in the project under investigation is underpinned by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and in particular

the view of literacy as social practice (Barton et al., 2000; Street, 1995; Crowther et al., 2006), which asserts that different literacies are associated with different domains of life and that literacy is acquired through specific social interactions and understandings, inferred and mediated by written texts (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). The study is also underpinned by a social view of learning (MacLachlan, 2008; Wrigley,1998), which sees the role of teachers and learners, in contrast to traditional models of teaching, as collaborative and shared and where support is gradually withdrawn from learners so that they can perform tasks independently (Brill et al, 2010).

I argue that the majority of ESLs require a different pedagogical model from school, where tuition and practice are less formal and engagement is foregrounded so that previous negative school experience is not repeated. Programmes and curricula need to challenge the ESL to achieve skills and qualifications tailored to his or her abilities and motivations. Although YP present with literacy issues, many are able to pick up new learning quickly. This is a critical point and must be given more attention by education providers so that ESLs are challenged at higher levels. There is a danger that providers may pitch material at too basic a level, causing ESLs to remain at the lower end of the qualifications scale.

In creating a new pedagogy, how the teacher views the ESL is critical. According to Atkins, educators within the further education setting have contributed to the problem of poor skills by providing a too therapeutic response to ESLs education. Teachers may see YP as victims and may provide levels of support which maintain YP at the lower end of the qualifications scale (Atkins, 2009).

In attempting to respond to the challenges outlined above, I argue that ESL learner involvement is under-researched and under-theorised. Theories are borrowed from other contexts and are applied to the ESL experience rather than having directly evolved from them. My study illustrates this clearly. I first drew on one theoretical framework for stage two, the teaching component of the AR

cycle. As the study evolved, I turned to other learning theories which might assist me in understanding developments in the study. Theoretical frameworks solely based on the study of ESL motivation and experience are lacking. My study highlights a need for further research on ESL learner experience and involvement.

A constructivist approach in the literacy setting

In considering pedagogic approaches for ESLs in the literacy setting, I thought the constructivist approach might offer a way forward, from a cognitive standpoint, in its principles of learning and its concern with how learning happens (Bruner, 1966). Principles of constructivist learning theory provide structure while encouraging the learner to be an active agent in the learning process. This gives voice to the learner, which is in direct contrast to the autonomous model of literacy (Ogbu, 1990; Rockhill, 1994; Street, 2006) in which some YP have experienced failure. The process of development in the constructivist paradigm does not consist of clearly distinct phases, but both context and content are crucial in determining the methods and strategies employed. The role of the teacher is that of partner and coach in learning (Vrasidas, 2000). An emphasis on cognitive processes and the individual's self-reflection skills provide a space in which the gaps in learning can be bridged and the individual can work to his or her potential, and where the teacher takes on the role of coach, rather than director of the learning environment. Although I conclude that much of the constructivist theory has its practice rooted in primary education, thus with a younger age group than the ESL, its principles informed the study and how we worked in the classroom.

Constructivism: A brief overview of theory and practice

Constructivism is generally understood as a theory of learning or meaning making. We make our own understanding of the world from what we already know and our new understandings are based on an interaction between what we

already know and believe and ideas and knowledge with which we come in contact (Resnick, 1989). Generally, within this framework, we find a way of developing meaning through the learning experience while understanding that constructivism itself does not suggest one particular pedagogy (Olsen, 1999). Within the constructivist movement, there are different approaches to how the formation of knowledge is constructed. For example, social constructivism centres on the way in which social forces such as the economy, power and politics all affect the ways in which groups of people form understandings of their world. Psychological constructivism, on the other hand, is related to a developmental learning theory that suggests that individual learners actively construct the meaning around phenomena

Developments in the psychological approach have acknowledged the social aspect of learning which takes place within this psychological context: knowledge creation can take place within a social grouping such as a classroom and equally in formal knowledge building within an expert community (Richardson, 2003).

I draw from the psychological approach to constructivism (Bruner, 1990; Piaget, 1975) and, in particular, teaching strategies drawn from constructivist pedagogy which support the development of autonomy in the learner, within a social setting.

While there are unresolved concerns regarding constructivism as a learning theory and constructivist teaching as a theory or practice (Richardson, 2003), there are characteristics common to both theory and practice which can be described as effective constructivist teaching strategies. For example, many writers agree that central to constructivist thinking are: (i) attention to the individual, (ii) respect for student background and understandings, (iii) provision of opportunities to determine, challenge, change or add to existing knowledge or beliefs and (iv) facilitation of group dialogue that leads to creating and sharing knowledge in a particular subject or area of interest (Barr, 2001; Wood, Nelson and Warfield, 2001).

Specifically within constructivism as pedagogy, I drew on the teaching strategies of teacher as coach (Christie, 2005; Giesen, 2008), generative learning (Wittrock, 1990) and self-directed learning (Simons, 2000). These are discussed below.

Teacher as coach

The role of teacher as coach in constructivist theory requires a particular approach to teaching and a shared collaborative view of learning. This study draws on the guiding principles from constructivists such as Bruner, Honebein, Christie and Giesen, who see constructivism as a process in which the work of the teacher as coach is to adapt the curriculum to address the learners' suppositions, help negotiate goals and objectives, pose problems of emerging relevance, seek and value the learners point of view and provide multiple modes of representations or perspectives on content (Bruner, 1960; Christie, 2005; Giesen, 2008; Honebein, 1996).

Generative learning

Generative learning has been described as the process in which links between old and new knowledge are constructed and personal understanding is developed. Wittrock suggests that generative learning takes place when links are created between the contents of short-term memory and our knowledge base. According to Wittrock:

> The essence of the generative learning model is that the mind or the brain is not a passive consumer of information. Instead, it actively constructs its own interpretations of information and draws inferences from them (Wittrock, 1990, p. 348).

In ESL learning, the break from education and the negative school experience often recounted can create gaps in learning and disconnection from the ability to create these links. In generative learning, the role of the teacher is to prompt or guide YP to lead them to make connections or engage in certain mental activity. The focus of teaching then shifts from 'information supply' to facilitating 'knowledge web construction' (Wittrock, 1990, p. 389).

Self -directed learning

In constructivist pedagogy, the skills of self-directed learning facilitate greater learner involvement in what is learned and in how things are learned. Self-directed learning is conceived as an active constructive form of learning

> in which learners are becoming better and better at designing their
> own learning environments (Simons, 2000, p.3).

In creating greater learner involvement for ESLs, self directed learning theory can contribute to our understanding of how we manage learning. Indeed, according to Revans, while learning is central to the process, the learners themselves determine the goals of learning according to needs arising from their actions, in VET, at work, or elsewhere (Revans, 1982). While this seems aspirational in aim, it can be seen as a positive way in which the ESL can take personal responsibility for learning. For example, self-directed learning principles could be applied directly to specifics in ESL education, such as curriculum, management of the learning environment or career planning.

Limitations of constructivist theory in the study

In constructivist pedagogy, a crucial factor in making progress concerns the level and source of motivation for learning. According to von Glaserfeld (1989a), for the learner to sustain intrinsic motivation, the potential for learning is strongly

dependent on how confident s/he is that s/he can learn. This confidence is related to past mastery of problems, something not generally experienced by the ESL.

The unanticipated findings in my study of the ESLs' emotional responses to the literacy programme, required me to go beyond the constructivist pedagogy for answers. Constructivism, while providing a solid cognitive framework for learning and teaching, is limited in how it can manage emotional reactions and motivational factors particular to the ESL. There is also a particular tension between cognition and emotion, from the purely cognitive 'how the young person learns' approach to how YP might feel about an aspect of learning or what we are attempting to develop regarding learner involvement. This tension pervaded Stage Two of the AR cycle and required new theoretical perspectives. To establish a successful learning environment which promotes greater learner involvement and which manages ESLs individual responses (both practical and emotional), requires a multi-theory approach. This study therefore draws on theories of motivation and of cognition, in particular on the theories of motivation and literacy and on self-determination. These provide some insights into how emotional factors pervade the ESL's ability to embrace new learning. How these theories informed the study is presented below.

Motivation and literacy

In endeavouring to understand the complexities of motivation and its impact on ESLs who are struggling with their literacy skills, I drew on the work of Davey, who states that

> literacy development requires a conscious act of will (Davey, 2006, p.165).

She develops this further by linking this conscious act to motivation, where

each literacy act requires the motivation to act, the motivation to persist in activity, and the motivation to engage in cognitive and affective practices that will result in comprehension (ibid, p.165).

As literacy is a developmental process, the learner must provide continued effort and persistence.

Key to maintaining the ESL on course is the impact of interest on his or her learning. Not only is the relevance of material of critical importance, but the enjoyment factor is also of equal value. The idea that the literacy environment could create a situation where 'even a temporary state of interest has been found to cause deep effortless concentration and enjoyment' should not just be aspirational (Davey, 2006, p. 168). In referring to the interactions of motivational factors in successful reading, Davey reports that autonomy is one of the most powerful affective motivators. This is particularly true of ESLs who often exhibit behaviours which indicate a need to control their situation. The importance of the learning environment is also seen as a significant factor, particularly for disengaged learners, and again the role of the teacher and the development of positive relationships are critical factors in ongoing motivation.

Self-determination theory: a new approach in ESLs' education?

The study demanded an understanding of the motivators which drive ESLs to participate and persist in challenging literacy acts, despite the emotional angst they experience. Within the field of educational research, motivation for and engagement in school are considered important for all students (Stroet, Opdenakker and Minnaert, 2013). These are equally if not more important for the ESL. For this, I turned to the work of Deci and Ryan on self-determination theory (SDT). While we are aware of the influences surrounding early school leaving, our awareness of what might affect ESLs ability and reasoning in persisting in

literacy development is limited. Understanding whether the motivators which sustain ESLs are extrinsic, intrinsic or a mixture of both is important. Davey's work and that of Deci and Ryan (1985) can provide a framework in which the motivators which influence ESLs to pursue a learning goal or to complete a course are more fully understood.

Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that at the core of our intrinsic motivation to learn are the innate needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. These resonate with what is known of the ESL learner, that feelings of incompetence can get in the way of his or her learning, that his or her relationships with teachers and with the purpose of learning facilitates disengagement and that lack of autonomy puts up barriers to active, willful learning. An additional powerful dimension in SDT is that it is specifically framed in terms of social and environmental factors that 'facilitate versus undermine intrinsic motivation' (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.58). The idea that intrinsic motivation, which, if we accept this position, is inherent in us as human beings,

> is catalysed (rather than caused) when individuals are in conditions that conduce towards its expression (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.58),

is an encouraging one and provides a structure upon which one can build for future work with the ESL. It follows that if intrinsic motivation can be 'catalysed', we as education providers are to some degree compelled to evaluate and create the conditions which might provide a positive and challenging learning environment for the ESL.

Where to now: Literacy, motivation and learner interest

This brings us to back to Davey's work on understanding the complexities of motivation and its impact, in particular with struggling students. Davey's work on

reading explains the links between motivation and reading (amount, understanding, and personal interest). She makes the point that extrinsic motivation may be particularly valuable for underachieving students who tend to lack motivation (Davey, 2006). While this refers particularly to underachieving students, the focus on extrinsic motivation resonates with Ryan and Deci's construct that motivation can be catalysed. Combining elements of both literatures may help to consolidate our understanding of what the ESL needs in the literacy setting, or indeed any learning setting.

In conclusion, developing an understanding of the ESL learner in the literacy setting is not supported through just one theoretical position. As with their individual and group complexities, explaining and devising appropriate responses to ESL needs, requires a framework derived from a number of theoretical foundations. SDT was particularly useful in helping to understand the motivators that drive learning. Davey's work, particularly on literacy development, combined with the literature above, guides us in developing a more critical response to literacy learning for the ESL in the vocational setting.

One aim of the thesis is to document what learners experience and take away from the programme. The literature review highlighted the need for further studies where definitive action is taken to directly involve ESLs in their learning. In light of this gap, this thesis can make a unique contribution to the story of ESLs' involvement in their learning.

My approach developed and implemented an intervention which directly sought to improve a literacy programme which both teachers and ESLs felt could be changed. This was by no means an easy task and it took time, patience and rigour to ensure that greater challenge and involvement was offered to participants. Whether or not we achieved this is discussed in the Findings section in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3 follows with an account of the methodology and a discussion of the AR design used in the study. My epistemological position is asserted and the data collection is described. Sampling, insider researcher concerns and ethical considerations of the study are also presented.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study used an AR design to examine the work of a literacy service, through the involvement and experiences of the ESLs and teachers working in the project. Section 3.1 describes the method of AR and documents the phases of the AR cycle. Section 3.2 outlines the curriculum in the Communications module and describes how teachers applied the constructivist strategies within the taught course. In Section 3.3, I discuss my epistemological position, restate the research questions and outline the study sample. Section 3.4 follows with a presentation of the methods used in the study and, finally, Section 3.5 outlines the ethical considerations of the work, including my position as insider researcher.

3.1 Action Research

AR involves a systematic approach to changing practice, involving action and reflective learning from the process involved, in which the teacher is the producer and user of theory. Implicit in the term is a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, and reflecting and deciding on a course of action. AR is not problem solving nor is it about learning why we do certain things. Its focus is on investigating how we can do things in a different or better manner. In effect, AR is a quest for knowledge about how to improve aspects of practice in a professional setting.

According to Carr and Kemmis:

> [a]ction research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (1986, p.162),

Elliott (1994, p.136) describes educational AR as focusing 'on changing practice to make it more consistent with the pedagogical aim'. The aim of this AR study is to develop a literacy programme that seeks to maximize learner involvement and literacy acquisition for the ESL. The process will be used to extend understandings of education theory in provision for ESLs, drawing from Kemmis and McTaggart's definition:

> An approach to improving education by changing it and learning
> from the consequences of change (Kemmis and
> McTaggart,1992, p.10).

A distinctive feature of the AR approach is that it allows the research to produce and generate educational theory while implementing change. Another key feature is the participatory nature of the research. Practitioners are engaged as researchers, involved in interrogating their own practice with a view to improving and changing it and to generating educational theory from the cycle carried out. This cycle of action is described by McNiff and Whitehead as 'the process of observe-reflect-act evaluate-modify-move in new directions' (2006, p. 9), an appropriate description in the context of this research question, where existing practice in a literacy programme is reflected upon, to provoke positive change in approach and pedagogy specifically for the ESL curriculum.

In designing the AR study I also drew on the CRASP model of AR, as defined by Zuber-Skerritt. In this model, the practitioner/researcher works from a theoretical framework which combines critical and self-critical collaborative enquiry and requires practitioners to be 'critical, reflective, accountable, self-evaluating and participative' (Zuber-Skerrit, 2004, p.71). Within this framework, reflective practitioners should be:

- accountable in making the results of their enquiry public,
- self-evaluative in their practice, and

- engaged in participative problem-solving and continuing professional development.

According to Zuber–Skerritt, AR takes a critical stance in its approach because practitioners not only look for ways to improve their practice within the various constraints of the situation in which they are working, but are also critical change agents of those constraints, and of themselves. AR is reflective in that participants analyse and develop theories about their experiences (Zuber-Skerritt, 2004). These principles guided the process and progress of the study as the iterative cycle developed.

Adapting this model, and also drawing on the Carr and Kemmis stages of the AR cycle, I developed a rigorous framework for the study. Figure 1 outlines the stages of the AR cycle based on those outlined by Carr and Kemmis (1986). This is followed by a brief outline of each stage of the cycle.

Figure 1. The four stages of the AR cycle based on Carr and Kemmis (1986)

Stage One:
Planning and development stage which included IFS.

Stage Two:
Implementation of Communications module and application of constructivist teaching methods.

END OF CYCLE ONE

Stage Four: reflecting on the ongoing process, including recommendations for future practice.

Stage Three:
Monitoring and evaluation of the intervention.
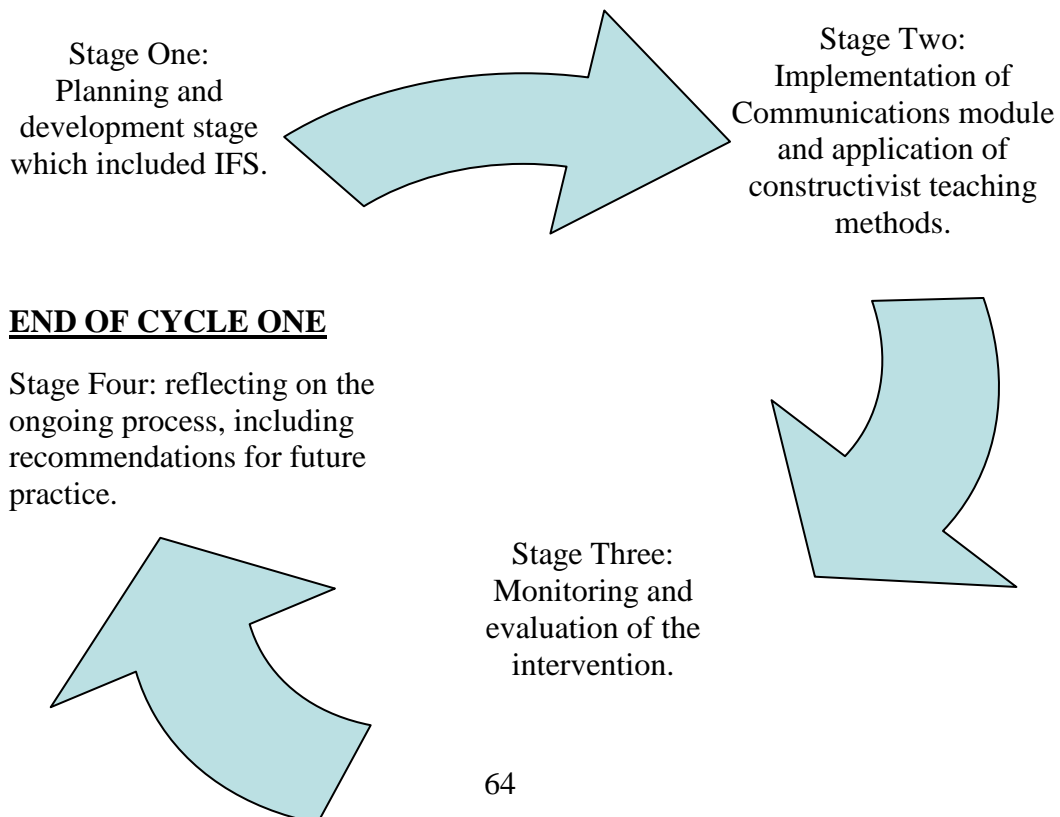
Stages of the AR cycle

Stage One: Planning and development stage. This stage includes a review of current practice, identification of problems and situation analysis.

Stage Two: Implementation stage. Implement a specific action over a designated timescale, with a view to observing its effect on the current problem and improving practice.

Stage Three: Monitoring and evaluating stage. Observe, monitor, evaluate and critique the action as it takes place. This stage involves looking at ways in which practice has or can be improved as a result of the intervention.

Stage Four: Reflection stage. Reflect on the impact of the cycle and identify where further changes or improvements can be made as a result of the planning, acting and observing.

Current phase of the AR cycle

Currently in the first iterative cycle of an AR study, this thesis specifically examines stages two, three and four of cycle one: implementation, monitoring and evaluating and, finally, reflecting on the impact of the cycle and identifying further change.

As part of the IFS study carried out in 2009, (cycle one, stage one) I examined ESLs attitudes and responses to the literacy programme in the YS CTC. The aim of stage one was to review current teaching practices and to establish what improvements could be made to methods and curriculum, as identified by ESLs.

Twenty YP participated in the IFS study. Findings indicated that 60% (N=12) of the respondents saw a need for change in several aspects of the current service.

Some declared an interest in being more challenged and also stated that some of the current work they were doing was 'childish' and 'like primary school' (Larkin, 2009). These responses prompted me in stage two of the AR, to design a new approach to our current teaching practices. I applied constructivist teaching strategies to a higher level Communications module, one level above the current level offered in the project (Level 3 on the NFQ framework, Appendix A). I felt that using targeted strategies such as these would maximise learner participation and might also impact on ESLs' literacy development. Another teacher and I began teaching this higher level Communications module and applied three specific constructivist teaching approaches to our teaching: teacher as coach (Grabowski, 1996), generative learning (Wittrock, 1990) and self-directed learning (Lowry, 1999), described in Chapter 2.

This approach was directly suited to the AR model in that new practices were being implemented and evaluated to create new learning and both learners and teachers were participants in the cycle.

3.2 Communications module: FETAC Communications (Level 4)

The Communications module consisted of seven units of learning, a requirement of the certifying body, FETAC. The seven units are outlined in Table 1 overleaf.

There were 38 teaching sessions, amounting to 57 hours of teaching in total. The recommended number of hours suggested by FETAC ranges from 60 to 80 hours.

Core to the module delivery was the involvement of the learner in decisions affecting programme content (which materials and exercises were chosen) and how we worked together (breaks, contract of behaviour, guidelines regarding drafts and corrections, learning environment).

Table 1: FETAC Communications Module (Level 4): Seven units of learning

Unit Number and Title	Content and Activities
Unit 1: Learning to Learn	a) Set learning goals at beginning of programme: What does the learner want to achieve for him/herself? b) Four Learner Journal entries, referencing what learning has occurred in the module and in his/her training in general, over one month.
Unit 2: Non Verbal and Visual Communications	a) Body language: learning to read body language, picking up cues from people's behaviour, how to convey a message without using words, how to convey a mood to others, role play. b) Recognising signs and symbols: map reading, timetables (bus, train, television), prepare a flowchart, produce a logo.
Unit 3: Personal Interaction	a) Informal conversation: demonstrate ability to initiate this. b) Formal conversation: carry out an interview. c) Listening skills: how to leave a phone message and take notes for a report.
Unit 4: Reading and Critical Thinking	Five pieces of reading which require different reading skills, including: read a book and write a book report, respond to a poem or a film script and comprehension passages.
Unit 5: Writing	Demonstrate a range of writing skills: formal and informal letter writing, report writing, notes taken from a meeting, form filling (three forms, such as one page CV, passport, driver's licence). Demonstrate an understanding of the range of media available.
Unit 6: Media Awareness	Compare and contrast a tabloid and a broadsheet (written or typed).
Unit 7: Communications Technology	Produce a 300 word typed paper on 'The impact of technology in my life'. Indicate ability to use an ATM and print a receipt.

The application of constructivist teaching strategies to the Communications module

In working towards the implementation phase and prior to teaching the programme, I divided the Communications module into its seven units and designed a template from which I prepared a teacher's booklet. This laid out each unit of the curriculum with suggestions as to how and where the constructivist principles could be applied by the teachers (June, 2010). I described how teachers could be coaches, encourage generative learning and promote self-directed learning (see Appendix D). Sinead and I modelled our teaching on this framework and it guided us in adhering to the constructivist approach within the prescribed curriculum. We checked the framework throughout the Communications course and made adjustments when we judged that an application or the content we were focusing on was not working for the ESLs.

The units of learning allowed room for teacher/learner decisions regarding curriculum materials which complemented the constructivist approach but it was not always possible, due to the time constraints of the study, to involve the ESLs in selecting materials. For example, the unit on reading requires examples of five different types of reading (report, novel, drama/film screenplay, media). In the main, the teachers organised the book and poetry options, without ESLs' input. The analysis of this part of the project will, I hope, shed light on the constraints of the applications and we will learn from it for future work. Where the ESLs had some decision making powers and where they had not is discussed later on in the chapter.

3.3 Epistemological position

I took an interpretivist-constructivist approach in this study. According to Ireland et al.,

interpretivism adopts the view that reality represents an interpretive device and that humans process experience and make such experiences meaningful (2005, p.4),

while Flick notes that one of the defining characteristics of an interpretive approach is the integration of the 'perspectives of the participants and their diversity' (Flick, 1998, p.5).

Within this AR study, the interpretative activity of the researcher allows a close examination of how both teachers and YP make sense of what they experience when they have greater involvement in their learning. Despite criticisms of the interpretive paradigm which posit that there is an overreliance on the meaning of situations (Charmaz, 2004) or that the researcher has the power to impose definitions on a given situation, its emphasis on the individual's experience and account of the process are central to developing appropriate and meaningful education for ESLs.

My epistemological position is informed by constructivism. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, as a paradigm, constructivism posits that learning is an active, constructive process and that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes (Bruner, 2006; von Glaserfeld, 1989b; Young and Colin, 2004).The theoretical framework informing the study draws from the constructivist principles of learning and teaching, where participants' sense of making meaning of their experiences is central to their participation. The research sets out to explore how YP make sense of what they learn and how their views and responses reveal what purpose learning has for them. We set out to create positive experiences for YP whose ability to connect new skills to existing ones in order to construct new learning is often dormant, and create what Bruner defines as the purpose of learning:

The first object of any act of learning, over and beyond the
pleasure it may give us, is that it should serve us in the future.
Learning should not only take us somewhere, it should allow us
later to go further more easily (Bruner, 1960, p.17).

In light of this, the research questions are restated:

i)   What are the effects on ESLs' literacy development when they have
        greater involvement in the learning process?

ii)   What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of ESLs when they
        have greater involvement in the learning process?

iii)   What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when
        learners have greater involvement in the learning process?

iv)   What are the effects of external circumstances on ESLs' education?

Sample

From a total population of 52 ESLs attending the literacy project, I involved 20 in
the IFS study in 2009. From this IFS group, eight YP were pre-selected to
participate in the programme, based on i) their expression of interest in taking a
higher level challenge and ii) they had noted that they were not involved in their
learning in the literacy project. I also made the pre-selection on academic
grounds. I was aware that the written requirements of the higher level
Communications module were demanding and so I narrowed the selection
process to include only those ESLs whom I felt would manage the literacy
challenge. I based these decisions on my professional experience of the literacy
certification process and on my knowledge of the individual YP. Furthermore, I
required   that   candidates   had   successfully   passed   the   entry-level

Communications course, (Level 3) on the GEC. I felt it was important that participants would be able to master the requirements of the module, under guidance and supervision, and that they would build on existing skills, rather than be undermined by 'gaps' in literacy abilities. It must be noted that for this type of study, only particular YP would be suitable for the approaches used.

I approached YP individually, in both formal and informal settings, either by a visit to a literacy class or in the corridor or recreation hall of the training centre. All eight ESLs were willing to take part in the programme and all expressed what I deemed to be a degree of surprise and pleasure at being asked. As manager of the literacy project and the adult responsible for the initial in-depth interview with YP entering the project, my role was significant in building relationships and setting up a secure environment for the ESLs. Consequently, as the adult involved in the ESLs' literacy development, a relationship based on trust and experience was essential.

The final sample comprised eight YP: six Irish and two YP from the Czech Republic. The mean age was 17.25 years. Table 2 provides both nationality and ethnic background of participants.

Table 2: Nationality and ethnic background of participants

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Other Factors
Clara	16	Female	Irish	Family issues regarding crime and weapons
Brian	17	Male	Irish	ADHD
Martin	19	Male	Czech Rep.	English not first language
John	17	Male	Irish	Dyslexic
Mark	16	Male	Irish	Member of Traveller Community
Trudy	16	Female	Irish	Member of Traveller Community
Cian	18	Male	Irish	Addiction issues
Matthew	19	Male	Czech Rep.	English not first language

Biographical information was also compiled on each participant and is presented in Appendix E.

Attrition of sample

During the eight months of the programme, three of the eight participants Cian, Clara and Mark, dropped out: Mark after two months, Cian after four months and Clara, two months before the course finished. The reasons behind the dropout are provided as they illustrate the complexities of the lives of the ESLs and the challenges they face. They also highlight the uncertain and challenging environment of ESL education, for staff involved. These are described in greater detail in subsection ix of Section 3.4, below.

3.4 Methods of data collection

Definition of learner involvement

The study set out to include YP not just in their Communications module but in all aspects of how their learning was organized. Our aim was to create more learner autonomy for the ESL in a setting which has a structured range of certification programmes and a somewhat prescribed curriculum. This involvement was not specifically a learner centred approach where:

> learner centred learning gives learners greater autonomy and control over subject matter, learning methods and pace of study (Gibbs,1992, p.23).

It was an attempt to create a learning situation in which new practices could be established and which gave greater control and ownership to the ESLs in the classroom. The ESLs were asked to make decisions about their learning environment, take control and be responsible for attending, participating in

sessions and working on literacy tasks. They did not have ultimate decision-making powers on the curriculum for the module, and neither did the teachers.

This description of learner involvement is similar to but is not the same as the constructivist approaches to teaching and learning applied in the study. According to Richardson (2003), characteristics of constructivist teaching include attention to the individual and respect for students' backgrounds, a facilitation of dialogue which leads to a shared understanding of a topic and provision of opportunities for students to challenge and determine or add to existing beliefs. While the study included these elements, our approach to learner involvement extended beyond the constructivist approaches and was related to learner choice, management of one's learning environment and how one learned. It also involved some powers of decision making. It must be acknowledged however, that there were some similarities between both approaches, such as respect for the learner and the creation of shared understandings with ESLs.

I employed a range of primarily qualitative measures as part of the process of the AR design, to ensure that people's experiences were taken into account and provide grounded insights and perspectives in answering the research questions. In addition, two items of quantitative data were also collected to establish pre- and post-reading and comprehension abilities as well as attendance records over a nine month period. The methods of qualitative data collection included

- Discussion groups(formal)
- Written questionnaire
- Participant observation
- Discussion group (informal)
- Interim review discussions with learners
- Learner journals
- Post course semi-structured interviews
- Tutor Field Diaries
- Learner Profiles

Quantitative Data

- Adult Reading Tests (ART)
- Attendance records on the course

A summary of these methods of data collection is presented in Table 3.

Learner profile/individual case studies

As an extension of the biographical data, I also prepared individual case studies on the eight participants, detailing their family backgrounds, education careers, incidents with crime, health conditions, personal interests and progress at the CTC. These provide insights into the challenging circumstances ESLs face when reentering education. The use of this case study material also enabled the presentation of behaviour over time. As for many learners, learning for the ESL does not take place on a linear level: it has ups and downs, which reflect the ESL's life. The presentation of case studies is also valuable in indicating and analysing how learner involvement and personal agency are very limited in the life experience of the ESL. Growing up in uncertain circumstances or moving around a lot as a family with interrupted education trajectories provides unstable foundations from which to build learner engagement or autonomy. Any additional disadvantage such as addiction or parental discord impacts heavily on the ESL. While these factors, in themselves, cannot be attributed to the ESLs' decision to leave school, their backgrounds and their perspectives are influenced by these formative experiences.

For more information on learners' backgrounds see Appendix F: sample case studies.

Table 3: Summary of methods of data collection presented in chronological order

Qualitative methods	When	Where	No. of participants	Purpose
1. Discussion Group with ESLs (formal)	August 2010	Literacy classroom	8 ESLs and 2 teachers	To explain the purpose and the objectives of the Communications course, involve the ESLs in setting up a group contract and establish how they would become more involved in and manage their learning.
2.Written questionnaire with ESLs	Sept 2010	Literacy classroom	2 teachers	To establish the ESLs' prior expectations of the Communications course: what did they want to get out of it?
3.Participant observation of classes while teaching	Weekly Sept 2010 To May 2011	Literacy classroom	2 teachers	To observe how ESLs managed their learning environment and how they reacted to decision making.
4.(informal) Discussion Group	Oct 2010	Literacy classroom	8 ESLs and 2 teachers (before dropout)	To gather background information on ESLs' previous educational experience.
5.Interim Review Discussions with Learners	Nov2010	Literacy classroom	8 ESLs and 2 teachers (before dropout)	Focus group to establish how the ESLs reacted to the programme.
6.Learner Journals	4 entries over a six month period Sept 2010 to May 2011	Literacy classroom	5 ESLs	Written documents to see the ESLs' written expression and views on their learning.
7.Teacher Field Diaries	1 entry per week over six month period Sept 2010 to May 2011	Office/literacy classroom	2 teachers	To observe and reflect on ESLs' reactions to the programme. To debrief and make sense of some of the ESLs' emotional responses to the programme and reflect on how the research process was going regarding my own role, decisions that were being made and emerging issues that we needed to explore.
8.(a)Post-course interviews	June 2011	Teacher's office	5 ESLs	To gather the experiences and observations of each participant as to how he/she managed the course.
8(b)Post-course interviews	June 2011	Teacher's office	1 teacher	To establish an overall picture of the programme, as experienced by the second teacher
9.Learner Profiles	Start date of each ESL in the CTC	Teacher's office	1-1 :ESL and teacher)	To carry out in-depth life histories of ESLs to date, from their perspective, and to administer the ART test.
10.Pre- and post-testing on ART	Pre-test Sept 2010 Post-test April 2011	Teacher's office	5 ESLs,1-1 tests, pre and post	Oral reading test, 5 passages + comprehension questions
11.Attendance records on course	Weekly from Sept 2010 to May 2011	Literacy classroom	5 ESLs	To see what ESLs' attendance was like throughout course and to examine impact of external and internal factors on same.

Qualitative data collection

A range of data was collected from both project staff and YP. I have presented the staff data first and YPs' data next.

Staff data collection

Second teacher's role in the process

Sinead's role in the research was primarily as a teacher /practitioner delivering the Communications module, using constructivist strategies. She was not involved in the design of the study or in deciding where the constructivist strategies might apply to the units of learning. Initially, I did not see her role as practitioner/researcher, as I considered that she had limited experience in this domain. However, as we progressed in the implementation stage of the AR cycle, her observations and experience proved to be insightful and her role in encouraging and fostering learner involvement was also powerful. She understood both the ESLs and what we were trying to achieve in the study and in this way she developed her role into what I would say was a practitioner researcher role, which was of value to the study.

Researcher and staff field diaries

Both I, as practitioner/researcher, and Sinéad, kept weekly field diaries throughout the implementation phase of the project: September 2010 to May 2011. The purpose of these field diaries was to record observations of the teaching sessions and of the ESLs' responses to constructivist practice and involvement in their learning. The diaries were also a source of analysis of our own practices as teachers and were intended to provide reflection on and critique of this implementation phase. A typical diary entry was 10 to 15 lines in my case and often longer. Sinéad's were

shorter (5 to 10 lines) and less detailed. We regularly debriefed after teaching sessions checking on how the sessions went, how well we were applying the three constructivist applications (teacher as coach, self-directed learning and generative learning) and how the YP were responding to our attempts to offer them greater involvement in their learning experience. We also had many informal conversations on an ongoing basis, after teaching sessions, and during the times when we were not formally teaching or involved with the YP.

The diaries raised many questions for us, mainly how we would proceed, how YP were responding in the immediate to the programme and queries about how we could make our teaching more effective in terms of learner involvement and literacy challenge.

A cornerstone of my approach to the field diary was the aspect of reflexivity (Hughes, 1999; Richardson, 1994; Watt, 2007): how to balance and manage the alternating dialogue between the formal and informal voice of my role in the implementation phase. I used the diary space as a source of self-examination, both as a researcher and as a professional concerned with 'seeing into' the issues about which I had concerns. In analysing my field diary, I named the challenges I was coming up with in the programme and recorded personal observations throughout the experience. I also noted patterns for myself such as feelings of stress, worry and concern regarding YPs progress, needing to be the teacher all the time, in fact, the tensions which existed in my roles as both teacher and researcher. I recorded these, attributing questions to personal recurring themes, which I noted and reflected upon. For example, teacher anxiety emerged in several of my diary entries and as I was conscious of reflexivity in the study, I discussed this with my supervisor. This ongoing analysis was part of the process of reflection and is discussed in more detail in 6.5 of Chapter 6.

I regularly consulted with other staff in the training centre when I was bothered about YPs' attendance or behaviour. I also shared issues around my own teaching skills with Sinead and I often used diary space to write about personal feelings, perhaps regarding a lack of confidence I felt as I taught the YP. I agonised quite a lot as to whether, in the hurly burly of the teaching from week to week, we were effectively applying our constructivist principles to the communications module.

Post-semi-structured interview with the teacher on the programme

Sinéad's experience of the project was explored through a semi-structured interview and her field diaries to establish what effects, if any, the new approach had on areas such as the change in role from teacher to coach, or her experiences of the preparation and teaching aspects of the course. I also wanted to discuss her opinions and feelings on how and whether we were maximising literacy acquisition and learner involvement throughout the process. I designed the interview questions to focus on the key research objectives but also to allow freedom of expression to Sinead, who has ten years' experience teaching the Communications module (See Appendix G: Interview Schedule Staff).

Participant observation

While not participating as students in the research, Sinead and I were researchers and observers as well as participants involved in a shared partnership with the YP. We used a form of participant observation as a tool to observe both the ESLs and ourselves as teachers, during the Communications course and during the sessions directly related to learner involvement. These included the initial stages of the study such as group contract sessions, informal group discussions and learning agreements.

These observations were 'hands on' and were used by both teachers to debrief after sessions, to try to explain YPs' responses and to allow us to reflect on the process. Participant observation was particularly useful in noting differences among the YP, looking for dominant voices, and in watching the ESLs react to each other or to an aspect of learning. Participant observations were recorded in teachers' field diaries, in discussions and in Sinead's 1-1 interview.

Data collection from the YP

I designed a range of different data for the YP, which I collected during the eight month implementation phase. I was aware that I would need a range and variety of data for two reasons: 1) to provide depth and triangulation within the study and 2) to anticipate some drop out in my small sample of eight participants. I also had a concern that YP would tell us what they thought we wanted to hear. My concern derived from the participants' limited experience in being asked to, or indeed simply being involved in, expressing their opinions about their lives or learning experiences. I was therefore motivated to provide as many opportunities for YPs' expression throughout the Communications programme, as was practical. I also considered my position as the teacher within the process. Having built a relationship with the YP, I wanted to ensure my role promoted rather than inhibited their participation. ESLs are free to talk in the project and in the organisation, but they are not generally asked to become involved in how they learn. This distinction is important in how the study proceeded.

i) Implementation of communications programme

Having spoken to all the ESLs individually (see 3.5, ethics section) we agreed to meet for the first teaching session. Our room space could not

accommodate eight YP and two staff, so Sinéad and I grouped the eight YP into two groups of four, basing our decision on gender and nationalities: we had two girls who wanted to work in the same group and the two non-national males needed each other for support and translation work. Teaching sessions lasted one and a half hours, once weekly, and had to fit into a wider timetable within the training centre.

Socially and behaviourally, the groups were very mixed. One ESL had a diagnosis of ADHD but was not taking medication while doing the course. His attention span and concentration were factors which affected his participation in the group and influenced with whom he was placed. Two of the YP were members of the Traveller Community, a distinct ethnic group for whom attendance and participation in any programme is governed by family events such as weddings, christenings and, in some circumstances, violent family feuds. One of the participants was involved in a feud during the programme. This type of situation is symptomatic of the extenuating personal circumstances which govern the educational trajectories of these YP, an issue which raised its head with other participants throughout stage two, the implementation phase of the study.

ii) Group contract

At the first teaching session with each group, I raised the idea of a contract. This was my first attempt to create greater learner involvement. The ESLs were unsure what to suggest and needed some prompting from both teachers, who suggested that they consider ideas such as choice of break times or what type of stationery to use. This prompting drew other suggestions such as agreements on the use of mobile phones, attendance and space to listen to each other. Both groups came up with similar agreements, based around the above as well as listening to each other or

giving each other space. These contracts were recorded for use throughout the programme (See Appendix H: group contract).

iii) Learning agreements

The next exercise carried out with the groups was built around how they wanted to learn, be taught and manage the units of the Communications curriculum. We talked about how many drafts of a written piece they would agree to do, what kind of notepads they prefer to write on, how they wanted teachers to correct material (either at the end or during a writing task) and how we would run the units. We discussed completing units in parts, changing from one to another, or completing them in order, one to seven. It became clear that this type of learner involvement was completely new to the ESLs and they were uneasy in their groups. They found it difficult to suggest ideas as to how to manage their learning and they did not appear to know what managing their learning meant. I had to prompt them and make suggestions, for example regarding the number of drafts of work they would agree on. In fact, they did not understand the concept of a draft: I had to use 'attempts' or 'efforts, as alternative terms.

One objection which stood out came from John, who was adamant that a red pen not be used, when making corrections. This was almost certainly a throwback to previous school experiences. Apart from John's declaration, there was no sense of a dominant personality in the group; rather, there was a general feeling of the YP being uncertain of themselves and somewhat afraid of the unknown. I consider that this was because they had never been asked to own or organise their own learning and they struggled with this. They eventually agreed on three drafts of any piece of written work and stuck to this throughout the course. Initially preferring to work, as we suggested, from parts of units, we revisited this and both groups expressed a preference for completing the units one by

one. The ESLs seemed to need structure in their work to give them a feeling of security and order.

iv) Prior expectations questionnaire

This exercise was designed to capture the learners' expectations of the course and took the form of a structured written response questionnaire, which I designed myself (see Appendix I: Prior Expectations Questionnaire). Due to time constraints and summer holidays (August 2011), I did not get the opportunity to pilot this, as I had to begin the implementation stage that September. The ESLs completed the questionnaire in small groups but it was an individual exercise and they were encouraged to write their own ideas. The exercise took 10-15 minutes to complete. I was hoping to gain some insights into why they were attending and what they expected to get out of the programme. I also wanted to revisit the outcomes after the programme was completed, to establish if expectations had been met. This was not, however, designed as a pre- and post-test instrument. I included specific questions on literacy skills to get the participants to assess themselves and to reflect on what they perceived to be their individual literacy concerns or gaps. I also wanted to explore their motivations in taking the Communications course to see if they took part simply because they were asked. It was made clear to them from the outset that they had been asked because Sinead and I believed they were capable and because they were identified from the IFS study as participants who had expressed a desire for greater challenge in their learning.

v) Semi structured group discussion on ideas of education and past learning experience

Both groups discussed this with Sinéad. This was an informal opportunity we seized to establish the ESLs' previous experiences of education. These sessions were recorded on tape. The teacher asked questions such as: What was primary school like? Why did you leave secondary school? Did you like it there? The recordings were muffled in some places and some of the ESLs talked over each other in their eagerness to convey that they didn't like school or that they were thrown out for various reasons. There was almost a sense of trying to outdo each other with their individual stories. These data reflected the group pressure in this context and the mixture of bravado and low self-esteem so often manifested by this target group. There was also, in some cases, a reluctance to speak up or to give a personal opinion, particularly from the two girls on the course. The boys were almost aggressive in their responses and it was obvious that school did not evoke pleasant memories.

vi) Learner journals

One of the requirements of the Communications module is that the learner completes four journal entries on any aspect of his or her training in the centre. This was mandatory and part of the curriculum laid down by the certifying body, FETAC. Each entry normally takes about 15 minutes to complete and is generally 10 lines or over. The ESLs have to describe what they have learned and how the previous week's training has gone. The objective is to get them to reflect on what they have learned over a period of time and to observe any changes they see in their learning.

To look at some samples from Learner Journals see Appendix J.

vii) Interim review discussions

This exercise was carried out with both groups at the end of November 2010, three months into the programme. The discussions took place in the literacy room at the beginning of a teaching session with both teachers present. As the main researcher, I facilitated both these sessions.

I opted for an informal group check-in. I used a set of questions which required the YP to reflect on their attendance and participation thus far. This allowed us to adjust aspects of the programme if ESLs wanted to, and to explore where they were taking ownership of the learning experience. Questions ranged from 'Are you enjoying the Communications programme? Is it living up to your expectations?' to 'Where do you take ownership of your learning; give examples?' I took notes from each group and asked participants to rate themselves individually on attendance and participation (See Appendix K: Interim Review Questions).

Some questions were more easily answered by the ESLs, in particular those which looked at the changing role of the teachers, ESLs' input into some decision making and taking responsibility for their learning. What created most difficulty for them, when critically thinking about issues were: 1) the areas of generative learning and 2) reflective skills, regarding their own views as to whether they experienced any impact from what they were learning in other areas of their lives, beyond the literacy setting.

viii) Post semi-structured individual interviews carried out at the end of the programme, June 2011

On completion of the Communications programme, an individual semi-structured interview was carried out with the five participants who had completed the course. The interview explored their experience of the programme: what they felt on completion, how they perceived they had managed their learning, thoughts on learner involvement and decision

making, current literacy skills and their perceptions of themselves as learners, having gone through the programme. In preparation for the interviews, I familiarized myself with Kvale's seven stages in carrying out an interview investigation: thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting (Kvale, 1996, p. 88). I did a lot of preparatory work on setting up open questions and creating a conversation between myself and the interviewee. Guided by Kvale's approach, I paid particular attention to transcribing the interviews and to the steps in the analysis phase of the work, in terms of structuring, clarifying, eliminating digressions and developing meaning from the data. (See Appendix L:Interview Schedule with Young People).

Each of the interviews lasted approximately one hour and all but one participant was happy to have the interview recorded. This refusal to be recorded came from Trudy, the young Traveller girl who had great difficulty in hearing her own voice and who had to force herself to record an interview for a job, as part of the course requirements.

ix) Data on ESLs whose participation was affected by external circumstances and who left the project mid-way

The purpose of this data was to explore why some ESLs leave VET. As discussed earlier, three of the eight participants did not complete the course. Significant barriers to learning still remained, even when support and stability were provided in the training setting.

Quantitative data collection

Pre and post Adult Reading Test (ART)

As the ESLs were the first group to take the higher level Communications course and the Adult Reading Test (ART) was new to the literacy project, it was not possible to compare results with other YP in the CTC. Initially, I had hoped to compare reading scores and attendance with a comparison group who were taking a two-year DES programme. However, the older age and experience of this group and the fact that their course was five days per week made this impossible. I was only meeting the research group twice weekly for one subject; therefore, any comparison of academic progress would be misleading.

This test was administered both at the beginning and end of the taught programme, to establish any changes in the ESLs' reading accuracy and comprehension as a result of their participation in the course. The tests were carried out individually and the setting was the project manager's office, as quietness and privacy were required. ESLs had to read five passages aloud and answer a range of comprehension questions after each passage. The test is untimed but it took, on average, 45 minutes per individual. We used the ART (Brooks, Everatt and Fidler, 2004), a standardised reading test designed to assess the reading skills of adults from 16 years of age upwards. It is also used to diagnose dyslexia and reading difficulties in adults. The test does not use age-related scores as it is for the adult population. It was designed, tested and standardised as part of a dyslexia assessment process at Roehampton University, UK. ART was standardised on a UK student population attending Further and Higher Education Colleges/Universities in South East England. The test gives centile-based levels for accuracy, comprehension, speed of reading and speed of writing. It comprises a five- or seven-version set of reading passages with questions asked after the reading has taken place. The questions are divided into factual, memory and inference questions. Alpha coefficients were used to measure the reliability of the ART test. Test re-test correlations were also produced on a sample of 32 students.

Coefficients were 0.88, 0.76 and 0.79 for accuracy, rate and comprehension, respectively. Validity of the test for reading accuracy was measured by testing all students on the British Ability Scales (BAS) Word reading test (Elliott, 1983). Pearson Correlation Coefficients were calculated between the BAS test and the ART measures. R-values of 0.76 for accuracy, 0.46 for rate and 0.53 for comprehension were found.(See Appendix M :Sample ART Materials).

Attendance records

Attendance records were kept for all participants during the project. These date from September 2010 to May 2011. In my IFS study, attendance was a big issue, with sessions regularly overridden by other demands in the CTC such as ESLs being required to cover in the kitchen or coffee bar, anti-bullying training or trips planned outside the centre. I raised this with the manager at the time and it was noted and addressed. This improved attitudes to literacy from other staff and there were fewer interruptions to the programme. Following this, in the implementation stage of this AR, I decided to block particular morning times for Communications teaching and emphasised with managers, staff and ESLs that these times could not be replaced or interrupted. This seemed to protect the programme and sessions ran smoothly. Nonetheless, the ESLs regularly missed sessions.

Was there real learner choice for the ESLs?

The amount and type of learner choice involved in the study was restricted in some areas of the course. It can be argued that some of this choice was tokenistic and that the study partially replicated YPs previous experience in their literacy project and in their wider training experience. Aspects of the course were pre-determined, due to the nature of the learning environment and several regulatory constraints laid down by the certifying

body, FETAC. Some aspects of the coursework were compulsory and so did not allow for any input or learner choice, including completion of Learner Journals, requirements that five pieces of reading were carried out and written work which had to include two letters, form filling and a CV. None of these allowed the learner any choice regarding materials.

A second area which did not include real choice was in the actual scheduling of the taught course. ESLs had no input into deciding what day and times the taught course would take place: this was dictated by the overall CTC timetable and only I, as manager of the project, had some choice here. In fact, I decided teaching would take place in the mornings and on one day of the week, in order to keep the course day and time consistent for the ESLs.

Thirdly, the ESLs did not have any choice as to which of their peers would be involved in the project; in other words, they did not get to preselect participants. This is an important point. Very often, YP are choosy about the people with whom they will engage; this is sometimes due to family feuds between communities, undercover bullying, such as extortion of money from another's training allowance, or general teenage rows. It is not uncommon to hear ESLs state quite firmly 'I'm not working with her' or 'I'm not going into that group with him'.

Finally, ESLs could not choose their teachers for the Communications course.The teachers were already selected, as is the case in all of their CTC training. There were also time constraints on the weekly teaching time and on the implementation phase of the study. This meant that staff could not always take enough time to listen carefully to what some ESLs wanted and what others did not.

ESLs had some input into choosing what materials they used, agreements on how they worked together and decisions on the classroom set-up. While it can be argued that these elements do not constitute true learner choice, given the limitations of the setting, they went some way in providing a measure of increased involvement in ESLs' own learning. The setting itself also imposed some restrictions on how far we could go in creating the ideal set-up. A detailed table on opportunities for learner involvement is provided in Chapter 5.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

In designing the study, I had several ethical concerns. As the research involved working with YP who were under eighteen, there were some requirements that had to be satisfied both in the YS and by the IOE. These included voluntary consent, anonymity, storage of data, power relations and insider research, and the methods used to feed back the findings to the ESLs. All of the measures and methods went through the IOE ethics procedures and ethical approval was received. All names of the participants in the study have been changed. However, the anonymity of the institution cannot be protected as the setting and context of the project, positioned within a YS in rural Ireland, may identify the organisation.

There is a moral obligation on me as researcher to provide the ESLs and the YS with the findings of the study and to ensure that these findings are clearly and transparently presented so that the organisation benefits from the work. An abridged version of the study, in accessible professional language, will be given to the Chief Executive Officer of the organisation.

Voluntary consent

As I bear full responsibility for the conduct of the research, it was essential that I complied with ethical guidelines appropriate to my discipline (those of the British Educational Research Association, updated guidelines, 2011), which emphasise the importance of gaining participants' voluntary and informed consent. This is a concept challenged by Homan as 'the myth of voluntariness' (Homan, 2002). According to Homan, consent must be sought, thus implying that it can be refused (Homan, 2002, p. 31), but participants, particularly ESLs, may agree willingly in order to please a teacher. I was particularly conscious of this and felt my approach in relation to consent had to be thoroughly explained, so that free participation was not compromised. I also had a particular interest in this guideline due to the nature of my research on literacy. I have often noticed that ESLs agree to requests without fully understanding what is being asked of them. It was important therefore that my explanations were clear and uncomplicated.

Consent letters

Having been approached by me personally and asked to participate in the research, all of the ESLs were then asked to sign a consent letter and were provided with an information sheet on the research beforehand. Having approached the individuals involved and explained the process, we read and signed the consent letters (See Appendix N). I outlined the students' role and informed them that they could withdraw from the research at any time but that they could continue their literacy module and achieve the Communications certificate.

Storage of data

The storage of data complied with the Data Protection Act 1988 and 2003 (Ireland). All the data in the study were sealed in boxes and removed from

the site. These included tapes, documents, questionnaires and consent letters. Only the Communications portfolios were kept in the literacy room as we used these on a weekly basis. Permission was sought from the YP to photocopy samples of their coursework for use in the appendices of the thesis.

Power relations

As manager of the project and teacher on the course, I was aware of the power relations that were present in the research process. I was conscious that this power was two-fold, in terms of role duality and in the balance of power between teacher and student. According to Smyth and Holian, the area of role duality is of key concern, particularly when the researcher is also a manager:

> There are inherent tensions between the role of researcher and the organisational role (colleague, subordinate, research partner and friend) that the researcher occupies as an organisational member. This is especially true when the researcher is a manager. Power and authority issues can become especially significant in that case. Researchers need to be aware of the influence of their organisational role on coercion, compliance and access to privileged information (Smyth and Holian, 2008, p. 39).

Due to my organisational role in the project, I needed to be aware of the power I held and ensure that I did not use this to coerce or influence students or the other teacher. As manager, I could make decisions about the learning situation or environment that neither the other teacher nor the YP could. My links with outside agencies meant that I could invite authors and poets to some sessions in the programme, but I did not necessarily

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have to consult with the group as to whom they would like to ask. In truth, this awareness raised some questions for me as to the level of decision making in which the ESLs were involved. I reflected on this but I also had to be practical within the setting we were in: it was not possible to consult and negotiate on all aspects of the programme.

I was also aware of the power relations between the teacher and learner, particularly in an area such as literacy learning. This perception on the balance of power was borne out by a comment from one of the ESLs in his final interview: he was commenting on learner involvement and said 'but it doesn't matter. Ye have all the power. The teachers have the power' (John, 1-1 interview), indicating that his previous experiences of education and of teachers and learners was that the balance of power lay with the teacher. As John was particularly challenged in areas of spelling and vocabulary, and had been quite emotional and angry throughout the programme, I interpreted his response as one of frustration and anger that he did not possess the literacy skills which seemed to come so easily to his teachers.

Related to John's response, another aspect of the power relations in the study was that of knowledge, specifically that of the teacher having more knowledge than the YP. While the YP were more involved in decisions about their learning, they were limited by their literacy gaps. This was clear to me from the outset, even when reading the guidelines for the programme. There was vocabulary that they simply were not familiar with and I felt very conscious of the teacher power balance in this context. Overall, it must be acknowledged that power relations within the taught course were not equal.

Practitioner reflexivity

The AR approach by its very nature supports the idea that the researcher is learning-in-action (Reeves, 1994), which demands heightened self-awareness. As the researcher reflecting on events, before, during and after the project, I needed to be aware of the unconscious issues or 'surreptitious agenda' (Reeves,1994; Shacklock and Smyth, 1998) I brought to the research, which might influence how I interpreted and analysed the data. I needed to balance my positions as teacher and researcher so that the teacher experience did not dominate and so that researcher projection would be avoided. As both manager of the project and a teacher on the course, I knew the ESLs and the setting intimately and had experience of both their characters and their capricious behaviours. While this was an advantage, there was a risk that this level of experience would allow a sense of acceptance or normality of 'what is' to creep in. I was conscious that a goal of the study was to challenge the ESLs to achieve to the best of their abilities. I was also concerned that an improvement in literacy skill was one of the objectives of the study. In order to achieve this, I set high standards for behaviour and commitment to the work of the project. I discussed these and other aspects of the data with Sinead and in joint supervision sessions at the Institute, so that I was able to assimilate multiple views and perceptions of the data.

Insider Research

My position as insider researcher had certain advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, I had an intimate understanding of the setting and knew the ESLs and the staff well. Having a relationship with the YP assisted the process of engagement in the research. I was able to ask for their help but also explain that their input might influence how organisations teach and work with ESLs in the future. I also knew the

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politics and historical perspective of the organisation, which an outsider researcher would take a long time to acquire. These were clear practical advantages, which are reflected in this description by Sikes and Potts:

> Inside researchers readily know the language of those being studied along with its particular jargon and meanings, are more likely to empathise with those they study because of in-depth understanding of them, are less likely to foster distrust and hostility amongst those they study, are often more willing to discuss private knowledge with those who are personally part of their world, are often more likely to understand the events under investigation and are less likely to be afflicted by outsiders' arrogance where researchers fail to understand what they observe (Sikes and Potts, 2008, p. 177).

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages to the position of insider researcher. For example, familiarity with the situation and the participants can lead to a loss of objectivity and there is also a danger that the researcher can unconsciously make wrong assumptions about the research process due to his or her prior knowledge (Unluer, 2012). Furthermore, there is the issue of role duality, the balance that needs to be struck between the role of teacher and researcher (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). There is also the possibility that the insider researcher can use the position to access privileged information or coerce individuals in the study (Smyth and Holian, 2008). In this study, I was aware that I could access information from the CTC manager and other staff on personal issues or my relationship with the ESLs could influence how they responded to my suggestions in the teaching component of the study. I was conscious that I was working with a vulnerable population with limited experience of being asked opinions within the learning setting.

Chapter 3 has described the methods used in this AR design and asserted the researcher's theoretical position. Methods of data collection have been listed and described in some detail and ethical requirements, storage of data and concerns regarding insider research have been discussed. The process and stages of analysis now follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: The Process of Qualitative Analysis

Chapter 4 begins stage three of the AR cycle and describes the process of analysis from all the sets of qualitative data involved in the study. I chose a thematic analysis, to which I took a hybrid approach. Section 4.1 refers to the conceptual framework of constructivism, which informed the process. This is followed in Section 4.2 by an account of how the data was managed and a discussion on practitioner reflexivity. Finally, Section 4.3 provides a description of the process of analysis used in the study and of the six stages used in developing codes, main themes and overarching headings under which I presented the data. Section 4.3 also relates these topics to the research questions.

4.1 Theories of analysis

According to Reicher and Taylor, conducting a rigorous analysis

> lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter (Reicher and Taylor, 2005, p. 549).

I chose thematic analysis for this study because it allows the researcher to analyse a variety of information sensitively and systematically,

> in a manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations and organisations (Boyatzis, 1998, p.5).

In choosing the framework, I was aware that I had some findings from previous research (IFS) which I wished to develop further and I also had a

wide range of fresh qualitative data from the implementation stage of the AR cycle.

Thematic analysis: A hybrid approach

In taking a hybrid approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to the thematic analysis, I used a combination of inductive and deductive coding. This meant the data generation and subsequent analysis were derived from two sources. The first source was the deductive aspect which stemmed from pre-conceived ideas (based on my theoretical perspective, research aim and questions, and findings from my IFS). These findings had established certain specifics which I wanted to develop within the AR cycle, which sees the researcher 'using his or her theories or prior research as a guide for articulation of meaningful themes '(Boyatzis, 1998, p. 52).

The second source was the inductive stage of coding which required an in depth engagement with the data. This allowed an overall picture to emerge and any key ideas or patterns to reveal themselves. I was aware that ESLs are underrepresented in the research literature and that their perspective would yield rich material for interpretation and dissemination.

To ensure structure and clarity within the process of analysis, I loosely drew on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), adapting their six step guide and integrating their ideas with those of Boyatzis (1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the step-by-step approach in conducting a rigourous thematic analysis includes
- familarising oneself with the data,
- generating initial codes,
- searching for themes,
- reviewing and refining themes,

- defining and naming themes, and

- producing the report.

Using an interpretivist framework and interpreting the data from a constructivist position which has at its core 'making meaning' or 'experiencing', (Bruner, 2006; Jonassen, 1991; von Glaserfeld, 1989b), I developed the process of analysis from the perspective of 'experiencing'. Constructivism sees each learner as a complex and multi-dimensional individual with unique needs and background (Gredler, 1997). The background and culture of the learner shapes the knowledge and truth created by him, in developing an understanding of the world around him (Gredler, 1997; Wertsch, 1997). How ESLs make sense of and interpret events (in this case their literacy experience) is influenced by this constructivist approach to learning.

4.2 Managing the data

Ordering the data

As I had built up a range and variety of data throughout the implementation stage of the AR cycle, I put the data sets in chronological order. I wanted to observe and analyse if changes in attitude or in approach to learning might have occurred during this stage. Following this, I separated the various items into two groups, individual exercises and group exercises, to see if any similarities or differences occurred between individual and group exercises. Individual data items included creative written work by participants, 1-1 oral interviews, personal Learner Journals written as part of the Communications module and other documents used in the study such as sample literacy materials from the course. Group data items included discussions of school experience which were tape recorded, a mid-way check-in with the YP through a group

interim review exercise on how the programme was going, and questionnaires. These were both written exercises and verbal discussions.

4.3 Process of analysis

Six stages of analysis were carried out, (based on the research questions which are presented on p.25 and on p.68).These are described in detail below:

i)   Listing and creation of a priori codes.

ii)   Reading and familiarising myself with the data, marking a priori codes (inductive) on the hard copy documents and marking post priori codes as they began to emerge.

iii)   Listing the free post priori (or deductive) codes.

iv)   Combining the a priori and post priori codes into one list of 79 codes.

v)   Deciding to organise and present the data under two key headings of Learner Experience and Teacher Experience.

vi)   Clustering the 79 codes under 8 broader themes, 4 under Learner and 4 under Teacher. There was some overlap between the Learner and Teacher themes.

i) Stage One: Listing of a priori codes

The rationale for using a priori codes in the process of analysis was based on the Stages of the AR cycle and the process of thematic analysis I was employing in the study. As described earlier, I was taking a hybrid approach to the data analysis, using inductive and deductive coding which was generated and collected in Stages One and Two of the AR cycle. In Stage One of the AR cycle, my aim was to investigate whether or not the project was serving the needs of the YP. These findings indicated that the ESLs had specific responses to the literacy project and how they

experienced it. There were obvious limitations which needed further investigation, in particular issues regarding curriculum relevance, appropriate materials and learner challenge and involvement. I considered that these were significant issues to bring into Stage Two, which would inform and strengthen the research process.

Prior to commencing the taught stage of the course (Stage Two), I therefore created a provisional 'start list' of 15 codes. This start list or a priori coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2003; Taylor and Gibbs, 2010) was informed by both the research aims and the questions(p.68) (and therefore the theoretical framework) and as stated earlier, by some of the findings in stage one of this AR cycle, my IFS. Central to the research questions were the experiences of the learners when they were involved in literacy learning: I was interested in exploring the YPs' responses to areas such as ownership of their learning, management of the process, responses to learner involvement and literacy skills development. Examples of these a priori codes include literacy challenge, learner involvement and curriculum used in the course. All 15 a priori codes are listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: A priori codes

A priori codes	
1. greater challenge	11. literacy skills
2. curriculum	12. learner autonomy
3. literacy as 'words'	13. learner efficacy
4. future goals	14. learner management
5. career	15. constructivist teaching methods
6. self-belief	
7. progression	
8. qualifications	
9. learner motivation	
10. greater learner involvement	

ii) Stage Two: Reading and familiarising myself with the data: all qualitative data sets

This stage of coding involved a full and comprehensive reading of the data corpus, so that I could assign emerging preliminary codes to each dataset. I read and re-read each datum and wrote codes in the margins of each hard copy document. I was systematic in my approach as I had a wide variety of materials, all of which required detailed analysis. When these codes were finalised, each datum was re-examined and notes written in margins. I then created tables which highlighted overlapping codes. For example, with the prior expectations questionnaire (an individual exercise), I rewrote ESLs' responses into a journal and wrote codes in the margins beside them. In that way, I developed a feeling for what was showing up. I also felt more confident in coding items, using this in-depth approach. I applied the same method to the discussion groups and to the interim review questionnaire, coding with key words and building up a series of codes. All items were stored in spiral bound journals so that they were readily available for me to revisit as queries arose.

Having read through the data several times, I then grouped similar patterns and picked up on particular ideas which became the key themes for analysis and findings. I worked methodically through a range of written texts and oral interviews, which I transcribed myself in order to be as close to the data as possible. I examined ESLs' written work from the Communications course, and scanned texts and read and re-read materials so that I got a sense of the overall ideas which were emerging from the data.

iii) Stage Three: Listing the post-priori (or deductive) codes

Post-priori codes emerged from all the sources of data, including 1-1 interviews, group discussions, journal entries, questionnaires, contracts and teacher observations. As I had transferred these data to corresponding notebooks I could refer back to responses and double check codes as I progressed throughout this stage. By this point I had generated over 60 codes, ranging from 'satisfaction' 'efficacy' and 'maturity' to 'alienation', anxiety' and 'rejection'. I created a table of these generated post-priori codes, available in Appendix O.

iv) Stage Four: Combining the a priori and post priori codes into one list

I subsequently carried out a detailed second stage coding on all the data collected and merged the a priori and post priori codes into more than 79 codes. I then created a table of the complete set of codes. These are presented in Table 5 below. I worked to reduce the number of codes further by looking for overlap and common patterns or families. For example, 'gaps' in literacy appeared four times in various formats, so I grouped these together. Evidence of anxiety emerged three times in various codes and these items were also clustered together. Other examples which I grouped together included 'the need for support', 'poor behaviours' and 'responsibility'. In this way, I developed themes from the clustering of codes which occurred naturally in the coding process. For instance, the theme of external influences emerged from both the teacher and learner data, and it became clear that external influences affected these ESLs' performance in the course.

Table 5: Full list of codes generated from the data set

Full list of codes generated from the data		
1. greater challenge	27. persistence	53. positive ed. experience
2. curriculum	28. fatigue	54. motivation
3. literacy as 'words'	29. swearing	55 .progression
4. future goals	30. efficacy (a priori)	56. security
5. career	31. power relations	57. poor behaviour
6. self-belief	32. maturity	58. rejection
7. progression	33. gaps in learning	59. alienation
8. qualifications	34. literacy skills	60. tutor responsibility
9. learner motivation	35. ambition	61. taking control
10. greater learner involvement	36. teacher as coach	62. patience
11. literacy skills	37. autonomy (a priori)	63. teacher anxiety
12. learner autonomy	38. maturity	64. reflection
13. learner efficacy	39. physical tiredness	65. need to be listened to
14. learner management	40. being unwell	66. lack of consistency
15. constructivist teaching methods	41. nervousness	67. achievement
16. greater challenge (a priori)	42. mood	68. generative learning
17. frustration	43. external factors	69. proving themselves
18. anxiety	44. making decisions	70. relationship
19. resistance	45. need for structure	71. order in learning
20. negative ed. experience	46. teacher belief	72. effort
21. need for support	47. value of education	73. learner support
22. structure	48. power relations	74. teacher skill
23. satisfaction	49. learner voice(a priori)	75. self-directed learning
24. change	50. barriers to learning	76. shock
25. owning learning (a priori)	51. not used to being asked	77. flexibility
26. responsibility	52. stress	78. teacher style
		79. value of constructivist methods

v) Stage Five: Creating two overarching headings: Learners and Teachers

While continuing with the work to see if I could cluster the family codes under a series of broader themes, I realised I could develop a framework on which I could confidently interpret and present initial findings represented under these two main, overarching headings: Learner Experience and Teacher Experience.

vi) Stage Six: The creation of four themes under each heading of Learner and Teacher

After a great deal of work, I eventually developed four broad themes for Learners and four broad themes for Teachers. There was some overlap between these themes.

The Learner themes included 1) literacy skills and issues, 2) emotional responses to the course, 3) experience of the course and 4) external influences. Table 6 illustrates how the codes were allocated under the four broad themes. The numbers in brackets are based on the original 79 codes and indicate the presence of this code elsewhere in the data set. For example, 'Stress' is coded as and manifests as 'frustration' (17), 'anxiety' (18), 'physical tiredness' (39), and 'experiences of alienation' (59).

Table 6: Four themes from family codes: Learners

Theme 1: Literacy skills and issues	Theme 2: Experience of the course
Gaps in literacy (3,11,29, 34)	Frustration (17)
Lack of expressive language (3,49)	Anxiety (18,41,59)
Value of education (4, 5,7, 47)	Swearing (29)
Previous negative experience (17,19, 20)	Stress (17,18,39,59)
Value of qualifications (8 ,47)	Fatigue (28,39)
Challenge (1, 35,67)	Challenge (1,16)
Conceptions of literacy -- writing, text (2,3)	Need for support (21, 65,73)
Future career/job (5,7,44,67)	Need for order (18,67)
Achievement (67)	Poor behaviours (29,42,57)
Thinking skills (1, 34)	Avoidance (39,40)
Formal voice (49)	'Alternative' voice (65)
Reflective skills (35, 61,72)	Security (56)
Transferrable skills (68,71,72)	Rejection (58,59)
	Influence of learner mood (17,42)
	Nervousness (41,57)
Theme 3: Emotional responses to course	**Theme 4: External influences**
Ownership (25)	Many barriers to learning (43,50)
Learner control (12,61)	Negative learning experiences (20)
Making decisions (44)	Multiple disadvantages present (62)
Satisfaction (23,53,67,69,75)	Lack of voice (48,49,65)
Structure (22, 45)	Social mobility (7,31)
Owning the learning (10,14,25)	Immediate life circumstances (45,66)
Not used to being asked (48,49)	Future opportunities (7,35)
Autonomy (12,37)	Crime (50,55)
Efficacy (27)	Addiction (46, 57,59)
Responsibility (26,32,61)	Progression (7,55)
Determination/persistence (27,35)	
Motivation (9,35,54,72)	
Tutor belief (46,73,74,78)	
Managing change (30,38)	
Learner choice (37,61,68,69)	
Commitment (25,54)	
Power relations (31,48,50)	

Under Teachers, I also had four broad themes. These were very similar to the themes under Learners in that they concerned experience, emotional responses and external factors or influences. The Teacher themes included 1) experience of the course, 2) experience of using constructivist teaching strategies, 3) teachers' emotional response to the course, and 4) external influences. Again, the numbers in brackets are based on the original 79 codes and indicate the presence of this code elsewhere in the data set. For example, 'greater learner involvement' is coded as and manifests as 'learner autonomy' (12), 'making decisions' (44) and 'taking control' (61). Table 7 illustrates how the family codes were clustered and structured under the four broad themes for teachers. This completed the six stages of analysis.

Table 7: Four themes from family codes: Teachers

Theme 1: Teacher experience of the course	Theme 2: Teacher experience of using constructivist teaching strategies
Challenge (1,16)	Greater challenge (1,16)
Flexibility (60,70,77,)	Frustration (17)
Need for structure (22,43,)	Need for structure (22,45)
Teacher style (74,78)	Fatigue (28,39)
Confidence (75)	Positive ed. experience (53,54,61)
Teacher skill (74)	Achievement (53,55,67)
Order in learning (71)	Gaps in learning (33)
Making decisions (44,55,60)	Generative learning (68)
Persistence (27,67,68)	Taking control (14,61)
Motivation (54,61)	Progression (7,55)
Progression (14,55),	Value of education (47)
Teacher belief (46,47,70)	Value of constructivist methods (15,79)
Satisfaction (23,53,55)	Teacher as coach (36) (79)
Change (16,24)	Teacher Responsibility (60)
Value of education (47)	Greater learner involvement(10,12,44)
Relationship (70)	Self directed learning (75)(79)
Theme 3: Emotional responses to the course	**Theme 4: External influences**
Teacher anxiety (63)	Many barriers to learning (43,50)
Fatigue (28)	Negative learning experiences (20)
Teacher belief (46,70,73)	Multiple disadvantages present (43,50)
Stress (18,19,39,52,63)	Lack of voice (49,65)
Patience (62)	Social mobility (7)
Persistence (27)	Immediate life circumstances (66)
Frustration (17)	Future opportunities (7,35,44)
Satisfaction (7,23)	Crime (50,57)
Tutor Reflection (64)	Addiction (50,59)
Motivation (54)	Progression (7,55)
Confidence (75)	Mood (42)
Shock (76)	Efficacy (13,30)
Power relations (31,48)	Alienation (19,59)
Mood (42)	
Lack of consistency (66)	

vii) Stage 7: Relating the eight themes to the research questions, four under learners and four under teachers

I now had eight broad themes under two key headings, the Learner and Teacher experiences, which related directly back to the research questions.

Under **Learners**, I matched the four themes presented above to the appropriate research questions:

1. **Literacy skills and issues:** based on Research Question 1: *What are the effects on their literacy development when ESLs have greater involvement in the learning process?*
2. **Emotional responses to the course:** based on Research Question 2: *What are the experiences, understandings and interpretations of ESLs when they have greater involvement in the learning process?*
3. **Experience of the course:** based on Research Question 2: *What are the experiences, understandings and interpretations of ESLs when they have greater involvement in the learning process?*
4. **External influences:** based on Research Question 4: *what are the effects of external circumstances on ESLs' education?*

Under **Teachers,** I matched the four themes presented above to the appropriate research questions:

1. **Experience of the course:** based on Research Question 3: *What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when learners have greater involvement in the learning process?*

2. **Experience of using constructivist teaching strategies:** based on Research Question 3: *What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when learners have greater involvement in the learning process?*

3. **Emotional response to the course:** based on Research Question 3: *What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when learners have greater involvement in the learning process?*

4. **External influences:** based on Research Question 4: *what are the effects of external circumstances on ESLs' education?*

The theme of 'external influences' emerged from the data during the implementation stage of the AR cycle. External circumstances impacted extensively on ESL participation and completion of the course to the extent that it required particular attention and could not be overlooked in the study. The mitigating external circumstances and life events which ESLs bring to the learning situation are key factors in determining their educational progression.

In summary, I used a hybrid approach involving both a priori and post priori codes. I began with a priori codes (stage 1), then familiarized myself with the whole data set that I had collected (stage 2). Stage 3 involved the creation of post priori codes that emerged from the data. These were clustered together with the a priori codes into more manageable families (stage 4). These codes were then allocated under the two overarching headings of learner experience and teacher experience (stage 5) and then organized under a number of larger themes (stage 6). Finally, they were checked against my research questions (stage 7).

Other areas of analysis that I carried out included simple quantitative and descriptive analysis of attendance records over the eight month period, pre- and post-reading tests, module completion and certification achieved.

Chapter 4 has described stage three of the AR cycle, the process of thematic analysis, and outlined the six stages of analysis.

Chapter 5 will now discuss the findings that emerged from the data analysis in this chapter. I have included data from all eight ESLs throughout the study, despite subsequent drop-out of three YP, as part of the thematic analysis employed. The findings are structured and presented under the two headings of Learner Experience and Teacher Experience that arose during the stages of analysis.

Chapter 5: Presentation of Findings

Chapter 5 develops stage three of the AR cycle and provides an overview of the main findings of the study, which represent the perspectives of both learners and teachers structured around the headings that emerged from the thematic analysis. In Section 5.1, I describe what has been learned from these ESLs under the headings of literacy skills and issues, emotional response to the course, learner experience of the course, and the impact of external issues. This is followed in Section 5.2 with an outline of the main issues arising under teacher experience, presented under the headings of experience of the course, experience of the constructivist teaching strategies, emotional responses to the course and the impact of external issues on the programme. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the key findings and emerging issues.

5.1 Learner experience

Literacy skills and issues

Expectations of the course and literacy skills

The ESLs in this study considered literacy skills and the ability to communicate effectively as important aspects of their lives. However, it was clear from their responses that they had identified gaps in their basic literacy, such as grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. In the Prior Expectations questionnaire, some ESLs stated that they wanted to use the course to improve their literacy abilities. Specifically, they wanted 'better English', (John), 'more English' (Brian), 'better English, to pass it' (Michael), 'proper English skills' (Trudy) and 'the right English to get my dream job' (Clara).

The majority of these ESLs identified gaps in spelling, reading and writing. Four of the eight wanted to improve their writing, three wanted to improve spelling and three, reading skills. Speaking and listening did not emerge as significant areas for improvement and were only mentioned by two ESLs who stated they would like to *'speak fluently'*, while another learner, Brian, reported that *' My reading and writing -- ok, but need to improve my communications'*. While most of these ESLs associated literacy skills with employment and the future, they did not name any specific jobs and most were unclear about their direction. When I spoke with them, there was a sense they were only beginning to think about the future, which was uncertain and vague. It was clear that these ESLs would need structured training pathways following the Communications course.

Aspirations/motivations and the value of education

Evidence in this study indicated that these ESLs associated good literacy skills with progression leading to secure employment. Clara, Matthew and Mark wanted simply *'to get a good job'*. Other ESLs wanted 'to show my children how education is important' (Trudy), said 'education can help me to get a job' (Martin), and stated 'I would like to get qualified in whatever I end up doing and hopefully set up my own business someday' (Cian).

Clara, who wanted 'to have the right English to get my dream job', is an Irish national. English is her first language but she felt a lack of skill and confidence as a result of her limited education. Brian saw the course as *'a better chance of getting a job, education. It's something better to put on my C.V.',* demonstrating ambition and hope for himself for the future. Related goals from these ESLs included 'get a good education', produce 'a better piece of work for my c.v.' (John), 'get another qualification' and 'get good communication skills and help find a job' (Clara) and 'move on to LCA next year' (Brian).

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Notwithstanding some levels of absenteeism, and despite their individual differences, five of the eight ESLs completed the Communications course, albeit with a high level of teacher support. To achieve this, the ESLs had to engage with literacy tasks which required turning new information into understanding. Despite personal challenges, they each displayed a level of self-determination that carried them through the course, driven, it seems, largely by extrinsic motivators such as the qualification and the prospect of future employment through improved literacy skills (Deci and Ryan, 1985). These ESLs displayed individual differences, in both level and orientation of motivation, which are described in Table 8. The table includes only those ESLs who completed the programme.

Table 8: ESLs and motivation

Name	Intrinsic Factors (doing something because it is inherently enjoyable or interesting)	Extrinsic Factors (doing something that leads to a separable outcome)	Evidence of self-determination and response to challenge
Brian	Brian displayed some intrinsic motivation: he liked English for its own sake, particularly enjoyed reading books and meeting the author who was invited to the project. Asked insightful questions.	Extrinsic motivation appeared to be stronger. Wanted to progress to LCA and future work. Had goals which he saw as real but after he completed the Communications course, he did not progress to LCA.	Brian was determined to finish the course and displayed a level of self-determination which carried him through. However, the teachers had to push and encourage him a lot.
John	John had a poor level of intrinsic motivation; he did not enjoy aspects of the course and was difficult to work with at times. He was also dyslexic, which was a challenge for him.	High level of extrinsic motivation. Wanted to pursue Level 5 Car Mechanics, which he did. Very anxious to get a job and have a good life. His life goals were motivated by things he wanted to achieve: qualifications, a job, a home.	John was very determined and he rose to the challenge of the course, despite a lot of issues with literacy. Reacted very emotionally but completed the course.
Trudy	Displayed very little obvious intrinsic motivation and yet she completed the course. Trudy seemed to suffer low mood throughout.	Low levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation but wanted to be able to teach her children in the future. Trudy is a Traveller girl, whose future is possibly mapped out already in terms of marriage and children.	Demonstrated very little determination, in fact was quite apathetic throughout, though she had very good literacy skills.
Matthew	ESOL learner: he did not appear to be intrinsically motivated, but he liked some of the course and wanted to succeed.	Higher level of extrinsic motivation related to the realisation that he had to have good English to get a job.	Strong levels of self-determination and he responded to the challenge of the course, despite almost giving up at one stage. He was persuaded to continue and extra support in English was provided.
Martin	ESOL learner: intrinsic motivation did not seem to be very strong, i.e. learning for learning's sake, but he liked some of the course materials, such as poetry and music	High level of extrinsic motivation, related to getting work to have a better future.	Displayed high level of self-determination, was impatient if he did not get the attention of teachers, wanted to know how to express things in English, all connected to his future.

(Based on Ryan and Deci, 2000)

Perceived gradual improvement in skills

While these ESLs had some criticisms of course materials, such as the amount and number of written text and corrections, comments on the Communications course were generally positive and they all perceived that they had made progress. In 1-1 interviews, remarks such as 'I'm better at my writing now', 'My spelling is better' and 'I can read more words', illustrate this. Trudy declared that 'My spelling is better. I know the meaning of some words and my reading is improved' while Brian noted that 'My vocabulary has developed a lot and I can spell better'. John, who was challenged by spelling and writing issues, also felt that he had improved:

> Spelling. New words that I learned that I didn't know how to spell 'til I got used to them for the first time, like. I'm better in writing, talking and reading (John, 1-1 interview).

Brian perceived that:

> My vocabulary has developed a lot. I know how to spell better. Just talking to someone, words would be popping into your head and I might use them depending on who the person would be (Brian, 1-1 interview).

In her 1-1 interview, Clara reported that:

> I found it very good and helpful. I improved in my reading, my speech, writing letters. Yeah, like speaking in front of people, reading aloud in front of a group. Before I'd just read to myself. It helps me outside now. Cos if I meet somebody

who says a big word I can understand it more, I'm not looking at them.

Clara had stated at the outset that she wanted to be better at English and to have a higher level of skill: it appears that she felt she achieved this to some degree.

Matthew, on the other hand, was critical of both the course content and some aspects of what he had to do, was ambivalent about the value of the course but acknowledged some progress. From his Learning Journal we read: 'The Communications course I found sometimes boring but I know it's good for me. But I'm not sure if it will be useful for my life or for my job.' Matthew also stated that, despite not liking some work, 'I know more words now. I have more sentences now. I can read and I know how to write letters of complaint and reports, how to begin them' (Matthew, Learner Journal). This raises the issue of the relevance of the curriculum for these ESLs and we encountered this again in the study, in relation to the antipathy with which they regarded the Learner Journal.

Overall, the majority of the ESLs felt that by the end of the course they had acquired more transferrable skills which they could use in other areas of their lives. They mentioned spoken language, spelling, reading and writing as well as specifically writing letters and doing interviews. This suggests that their attitudes to literacy had also changed and there appeared to be less fear of the subject at the end of the course, with each ESL coming across as more self-assured in his or her 1-1 interview.

Expanding ESLs' understandings of literacy

At the beginning of the course, the ESLs' understanding of literacy was generally confined to spelling, reading and writing (Larkin, 2009). As the

Communications course progressed, they were involved in interviews, role play, studying aspects of body language and listening skills. Initially, they were reluctant and awkward in role play exercises. They were sensitive and self-conscious of their voices, their body language and having their photos taken. Gradually, they became more confident. Martin, an ESOL learner, reported 'I have more control in English. I am listening differently' while Clara stated that she had become more confident as a result of developing speaking skills: 'Yeah. Like I never thought I'd get up and talk, give speeches in front of a room of people. You helped me through it and I did it and I felt comfortable with it'. For Brian, the main lesson he took from the course was that every communication has a sender and a receiver. His final interview notes that 'I've a better understanding of communications, yes. There's two people sending and receiving information. I hate writing tho'.

Brian had a particularly poor understanding of the impact of what he said and how he said it, had on others. In one example, he did not show up for his Communications session so Sinéad, the teacher, went to find him. When she appeared in the door of the woodwork workshop, he put his hand to his head and shouted, 'I'm not going up to that f****g class. I'm not in the mood, I'm not going up'. This took her completely by surprise and she challenged him on it. He was totally unaware that he might have shocked or upset her, or indeed that his response was inappropriate in any way. It is interesting that Brian considered his understanding of senders and receivers in communication to be his key learning item.

Other responses reflected feelings of inferiority and a self-consciousness regarding social background. For example, Trudy would not speak aloud or agree to be recorded for a job interview, which was a requirement of the programme. She was angry when asked to record her voice and said 'I hate listening to myself. I hate me voice, big traveller voice'.

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Many ESLs have negative school experiences (Natriello, 1984; Smyth et al., 2000, Taylor, 2009) which they carry with them into further education. In John's case, memories of these experiences seemed to be triggered by the course and he was constantly aggressive and defensive. He had negative associations with speaking and listening and did not see them as connected with learning. He was also scathing about the amount of explanation teachers provided before beginning a piece of work. On one occasion, when he was anxious to begin written work, he exclaimed: 'why don't ye just get on with it and let us start some real work. Let us get something done. All this talking is nothing. It's not work' (John, classroom setting). Despite teachers' efforts to 'respect and understand their students' knowledge and ability to learn' (Jaeger and Lauritzen, 1992, p.14), creating learner involvement with some of these ESLs was not an easy task.

Progress in literacy

There are two findings which indicate that the majority of these ESLs made some progress in reading comprehension and ability to tackle literacy challenges: the ART reading tests and the results of the Communications course. Table 9 presents the ART results for the five ESLs. These findings have to be interpreted cautiously as the study sample is small and the ESOL ESLs did not complete the post-test in full. Pre and post test results are presented as centiles[4], where 10th centile indicates being in the lowest 10%of the population and 90%indicates being in the highest 10% of the population. Improvement in reading accuracy was inconsistent. Two participants had marginal increases in accuracy, one remained unchanged and two decreased. Reading

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[4] Based on the original standardisation sample of 304 tertiary level education students attending FE/HE in south-east England.

comprehension scores, however, improved for four of the five, indicating that they were reading and interpreting materials with more understanding and perhaps more critical thinking skills.

Table 9: Pre and post ART results of the five ESLs

ADULT READING TEST	ACCURACY SCORE		COMPREHENSION SCORE	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
Brian	45th centile	35th centile	40th centile	60th centile
John	20th centile	30th centile	35th centile	60th centile
Trudy	30th centile	30th centile	75th centile	65th centile
Mark (ESOL) (4 post-tests only)	30th centile	70th centile	25th centile	40th centile
Matthew (ESOL) 4 pre-tests only and 3 post-tests only	20th centile	15th centile	20th centile	25th centile

In terms of the Level 4 qualification in Communications, all those who completed the course gained the qualification. The external examiner remarked:

> The Communications (L4 G10001) module was of a particularly high standard (Guerin, 2011).

All received Merit grades (the rankings were Pass, Merit or Distinction) and presented portfolios of work which reflected their hard work and commitment. Again, the role of motivation in the literacy development of these ESLs is powerfully demonstrated. In carrying out the literacy tasks they had to engage in 'a conscious act of will' (Davey, 2006, p.165), and an ability to move from basic skills work to more demanding English, which required deductive and inferential thinking. This is a critical factor in these findings. ESLs are generally switched off school and learning; they are difficult to engage and often lack persistence. While these ESLs were

pre-selected for the course and had completed the previous level of
FETAC Communications(Level 3), without motivation they would not have
made further progress, as 'ability becomes meaningless if the individual
lacks the motivation to act' (Davey, 2006, p. 165), and 'one of the most
powerful affective motivators is autonomy' (Davey, 2006, p.172). These
ESLs became powerful in their own literacy environment which in turn,
may have contributed to their motivation in achieving their qualifications.

ESLs' response to greater challenge, particularly written work

Responses to the challenge of the course were mixed. In this study, the
ESLs complained of being tired at times and often yawned or stretched in
their seats. Yet they persisted with tasks, suggesting there may have been
more of an issue with learner stamina than cognitive or academic abilities.

There were particular reactions to the challenges of written work. When
writing multiple drafts or their Learner Journals, ESLs' attitudes to the
writing process were negative. This was true of both males and females.
We know that young males have particular issues with writing and so this
brings into question the appropriateness of offering programmes with high
writing demands to ESLs who have literacy issues. This also presents us
with a challenge to VET certification and how it is designed, when

> writing is no longer reserved for the page; the ubiquity of the
> screen is changing the concept and process of making
> meaning from writing, resulting in new challenges for the 21st
> literacy learner (Gingell, 2011, p. 2).

On the other hand, these ESLs seemed to associate writing large amounts
of text as an indicator of how difficult the course was. They were proud of

work they completed and they were, I feel, anxious to prove they could do this difficult work. Brian, in his 1-1 interview, commented:

> It was more of a challenge than the Junior Cert anyway, a lot more challenging. The reading and the writing was a lot harder. There was a lot more writing in Communications. The words were a lot bigger.

while Trudy felt endorsed by the challenge of the work and felt she was learning:

> It was a bit harder. Yeah made me work more, writing more, I didn't know I could do all that. It was a bit harder. There was more stuff -- more writing. The thinking was harder. You had to think more (Trudy, 1-1 interview).

John liked the challenge of the materials and even experienced some enjoyment!

> I enjoyed writing out the report and getting it done, over and done with. I just said I might as well do it. I got help but I knew what to do towards the end. I knew I was learning how to write about something (John, 1-1 interview).

In contrast, the response to the written Learner Journal was negative. It emerged early on in the process that the ESLs disliked this aspect of the programme intensely and did not know what to write or indeed *how* to write reflectively about their learning. The YP did not see this element of the course as useful or relevant. They took offence at the repetitive nature of the journal: their comments illustrate this. Cian stated 'get rid of the learner journal. Four entries are too much it gets repetitive' while Brian

said 'I hate writing about myself' and Clara described it as 'boring.' This deserves specific mention as an example of poor literacy demand, with a low level of skill required and with little relevance to developing skills or knowledge. I sensed the YP felt patronised by this piece of curriculum as it demanded very little from them in terms of literacy skill.

In comparison, neither Matthew nor Michael, the two ESOL learners, complained about the Learner Journals and they were less vocal in airing their opinions on any aspects of learning. This was an interesting contrast between the ESOL ESLs and the non-ESOL ESLs: they did not complain and were not as loud as the others in the group. They expressed frustration with the demands of the course but their way of dealing with it was to ask teachers for support.

Learner experience of the course

Initial reactions to learner involvement

ESLs were very much at sea at the outset of the programme and were unsure how to react when asked to create a contract and agree how sessions would be run. We, as the teachers, were attempting to create an environment which had elements of effective constructivist teaching, such as opportunities for change and challenge (Barr, 2001; Wood, Nelson and Warfield, 2001), but the ESLS were not ready for this level of engagement. When asked to give opinions on the types of pens and paper they used, the room set-up and the breaks taken, they were unsure what to answer. The teachers needed to suggest responses to them. This suggests that they did not expect to be asked to decide about their learning, nor were they used to this type of involvement. Their learner contract (Appendix H) was a first step towards greater learner involvement as were their subsequent agreements on corrections and drafts of work.

As they gradually settled in, ideas developed. I was interested in the number of suggestions associated with managing behaviours, such as 'no mood swings', 'coping skills', 'sit down and talk to him', 'listen to each other', 'everybody gets a chance to speak', and 'change material/swap it around/leave for another day'. Rules regarding mobile phones and being on time were also put forward by the YP. It appeared they were aware that behaviour and lack of control could disrupt sessions.

So from an early stage, the traditional classroom style was no longer in use and the group could see that the teachers were looking to them for decisions. Initial sessions began with learner fatigue, physical yawning and stretching, moans about the work we had to do and an overall feeling of malaise, possibly masking anxiety and uncertainty.

As the course progressed, the interim review exposed a more assertive yet truculent group, with the ESLs expressing clearly what they felt was not working and what they did not like. Brian said 'I hate writing stories. Do less of them', while John declared that he was not learning enough and was finding things difficult 'No, there could be more learning for me. There could be easier ways of learning for me' and Clara stated that 'I need to fidget when working. I don't like doing the work in silence'.

These responses were typical of these ESLs at various times throughout the course: they were sometimes sullen and often lacked concentration. In one session, the boys made phone calls about car insurance despite the agreement regarding phones. In another session, Trudy was more interested in the tattoos displayed in the Guinness Book of Records than in suggesting improvements to the Communications programme. This was often disheartening for us as teachers but it was not untypical of ESL behaviours and a common reality in working in this setting.

On reflection, those two sessions provided an opportunity for literacy as social practice in action, where literacy is acquired through specific social interactions (Barton et al., 2000; Street, 1995). In those disrupted sessions, we had an opportunity to work on a new piece of curriculum created by and relevant to these ESLs. The learner was central to the activity and provided the stimulus, all hallmarks of good constructivist practice (Bruner, 1960; Richardson, 1999; Vrasidas 2000). Seizing the opportunity had several implications for us. Firstly, we were restricted by certification requirements and had a particular body of work to cover during that session. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, it was not as easy as we thought to deviate from the planned course and follow the leads of the learners. This would have required a degree of reorganization which we felt too constrained to follow. In hindsight, I consider that we missed an excellent opportunity: it would have been an exciting departure to plan a curriculum with the learners and include units of learning based on car insurance quotes and stories from the Guinness Book of Records, all areas of interest to these ESLs. This example highlighted the challenges of using a constructivist framework in the VET setting, given the ESLs' need for security and structure.

Growing in confidence and taking responsibility

Gradually, these ESLs engaged more with the process and took more responsibility for their learning. For example, in one session, Clara offered to ring two of the group who had not shown up, in case they were mixed up regarding time or place. There was general adherence to learner contracts by showing up for sessions on time and returning on time from smoking breaks. Though small examples, they illustrate how these ESLs were getting used to working in this type of setting and were taking on more responsibility. In a group interview, John reported that 'yeah, we are

involved. We decided to get into the Communications course' while Clara's experience was connected to making choices about her learning: 'we picked what we wanted to do at times'. Martin spoke about his sense of having to take responsibility for the work: 'you had to take responsibility for your learning, all of it.' This was echoed, again by Clara, who felt a responsibility to the group:

> If I didn't push myself, I felt I was letting somebody down. I can't say to Matthew 'go in there and do my learning for me (Clara, interim review discussion).

Again, the sense of taking responsibility for one's learning emerges, as Trudy reports:

> It's a good way to do it. It's up to yourself to do it. It's a better way of doing it, to let people know that they have to do it themselves. You have to put your head down to do the work like. If you're petted too much, you get jaw locked. You sit there and do nothing. Let them [teachers] do it (Trudy, 1-1 interview).

The sense of responsibility felt by some of the learners seemed to be associated with a sense of challenge, as if this programme was taking them seriously and they, it.

Growing learner involvement

As with taking responsibility, learner involvement developed over time. Developments were not linear and there were ongoing issues with ESLs' absenteeism, aberrant behaviours and mood swings. Furthermore, there were opportunities and restrictions on the level of involvement the YP

could have. Interestingly, the learning environment, break times and room layout did not overly concern these ESLs. They became more engaged in curriculum decisions about drafts of work, how corrections were to be approached and the order of the units of the coursework.

For example, when trying to agree on the number of written drafts, teachers suggested various options: three drafts, four or even five. When we all discussed the practicalities of doing four or five rewrites of a report or a letter, John proposed three drafts and there was general and unanimous agreement. There was no sense of the ESLs being dominated by John, or being uninvolved in the decision. It must be noted that there were some restrictions to learner involvement, such as freedom to choose all aspects of the curriculum. Table 10 provides examples of the ESLs' opportunities for and restrictions to learner involvement and where the YP took responsibility.

Table 10: Opportunities for learner Involvement

Opportunities for learner involvement	Restrictions to learner involvement	Evidence of learner responsibility
• Agree how to work together: contract re phones, learning together, listening, helping. • Learner environment -- choosing stationery, venue, break times. • Choice in how the module was taught – units taught sequentially or random order. • Choice to use bigger room, when available • Choice in how corrections are done, what colour pen is used! • Decision on number of drafts of a written piece.	• Schedule re course, .i.e day and time the teaching sessions were held. • Curriculum requirements: no choice regarding Learner Journals, oral recorded interview, 5 pieces of written text, 5 samples of reading activity. • No opportunity to select visitors to the course. • No choice in the qualification taken • No choice regarding portfolio presentation. • No choice regarding teachers on the course.	• Created and agreed on how to work together – contracts. • Punctuality re breaks and start up times. • Called each other to check on attendance • Responded to tasks and accepted the course requirements. • Participated in sessions with visiting authors. • Spoke of a sense of responsibility to each other in the group. Helped the ESOL learners with English.

Learner involvement, choice and ownership

Brian connected his learner involvement directly to the curriculum, which gave him some influence in how the units of learning were structured. This

was connected with a sense of taking ownership of his learning. He described his experience as follows:

> It was good, cos we, the group, got to decide the order of the units-what's first, what's last. That's right, we did. We got to decide what way we learned instead of you just pushing the stuff on us. I got on better, like, with having to decide what to do, when, what day. With Communications, it was kind of up to yourself. Ye gave me my own chance, like. If you want it, you'll do it. But I did want it, so I'd get in the mood, snap out of the mood five minutes later and then crack on again (Brian, 1-1 interview).

Other ESLs reported similar thoughts, connecting a sense of learner involvement with having a voice in how they learned. For example, Matthew expresses his experience of being involved with having a voice in how he learned:

> like everyone had the right to say how you learn. That way of learning, I liked it. We were making the rules how we wanted to learn Yes, talking about some things for a while and then you said 'now, go and do it (Matthew, 1-1 interview).

The second ESOL learner, Martin, was the one ESL who was less able to take control and he required a lot of support from teachers. When asked about this, he replied that 'you have to be cross sometimes to make people...'. Of all of the ESLs, he found it the most difficult to take ownership of his learning. Perhaps this reflected his lack of confidence in English but he required a lot of support before starting a piece of work and he would persist in asking questions and making sure he was right before he started something. When teachers eventually ran out of patience and

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told him to start the piece, he would begin. This is perhaps what he meant when he said 'you have to be cross sometimes'.

In contrast, John experienced learner involvement in only a minor way. In his final interview with me, John reported the following:

Interviewer:	What did you make of being asked to be involved in things: in the number of drafts, times of breaks? Did you like that? Did you think it was a good idea?
John:	Am, yeah, like. You can say what you want and they'll help you out.
Interviewer:	Were you used to being asked to be involved in what you learn?
John:	Not really, no.
Interviewer:	Was it strange to be asked, to give your opinion, etc?
John:	It was a shock at the start like.
Interviewer:	And how did you cope with it?
John:	I just got on with it.
Interviewer:	Yeah but did you offer an opinion. Did you contribute to the contract?
John:	Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer:	And did you feel you had a bit of control over the learning then?
John:	A small bit.
Interviewer:	And who had the most control?
John:	S and T. [He refers to the teachers.]
Interviewer:	And why would you say that?
John:	Cos they're the teachers. They know more than all of us at the end of the day.

John's interview illustrates how he sees the balance of power distributed between teachers and ESLs. His view is that the teacher holds the power and that power is knowledge. His responses are similar throughout the data, in other group discussions and in other areas of this interview. However, John was positive about what he achieved and described the feeling of learner involvement as:

> I dunno. There was more, I dunno. It just made us come in more, we knew what we were doing so we had our own choice about what we wanted to do so we just got on with it. Got it over and done with (John, 1-1 interview).

John seemed to have gained a sense of learner responsibility regarding his work and when comparing it to the certificate he had done before, he stated: 'The other course was handed to you. This Communications course was up to yourself. No one's going to push you. If you're willing to do it, they'll help you.' When asked how he felt about having to take on the work himself, he said, 'I felt ok about it. Cos if you were going in there, you were going in to work' (John, 1-1 interview).

These extracts indicate that most of these ESLs responded positively to having some control over their learning. This finding supports current evidence that a key feature in effective interventions is the emphasis on engaging ESLs in this process (Lehr et al., 2004) and illustrates the potential that exists for creating new approaches to ESL education based on greater learner involvement.

The need for structure and support

Even though learner involvement began to develop, a strong need for structure and security emerged from the data. These ESLs needed to see learning happening sequentially and they all voted to complete the units in chronological order. It seemed to give each of them a level of control and security. Brian, who is dyslexic, found the structure very important:

> It was good working on all the different units. Cos you knew where you were at then -- you knew the bit to complete. I found it easier to keep track of stuff*.*

Many others expressed this in their comments on how work was explained to them and how, when they felt unsure of themselves, they could ask for clarification. Clara expresses this as:

> Yeah, ye talked to us more and explained to us more than other tutors. I like the other tutors, don't get me wrong, they explain, but they leave you off. You and Sinéad explained and gave help with spelling and things .I knew that if I needed explaining a word I couldn't pronounce, I could just call on ye. It showed me ye were there to help, that ye weren't there to say 'get this done, get that done' (Clara, 1-1 interview).

Mark said in an informal discussion 'the teaching that you're doing is good, cos you explain a lot'. There is a connection here between support and belief as he follows on from this with:

It makes you feel like an adult. It makes you feel we know how to do it. She thinks we know how to do it, but we don't, but we just do it anyway.

This need for and appreciation of support is evidenced again in John's comments and suggests that the teacher role contributed to an increase in both learning new skills and in levels of confidence: 'I've learned so much, to do things by myself instead of being afraid to write in case I get it wrong'. Martin, who sometimes found English difficult, reported that he learned because

learning with you is different to the other teachers, so I was more comfortable with you and with Sinéad because you explained everything, every word, every sentence (Martin, 1-1 interview).

The need for explanations and to understand was obviously important to the ESLs and suggests that previous learning experiences left some of them confused or falling behind: this corresponds with the previous findings in my IFS study (Larkin, 2009) which clearly identified gaps in the ESLs' literacy skills. For example, many of these ESLs did not know the correct use of capital letters and commas. In other cases, basic spelling errors such as *lerner* for *learner* or *intrest* for *interest* or pronunciation of *FETAC* as *VETAC* were common. Perhaps the approach to teaching offered throughout the course closed some of these gaps. It also suggests that, while ESLs respond to higher level work, they also need tuition in basic skills as part of broader coursework.

Teacher sensitivity was also needed in managing regular outbursts of swearing, presenting physical ailments and fatigue. This was as demanding as organising the teaching sessions. The study was modeled

on constructivist principles and used some of features of effective learning, such as small group ratios and non-threatening environments (Lamb et al., 2004; Lehr, 2004). Despite this, other challenges presented themselves, which we had not anticipated.

Emotional responses to the course

More challenge creates anxiety?

Among the risk factors characteristic of ESLs is 'depression and a lack of emotional regulation' (Gordon, 2013, p. 5). This lack of regulation featured strongly in some ESLs' emotional responses to the literacy experience. While teachers were experienced and were aware of the ESLs' individual situations and learning abilities, the YPs' emotional reactions were still a surprise. Perhaps because they felt there were higher expectations of them than before, they became more anxious and self-conscious regarding literacy issues. There was also the tension of self-doubt which plagues the ESL learner.

Sensitivity to corrections

John was particularly affected by emotional responses and regularly said he had had enough or felt picked on. If his work was corrected or a suggestion made on presentation of work, he personalized it and became upset or lashed out at teachers. In one teaching session, he misinterpreted a comment on spelling accuracy and addressed me aggressively:

> I know you f****g mean me when you say that. When you
> say' there are some spellings we are all getting wrong, you

f****g mean me. Why can't you just say it straight out. F**k

this. There must be an easier way to learn.

The rest of the group did not know how to deal with John's reaction and all of them went quiet. It was a difficult situation for teachers and John refused any explanation or withdrawal of his statement.

Another example of emotional upset involved Trudy, who regularly complained that she was 'not able for the work'. On several occasions she rushed from the room, exclaiming, 'I've got to get out. I can't breathe here', and she was very tense. She typically returned to the session after a five minute break, but these outbursts were upsetting for her and for the teachers: the other ESLs did not remark on her actions, but they seemed to empathise by being quiet or not commenting on her behaviour. She also requested 1-1 teaching as she felt she could not cope in a group.

Culture or confidence?

One difference that I observed between this group of ESLs deserves particular mention. Perhaps due to cultural or confidence differences, the Irish ESLs appeared to react more vocally and explicitly than the two ESOLs. This illustrates the potential differences in this community of ESLs. Sinéad and I concluded that the ESOL learners attended the centre not because they had failed in school but due to their migrant status. They were therefore not as angry as the other learners regarding their educational experience and their profiles indicated they liked school in their own home countries (Appendix F). Personally, I consider that the Irish ESLs, though academically able and pleased to be involved in the challenge, were very much impeded by their lack of personal communication and social skills, and their previous negative school

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experiences, which is reflected in their behaviour. They had little emotional regulation and there was little evidence of self-control.

Physiological responses

There were also physiological reactions from some of the ESLs, including yawning, swearing, problems with breathing and teeth pain. The yawning and swearing was mainly from the young men while the breathing and teeth pain came from Clara and Trudy. These were regular occurrences and seemed to be a way of coping with the anxiety surrounding the challenge of the course. While these may be typical reactions to tiredness, general malaise and normal dental pain, they seemed to be a part of the learner's persona in the sessions. This was remarked on by both teachers.

External issues

Given that social and psychological wellbeing have a profound impact on YPs lives, and that

> [g]ood social, emotional and psychological health helps protect young people against emotional and behavioural problems, violence and crime, teenage pregnancy and the misuse of drugs and alcohol… It can also help them to learn and achieve academically, thus affecting their long-term social and economic wellbeing (NICE, 2009, p. 5*),*

the majority of these ESLs were in particularly poor situations. The impact of their individual life circumstances on their learning cannot be understated. As Clara noted,

'there isn't one minute of any day when I amn't thinking about one of my family'.

Clara's partner, Mark and her brother, Joseph, were both arrested, in separate incidents involving possession of weapons, and she left the course midway. Mark was involved in a Traveller feud and received a prison sentence. Early in the course, Cian left to take up a place in an addiction centre and on release, served a prison sentence. During the course, Trudy was managing a difficult domestic situation: her father was drinking heavily and was nightly terrorising her mother and other children in the house. She was often tired and upset when she did show up. Both ESOLs had family pressures such as caring for an ageing grandparent or translating for parents, all of which placed demands on their abilities to be fully present throughout the Communications course. Brian had the only stable situation: his parents were separated but he had a very supportive mother. She took an interest in his work and drove him to the centre from their home ten miles away. These examples illustrate the barriers to participation and learning that ESLs face. Indeed, it comes as no surprise to learn that the incidence of emotional and behavioural difficulties is significantly higher in ESLs in VET, in Ireland, than in mainstream schools (Gordon, 2013).

In total, we lost three ESLs to a range of issues outside of our control. Having planned the programme for six months (from September 2010), we soon realised that it would take longer to complete the seven units of the programme and so continued until late April/early May 2011. This gave us an eight month period with the group. On reflection, the longer timeframe was very beneficial and allowed us to cement relationships in a sustained way as we continued the Communications programme.

To summarise, Table 11 below outlines the participants' reasons for non-completion of the Communications module.

Table 11: Reasons for non-completion of programme

Name	Age	Gender	Time on prog.	Reasons for leaving	Nationality	Current situation
Clara	16	Female	5 months	External problems, including brother in prison and boyfriend in family feud and charged with possession of weapons. Described situation as overwhelming and said she couldn't cope.	Irish	In training in her first year of a two year state certified programme at the YS.
Cian	19	Male	4 months	Addiction to alcohol and drugs. Spent time in a treatment centre followed by prison sentence of six months. Currently serving sentence.	Irish	Prison
Mark	17	Male	4 months	Became involved in Traveller feud and was arrested and charged with having weapons and doing criminal damage. Currently in prison.	Irish	Prison

Attendance Records

Attendance records also reflected the impact of external circumstances and YP themselves were largely responsible for missed sessions. Apart from holiday periods, there was little or no interruption to the course, from internal CTC events.

Attendance was recorded and analysed by counting the number of days attended by each participant and labelling each attendance record under various headings such as full attendance, nearly full attendance, good attendance. Attendance averaged three days out of five per participant.

Table 12: Attendance record for each participant

Participant:	No. of days in attendance out of approx. 38	
Brian	20	53%
John	27	71%
Mark	25	66%
Matthew	27	71%
Trudy	22	57%

5.2 Teacher Experience

The findings related to Teacher Experience are reported under the following headings: experience of the course, experience of constructivist teaching methods, emotional response to the course and external issues.

Experience of the course

Challenges and demands of the course

Both teachers reported considerable challenges in teaching the course, including dealing with literacy issues, managing the ESLs' responses to the Communications programme, introducing constructivist strategies and providing opportunities for greater learner involvement. We were constantly planning and reflecting. Early on, we realised how critical it was to debrief after sessions and reflect on and critique our methods. I had difficulty with the issue of distance: being so close to the teaching and the research meant that I might overlook particular aspects of the setting and so I had to step back at times to balance closeness and distance (Charmaz, 2004). It became clear to me that professional support for

teachers would be necessary, were this approach to be implemented on a larger scale.

We were conscious of the importance of the startup phase of the taught programme in dictating the success of the course: agreeing contracts, establishing attendance patterns and dealing with issues that ESLs present with on a daily basis. This sense of challenge and nervousness is reflected in an extract from my field diary one month into the programme:

> I've been looking at how things are going for the first month-
> am feeling negative and not without reason! The numbers on
> the programme are not stable. External factors really affect
> this work. There has never been full attendance. Am now
> anxious about the validity of the work. Hard to deliver the
> teaching end. I sense that some of the group are having
> difficulty and are really being challenged by the programme-
> this is probably a settling in phase. It's not the content as
> much as the language for the ESOL lads and the adjustment
> to the ownership of the programme for the others. (Field
> Diary extract, October 2010, researcher/teacher).

Later in the course, I noted that:

> The whole thing requires endless patience on the teacher's
> behalf. I find it very tiring-teaching material and being
> conscious I am clear and that they 'get' what I am doing. Am
> also trying to keep them motivated and keep the pace of the
> teaching up so that they do not slump. I am very concerned
> re order and structure of the programme to ensure that
> learners are secure (Field Diary extract, February 2011:
> researcher/teacher).

Teacher responses to literacy issues

As the implementation stage progressed we both found that while the group was taking on a more challenging Communications course, the gaps in their literacy skills still affected their progress and needed to be addressed. This group of ESLs was particularly sensitive to these issues and therefore had to be managed carefully. We both experienced this in different ways. To ensure that they understood and could cope with the work, I explained a lot of vocabulary and assured them they were able for the programme.

One of the tensions between Sinéad and I related to my approach to explaining things, in such detail. I felt the YP needed this but Sinéad felt that it was confusing to over-explain things and reported in a debriefing session that she was sometimes muddled by this. In contrast, all the ESLs in their 1-1 interviews remarked that they needed the explanations and felt reassured by them. This suggests that we may underestimate the levels of support needed by ESLs, but providing high levels of support can present challenges for the teachers. In my case, I had to be careful to allow these ESLs to find their own way and to make mistakes. Following Brill (2010), my role was to withdraw support from learners so that they could perform tasks independently, and I had to learn to do this.

A second tension was the fact that I honed in on literacy issues such as spelling or poor handwriting and sometimes questioned whether or not these ESLs were able for the challenge. Sinéad rightly recognised that they had to be at a certain standard to take on the programme. She notes:

> At times, I would find it a bit tiring. Remember, we didn't go
> in to tackle all their literacy skills. There might be a case for a

short intensive course, but you can't do everything or you would never get anywhere (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

Sinéad also saw the development of literacy challenge as a positive thing for both the teachers and these ESLs:

> Oh I'd say they will remember it. Initially, they found it confusing and difficult. Most of the time, I'd say they found it demanding, but demanding in a good way. I think they will have realised that we were demanding something and they were demanding something of themselves that they were actually capable of and just to get to that point was a bit tricky. I think they benefitted. I think they know they benefitted (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011)

Sinéad's acceptance of what we were able to deliver as teachers was pragmatic. Her approach allowed her to deliver the programme without experiencing the tensions I felt, which were underscored by my need to fill in all the gaps. I would suggest, however, that these differences in style or approach were, in the case of this study, a positive factor. The two teacher styles complemented each other and the ESLs responded to both. Matthew commented:

> There were two of you. If I wanted help, I'd go to Sinéad. If I wanted to learn, I'd go to you. Learning with you is different to the other teachers so I was more comfortable with you and Sinéad, cos you explained everything, every word, every sentence (Matthew, 1-1 interview).

Teacher satisfaction

Despite the challenges, both of us found the experience enjoyable, especially when any of the ESLs demonstrated an increased ability to become involved in their learning, make decisions and take responsibility for their work. While Sinéad noted that this approach slowed down the pace of learning, the overall course length was well within the parameters of the normal time it took to complete a module and these ESLs appeared to enjoy and benefit from having a greater say in their learning. I noted that despite my anxieties and worries I too experienced satisfaction and enjoyment:

> Despite my fears, there are breakthroughs with individual learners, even at this early stage. John, Brian and 2 of the Czech lads. They are responding to the programme, having fun, taking control over the breaks and offering opinions (Field Diary extract: January 2011, researcher/teacher)

while Sinéad reported:

> I enjoyed watching people making progress. It was very satisfying. And when we're having a good laugh, when something good was happening, we were on the same wave length. There was a standard. There were challenges and the fact that they all stayed the course heartened and gladdened me. That took application. Turning up. I was happily surprised there were so few hissy fits (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

In this study, it is clear that the role of the teachers was influential in creating an atmosphere of support and encouragement. This was underpinned by the social view of learning, to which both teachers subscribed (MacLachlan, 2008) and helped create a collaborative and shared approach with these ESLs, which in turn contributed to teacher satisfaction.

Learner involvement: Is this going to work?

Creating greater learner involvement required a heavy investment from us. This was compounded by the fact that these ESLs were not used to giving opinions on their learning. Sinéad also remarked that these ESLs were not used to being taken seriously, nor did they have the communication skills to allow them to discuss things with ease:

> My experience of approaching Communications this way has proved both challenging and interesting: one of the most daunting tasks has been to elicit opinions which give coherent expression. This may be because of paucity of vocabulary, as well as not having the experience of being listened to much or having one's opinion dismissed perhaps. Our new approach came up against this hurdle early on: it was nonetheless a valid tussle! The idea that we would explain to the students what needed to be done to achieve this; here we diverged from the usual practice and asked them how, in what way they could envisage these goals. I observed that when this was explained well, the students appreciated the control this would give them. It was further explained that, in terms of sequence of units, they also had a choice in how to approach this (Sinead, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

As the course progressed, both of us considered that learner involvement was growing. For example, most of the ESLs returned on time after breaks and did not ask to go out for cigarettes during a teaching session. Furthermore, they regularly started work as soon as they began a session and were less tentative in their approach. Sinéad felt these ESLs were aware that they had greater involvement in their learning and that their experience had been meaningful for them. This profoundly affected her approach to teaching and to future work with ESLs:

> I think that it has changed everything. I think that we changed our own mindsets and we changed the mindsets of these ESLs. Because we really stuck to our principles as much as possible to try and get them involved in what they were doing and have a say in how they were doing it. It took a long time because it had to be established and reestablished for them and I think we encountered a certain amount of resistance to that, because they're just not used to it and because it slowed things down quite a bit but I don't think that could have been avoided (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

Sinéad provided further examples, illustrative of individual learner control and greater involvement:

> John,taking you to task for how you corrected his work and how you decided to modify that. Trudy, who hates to be recorded: it was pointed out to her that this was a requirement of the course and she fought all the way. And we didn't impose it on her. We told her 'this is how it is' and after several attempts, she did it. She did step up to the plate

and take control of the situation herself so….That's what I mean, it wasn't being forced on her and she realized she had to make that decision as to whether she was actually going to do it or not. We couldn't actually make her. We told her that even though we found it frustrating. Brian, he would be another. He works quite thoroughly but he's quite slow because he likes to think things through (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

In summary, we both felt that we benefitted from the process of engaging the learners in their learning. We agreed that this approach, with some adjustments, could be mainstreamed in the literacy project in the future.

Experience of the constructivist approaches to the course

Sinéad and I described the experience of applying the strategies of teacher as coach, self-directed learning and generative learning as 'challenging' and 'demanding'. Sinéad thought this slowed the pace of teaching. I, on the other hand, found the experience challenging from a different perspective. Trying to teach the content of the module and ensure that the constructivist strategies were applied consistently was difficult to do all the time.

Planning and preparation

One advantage which benefitted the teaching phase was the amount of detailed planning that had been done prior to implementing the course. (as described in Chapter 3). We had identified where the constructivist strategies could be applied to the units within the Communications module. This planning provided a scaffold to identify where we could be coaches, what aspect of the reading unit could be self-directed and where

we might apply generative learning. This indicates that detailed preparation and planning is an essential component of this approach to teaching (Appendix D).

Constructivist approaches and learner involvement for these ESLs

The strategies of teacher as coach and self-directed learning contributed directly to the learner involvement aspect of the study, while the strategy of generative learning contributed less so. Overall, the strategies were useful in creating a level of independence in learning for the majority of these ESLs. This, I suggest, encouraged them to take more responsibility and so they felt they had a degree of learner control.

Teacher as coach

Acting as a coach rather than directing all the teaching was a new experience for both of us as we were standing back from our normal role of direct teaching (Locke, 2008). While I did not find this difficult, Sinéad found it tiring to observe herself trying to implement the strategy, though she felt the approach was worthwhile. She considered that the ESLs observed our efforts and commented:

> In teacher as coach, I think the line that stands out for me was that we were partners. These ESLs would have seen us struggling also and having difficulty and I think they would have been very aware of our efforts to motivate them and help them as distinct from dictate to them, and from that point of view, yes, teacher as coach (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

I experienced a degree of satisfaction with this strategy as I found it was easier than I anticipated. In fact, I sensed that the ESLs enjoyed this approach and there was a sense of more equality in the delivery of the programme.

Self-directed learning

Both of us explored this concept as we went through the course. Sinéad felt that we managed to employ this strategy to a lesser degree than teacher as coach: she suggested this was because we were restricted by curriculum requirements and so it was not possible to encourage ESLs to select what they wanted to study. However, I suggest that, despite a lack of input into curricula, these ESLs had some control over how they learned. Sinéad comments:

> We picked a lot of what and how they learned .But we did not dictate at what pace they learned. How much they put into it, and what way they wanted to learn. I think that they did that a lot, themselves (Sinéad, 1-1 interview, July 2011).

In challenging this, I suggested we had provided a lot of the materials and was unhappy that self-directed learning was not well applied. Sinéad was adamant that though this had to happen, 'we're still dictating some of the content due to the requirements of the course. But we're giving them a choice'.

Generative learning

This was the most difficult strategy to apply as it involved creating links between old learning and new. According to Wittrock:

to be effective, generative teaching activities induce learners to construct relevant representations that they would not compose spontaneously (Wittrock, 1990, p.369)

Sinéad and I had different views on this. I considered that it was too difficult to apply and that the ESLs did not know what I meant. I had to simplify connections and ask direct questions such as

'Does that remind you of anything you've done before?'
        or
'Do you recall coming across that somewhere else?'
        or
'Did you learn anything like that in secondary school?'

In general, I considered the approach to be unsatisfactory and confusing. Sinéad, on the other hand, found that we invested a lot in making links across areas of learning with which these ESLs were able to connect.

Overall, these ESLs, despite their mixed reactions, seemed to react well to being active participants, involved in the creation of their learning within a social group, and they responded well to us as coaches in a collaborative partnership (Bruner, 1960; Hargreaves, 1984; Richardson, 2003; Vrasidas, 2000).However, where constructivist strategies were of limited use in this study was in their presumption that all learners can be autonomous and active from the outset. Constructivism does not make allowances for the vulnerability of these ESLs, who needs sensitive treatment at some times and challenge at other times.

Emotional response to the course

In general, our emotional responses were influenced by the ESLs'
reactions to literacy issues and other challenges of the Communications
programme. The intensity of preparation for the teaching sessions led to
some teacher fatigue but this can be accounted for by the fact that
teaching, implementing constructivist strategies and creating learner
involvement were happening all happening at the same time. I was
particularly bothered by my response to the YPs' emotional reactions,
despite all my experience. I recorded my feelings as follows:

> I am also fascinated and feel a little naive at my own
> reactions to their responses. At times, I am shocked by the
> YPs reactions - grumpy, irritable, angry re literacy
> corrections, refusal/avoidance and balking at tasks. Though I
> have over 20 years' experience here, the 'up close and
> personal' of these reactions is shocking me (Field Diary
> extract: researcher/teacher, November, 2010).

Sinéad was not as perturbed as I was; her field diary extracts provided
observations of individual ESLs, whereas mine reflected upset and worry.
As the main researcher and the person with overall responsibility for the
course, while also needing to collect data for the thesis, I tended to take
responsibility for literacy issues and tried to be in control all the time. This
resulted in feelings of tiredness and stress, particularly in situations where
learners expressed dissatisfaction or anger at aspects of the programme.
In one field diary extract, I noted two separate instances where I felt upset
or guilty after an encounter with a learner. In the first example:

> I was carrying out the ART pre- test with Brian to establish
> his reading and comprehension skills when he observed a

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poster on my office wall entitled 'Sharpen Your Brain'. He was taken with it and asked me about learning styles and intelligences. I went to get the book I had on Multiple Intelligences but could not locate it. I didn't really lead him anywhere and was disappointed in myself as he was interested in styles and the brain and thinking and I did little to enhance this. I felt he lost interest. And it was a wonderful opportunity to develop his interest (Field Diary extract: Researcher/teacher, November, 2010).

In the second example:

John displays a very strong reaction to corrections of his work, in particular spellings and vociferously shouts at me 'there must be easier ways for me to learn.' This perturbs me and I feel a sense of responsibility to find ways in which he can experience success without feeling diminished by the corrections he needs help with. What has happened along the way in his educational experiences to cause this rage and anger? (Field Diary extract: researcher/teacher, September, 2010).

I wanted to make the experience a positive one for these ESLs and I was uncomfortable when I felt I let them down or when they were upset due to literacy issues. I also questioned why I was taking responsibility for all of these experiences. Was I subconsciously trying to compensate for the previous negative educational experiences these ESLs had and for their difficult lives? It is a question that will follow me.

My position as insider researcher also came into play and I reflected on this quite a lot as the study went on. I was conscious of the situatedness of

the study and of the interplay between myself and Sinéad within that setting. How I evaluated myself was important: I was responsible for the idea of the study, the design and implementation and the introduction of a new higher level challenge to these ESLs and so I was exposed professionally. I was also sensitive to the reactions of other colleagues and the need to ensure transparency in communicating that the research was happening in order to bring about improvements to practice, which can, over time, have significant benefits to organisations (Costley, 2010; Raelin, 2008).

External issues

The study found that the external issues affecting these ESLs' lives affected us, their teachers. Some of their domestic situations provoked both anger and despair from both of us. Our experience, spotlighted through the research process, raised many questions with regard to what, if any, meaningful progress can be made against such instability. Moreover, these ESLs were further marginalised by the range of structural inequalities already in place in their lives (Atkins 2009; Jones, 2009). Sadly, all the interventions of the programme could not possibly compensate for these ESLs' individual backgrounds. While those who dropped out were beset by complex circumstances illustrated in Table 11, there were equally challenging issues for those who remained until the end.

It is clear from the study that we underestimate the effects of social and emotional deprivation on the progression of ESLs. The findings presented above provide an indication of the complexity of implementing new approaches in the ESL setting and highlight the challenges faced by ESLs and for those working in ESL education.

On the other hand, some very positive experiences occurred. The findings are encouraging in terms of these ESLs' experience of the taught course and, in particular, their responses to learner involvement. Each of the five ESLs responded to the challenge of taking a higher level Communications certificate and each succeeded. Teachers stepped out of normal practice and implemented a challenging intervention which took considerable time and involved certain risks. Results indicate that with some adjustments to aspects of the taught course, there are possibilities that this approach could be replicated for a wider teaching community.

My final chapter offers a synthesis of these findings. This includes a return to the original research questions as well as the theoretical underpinnings within the literature review. I also identify implications for professional practice and I propose how the findings of this study, which contribute to ESL education, can be disseminated.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this thesis was to explore what occurred when ESLs had greater involvement in their own learning and what experiences both ESLs and teachers had when they participated in a more challenging certified literacy programme, delivered using constructivist teaching strategies. In this final chapter, stage four of the AR cycle (reflecting on and making recommendations for future work), I will, in Section 6.1, answer the research questions. In Section 6.2, I will discuss the need to address ESLs' gaps in literacy while in Section 6.3 I offer reflections on the ESLs' sensitivity as learners. In Section 6.4, I will argue the relevance of current curricula and the need for reform in VET so that we raise our expectations of what YP can achieve. Section 6.5 reflects on the challenges for the researcher and for teachers working in ESL education while Section 6.6 addresses the limitations of the study.6.7 discusses how the outcomes of the thesis can best inform professional practice in the sector. Section 6.8 makes recommendations for future practice, while, finally, Section 6.9 offers my final reflections on the results.

6.1 Introduction to the Research Questions

Introduction

This study has established that ESLs deserve and are capable of achieving more than is currently expected of them in existing VET provision. While recognizing that ESLs have gaps in literacy skills, we have seen that these need to be sensitively addressed and that basic skills teaching must be incorporated into new academic challenges for ESLs.

While exploring and challenging constructivism as a learning theory, the thesis has also illuminated other practices within ESL learning and in this way contributes to theory generation in ESL education. We have seen that constructivist strategies were used with an older age group than normal (younger children at primary level), with some measure of success.

While it is difficult to generalise, the approach taken in the study sheds further light on and adds to our knowledge of the ESL and how s/he responds to a higher challenge and to greater involvement in his/her learning. The study found that a direct approach taken to greater learner involvement facilitated greater learner autonomy for this ESL population. Despite some surprises, as time went on, the YP became more involved in managing their learning. It is likely that if this type of challenge was to be offered to other ESLs, some positive responses would emerge.

Curricula for the ESL must involve the learner. There is a constant tension in place when cognitive materials are foisted on this group, when, in fact, more appropriate, interest-led curricula should be developed. An ideal programme would need to include more relevant curriculum such as the car insurance and Guinness Book of Records examples, as seen in Chapter 5.

Other significant considerations in exploring future options for ESLs are the importance of affective factors in this teaching, studies of which are limited in the literature on early school leaving. Furthermore, external issues and the findings on low attendance exemplify how difficult it is to bring these YP to a place of achievement and to acquisition of higher qualifications.

Research Question 1: What are the effects on ESL's literacy development when they are given greater involvement in the learning process?

This study set out to establish how an AR design could introduce effective change to a literacy project for ESLs. A central argument of the work is that the autonomous model of literacy is likely to fail ESLs because it approaches literacy as a set of decontextualised skills (Ogbu, 1990; Street, 2006) associated with school and the transmission model of education. We explored the effects on literacy skills of involving ESLs in their learning and teaching a higher level Communications module.

Objective measures of progress

The standardised assessment, using pre and post ART, revealed little overall improvement in reading accuracy for participants. Two participants had marginal increases in accuracy, one remained unchanged and two decreased. Analysis of reading comprehension scores in Table 9 provided evidence that four of the five ESLs improved one centile, suggesting improved understanding and thinking skills as a result of participation in the course. An experimental study, which is conventionally embraced as the strongest level of evidence of effectiveness, would need a larger intervention sample and a well-matched comparison group. Neither of these conditions was possible in the present study, which is characteristic of the provision available for ESL learners. It is nonetheless important to measure progress and it is interesting that these ESLs made measurable gains in the areas which were the focus of the course, but not in areas that were less systematically targeted.

There were also some visible improvements in handwriting and presentation skills: written examples of work at the end of the study showed neater, cleaner writing with more care given to presentation of work. Spelling remained a challenge. While these ESLs made efforts to correct spelling, more often than not, the same errors appeared in future work throughout their portfolios.

In the areas where improvement was evident, it is not clear if this was a result of the YPs' greater involvement in a challenging course, or whether such improvement is to be expected as a result of any course. The achievement of their Communications certificate (equivalent to UK Level 3) provided the most useful measure of success. Prior to the programme described here, Communications at Level 3 was the highest level of qualification available to these ESLs attending the CTC. Additionally, the FAS external examiner singled out the portfolios as examples of high quality work and commented on their high standard. Achieving this qualification in Communications not only underlines that ESLs are capable of achieving at this level, but it also removes them from the lower end of the qualifications scale, where low level qualifications lack credibility on the labour market (Wolf, 2011).

Teachers' perception of literacy progress

Sinéad and I agreed that these ESLs seemed to develop not only skills, particularly their ability to express themselves, but also confidence. This in turn, appeared to increase their willingness to ask for support or express their unhappiness or difficulty with the work. From my point of view, the connection between skills improvement and learner involvement is tenuous, but there are certain points worth noting from the study. These ESLs were challenged to manage their learning and take responsibility for their work and their learning situation. They were asked opinions on

course materials and how they wanted to learn. While not directly affecting literacy ability, this contributed to their having learner control. Bearing in mind that the ESLs had no previous experience of this, they demonstrated an ability to engage with the teachers and to respond to challenge. Their average age was 17.25 years and all had already achieved Level 3, but, apart from the ESOL learners, who were not as vocal in their complaints as the Irish ESLs, there were no differentiating characteristics attached to this group. From both my and Sinéad's professional judgment, neither were there were any observable differences between these ESLs and their peers in the CTC. This suggests that this approach of greater learner involvement could be adapted for use in the broader literacy setting within ESL provision.

ESLs' perceptions of literacy progress

From their own comments and responses, these ESLs perceived that they had improved literacy skills and were more confident in approaching tasks and written work. They also felt that they had acquired new skills, such as report writing and assignment work. This is an important development. How the course was presented to them also affected their perceptions of literacy skill. Excerpts from 1-1 interviews suggest that they seemed to associate their achievements with how the course was taught:

> We were responsible for our work.
> You had to do it yourself like.
> Ye thought we could do it and so we did it.
> It was different like, to any other course.
> We had to decide things for ourselves.

The learners perceived that the greater autonomy required of them contributed to their progress.

In particular, the ESLs' ability to offer opinions developed throughout the programme, both verbally and in written work. This came across strongly in the final assignment entitled 'The Impact of Technology on my Life', where responses were open and the opinions revealed were honest and mature. Three of these ESLs felt that technology had an adverse effect on their lives, an interesting finding in this technology-driven generation.

These ESLs were very proud of what they achieved and this was evident when viewing their completed portfolios before submission to the external examiner. Their satisfaction was very encouraging to see and was an endorsement of their hard work throughout the course. The YP had taken ownership of their work and what they wanted to say, which I suggest was a result of being involved in their own learning journey and being challenged to stretch themselves.

While it is difficult to evaluate how long the perceived improvements will last for the ESLs or how confident they will be in approaching their next literacy task, the experience of learner involvement yielded some positive changes in their approaches to literacy and to their self-images. These ESLs were motivated and grew in confidence as the course progressed as a result of the support received from teachers but also because the teachers believed that they could do it. This inspired confidence in these ESLs and enhanced their motivation to succeed. Also, the teaching style changed: the autonomous model was challenged throughout the taught course and a more democratic partnership was established.

We know from the field that there are established links between adult learning and the development of confidence and skills. According to Schuller, 'the most fundamental and pervasive benefit from learning of every kind is a growth in self-confidence' (Schuller, 2002, p.14), and self-

confidence and esteem are seen to be linked to achievement in education (Eldred, 2004). Given this, the future for ESL education must provide for learner inclusion so that learner confidence is built on and further achievement is possible.

In studies like these, there is an issue regarding what outcomes can be achieved with such a population in a short-scale study. There is also an argument that researchers should not be bound by the specifics of experimental studies which are outcomes focused. The actual work of such a study is perhaps best seen through the lens of 'how you do things' with YP, work which is not easily quantified.

Research Question 2: What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of ESLs in a literacy programme, when they are given greater involvement in the learning process?

Our understanding of the ESL learner has been developed through this thesis. We have observed that s/he brings particular stresses and strains to the learning environment. Some of this anxiety can be attributed to external circumstances and some to the ESLs' reactions to learning and to what learning reminds them of. Throughout the study, we saw outbursts of swearing and aggression, mood swings and physical ailments, all of which were part of the learning process. Some of these were related to unregulated sleep patterns and poor diet. It was normal for participants to yawn or be inattentive or hyperactive during a session and when asked, as we regularly did, what time they had gone to bed, the answer was inevitably 'two or three am, I dunno. I was up playing on the Xbox'. Missing breakfast was also a regular occurrence and sessions sometimes began with bottles of Coke and packets of crisps. These issues and the documented behaviours of the ESLs in this study are characteristic of ESL learners and affect both learning and teaching but they are not explicitly

addressed in cognitive models, including the constructivist framework adopted in the study.

The ESLs in the study had mixed attitudes to literacy: their responses were generally positive but this was mainly when answering questionnaires and participating in discussions on literacy skills. It would appear that they had little emotional engagement when responding to exercises or rating their own skills. Attitudes and behaviours changed notably when teachers presented a challenge or corrected literacy errors. This upset some participants, for example John, and perhaps reminded them of previous negative school experiences.

Despite the challenge of learner involvement, it bore fruit in terms of course completion and qualifications, and also established new principles of engagement for both learners and teachers. These include ESLs developing independence and taking responsibility for their learning and particularly realising that teachers would not do work for them. While the YPs' attitudes, at times, reflected annoyance and irritation, overall the study found that they were able to take on learner involvement as they practiced at it. The challenge by teachers was also crucial here.

On the other hand, some aspects of learner involvement caused uncertainty and even fear, mainly when ESLs were asked to make decisions. The ESLs lacked confidence and were unsure of themselves, with a fear of getting things wrong, perhaps a reminder of previous learning experiences. Furthermore, the lack of control over the curriculum was not conducive to learner involvement. An analysis of the opportunities and restrictions to creating greater learner involvement (Table 10) indicated that restrictions regarding curriculum were prohibitive, limiting ESLs' choice on selecting relevant or interesting materials.

However, the ESLs also experienced satisfaction as they saw themselves completing work and making progress. They were vocal about this and about how they valued the role of the teachers in the process. Despite being angry and emotional at times, the majority of these ESLs talked about being pushed in a positive way and they appeared to like this approach. We are reminded of the recommendations from the Nuffield Report to include the voice of the learner in reviewing VET which suggests, among other changes,

> the re-distribution of power and decision making such that there can be greater room for the voice of the learner, for the expertise of the teacher and for the concerns of other stakeholders in the response to the learning needs of all young people in their different economic and social settings (Pring et al., 2009, p. 4).

In a study such as this the tensions that pervade the learning environment cannot be overstated. In engaging with training and teachers, the ESLs come from a place of fear and trepidation and their primary experience of learning is a transmission model with a top down approach. We attempted a challenging approach with a group not normally used to having any involvement in their learning and found that, despite their poor attendance, it is challenging but not impossible to engage ESLs in their own learning.

Research Question 3: What are the attitudes, experiences and interpretations of teachers when ESLs have greater involvement in their learning?

Developing learner involvement

Findings indicate that the two teachers in the study (Sinéad and myself) had mixed experiences in developing greater learner involvement. There were a lot of new constructs for us and we had limited experience of learner involvement which involved moving away from the normal unspoken code of teacher and learner to a new balance of power. Handing over some of one's control in the classroom required courage, as at times, in ESL education, having the teacher in control is what keeps an environment calm. Both teachers reflected that this change was challenging but worthwhile and at the end of the study we were committed to applying this approach to the literacy project. The teacher's field diaries and post teaching debriefings also indicated that they were encouraged by how these ESLs responded to the challenges of the programme on all fronts. Yet the ESLs needed a lot of support. Teachers also had to deal regularly with outbursts and negative reactions to the course and at times, this caused stress and anxiety.

Within such a fraught environment, there are a lot of demands on teaching staff. We risk falling into the YPs chaos or seeing them as victims which can affect our perspective and our expectations of the ESL. This point is of considerable importance in understanding the challenges which teachers face in this setting. Furthermore, while we as educators try to create more learner autonomy, we must remember that some ESLs have deep-rooted values which may not include education. This is corroborated by some of the findings in this study and in the IFS (Larkin, 2009), which revealed that these ESLs had a pragmatic approach to education and associated literacy with getting a job and looking towards the future, as indicated in the Prior Expectations Questionnaire. Additionally, teachers may impose values that they may not share, particularly as teachers' experiences of the system are generally more positive than those who return to education as young adult learners (Quigley, 1998).

Against this backdrop, we ask how far we got in our efforts to create greater learner involvement in the programme and whether we succeeded in giving these ESLs greater autonomy? We must bear in mind that there are structural issues under which teachers must operate, despite our best intentions to involve the YP in their learning. We must also consider the issue of tokenism. The obvious constraints of the study included the lack of choice ESLs had in curriculum selection, in teacher selection and in the compulsory aspects of the course. Furthermore, this approach requires open-minded, experienced and highly skilled teachers and not all teachers would be willing to relinquish power to the learner. However, in including the learner, we addressed some of the flaws in the current system, in what was an innovative and challenging intervention.

The constructivist approach

We were challenged when applying the constructivist teaching strategies to the literacy module. Despite this, there were some clear indications from Field Diaries and interviews, that the experience changed the role of the teachers and our perceptions of ourselves as teachers.

Sinéad and I agreed that the implementation of strategies was challenging; nevertheless, we felt the approach opened up our teaching styles and the experience was rewarding for both us and these ESLs. We considered that the role of the teacher became more of a coach than a talk and chalk approach. We were forced to hand over some of our authority to them and allow them to suggest or reject things. We encouraged these ESLs to direct their learning and we encouraged them to find links to previous learning, with less success. We were implementing a completely new approach, at odds with the CTC's house style, and this was a challenge for us, as staff. It was also very new to the ESLs.

Overall, findings suggest that the constructivist approach helped create a positive learning environment for the ESLs. The teaching strategies worked well but slowed the pace of learning and were not sufficient to address all the ESLs' emotional needs. One must consider how practical this approach is in daily VET work, due to the time needed for planning and implementing the strategies in the classroom. Constructivism as a learning theory leaves some unresolved issues, in particular when translating aspects of theory into teaching practice. It remains a strongly ideological pedagogy which has pragmatic implications: the demands of practicing the theoretical elements are high and the theory places high expectations on teachers, both in knowledge and in practical skill. However, in this study, the strategies we used contributed to, and were complementary, to the overall approach of learner involvement. The teachers had tools to use in asserting the learner's role and withdrawing their own dominant one. I suggest that a combination of the elements of teacher as coach and self-directed learning would be appropriate to include in designing a model of learner involvement for the ESL. If this type of approach were to be considered, there is a need for greater structural change in VET to support such initiatives, in both the approach to the learner and qualification standards. A greater acceptance of autonomous learners and a curriculum which is more readily responsive to student interest is needed, as well as more time for teacher planning.

Research Question 4: What are the effects of external circumstances on ESLs' education?

What chance?

The effects of external circumstances on ESLs education raised important questions in the study. If external pressures are very extreme, the YP cannot concentrate on a programme of study. This is why attrition rates

are so high in ESL education. Dealing with one disadvantage is perhaps manageable, but dealing with several combined, creates an impossible situation for the ESL. While structural inequalities remain, the challenges faced by ESLs in following a programme of uninterrupted education, are high. Despite the best efforts of teachers who provide high levels of support, absenteeism and behavioural issues remain a feature of ESLs education trajectory. However, five of the eight completed the Communications course and became involved in their learning. Teachers believed they created some change in the educational experience of these ESLs. A more in-depth study of SDT and motivation, from the perspective of the ESL, would assist educators in understanding what might bring ESLs back to education and, more importantly, what would help to keep them there.

The role of motivation

Understanding what motivated these YP is helpful in developing an understanding of what supports are needed in future ESL education. The ESLs in this study were faced with challenging external circumstances which affected attendance and completion. As noted earlier, three of the eight YP left the course for reasons directly related to their personal lives: addiction, family feuds and prison sentences. Both teachers wondered if any long-term progress could be made, in the face of these issues. We struggled to understand what motivated these ESLs to continue, in particular the five who stayed the course. Analysis of what motivated the five YP, presented in Table 8 provides evidence that extrinsic motivation was high for four of the five participants and they saw this course as a route to a better future. While they reacted strongly to situations, they were also determined to continue. This is in some way explained by Deci and Ryan in SDT, who suggest that our intrinsic motivation can be stimulated

by extrinsic sources or situations which act as catalysts and facilitate us in reaching our goals (Deci and Ryan, 1985). There may be a connection here with our finding that the ESLs seemed to need to prove themselves and complete their programme. They also responded positively to our belief in them, and this played a part in their persistence.

6.2 ESLs have gaps in literacy skills which need to be addressed

ESLs sometimes lack literacy skills in core areas such as grammar, punctuation and a general knowledge of the rules of English. There are also issues with handwriting and presentation skills. In this study, the ESLs were aware of these gaps, examples of which included 1) an inability to use capital letters correctly; 2) a lack of understanding of the purpose of commas, exclamation marks and colons; 3) limited experience of synonyms and acronyms and 4) issues with spelling. Both teachers also noted a paucity of vocabulary and limited expressive language skills, a finding already noted in the IFS. These gaps in skills are typically the focus in conventional ESL literacy courses and raised some fundamental questions in the study.

Despite these limitations, the YP were interested in the course and responded to the challenges of completing written work and thinking independently about texts to which they were exposed. They were also receptive to a range of reading materials such as reports, poetry and film scripts. But even with their positive responses to the challenge of the Communications course, the ESLs were upset and reactive when these literacy gaps were exposed and were humiliated at not knowing some of the basic skills taught at primary school level. While it can be argued that these limitations are not significant barriers to learning, they do affect

performance and confidence among ESLs, something I have witnessed in my 25 years of practice. This clearly suggests a need for these gaps to be addressed during VET, with sensitive and experienced staff.

These findings bear out the complexities involved in working with ESLs in the literacy setting: the YP are limited by skills that they have either forgotten or not received and yet they are willing to work to reach to a higher level of skill. This anomaly again hints at YP perhaps wanting to prove themselves and rise above their negative school experiences.

Furthermore, in line with the focus of the study, which was to explore how ESLs respond to increased challenge, there is also a need to expand our definition of literacy to include the gaps in abilities to think critically, form opinions, make judgments and appreciate art and nature. Hurry describes this as the substance and skill approach to literacy (Hurry et al., 2010), a description of which was presented in Chapter 1. Simply put, it does not seem enough, to me, to address basic skills gaps; rather, any approach to literacy with ESLs must include a dimension that emphasises learner motivation, so that an equitable and meaningful experience is available to the ESL. Skills are important, but a single-minded focus on skills is likely to be unfruitful.

6.3 ESLs are very sensitive learners who bring anxiety and stress to the learning environment

Understanding the tensions and stresses that ESLs bring to the learning situation requires sensitive and experienced teachers who can provide confident support and challenge to their learners. Achieving a professional balance between recognising ESLs' individual circumstances and maintaining high expectations of them is essential for learner development. Practice and policy, while acknowledging the stresses, must

not allow them to dictate the ESL environment, nor influence the amount of challenge offered to them. When we do that, we continue to view the ESL as the source of the problem.

Approaches in VET education have tended to label learners from a 'deficit' perspective, using emotive language such as 'at risk' 'vulnerable' or 'suffering from low self-esteem, to describe the ESL. Recent thinking in this area provides a welcome challenge to this perspective. The recent discourses on therapeutic overkill (Atkins, 2009; Ecclestone, 2007) are timely. According to Ecclestone, labelling learners does little to enhance the learning power of the individual. In fact, it creates a dependent learner. Furthermore, Ecclestone suggests that should this current discourse prevail, institutions and teachers will begin to treat learners more emotionally and less intellectually, so that the learning experience then becomes a less challenging academic one and is mainly concerned with improving the self-esteem of learners. While a concern with emotional wellbeing is to some degree inevitable with the ESL population, an overdeveloped concern with the emotional wellbeing of learners as paramount in the learning process is not only a limiting approach but is detrimental to maximising their potential.

In my opinion, the approach taken to emotional wellbeing must be appraised very critically, lest it dominate as a central construct of the education offered to ESLs. We have seen in this study how ESLs can respond to challenge and to taking some responsibility for their own learning. I would venture to say that these ESLs responded to the challenge presented to them because teachers expressed belief in them. Perhaps a way of working to develop emotional wellbeing in ESL learning is to provide increased challenge along with teacher support and create a new discourse: a discourse of expectation in ESL education.

6.4 Curricular relevance and standards in VET

The literature review revealed the growing concern that VET standards need critical evaluation and that current certification programmes are of little use in gaining entry to the labour market. This raises the issue of the relevance of the curricula taught in VET, a concern raised in the introduction to this study and in the IFS. In evaluating the literacy project throughout the AR cycle, I have been concerned with what ESLs are being taught, in both relevance and level of challenge. Will YP, as a result of VET, be equipped with the skills they need to navigate their way through life and will they have been challenged to achieve their maximum potential? There are two considerations here: 1) what is relevant to the YPs' interests and abilities and 2) will what is taught assist YP in future training or employment opportunities? Despite the bleak statistics on youth unemployment, many of these YP want to have careers.

VET curricula must respond in two ways. We have already seen from the research (Atkins,2009; McSkeane, 2008; Hodgson and Spours, 2010; Wolf, 2011), that some programmes currently on offer do not intellectually challenge YP and there are already serious concerns about the low level of skill demanded from learners in VET. While the argument has been put forward by Finn and others (Finn, 2007) that a 'vocational' curriculum is most appropriate for ESLs, this must be challenged. Practical skills attract some YP to learning but for others, both practical and academic skills are of interest. There is also the consideration of learner interest in education in general. It is appropriate that the ESLs be consulted about what is meaningful to them in any return to learning. This would help to address ways of managing the gaps in literacy with which ESLs so often present: YP themselves should be involved in developing an approach to this sensitive issue.

A development in VET training is necessary, which makes explicit commitment to providing more challenging ESL training. Without it, we run the risk of perpetuating a view of ESLs as less valued citizens (Atkins, 2009). This point is echoed by Wolf who describes VET for 15-19 year olds as 'a diet of low level qualifications, most of which have little to no labour market value' (Wolf, 2011).

Unfortunately, commitment to high quality VET provision and broader structural changes to the lives of these YP requires greater political and social commitment, currently not a feature of government policy in Ireland or the UK. Furthermore, while EU policy may be committed to reducing early school leaving to under 10% by 2020, we know from the literature that there is limited material on effective practice in ESL education and less, if any, on raising the level of challenge in VET qualifications. This does not bode well for progress in this domain.

6.5 The dual role of being both teacher and researcher proved stressful

The experience of being the researcher and the teacher on the course was a cause of some strain throughout stage two of this AR study. Despite having experience as a project manager and teacher, I felt the effects of organising the entire project and of teaching on the course. At times, I felt under pressure to deliver the programme and to satisfy every whim the ESLs had, so that their experience was positive. I was also conscious that my overarching goals were to challenge them to work, to involve them in their learning and create an atmosphere in which they felt they were in a learning partnership rather than in the traditional teacher-student role. A second source of stress was the feeling of being 'on duty' and watching

myself as the teacher, wanting to ensure progress and respond to learner's queries and concerns. I wondered if I was doing it right and how my teaching was coming across. Was I up to the mark? Was Sinéad, the second teacher, more in command? As I had been doing 1-1 work for some years, I had to relearn the practice of group teaching. I had confidence issues, but they helped me understand how the YP were feeling as they reacted to various things in the course. This made the teaching experience very intense.

Coupled with this was my concern that the constructivist teaching strategies be applied with rigour so that that we were teaching these ESLs to self-direct their learning, in as far as this was manageable. I found this aspect particularly challenging as I wanted to make sure we were coaches, not teachers, and remained true to the constructivist principles. This sense of a stressful experience may be put down to wanting to ensure the research project did not founder or that ESLs did not leave as a result of teaching situations which they did not like.

In addition, being aware of the external circumstances affecting ESLs in the study also caused stress. At times, I felt empathy for the YP, at other times distress and anger at their parents or partners for affecting their ability to participate in the course. I often struggled with this and, as leader of the project and onsite researcher, I sometimes felt at a loss and would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss concerns or individual issues that arose during the course.

Throughout this implementation stage of the AR cycle, the capacity of the teachers to engage in any type of 'emotion work' as described by Huyton (2009) was very limited and indeed my role as teacher and coach was stretched as it was, leaving me very little time to work with individuals in this domain. Emotion work is generally understood as work carried out

with students to help them recognise and manage their emotions in a structured manner. Its goal is to create stability and independence, not dependence. It is argued that training in managing emotions and dealing with self-disclosure facilitates transformative learning (Brockbank and McGill, 2006; Beard et al., 2007). The ESLs' learning environment can tend to be governed by the YP's emotional state and it is here that the role of the teacher is critical and very often, taken for granted. In general, there is limited attention paid to the fact that staff, by the very nature of what they do, are expected to manage emotional situations without too much fuss. In my experience as a practitioner in the field, I have witnessed 'emotion management' carried out by staff on a daily basis and without specific theoretical foundations, as part of normal work practice. It is simply part of the territory.

However, while practitioners in the field might be experienced at carrying out emotion management work, it takes its toll on staff due to the intense and normally stressful features of ESLs' lives. This study highlights the importance of having sound professional support in place for staff. Opportunities to engage in debriefing sessions with colleagues are important, as are options for external supervision.

Despite the tensions involved in such a study, my experience was a positive, if challenging one. I went into the course with certain expectations and outcomes that I wanted to realise. It was important to me to deliver the Communications course in its entirety and to a high standard. I was particularly committed to making sure the ESLs were involved in their experience and that they succeeded in achieving the qualification that we, as their teachers, had suggested they were able for. I am happy with what was accomplished in this regard.

ESLs are a naturally untrusting group: I wanted to change their view of education by involving them in an experience which would put them in control of some of their learning. Overall, I am satisfied that this was achieved to some degree and that these ESLs had a new experience of involvement in their VET. The constructivist strategies had a role here and I would single out the strategy of teacher as coach as being the most significant in shaping my future practice.

What surprised me, and what I found most difficult, is that I did not anticipate how some of these ESLs would react to the literacy issues that affected their progress, and how their lack of emotional regulation would dominate their learning. These two items affected their self-management, which was challenging for their teachers but also upsetting for them.

If I were to replicate the study, I would make some changes to the areas outlined below, as follows:

- I would address literacy issues by providing a course in basic literacy skills, parallel to the Communications course, so that grammar and punctuation could be addressed throughout the course.
- I would use the speaking and listening elements of the curriculum to work on emotional regulation (for example, work on moods, or role-play and drama techniques) to manage conflict and stress.
- In addition, I would focus more on engaging the ESLs in learner involvement by revisiting the learner contracts throughout the taught course and including ESLs more in selecting curriculum materials.
- With regard to constructivist strategies, I view the strategies of teacher as coach and self-directed learning as powerful ways of creating learner autonomy and I would apply these to future

teaching practice. I would not repeat the use of generative learning, (trying to create links between old and new learning for ESLs) as a strategy for ESL learning.

6.6 Limitations of the study

In a study such as this there are particular limitations which must be acknowledged. a) There are issues with researcher bias that have implications for the work, such as my level of commitment to the course and the time and energy I invested, in order to bring the study to fruition. I worked hard to create relationships with these ESLs and as such, there was a danger that these YP would tell us what we wanted to hear, because they knew and liked both myself and Sinead and so wanted the programme to succeed. It must be noted that this level of commitment would not be possible in a daily teaching schedule in VET. b) There was also a lot going on throughout the study, from applying the constructivist strategies to creating more learner involvement, presenting quality portfolios and managing the emotional responses of the ESLs. It is difficult to disentangle all these issues, especially when the course is happening on a daily or weekly basis, and I would sound a cautionary note in repeating an AR cycle, with all of the above included. c) The fact that the ESLs in the study were pre-selected and did not volunteer for the programme can also be considered a limitation of the study and creates a difficulty when trying to apply any useful generalisations for future work. Despite these constraints, the study identified some positive aspects to ESL involvement which did not just relate to interviews with YP but were supported by multiple methods such as observations, questionnaires and YPs behaviours. Sinead's presence as a second opinion was a good witness to all of this. While these issues may have constrained the types of responses in the study, I believe they are an unavoidable consequence of this type of research and with this population.

6.7 Implications for professional practice

The results of the study have clearly identified key areas which have implications for professional practice. The research was conducted in the ESL context within VET. The overall intention was to gain new knowledge about ESLs' learning experiences for the purpose of developing practice and providing a new approach to ESL teaching, for use by colleagues who are both practitioners and policy makers in this area of education.

Through the AR cycle, the study conducted a systematic evaluation of a literacy programme in the VET setting which assessed how greater learner involvement, using constructivist teaching methods in a more challenging literacy course, affected ESLs and teachers. Such a study, where the teachers withdrew from their usual role and created an environment of involvement and challenge, was an innovative departure in ESL education. Having a clearer understanding of what factors worked within the study enables me to help teachers and educational policy makers tailor their curricula and teaching approaches for this group of YP. The research is intended to improve the educational provision for all ESLs, in particular in the area of literacy education within the Irish and UK education systems.

Furthermore, this research has provided me with a unique opportunity to fill some of the gaps in ESL literature and foreground the position of the ESL learner, heretofore underrepresented in the literature. This allows me to take a more informed stance in professional practice when discussing ESLs' education, particularly in the areas of greater learner involvement and increased challenge.

In my IFS (Larkin, 2009), ESLs implied that they were not satisfied with curriculum materials used in literacy and that they wanted more

challenging materials. There is now an opportunity to develop research in curriculum design in VET training. We know that literacy gaps are a particular problem for many ESLs. Incorporation of basic literacy skills training throughout VET training would help to address this issue. This is an area that can be developed with other practitioners in the field, at local level and beyond.

The study raised our awareness of the sensitive nature of ESL learners and the complex circumstances surrounding their lives. ESL education is a challenging area of work and the specialist nature of ESL teaching cannot be overstated. In moving in future directions, there are issues for initial teacher training and post-16 education which require attention. Educators need to address the issue of learner autonomy and challenge and also reflect on their teaching.

Furthermore, due to the demanding nature of the work, there is a clear need for continued professional development for teachers, both in emotional support work and in approaches to creating greater learner involvement. This would help to create a learning partnership between ESLs and teachers, leading to a more satisfactory experience for all. The findings of this work can impact on continued professional development in many ways.

Finally, a direct development from this thesis would be the replication, on a larger scale, of the AR cycle carried out thus far. The new knowledge revealed in the study provides the evidence needed to create new approaches for these learners. Contribution to the development of this approach on a larger scale is an exciting prospect. Furthermore, this replication is appropriate on both an institutional and national scale within ESL education. Given that ESL education is funded through Departments

of Education both in Ireland and across the EU, it is conceivable that this could be carried out on a pilot basis in an Irish or European context.

6.8 Recommendations for future related research

This study has provided some critical observations of the issues surrounding early school leaving and of ESLs' abilities to engage in learner involvement and respond to challenge. As with any area of research, there is always more to explore. I have, however, set boundaries so that a manageable exploration of the issue of ESLs involvement in their learning could be undertaken. Having examined the literature, I think there are several areas of future research which are natural extensions of this current work. Examples of VET practice in both the EU and internationally reveal a dearth of studies on effective strategies or models which can be replicated across education systems. There is also a lack of longitudinal studies on ESL learners in general and from the ESL perspective in particular. A broader and more extensive study in any of these areas can contribute to future developments in ESL education.

Raising the bar in VET qualifications and assessing existing requirements for cognitive challenge is now overdue. A comprehensive overhaul of what ESLs are offered in basic skills training must be undertaken and, where necessary, replaced by new course materials which challenge youngsters to both think and progress. A large scale body of work needs to be undertaken, possibly as part of a larger partnership approach in VET education and between nation states, so that replication is avoided. I would be interested in pursuing this area in the future.

The culture of low expectation and a too therapeutic approach to ESLs must be replaced by a new discourse of expectation, and ESL learning must be reconceptualised so that progress, challenge and higher

expectation are the norm rather than the exception. This is an area in which more research is needed, involving YP, to ascertain their attitudes and opinions as to how they want to deal with their own education.

6.9 Contribution to knowledge

In the extensive review of the literature carried out, I have illustrated the range and variety of perspectives which compete with each other in an attempt to understand the phenomenon of early school leaving. The current debate on structural inequalities highlighted in the review and the debate on the standards in VET have raised some serious questions regarding the root causes of early school leaving across Western societies. I have clearly illustrated the complexity of the issue and the need to tackle it at source.

 I have also identified that the issue of early school leaving is under-theorised. In carrying out the study, I found that no-one theory could explain or illuminate the various responses of ESLs to their learning, influenced as they were by external circumstances and various emotional reactions to the learning experience. I established a framework for working with ESLs by linking some of the literatures such as SDT, constructivism, and Davey's theories on literacy and motivation, thereby providing some new insights into working with ESLs.

My study has also provided professional insights into a new approach in ESL education. In engaging the ESL in his/her education, I have gained particular insights into how ESLs react to greater involvement in their learning and how incorporating the learner's perspective in future ESL provision, can make for a more successful learning experience. In employing constructivist teaching strategies and in using particular approaches to learner involvement I have contributed to developments in

teaching methods and in approaches to involving the learner as an equal partner in his/her study.

I have also established that ESLs are particularly sensitive learners who need extensive teacher support and belief, in order to overcome previous negative experiences and develop and refine their literacy skills.

Furthermore, I have clearly demonstrated in this study that ESLs are able to respond to more cognitive challenge than they are sometimes offered in ESL provision. I argue for a discourse of expectation in ESL education, one which will challenge both YP and their education providers, institutions and teachers to provide and expect the best for and from ESLs. Finally, I have contributed to the discourse on standards in VET courses and curriculum, suggesting that they require more screening to ensure that YP are not offered low level courses and qualifications, which do not lead to gainful employment or further training.

6.10 Personal reflections

The first of these reflections is related to the ongoing concerns I have for ESLs in VET and the fact that the situation has deteriorated since I embarked on this study seven years ago. As a result of the global economic crisis since 2007, youth unemployment is at an all-time high and so unqualified ESLs are more at risk of remaining long-term unemployed. Furthermore, credible qualifications leading to employment are not yet available within VET. This raises serious questions for the future.

More troubling is the fact that the issue of early school leaving is deeply rooted in structural inequalities across societies, which is a particularly challenging starting point for improving the circumstances of this group. ESLs need adults who will dream for them and create concrete changes.

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A way of addressing this is through the recent OECD report on Ten Steps to Equity based on fairness and inclusion (OECD, 2008). In creating equity in education, the barriers which impede progress, such as personal or socio-economic circumstances, must not be obstacles to achieving educational potential. In addition, a minimum level of educational knowledge should be available to all, no matter what background, age or ethnic origin (OECD, 2008).

Another reflection is an awareness of the development of my critical thinking skills as a result of the study. My research has opened up a bigger world than the one I inhabited when starting off in a centre in a small YS setting, with a concern that ESLs were being shortchanged. I have also witnessed how the study has influenced my professional thinking and opinions. I have been able to combine the professional and the academic in a way that has influenced and improved my own practice.

A final reflection is the opportunity the study has afforded me to stand back from my practice and observe how ESLS are underrepresented in any arrangements about their educational provision. While working at the coalface of ESL education involves many challenges and the lives of the YP are in turmoil much of the time, they have a role to play in future VET developments. Part of my professional learning is that my role is to continue to affirm the importance of ESL education with and for ESLs, in an attempt to create a 'joyous shot of how things ought to be, long fallen wide' (Larkin,1958, p. 17), for this resilient group of young people.

Epilogue

In closing the pages on the study, I wondered what had happened to all the participants since we carried out the implementation stage of the AR cycle, in 2011. Here are their stories:

Trudy: now aged 18, left the centre, having completed the course. A member of the Travelling Community, she is destined to marry at this age. She drives her own car but has not taken any further training, nor is she working.

Brian: aged 19, has left the centre as his two-year programme had finished. Having suffered a nervous breakdown and spent some time in hospital, he has now recovered and is doing a full Level 4 programme in a new town, initiated by his girlfriend, who is studying catering.

John: is an apprentice car mechanic, a programme he started soon after he completed his Communications course, as his two-year programme at the centre had come to an end. John completed Level 5 Car Mechanics. He is currently unemployed and recently became a father.

Matthew: ESOL learner. Matthew has left the centre as his two-year programme had come to an end. He has recently become a father and both he and his girlfriend are unemployed. They have both expressed a keen interest in finding work.

Mark: ESOL learner. He has left the centre as his two-year programme had come to an end. He is currently unemployed but is 'taking a break', as he told me recently.

Sinéad, teacher on programme: has taken a career break since August 2013, due to husband's ill health.

Researcher/teacher: due to severe financial budget cuts in the project since 2008, opted for voluntary redundancy in July 2013 to write up this thesis.

Those who left the programme:

Clara: returned to CTC in 2011 to complete Leaving Certificate Applied, which she did. She became pregnant and is now a mother to a one year old baby boy, with her partner, who featured in the study, but who left due to his arrest.

Cian: returned from treatment centre in 2012 and is sober. He has a daughter of five and spends a lot of time with her.

Mark: whereabouts unknown.

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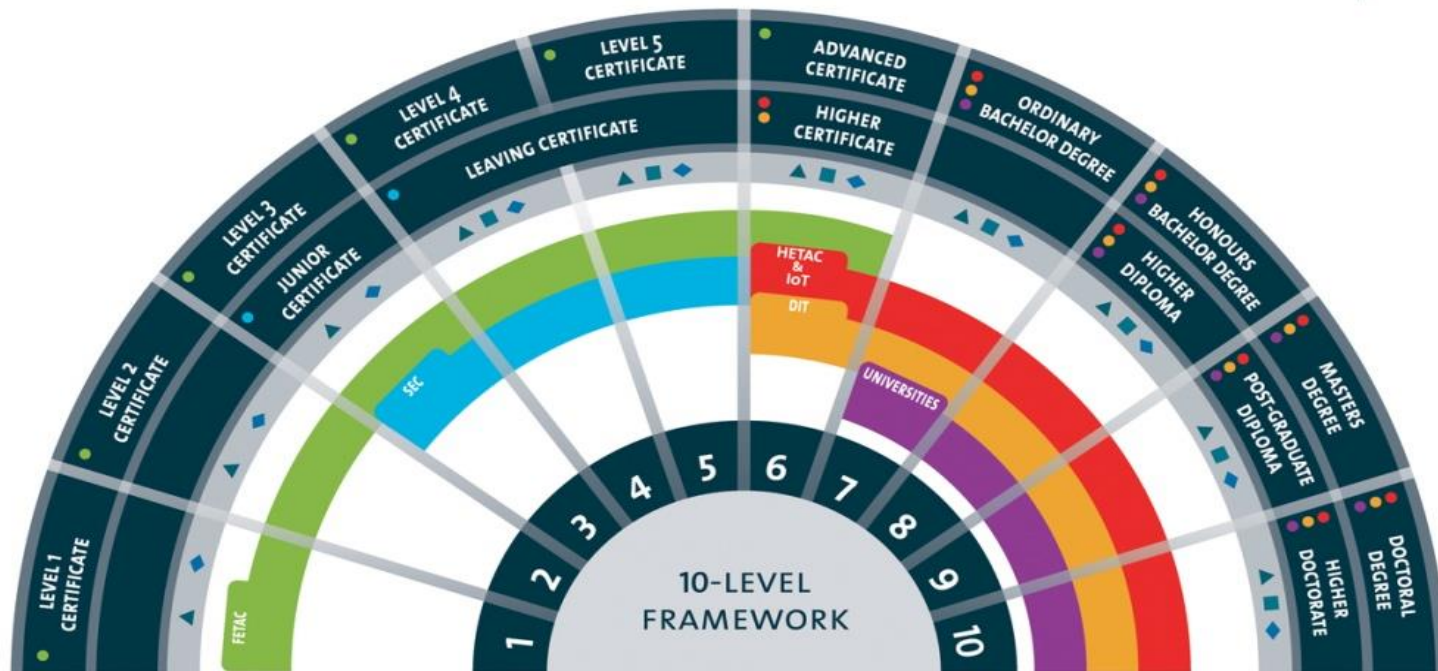Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.). (2004). *New directions in action research*.

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Appendix A

National Qualifications Framework in Ireland

Source: Further Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland (www.fetac.ie)

Appendix B

Correspondences between UK and Irish frameworks with European qualifications frameworks

Within Europe, two overarching qualifications frameworks exist to which the national qualifications frameworks of the UK and Ireland relate: The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) also known as the Bologna Framework.

Table 1 shows the correspondence of levels established between national qualifications frameworks and the EQF:

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	Qualifications and Credit Framework England/ Northern Ireland (QCF)	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	The National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland (NFQ IE)
8	8	8	12	10
7	7	7	11	9
6	6	6	10/9	8/7
5	5/4	5/4	8/7	6
4	3	3	6	5
3	2	2	5	4
2	1	1	4	3
1	E3	E3	3	2/1
	E2	E2	2	
	E1	E1	1	

Table 2 shows the outcome of verifying the compatibility of higher education frameworks for Scotland (FQHEIS/SCQF), for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and for the NFQ for the Republic of Ireland (NFQ IE) with the FQ-EHEA as follows:

Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ level	FQHEIS/ SCQF level	NFQ IE level	Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle
Doctoral degrees	8	12	10	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (including Integrated Master's)	7	11	9	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Postgraduate diplomas	7	11	9	Intermediate qualifications within the second cycle
Postgraduate certificates				
Bachelor's degrees with honours/ Honours Bachelor Degrees		10	8	First cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Irish Higher Diploma				
Bachelor's degrees/ Ordinary Bachelor Degree	6		7	
Graduate diplomas		9		Intermediate qualifications within the first cycle
Graduate certificates				
Foundation Degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)	5	8	6	Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)				
Higher National Diplomas (HND)				
Irish Higher Certificate				
Higher National Certificates (HNC)	4	7		Intermediate qualifications within the short cycle
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)				

For more information on compatibility with these frameworks see: http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm and www.enic-naric.net.

Thinking of working or studying in the UK or Ireland? You may be interested in the answer to one or more of these questions.

- What do they call the qualification which compares most closely with mine?
- Will I get some recognition for the qualifications I have?
- What kind of job or course can I apply for with my current qualification?

Recruiting people with Irish qualifications in the UK or people with UK qualifications in Ireland? You may be interested in the answer to these questions.

- How do I know what a qualification from another country means in terms of level?
- Which national qualification should I compare this qualification to?
- Where can I find more detailed information about the content and level of qualifications?

This leaflet helps you explore these questions.

Qualifications are different in different countries. However there are some clear stages people move through in education, training and work that are common to most countries. Primary education is followed by secondary education and then initial entry into employment and/or further and higher education or training.

The main table gives an indication of how you can compare qualifications across national boundaries. Examples of major qualifications at each level are provided. For more detail of the qualifications in another country, you will need to consult the website given at the head of each column. All these frameworks of qualifications change from time to time and you need to check these websites for the latest versions. Entry requirements for jobs and courses often vary within a country. This means you will need to check specific requirements with the employer or institution for the job or course that you are interested in.

Qualifications can cross boundaries

A rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

How to use this leaflet:

- This leaflet provides information that allows you to look at the ways qualifications are organised in the UK and Ireland.

- It shows which qualifications in other countries are broadly comparable to your qualifications (or those that you are interested in taking).

- On the left side of the principal table you will find the main stages of education or employment - you can find where you are in these stages.

- The next column shows the qualifications framework for your country.

- To the right of this you can see the nearest levels and similar kinds of qualifications that are used in the other countries.

- This makes it possible to draw broad comparisons, rather than direct equivalences, between qualifications and their levels for each country.

- The back page indicates how UK and Irish qualifications frameworks relate to qualifications frameworks in Europe.

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Appendix C

SECTION B – FICTION

Read the following piece of fiction and then answer the questions that follow:

THE HOBBIT
By
J.R.R. Tolkien

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy small, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat; it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

It had a perfectly round door, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel; a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with paneled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted. The chairs were polished and there were lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats as the hobbit was fond of visitors. The best rooms were all on the left-hand side (going in), for these were the only ones to have windows. The windows were round and deep-set and looked out to the garden, and the meadows beyond, sloping down to the river.

The hobbit was a very well-to-do hobbit, and his name was Bilbo Baggins. The Baggins family have lived in the neighbourhood of The Hill for as long as anyone can remember and people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected. You could tell what a Baggins would say on any question without the bother of asking him. This is a story of how a Baggins had an adventure, and found himself doing and saying things altogether unexpected.

What is a hobbit? I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large folk like you and me come along, making a noise like elephants, which they can hear a mile off. They tend to be fat in stomach and they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow). They wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick, warm, brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly). They have long, clever, brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep laughs. They have dinner twice a day, when they can get it. Now you know enough to get on with. *(Abridged Extract)*

QUESTIONS:

1. Where did the Hobbit live?

_____

2. What shape and what colour was the door of the Hobbit's home?

_____

3. Where are the best rooms in the house?

_____

4. What was the name of the Hobbit in this story?

_____

5. Why were the Baggins family considered respectable? (Give two reasons)

_____

6. What size is a Hobbit?

_____

7. Do Hobbits have beards?

_____

8. What kind of clothes do Hobbits wear?

_____

9. Why don't the Hobbits wear shoes?

_____

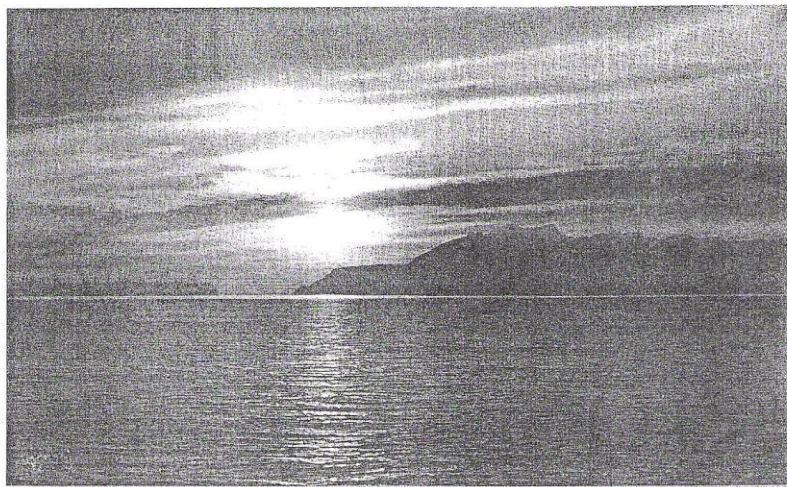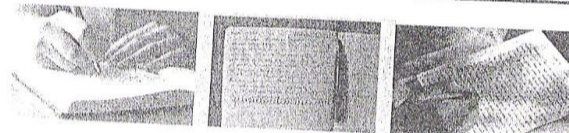10. What kind of faces do the Hobbit have, according to the author?

_____

Writing Postcards

Look at the picture on the front of the postcard.

Imagine that you are there.

Write about what you were doing, what it is like and if you are enjoying that kind of holiday.

Title: WRITING: Learning Journal

Instructions:

Keep a journal, recording learning over a minimum of 15 days
- At the beginning of your journal, state what you hope to get out of this course.
- List your skills and qualities
- Identify what you already know about how you learn best
- Write in the date of each entry
- Record what you learnt on a day to day basis (or weekly basis – depending on the course time-table)
- State what you enjoyed learning, what you found challenging and what you did not like
- Describe the different types of learning you participated in (e.g. role play, research, class discussion)
- The journal should be hand-written unless otherwise agreed with Instructor
- Write rough notes or drafts, proof-read to correct any spelling or grammatical mistakes
- Ensure that your journal is near and easy to read
- Insert journal and drafts/notes in your portfolio

You will need a pen and notebook / diary / journal / exercise book to record your learning. You also need a refill pad for rough drafts and notes.

Successful (S) = All instruction points achieved

Referred (R) = Not all instruction points achieved

Transfer the final results to the Portfolio Learner Assessment Sheet

Please sign and date appropriately as indicated in the space below:

Learner's signature:_____ Date:_____

Assessor's signature_____ Date:_____

COMMUNICATIONS:
LEVEL 3

UNIT 2: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

(a)   Look carefully at the pages of the

GARMENT CARE SYMBOL GUIDE

Explain one symbol out of each of the 5 categories, i.e.

- WASHING
- DRYING
- IRONING
- BLEACHING
- DRY CLEANING

and write them in beside the symbols

(b)   Examine the **MAP OF---** and locate and highlight the following:

- General Hospital
- St. Joseph's Hospital
- Court House
- River ------
- County Council Offices

Appendix D

Fetac Level 4

Communications Module

Units of Learning:

Unit 1:   Learning to learn

Unit 2:   Non-verbal and visual communication

Unit 3:   Personal interaction

Unit 4:   Reading

Unit 5:   Writing

Unit 6:   Media awareness

Unit 7:   Communications Technology

Constructivist Principles:

Generative learning:
linking old knowledge to current learning so that links are formed and connections are made for the learners.

Self directed learning:
The learner chooses some of the content in the programme based on what is relevant and meaningful to his/her life. The learner also decides how she would best/would best like to learn, i.e. using equipment/listening/demonstration by someone/ independent learning.

Teacher as coach:
The teacher acts as a partner in the learning process, providing support and advice when requested and where needed. This can be in puzzling out something or providing an answer to a basic problem, leading the learner in a particular direction which might assist in discovering solutions/answers/new thinking or awareness. Our objective for teacher as coach is to raise awareness and develop critical thinking.

The learning outcomes for each unit, as required by the module are attached in Appendix A.

Rationale for the learner:

The introduction to the constructivist learning process in Level 4 Communications has to be presented to the learner in a manner which makes sense and is easily understood.

For Example: 'Anything' you need to do in life requires a skill: writing, making a decision, learning to drive, earning money. You need to be able to show that you've got these skills. You can do this through some of the work in this module. At the end, you will be able to demonstrate how you have these skills and you will be able to explain to yourself and to others what you have learned.

Facilitators / Tutors

Step 1:

How we will run this unit	Outline, unit by unit, what each piece entails, what the learner needs to know and what they need to 'show' at the finish of each unit.
Emphasise	You will be involved in selecting some of what is done. You will **direct** some of what is done.

Step 11:

How we will run this unit	Each unit has the ways we will learn outlined in front of it. It shows how you will direct your learning.
Emphasise	How, can you, as the learner, show to somebody who doesn't know you, that you can do . . . . . have . . . . skill, can present . . . . .

This module is about:

- identifying what you want to learn

- thinking about your learning (reflecting)
and how you are developing.

- learning to organise and present your work

- understanding body language, signs and symbols (communication without speaking)

- learning to listen to yourself, to others.

    to messages (to pick up key information:

- learning how to have a conversation in: a) relaxed setting; b) formal interview

- learning how to write formal letters and a CV

- learning how to write reports, notes from a meeting

- learning how to read and report on a book, a newspaper article

- learning how to examine the effect of technology on your life

- developing your skills and your self-confidence

(Provided by FETAC)

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 1			
Learning to Learn Learning Journal	Introduce to YP: this course requires that you have some comment to give on what you learn in the programme – how would you like to do this?	YP will decide what they think they need to do – what way would they like to do it?	Bring in something you have that you think the group and you would enjoy.
Goal Setting	Where do you think there are 'gaps' in your learning? What/where do you feel fuzzy? On what aspects? What kinds of things do you enjoy like/dislike at school?	How much audio/video would you like – movies/document – written or oral work. Would you like to choose some of the materials?	Send to Library Pick / Select / Choose Materials
Generative Learning	Link up: what they liked / good at/ to direct their future learning/goals. What do you think you're here in the Youth Centre to learn	What would you consider relevant?	<u>Getting them to discuss at end:</u> conversation on learning: do you ever think about your learning, did you learn, evaluate. What do you want to learn? What's useful in your life?

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning – linking old and new –	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 2			
Non Verbal & Visual Communication a. Body Language b. Signs & Symbols Conveying a mood – **Draw** your mood	<u>Non-Verbal</u> Tell me the last time you picked up a 'cue'/sign from somebody: to stay away, to offer help, to be quiet, to shut up, to leave. If you are having a bad day how do you convey that to others? i.e. put in your earplugs, put cap on, head down!	Choose an exercise to convey a message without using words. Tell me what it is. Define How will we record it – audio / video Allow them to decide	a. Advising: a way to pick up on body language is to watch, look, be attentive. Suggestion: do down town – observe – select something to report on b) or soaps are a good idea **without** volume Group discussion on what they have to say. Provide vocabulary. Give out a sheet of paper. Draw a mood.
Interpret and evaluate images: Photos, maps, advertisements	<u>**Signs & Symbols**</u> Display photos what mood you think . . . tone of picture. . . Local map: start with Map of your own country. Recognition of basic symbols on a map: rivers, mountains, heritage sites, towns, cities	<u>**Signs & Symbols**</u> Select same thing that you've learned how to do and flowchart it, i.e. a flowchart for changing a wheel. Produce a logo with a meaning and describe it / tell us what it means	<u>**Signs & Symbols**</u> Happiness Jealousy Contentment Envy Logos: Teacher as coach can help in creative awareness. BMW logo – everyone know it but nobody knows what it means –

			can be applied to lots of gaps in learning.
			BMW: symbol of blades of a helicopter against the sky WW11 (BMW originally made engines for planes in WW11)
			Now let's look at another example – a lot of you wear NIKE. NIKE is Goddess of victory in Greece. The NIKE sign (the NIKE whoosh) is a mark of approval, rightness.
			Teacher as coach: Play bunny symbol on gear – where did it come from?

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 3			
Personal Interaction	**<u>Oral presentation:</u>** Choose something you are interested in: a hobby, an interest, a dislike, a book you've read: 3 – 5 minutes present to peers. Record Teachers can assist here by saying – and when did you become interested in this . . . Ans: 'I can't remember' Well lets think back – were you at school – was it parents influence, etc. set them thinking	Informal conversation: YP to introduce it / initiate it. Their task: decide the topic of conversation, i.e. what annoys you? Ask us to participate. Invert the dialogue, initiate it, develop it, conclude it Offer a few options: i.e. what's your earliest memory or <u>use this</u> as a short part of some part of a unit. Think of The Guardian -it does this well> Watch how the YP may often flip question back on you: Do you believe in God?	Recording a telephone message. Teacher coaches through the process – listening 'practice run' Time Date Content Demonstrate it 'badly done' Well done' Set up with YIB

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 4			
Reading Reading and Critical Thinking	First experience at school. What was easy to learn. What are your memories of something special you learned, i.e. glass painting, an instrument, a visitor to the school. Elicit/ Move this on to current learning **Newspapers**: asking what things bother them in the news/what types of stories/why? What do you know about this ? when did you first learn about this?	While reading a book is compulsory, you direct it by: Select a book/short story. Read it. Tell us about it in a synopsis. Decide how much you're going to read. Why did you choose it, etc? cover, etc? What influenced your decisions? Newspaper article: See left. Select an issue that troubles you/irritates you in your local community or in the wider world. Research it . Present it-in any format. (this links with approaches in LCA and Cont Issues)	Use a play: Pulp Fiction. Ask re a film they've seen recently. Ask them re a particular scene they liked. What was good about that scene? Do they ever think about that? Do the actors make it up as they go along? Learning Journal from Unit 1 and Unit 4 here – provide reflective vocabulary, understanding the use of this and the value of reflecting. What effect does thinking about your learning have? Does it help you to do this? Why? In your own words, tell us how you describe what you're learning and thinking about your learning means.

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 5			
Writing	Think about something you're sorry about – something you did. Write a letter to yourself to . . . . . Saying this and saying how you have been changed by this.

Where you are now.

Write a letter to yourself: or to someone you choose, <u>looking back on</u>

A desire
A dream
A regret
An apology

You want to write about and then in that place, state/refer to where you've moved to in your life since. | Learning new skills: What use are the following to you, in your life? Why might you need them? Is there any you would choose to leave out? Why/

Informal letter
Formal letter
Find a job
Make a CV
Report writing
Form filling | Correcting and drafting this.

Informal letter
Formal letter
Find a job
Make a CV
Report writing
Form filling

Assisting in developing further goals or areas of interest, if the YP wish to do further ed or training/apply for a job etc. Help put the skills into action. |

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 6			
Media Awareness	Advertisements on tv/radio that come to mind from – childhood – adolescence Consider- Why do you think you remember it? What was special about them? Was there a jingle? A song? A symbol? What stuck> Consider: why Did you ever think about the message effect. Now: Select a current ad.– tell now what you make of it, why you chose it, etc. And did your study of this have any effect etc. Did it make you think – the power of ads.	How would you show that you have an understanding of the media and how it works? Power of ads, emotional stories/drama stories/true life stories On what – why Produce a newsletter or a small paper? Learners decide what the contents of the newsletter or chosen medium will be and how it will be presented.	Football jersey -strips – symbols and meaning Arsenal are Gunners. Suggest YP reflect on what it means Get them to suggest: their own symbols i.e. Promote a discussion: What symbolic affect are these having? Why do you think we are influenced by these symbols? What does it say about us as human beings? Have you ever thought about this-the money we spend, our identity bound up with the symbol.

YP = Young Person Unit	Generative Learning	Self-directed learning	Teacher as Coach
UNIT 7			
Communications Technology

Write a reflection on this | a) can you remember a time without technology in your life. i.e. phone, i-phone. Could you write and describe or report and tape life for you as a teenager now and the technology you use vis a vis when you were in the last class at primary school. Have things changed technology wise/ Draw comparisons | a) Assignment: write about impact of technology on personal life.

b) as part of this reflection, could we go around and ask all in the building about this?

Conduct a survey in building?

do a comparison exercise.

Learners to design questions. | Teachers taking YP through every reflective process of information and cause and effect of technology.

- instant aspect
- memory vs. internet
- falls in concentration
- dependence of and on . . . . . .
i.e. John's description 'its part of me'

Instant communication Feeling of being wanted and/or harassed

Access, i.e. play song 'before the TV' |

15th June 2010:   Planning Stage

As part of the pre planning stage, I asked some YP in the literacy project to look at course materials and create a set of questions that they think other YP would answer,in language that they would understand.

Participant: Clara

Material for : Level 4.

Poem: Mid Term Break (Clara)
Responded well when asked to help construct some questions for the poem.
Me:If you did the poem what questions would you like to be asked / would you ask / like to ask others to ensure that other young people would understand and enjoy the poem.

These are the questions Clara came up with
Sample questions for comprehension passage:

1.   Do you get the drift of the poem or do you have to break it down to understand it?

2.   What do you think the terms, sick bay / stanched mean?

3.   What is the mood of the poem?

4.   Do you get the meaning of the last sentence of the poem?

5.   Can you pick out some words or phrases that you like?

Participant: Don

Material: for Level 4 Communications

I gave him two books and asked him to put yellow stickers on topics/stories that he likes.
'Can you read this and then tell me what I need to know about 'safe cars''
Don did this readily but he did not answer or write up questions for others to use. Don was not very focussed on this task.

Mid-term Break

I sat all morning in the college sick bay
Counting bells knelling classes to a close,
At two o'clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying-
He had always taken funerals in his stride-
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram
When I came in, and I was embarrassed
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were "sorry for my trouble",
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived
With the corpse, stanched and bandaged by the
nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops
And candles soothed the bedside. I saw him
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now.

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple.

He lay in the four foot box as in a cot,
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

Seamus Heaney

F.E.T.A.C. COMMUNICATIONS. L.4
UNIT 4   READING A POEM

"MID-TERM BREAK"

By

SEAMUS HEANEY.

1.   Do you get the drift of the poem, or do you have to
      break it down to understand it?

2.   What do you think the words "sick bay" (line 1 verse 1)
      and "stanched" (line 3 verse 5) mean?

3.   How would you describe the mood of this poem?

4.   Do you get the meaning of the last sentence of the
      poem?

5.   Can you pick out some words or phrases that you like?

Appendix E

Biographical Data

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
CLARA	F	Irish	18	Urban	Parents separated-lives with mother, siblings, stepfather and boyfriend	Community College Secondary school 3 years	D.E.S Junior Certificate exam– passed and failed subjects	ART Reading Test Accuracy:40th centile Comprehension:65th centile	3 brothers 2 sisters	Brother in prison for arms offence	No court history	Hair and Beauty
BRIAN	M	Irish	17	Rural	Parents separated. Lives with mother. Father in Australia since 2006.	Secondary School - 3 years.	D.E.S Junior Certificate exam-passed.	Diagnosed as ADHD but gave up medication in 2009. ART Reading Test Accuracy:45th centile Comprehension:40th centile	No siblings	2 police cautions and curfew imposed for 3 months-driving offences, petty crime.	YS Transferred from L.C.A. to level 4 in YS after 8 weeks	Woodwork
MARTIN	M	Czech	18	Urban	Parents separated-never met his father. Lives with mother and stepfather, brother and stepsister.	Vocational School - 3.5years	D.E.S. Junior Certificate exam-passed. 2008	ESOL student. ART Reading Test-only completed three passages	1 brother 1 stepsister	Limited social experiences	YS	Computers, Music
JOHN	M	Irish	17	Urban .	Parents married to each other, living together.	Vocational School – 3.5 years.	D.E.S. Junior Certificate exam-passed.2008	ART Reading Test Accuracy: 20th centile Comprehension: 50th centile	1 sibling – older sister .	Disliked school-found it difficult.	YS Cautioned for fighting at school. Incident on estate	Hurling, Boxing, Metal, Wood.
MARK	M	Irish	17	Urban	Parent's together-member of travelling community.	Community College 1.5 years Oberstown Detention Centre 1 year.	D.E.S Junior Cert. 2007 2 subjects taken-passed.	ART Reading Test Accuracy: 45th centile Comprehension: 90th centile	3 brothers, Middle in family.	Petty crime, burglary	YS Youth Justice Project	Cinema, Videos. Has a young son-no access
TRUDY	F	Irish	17	Urban	Parents together-member of travelling community	Local girls secondary school 1.5 years	No state exams	ART Reading Test Accuracy:30th centile Comprehension:75th centile	1 younger brother	Very poor self image regarding ability.	YS	Hair and Beauty
CIAN	M	Irish	19	Urban	Parents separated, lives with mother	Community College 2 years-asked to leave	No state exams	ART Reading Test Accuracy: 55th centile Comprehension: 80th centile	1 older brother	Alcohol problems-cautioned by Gardai	YS	Soccer, Metalwork Has a baby daughter
MATTHEW	M	Czech	20	Urban	Father deceased. Mother in Czech Republic.	Secondary Education in Czech Republic	State exams at 17 in Czech Republic	ART Reading Test -only completed three passages	1 older sister and brother	Lives with older sister	YS	Interested in learning-getting a job

Key to Codes on Table 1:- Key to Codes on Table 1:-A = Code, B = Sex, C= Nationality, D = Age, E = Rural/Urban background, F = Biological parents/legal status of relationship, G = Secondary school attended and length of time, H = Educational qualifications, I = Reading Age, J = Siblings, K = Presenting problems, L = Agencies involved with participants, M = Interest

Appendix F

Literacy Profile

Name: **B**

Date of birth: **11/10/93**

Present Age: **17 in October 2010**

Nationality: **U.K. citizen**

Gender: **Male**

Start Date: **January 2010**

Training Centre:

Community Training Centre

Training group:

Foundation Level training-this corresponds to a certification programme which begins at Level 3. This is where B will begin training in metal, wood, literacy etc. It is a lower standard than the Junior Cert/GCSE qualification.

General Background:

B attended for interview on January 26th 2010. He was a very friendly and chatty young man who told me his life story in a free and engaging manner. He was born in the Isle of Man in 1993. The family lived there until B was two years of age and they then moved back to Ireland, (B's grandfather had become ill) where they eventually settled. His parents separated four years ago and his father now lives in Australia. He is an only child and lives with his mother. He appears to have a close relationship with his mother who is keen for B to achieve formal training and qualifications. He is interested in woodwork and he likes playing around with computers.

B does not like school and speaks negatively about his experience. As the family moved around when he was younger, he attended three primary schools. (Primary school is normally attended between the ages of five years to twelve years, while secondary school between the ages of twelve to seventeen /eighteen years.) Legally, one can leave school in Ireland at sixteen years or if one has achieved the Junior Certificate examination.) He attended secondary school where he took his Junior Certificate Exam (equivalent to GCSE exams) in 2009, which he passed, achieving two grade B's in wood and metalwork, three grade C's and two grade D's in various other subjects such as Maths, English, Civics, Business and Religion. B claims he cannot find a record of this exam but I have asked him to source a copy from his school. B is exempt from Irish as he is a U.K. citizen. B told me he left school because 'I was getting sick of it, it was a bore' and that he got detention for not doing homework. While in primary school, B was assessed by a psychologist and was diagnosed with ADHD. He was prescribed Ritalin and then Concerta and he has been under the care of a psychiatrist whom he sees every three months. B talked about how he felt the medication affected him – at times it was an appetite suppressant or an appetite booster so he did not feel well on it. 'I would either be very hungry or not hungry at all.' He decided to try life without the medication and to concentrate himself - so he stopped taking it some time in his Junior Cert year and has not gone back on it. B says he feels better without the medication though he has difficulty concentrating at times. B hated homework at school and it was a real problem for him. He is hoping that in coming to the centre 'it might direct me into an idea of what I might like to do'. B was tested on the ART reading test and scored in the 40th centile for comprehension and the 45th centile for reading accuracy, indicating that he is performing in the average range. He describes his own reading ability as 'ok' as he does his spelling, though he finds handwriting difficult and it takes him time to write things down or to copy pieces of work. He likes

Maths and has no difficulty here. He only reads books or magazines if he is interested in the subject matter.

Health:

As a younger boy, B developed exercise induced asthma and has been on an inhaler since, though this is much improved, he stated. When asked has he ever experienced anxiety or depression he replied 'no, not yet, touch wood.'

Offences:

B has been in trouble with the Gardai in the last twelve months, for minor offences such as disturbing the peace and has had two curfews imposed on him-the last one running from 6th Dec to 6th March 2010-where he has to be indoors between 9pm and 8am. His offences are related to breaking a car windscreen though he says this was the group he was with, driving lads from village to village, throwing eggs at a Garda station and driving a mini digger into the primary school! Since he started at the centre, B has had a leg injury and is now attending one day a week.

Recommendations:

As B seems of mid to average ability and competent in core skills areas such as reading and writing, he will need a focused Individual Learning Plan, concentrating on achieving a foundation certificate and then moving him forward. Progression to the Leaving Certificate Applied programme after year one in the centre might be a future option for him.

1) A structured timetable with a coherent certification plan, which is time bound.
2) An ILP which incorporates personal development, given his brushes with the Gardai so far.
3) A group of peers with whom he can build good relationships and express himself.
4) A challenging academic portfolio which moves him up to level 4 fairly quickly and for which he takes responsibility.
5) Any art or creative writing work which facilitate self expression.

6)   Groupwork or any programme which teaches consequences of behaviour and personal responsibility.

Progress Update: December 2011.

B's progress at the training centre has been erratic in the last twelve months due to his attendance pattern. He appears to be fatigued a lot but this is because he is staying up late watching films and playing computer games. Contact has been made with his mother on this.

B has decided he wants to progress to the LCA programme in August 2010 and has done an interview for same. In late September, B was asked to leave the LCA programme after a months' trial as he cannot concentrate and was messing a lot in class. I have been asked to take him in Level 4 Communications to which I have agreed.

B has commenced the programme and has taken it on with a mix of reluctance and resignation. He behaves as a juvenile and it has taken him time to realise that the programme is about his involvement and his learning. As we progressed over the nine months, B waxed and waned between great attention and determination to limited focus and lethargy. Overall, however, his attendance was good and his commitment to getting things right and accurate, in particular English expressions was excellent. He found the written work difficult and it took him a long time to write material, often over forty five minutes to write two short paragraphs. However, he persisted and stayed with the programme and his one to one interview indicated that he felt he was responsible for his learning and that this motivated him to continue. He passed the level 4 Communications module, which is marked by staff and then moderated by an external examiner, achieving a merit, out of three categories, pass, merit or distinction. B has remained at the training centre and his two year period of training is due to finish this January. He is still attending the workshops in metal and wood and a work experience is planned for him Overall, however, his progression path   is not clear and I have

concerns that he will end up on social welfare, unemployed and aimless, if he is not tracked and monitored by centre staff.

Project Manager
Literacy and Assessment Project
February 2010

Literacy Profile

Name: **C**

Date of birth: **14/10/92**

Present Age: **16 (08 data) C is now aged 19 years**

Gender: **Female**

Nationality: **Irish**

Start Date: **September 2008**

Training centre:

 Community Training Centre

Training group:

Foundation Level training-this corresponds to a certification programme which begins at Level 3. This is where C will begin training in catering, literacy, computers, maths etc. It is a lower standard than the Junior Cert/GCSE qualification.

General Background:

Our interview took place on September 16th 2008 when C first signed up at the centre. She had left school in June 2008 after taking her Junior Certificate exam. C lives with her Mam and six siblings - her parents are separated but she has a stepfather and he lives in the family home with them. She was friendly and willing to engage when we met, but didn't give too much on family or background. She described her mother as a strong person and says she gets on well with her. She came to the centre at her mother's suggestion but also because she knew other girls attending. I found her pleasant and friendly at our interview. C was only fifteen at the time of interview. She appears to be close to family members and came across as resilient and able. She has one older brother and four younger sisters and brothers.

C talked about her past interests and told me was an active and competent gymnast for seven years until trapped nerves forced her to give up. This is obviously significant to her as she spoke at length about it. She explained that this is a normal part of gymnastics and happens to some athletes. The condition is characterised by the legs/under the knees giving way, causing her to fall - this has happened to her less and less but the last time was four weeks ago (late Aug 08) in the street. C has been treated for this by her G.P. but does not see herself taking up gym again. It is something to note for her within the programme here.

Education and Assessments:

C received all her education in the local primary and secondary schools. She left in September 2008 having completed the Junior Certificate exam in June, in which she achieved seven passes. She says she attended very infrequently in 3rd year because she found it hard to study and 'just couldn't do it'. She also explained that she was always breaking the rules and was very cheeky towards teachers. She was eventually suspended from school when she told the principal to f….. off! when he told her her trainers were too thick (there is a rule within the school regarding trainers). It was obvious that C had a dislike for the formal system and she reacted by acting out behaviourally when she could, in order to express her defiance but it is also clear that she found school challenging. She likes the cinema, music, hair and makeup and cookery. On the ART Reading test, administered in August 2010, C scored on the 40th centile for reading accuracy and in the 65th for reading comprehension, indicating mid average to good ability, but she will need work on her expressive language and on independent reading. She describes her own reading as 'quite good' which is useful in terms of her own confidence. She needs help with Maths and received support at both primary and secondary level. Her Maths assessment recorded the following:

1. Understanding of Maths Language and Terminology:

She found the assessment intimidating, low self confidence when working with numbers. Needs revision of place value and terminology

2. Computation ability in four basic skills:

Average grasp of addition and subtraction, single digit multiplication only and non existent division. Will need a lot of revision and one to one attention to boost her confidence. Little or no understanding of fractions.

3. Problem solving ability:

Poor, probably due to the above and not due to any difficulties in lateral thinking.

Overall, C appears to be interested in learning and in achieving certification while attending the centre. She has expressed an interest in beauty and in childcare.

Health:

C is fit and healthy apart from her problems with her leg/knee and is not on medication for any condition. During her level 4 course she had specific dental problems and often left sessions to go to emergency appointments with the dentist.

Offences:

C has no police record and was not referred to the centre by probation or any other service.

Recommendations:

When designing her ILP her team could bear in mind the following:

a) C needs to start a structured programme where she understands the boundaries but where her interests are met, bearing in mind her negative experience of school.

b) Catering and cooking appear to be a keen interest of hers so this should be considered immediately. FETAC certification in this area could be started immediately to give her focus.

c) Maths support in a relaxed learning environment where she can achieve - this is obviously a block area.

d) I.T at Level 3 to establish word processing skills which will be helpful in literacy.

e) Attendance at literacy programme to develop independent reading skills and general higher order skills such as offering an opinion etc.

f) Participation in social programme to encourage her to trust staff and to mix with her peers.

Progress Update: December 2011.

C was approached by me to participate in the Level 4 Communications module as part of her literacy programme. She was identified for this programme as she had expressed an interest in more challenge in her literacy work and had described herself as 'being able for more'. (I.F.S study, 2009).C took part in the programme from September 2010 to February 2011 when she dropped out of the centre due to extenuating family circumstances which overwhelmed her. Her brother was found with and charged with possession of firearms and subsequently imprisoned. This had a profound effect on her family and on C and she spent her time visiting him in prison and worrying about his wellbeing. A month later, her partner, who was also doing the Level 4 Communications course, was charged and imprisoned for arms and malicious damage offences in a traveller family feud. C left the centre and did not complete the Level4 Communications module. Staff at the centre made several attempts to contact her but she was not interested in returning and said she needed time out on her own. In July of this year, she made contact with us again and attended an interview for the two year Leaving Certificate Applied programme. We met and carried out an 'exit interview' where we discussed her participation in the course and her reasons for leaving. C is now six months into year one of the LCA programme and is doing very well, attending daily and working hard. She tells me she realised she had to stop doing things for everyone else and concentrate on herself. This is a positive sign for her future.

Project Manager
Literacy and Assessment Project
August 2008
Update December 2011

Literacy Profile

Name: **J**
Date of birth: **13/5/93**
Present Age: **16**
Nationality: **Irish**
Gender: **Male**
Start Date: **May 09**

Training centre:

 Community Training Centre

Training group:

Foundation Level training-this corresponds to a certification programme which begins at Level 3. This is where J will begin training in metal, wood, literacy etc. It is a lower standard than the Junior Cert/GCSE qualification.

General Background:

J presented as a friendly young man, with plenty of conversation and information. He was only fifteen at the time of interview but his physical appearance belies that of a seventeen year old. He lives at home with his parents and older sister, who is eighteen. She attends Adult Education in the Vocational Education Centre. J has come to the centre for 'something to do' and 'to get more of an education'. He is fit and healthy and used to do hurling and boxing, playing for u-16 but he got fed up with them all and has given up since last year. He regularly works with his father, going out to farm on land, ten miles from home. I did not establish whether this is family land or not. He likes cars, being with his friends and wood and metalwork.

Education and Assessments:

J attended the primary school to 6th class and then attended the local secondary school for three and a half years, leaving in June 2008. He says he hated school from an early age and can remember as a small boy hating the experience of having to go into a room 'and do things that maybe you can't do.' This seems to be a constant theme through his education, a lack of confidence and in some circumstances, ability to tackle reading and maths. J has said that he would 'rather be doing rather than writing'. In fifth class, he noticed things were getting harder and this continued, despite having passed the Junior Cert and commencing year one of LCA. He received support in reading and Maths throughout primary and secondary. He scored an average reading with comprehension age when he first attended but on the Adult Reading Test he scored significantly lower on reading accuracy (20th centile) than reading comprehension(50th centile) indicating dyslexic traits, which explain his struggle and dislike of the world of text and print. However, J can read and can read competently – it seems that his experience and association with words has been a bit of a struggle for him and had negative connotations. He dislikes Maths. In secondary school, he says he 'just wanted to get out of there' and caused hassle in some classes, giving cheek and coming late to classes.

Health:

J is fit and healthy and has no underlying medical conditions. He is not taking any medication.

Offences:

J has been cautioned for fighting by the Gardai and he discussed this freely - fighting outside school and on another occasion, with a friend on his estate – which involved the Gardai. He says this is ok now. He referred to being bullied by Travellers and seems afraid of this but his own fighting may indicate bullying tendencies (out of fear) so we need to look out for him on this front.

J's ILP will need careful consideration as there is a lot of negative material re school and there may be behavioural objectives needed also.

1) Primarily, J needs to experience success and achievement in a relaxed setting, in his training here - this is important in all settings, especially reading and maths.

2) Set him up with metal and wood - this has already begun and he is proud of his achievements, to date.

3) Begin FETAC Communications and Maths at a pace that is comfortable for him - and check in with him how he is feeling about how he is progressing.

4) It is very important that J is placed in a small group for both the above subjects. He may experience frustration in a bigger group.

5) Capitalise on his existing ability - he needs encouragement - he has good skills and needs expansion and development of these. It is his memory of learning them and his perception of his ability that we might be able to help with.

6) Personal development such as groupwork would greatly assist with his social skills and maybe, his tendency to fight. A programme exploring bullying would be very useful also, if this was run as part of a social programme.

7) J's overall progress to be reviewed after six months to see if objectives are being met, how is his personal development and his progress in learning to understand himself.

Progress update December 2011:

J has completed the level 4 course and passed with a merit grade. He was an excellent attendee throughout and stuck the pace and programme, despite, at times, being irritated and frustrated with the learning experience. J had very strong reactions to any corrections of his work and took on tutors aggressively and critically if he did not like how his work was managed. This caused conflict several times and tutors had to work hard to come up with ways which would be less frustrating for him. He hated handwriting and correcting drafts of work - eventually we suggested he use a laptop for his documents, such as reports and letters. This helped the situation and J was, for the most part, satisfied with the experience. He found the learner involvement unusual and it is difficult to say what he made of the experience but he worked hard and was

determined to complete the course which he said was important. He is currently an apprentice mechanic in a local garage, arranged through the training centre and he is doing very well. He declared in his one to one interview that he would not be afraid to take on new learning as 'now I know I can do it.'

Project Manager
Literacy and Assessment Project
May 2009
Update Dec 2011

Literacy Profile

Name: **M**
Date of birth: **30/11/93**
Present Age: **Age 16**
Nationality: **Irish**
Gender: **Male**
Start Date: **Dec 09**

Training Centre:

Community Training Centre

Training group:

Foundation Level training-this corresponds to a certification programme which begins at Level 3. This is where M will begin training in metal, wood, literacy etc. It is a lower standard than the Junior Cert/GCSE qualification

General Background:

M presented as a friendly young man, able to hold a conversation and have a chat with an adult. He lives with his family, and is a member of the Travelling community. He comes from a large family, of whom two other brothers and one sister are currently or have previously been at the centre. His parents are together and live in the family home. He is sixteen years of age since November 09 and is therefore young and still quite immature. He has had a spell in Oberstown house for young offenders. M spoke about living in a trailer and how he wished he could live in a house but that it is difficult for the council to house them as there are fifteen in the extended family. They would not all be allowed into one housing estate!

Education and Assessments:

M was educated in the local primary school and then transferred to the local secondary school. During his first year there he was sentenced to a period in O---- house detention centre. Here he completed FETAC certification in Computers, Pyrography and Art and Junior Cert English and Maths. He has good ability and scored a high average on the old reading test we used at the time while on the Adult Reading Test; his centile scores were in the 45th c for accuracy and the 90th for comprehension, indicating he is mildly dyslexic. This corresponds with his presentation and written skills as there is some confusion with particular letters and words. M has good clear handwriting and is also articulate and able to express himself well in conversation. His maths assessment indicates that he understands what he is being asked and can do computations but needs help with division. He had good skills in the area of problem solving and liked the challenge of same. M will need to be challenged in all areas of his training as he is generally very active.

Health:

M is healthy though he says he gets ear infections regularly and that he suffers from migraines, perhaps every three to six months.

Offences:

M was sentenced to two years in a juvenile detention centre in the north east of Ireland for offences carried out during his teens - these included not attending school, fighting and petty crime. Generally M was out of control and the courts and social welfare officers felt this was the best place for him. M got on well in O--- and yet was anxious to be back home again. He did not like the lack of freedom in the detention centre.

Recommendations:

M's ILP will need to look at his general ability and his overall concentration. He has been in trouble and is at risk of falling into the same cycle again if the centre doesn't set boundaries. He has a very kind streak which we should work on.

a) Ensure that M works in team in the social programme to develop his skills of playing as a member and taking responsibility as a team player.

b) Complete FETAC certification so he achieves a full certificate.

c) If he is not able for a full time programme his hours should be considered (part-time)

d) Match his interests to the training programme so that he is engaged - wood, music. He is a good musician and displayed talent during the taster sessions in Dec and Jan.

Progress Update December 2011:

M attended the programme for three months and was very able and communicative while there. He was interested in the challenge of the work and was anxious to please tutors and to get it right - checking regularly if his work was satisfactory or constantly trying to come up with a phrase in English which we would praise! M left the programme very suddenly he was involved in a family feud one weekend which involved arms and ammunition and he was arrested and imprisoned. He has spent several months since March 2011 in Limerick prison and he therefore did not get to complete his level 4 communications.

Project Manager
Literacy and Assessment Project
Jan 2010
Progress Update Dec 2011

Literacy Profile

Name: **T**

Date of birth: **8/8/93**

Present Age: **16-17 in August 2010**

Gender: **Female**

Nationality: **Irish**

Start Date: **January 2010**

Training centre:

Community Training Centre

Training group

Foundation Level training - this corresponds to a certification programme which begins at Level 3. This is where T will begin training in catering, I.T., maths, literacy and other subjects. It is a lower standard than the Junior Cert/GCSE qualification.

General Background:

T presented as a friendly young girl who was willing to chat and engage with the interview process. She lives with her parents and one younger brother aged seven. T is a member of the travelling community. She explained that she has been out of education for the last two years and has been at home, doing nothing. Her mother has concerns about this and has now pushed T to become involved in the Community Training Centre - it appears that T has no choice about this! But she seems to welcome her mothers' persistence as she is bored and becoming more withdrawn by remaining at home, without social or training opportunities. Much of our interview was spent talking about her previous educational history and whether or not she wants something from training here. T expressed an interest in woodwork, hair, nails and anything related to beauty. She likes music and shopping also. She also likes drama and participated in many shows at school, often performing in the local arts centre, with the school group.

Education and Assessments:

T attended primary school in and then transferred to an all girls' secondary school where she remained for one and a half years. She left because she wasn't getting on with the teachers and she found the work too hard-she felt she wasn't getting enough help. When probed on this, T says she 'may' have received reading support in primary school while in secondary school, she and another traveller girl received weekly support,   the visiting traveller teacher. T also received one to one maths tuition while in secondary school. She attended a homework club in Traveller's training centre during her first year at secondary school. When tested on the Adult Reading Test, T scored a poor accuracy score (30th centile) and a high comprehension score (75th centile), indicating she has good understanding and working memory but limited reading experience. T has good handwriting and presentation skills. She will need some brushing up on spelling but overall should be able for mainline literacy and FETAC Communications at Level 3. She describes her reading as 'ok', but that she cannot spell big words. She can carry out the four main computations but needs help with other Maths. She is not sorry she left school but wants to get some qualifications and was very clear that if she likes something she will concentrate on it. T has no formal qualifications and so progress in certification is important.

Health:

T is fit and healthy but does suffer from lethargy and has a tendency to moan regarding taking on tasks assigned to her, in the kitchen or in other areas.

Offences:

T has no offences or cautions. Her parents are interested in education and are quite strict.

Recommendations:

T's ILP will need to be structured around her learning needs and her social skills. She may be unaware of boundaries with staff and YP as she becomes comfortable in the CTC so staff will need to give guidance here.

1) Set specific targets with T so that she begins to achieve and to take a certified programme early on in her time here.
2) Provide support in maths so that she is confident before she begins FETAC Level 3.
3) Ensure she mixes with a peer group and not just her own ethnic peers-she needs to integrate with others.
4) Begin Information Technology Level 3 as she can use a computer-develop these skills.
5) Set a realistic track for her with FETAC Communications and work on spelling and grammar. Independent reading skills will also improve her vocabulary.
6) T will benefit from any participation in drama. Creative work or art-she has experience of this and likes it. Important for developing expressive language.
7) Keep T focused and monitored to ensure progression.

Progress Update Dec 2011:

T has participated in level 4 Communications since last September-she was approached by me as she had been involved in the I.F.S study and had indicated an interest in more literacy work. T also had good ability, despite her poor reading accuracy and her presentation of work was excellent. Throughout the course, however, T was very fretful and lacked confidence, always declaring she couldn't start a piece of writing and needed help. She hated writing anything 'from my own head' and was regularly stressed about this. In the compulsory interview part of the module, she refused point blank to be taped even though we explained that the examiner would need evidence that she had done this component of the course. We offered her the option of doing it in private in another room and prepared her thoroughly for this – finally after a three week delay, she agreed to do it. When asked about her block, she told me 'I hate the sound of my own voice, that scummy traveller accent.' Despite this, she attended regularly and

completed the course, presenting a very high standard of portfolio coursework. On examination, the external marking the files suggested I should raise her mark from a merit to a distinction. I declined as I know that T's high standard of presentation does not match her reading ability and her vocabulary - I would like to see her reading more and expressing more at a higher level before raising her mark. T has finished her two year training programme with us at the centre and is now back at home, without a job or any training prospects. It is expected she will be married to a member of her own community within the next year, as is the current practice. T had known this all along and was at times, difficult in her other training groups and subjects: acting out, being lazy or practicing other avoidance behaviours which frustrated staff. T's father was drinking heavily and causing trouble at home in the latter stages of her course (April/May 2011) and T was regularly protecting her mother form his outbursts. While not physically violent, the household was emotionally very disturbed and T often had not slept at night until her father had drifted off. It is difficult to see what the future holds for T that will involve her making her own decisions - it appears they will be made for her by her culture and community.

Project Manager
Literacy and Assessment Project
February 2010
Progress Update Dec 2011

Appendix G

Interview Schedule:

Semi-structured 1-1 interview with staff member:

Post-programme:

1. How do you think the course has been run with regard to satisfying our aim of learner involvement?

2. Do. You think that learner investment slowed down the teaching (i.e. getting through the content)?

3. Give me a few examples of what you perceive were good aspects of the learner involvement process?

4. How do you think the young people experienced the programme in general?

5. You say they found some of it confusing. I'm interested in that, tell me more about it.

6. Do you think that we succeeded in applying the constructivist principles and how conscious were we of really delivering these?

7. Were we driven by the content of the programme and the timescale of it?

8. Let's go through each strategy. How well did we deliver on a) generative learning' b) teacher as coach; c) self-directed learning?

9. We had two different teaching styles – do you think that was useful in the programme?

10. How could we improve on including them more in choosing parts of the curriculum?

11. What was the most difficult part of the constructivist approach for you?

12. Is it a practical approach?

13. Do you think that the young people became more involved in their learning as the programme went on?

14. What evidence did you see of that?

15. Of those who dropped out of the programme, did you see or remark any responses from them re learner involvement?

16. Do you think that we maximized literacy acquisition in the approaches we used?

17. Level 4 was very text and writing focused. Do you think we managed to address core literacy skills as well as teaching this higher level course?

18. What has surprised you about the whole experience?

19. What did you enjoy most?

20. Were your teaching methods in your normal everyday teaching different to what you did or how you did it in this programme?

21. What changes or suggestions would you make to the programme?

22. In terms of your own methods, is there anything you would consider that you would use a bit more in your teaching?

23. Do you think we gave enough time for the process of engaging with the young people and checking in with them on their learning, their self-awareness around it? Could we have done more?

24. Do you see a value in using the constructivist approach with early school leavers?

25. Were you surprised at the emotional reactions of some of the young people?

26. Where do you think that emotional reaction comes from, is it directly related to their literacy experiences? Poor school experience?

27. Have I left anything out? Is there anything you would like to add to the discussion?

Thank you.

Appendix H

Group Contract

1. Can't answer phones – on silent.

2. Absenteeism: be here every Tuesday. Text early if a person is out / absent.

3. Length of session: 11.10 am – 12.30 pm (catering).

4. Debate: everybody gets a chance to speak. Freedom of speech.

5. Need to check a word in Czech.

6. Be committed to the project.

7. Permission to use tape and video.

8. Listen to each other. Action research.

9. No mood swings

10. Coping skill

11. Sit down and talk to him

12. Be here and be on time

13. Leave up contract

14. Break at 10.00am

15. *No phones*

16. Concentration break

17. Change material / swap it around / leave it for another.

18. Use tape recorders / videos

Appendix I

Prior Expectations Questionnaire

1. Why did you take a place in this course?

2. What do you think this course can give you?

3. What do you want from this course? (individual needs/wants)

4. How would you describe your communication skills now? (reading, spelling skills etc)

5. At the end of this course I want to be able to…for example-write my cv, improve on…

6. At the end of this course I want to be able to…

7. What can you bring to this course?

Appendix J

Learing Journal

The first thing that I enjoyed in the last month was music with Tony Maude. I learned how to play some instruments e.g. Balalaka, Ukelele and guitar. The instrument that I liked most the Ukelele because Tony taght me how to play a song called "That's alright Mama" by Elvis Presley. I think the Ukelele is easy to use or to learn to play. I dint like some of the poems of Tony because I did not undrestading them.   understand

The second thing in the last month I want to write about is the social programe. I do not enjoy it because I do not like sports. Some of the classes are okay for me e.g. bowling or pool in Leisure Centre.

subtle : not said straight out.
not direct

the

'A four foot box, a foot for every year.'

Learning to learn   Entry 3

I'm on my third learning Journal and im starting to enjo
coming into the youth centre lately. My attendance is still
improving and im getting a lot work done lately. I've Just
changed class from Metalwork into home improvement
Whice is ok but I'll miss doing metalwork. In level 4 Engl
Where aloud to decide in what unit we want to do next
Which is good because' gives the trainee' some control.
I like doing the level four English its differant then
OR other classes because we have a choice in what we
want to do and im looking forward to finishing the
project by Febuary OR March 2001.

Learning Journal   30/11/2010

This week iam doing double entry in my learning Journal. Since i last wrote in My Journal i have been taking part in a drama class the person thats doir the drama with us her name eienor we started witt Some exercises but I didnt like it, For example we acted like puppets we go to keywork once a month i find it helpful. The Keyworker asks me how iam getting or and gives me advice.

             Yesterday in the catering we all wrapped christmas pudding to sell for christmas to raise money for the youthcentre and I enjoyed it very much. I enjoy working with my hands. I Also Really like maths but we havent had much lately, because the tutor is out sick. Iam looking forward to do more when she comes back. Overall since i came to the youth service. I think i have learned new skills in catering, crafts, english, computers and Maths.

27-4-2010

Today is the final piece of my learning journal. When I think back over the past 4 weeks i realise i took on ~~than~~ new challenges that i never thought i would have done. I surprised myself by doing this because i think of myself as a quiet person. for sure i was ~~afraid~~ to read out in a ~~group~~ and i would be ~~never thought~~ of ~~doing it~~ but with ~~the confidence~~ ~~since i does i coll~~ ~~get on~~ well with it, i've also joined book club and that's going well i enjoy coming in on monday morning's to read my book, i've been to the library and i met the author kate Thompson she is a very nice and interesting person. my time in Clare Youth Service is finished in

This paper is recycled.

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LEARNING JOURNAL

THIS IS MY LAST LEARNING JOURNAL. ~~LIKE~~ IN WOODWORK I'VE LEARNED HOW TO MAKE FURNITURE, HOW TO USE MACHINES, THEIR NAMES, ~~& GOT~~ AND OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS WHICH ~~ARE~~ WILL BE ~~USFUL~~ USEFULL FOR ME AND MY FUTURE. MY ENGLISH WAS BAD, ~~BUT~~ WHEN I STARTED HERE, BUT IT WAS IMPROVE AND NOW I ~~MORE~~ UNDERSTAND, AND MORE ~~MORE~~ TALK~~ING~~. I'M GLAD I'VE STARTED OVER 4 LITERACY. I'VE LEARNED ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE, SIGNS, SYMBOLS. I LIKE TH STYLE WE ARE LEARNING IN. I DON'T WANT ~~IT~~ TO CHANGE IT. 2 MONTHS AGO ~~A~~ I STARTED DOING THIS CLASS, I THINK ~~FOR SKILLS~~ I GOT NEW SKILLS, BUT ~~OTHER~~ I'M STILL THE SAME PERSO ~~I MYSELF DIDN'T CHANGE~~ I LIKE ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE CENTRE BECAUSE THEY SUPPORT~~ING~~ YOU AND WANT TO MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER.

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11.-5

I've been in all this week
I'm gradually improving my
attendance. I'm hoping I will
keep it up. I have started
other books from Kate Thops
Annan ~~Witness~~ I am not as
impressed as I ... the
last book I read ~~half~~ ...
Thomps... ... ...
half way thro... ... ...
might change. I just must ...
into it.

As I go on in my train...
I find ~~In~~ that my learning skills ha...
improved, for example my beh...
and concentration, I've also notice...
that my attitude to learning and my
ability to learn has changed in many
way's.

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2-11-2016

Learning Journal   Entry three

Im on my third journal entry. Im glad
I started level 4 because I think
that this will prepare me for the L.C.A. I was
all over the place when I started the L.C.A
so I droped out and joined this class, I think that
was (p) a good decision. Looking back I think
it was ~~going~~ back into one class room
for such long hours that just threw
me off track. I think it's good to know
~~(~~ what unit's that are going
to come up in this programme and I
will be prepared for it.

Final entry:

Appendix K

Interim Review Questionnaire

Review discussion (group) or if preferred, written answers: mid way review with participants in Level 4 Communications regarding constructivist approaches to learning.

1. Now that we are halfway through the course, can we take a look at how we have been learning and how things are going for you?

<u>Learner Involvement:</u>

1. We said you would have some control over your learning and how we do this course, understanding that we have certain things we must do as part of level 4.

2. Do you think you have had some choice about how you learn?

3. Do you think we stuck to the contract we made and yet were able to break it to suit people's needs – i.e. phones?

4. Some of you said we should change rooms at times – did we do that enough so far?

<u>Constructivist Approaches:</u>

1. Do you think we, S and I, were coaches as opposed to teachers i.e. that we encouraged you or made you take responsibility for your learning? Give examples? (teacher as coach)

2. Do you think you had to take responsibility for some of the learning on the course? (self directed learning)

3. Do you think some of what you learned has had an effect on you outside here – describe. (transfer of learning)

4. Is there any stuff you learned that reminded you of what you learned years ago or that you got to know better through this course – linking learning you kind of knew that you felt was triggered and reminded you of other stuff? (generative learning)

5. During the course, has anything you have done had an effect on other parts of your life?

6. Maximisation of literacy skills / literacy acquisition-any comments on your skills now and

    a) can you see for yourself any difference between how you approach a task you have to do?

    b) Do you think you are more determined in deciding you will complete something or do you give up easily?

    c) Do you think you approach tasks in this course or any other learning a bit differently?

    d) re you more aware of how you are challenged in taking on something and that you will do it?

    e) Are you more organised in your learning – how?

    f) Do you approach things differently if you get stuck in an area?

    g) Are you more disciplined in your learning – if there is something to finish do you do it or give up?

h) Do you think the type of approach we used made any difference to your learning / your way of learning / your interest in learning / your personal belief in yourself?

i) Would you be inclined to correct something now to make it better – would you see yourself sticking it out and getting it better?

Appendix L

Interview Schedule:

Semi-structured 1-1 interview with young people:

Post-programme:

1. Now that we have come to the end of the programme, can you tell me a bit about that the experience was like for you?
2. Were you challenged in Level 4 and if so, how or in what ways?
3. Anything else you were challenged by?
4. You felt that. . . . . Tell me about that? What did that feel like?
5. Do you think your skills improved, for example, reading, spelling, and speaking?
6. Tell me what was your most favourite part of the course?
7. What were the most difficult parts?
8. Were there too many pieces of written work?
9. Did we come up with any ways of dealing with too much writing or areas of the programme you didn't like?
10. Did you find the programme challenging – the work, attending and sticking it out?
11. What made you stay on?
12. Do you think you have more literacy skills as a result of the programme?
13. In what areas?
14. What did you make of being asked to be involved in your learning?
15. Were you used to being asked to be involved in your learning?

16. Was it strange to be asked to give your opinion on something or to make a decision about your learning?

17. How did you cope with that?

18. Did you contribute to the involvement, do you think? Did you get involved in creating the contract at the beginning, for example?

19. Did you feel, as a result, that you had some control over the learning?

20. Who had the most control?

21. Was this different to other experience in the centre, i.e. Level 3? If so, tell me about that?

22. Why did you want Level 4?

23. Why did you feel ok about it?

24. Is it going to make a difference to you in the future?

25. Was a lot of your material different to the other course you had done in literacy?

26. Has this experience made you any different as a learner, i.e. the way you look at yourself as a learner?

27. Do you believe in yourself any bit more, as a learner, as a result of being in the programme?

28. How did you feel when you were stuck with something or challenged? Did you have the courage to get on with it / ask for help, etc?

29. Was the teaching different in Level 4 to other experiences you've had?

30. Did you feel you were responsible for your work in Level 4? Tell me.

31. Did you find the teachers less inclined to spoon-feed you, were they less 'teacherish'? Tell me about that. Were they more as guides?

32. Did you like that? Would you have preferred them to do everything?

33. What did you learn about yourself?

34. What frustrations did you experience?

35. Did what you learned connect you back to any learning you had done before?

36. What plans have you now?

37. Do you think you'll be more confident now as a result of the experience?

38. Would you recommend this programme, and the way you were involved in your learning, to others?

Thank you.

Appendix M

Test 1

Health

It is important for people to be healthy. Everyone should eat a good diet and get enough exercise. In the UK, most people do not eat enough fruit and vegetables. Experts say that you should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. This will help both adults and children to get all the right vitamins and minerals that they need.

It is also recommended that everyone does some form of exercise every week. People should be helped to do more sports. Swimming is very good for people of all ages, as you use lots of different parts of your body when you swim.

Some people say that young people are less likely to do sports these days. They say that the use of computers, videos, game boys, television and stereos has made young people sit around a lot more. At the same time, many schools have had to sell off their playing fields to make money. This means less sport, more sitting around and a less healthy younger generation. These concerns have led to the Health Council starting a publicity drive. It starts next week and is called 'Get up, Get out and Get Healthy'.

Test 4

Film

Maria Tipsot is, perhaps, the best-known female film director of the last century. Her films include 'The Unbearable Darkness of Living', 'The Shrinking Violet' and 'A Portrait of a Jealous Man'. She studied at the Vienna School of Film and Drama for five years under the great master of avant-garde film, Sam Green. Many believe that she developed her own unique style of film-making by absorbing the theoretical teachings of Green, and then re-interpreting them by using her own cultural influences. This has led one film critic to describe her as 'an individual who has broken the conventional barriers of modern film-making'.

She first came to the attention of the public when she filmed a real bank robbery as it took place in the main shopping area of West Berlin. Unfortunately for her, the authorities viewed her knowledge of the planned robbery with disdain, and the court rejected her defence of freedom through art. She was sentenced to two years in jail, but only served nine months and was released for good behaviour.

She was heavily influenced by the ideas of Victor Krantz, who collaborated with her on the groundbreaking series of short films entitled 'Visions of an Electric Era'. In 1984, she won the Plonk International Film Award for best director for 'The Shrinking Violet'. Nine years later, she made her last and most notorious film, 'A Portrait of a Jealous Man'. Although rumours abound regarding her re-emergence from retirement, there are no known plans for a forthcoming movie.

Test 5

Gases

When two non-inert gases are mixed together, a number of possible reactions could occur. This obviously depends upon the chemical composition of the gases involved, and, indeed, some combinations can have lethal consequences. Take, for example, the mixing of Trophine with Oxyhyphate. When this takes place at room temperature, an explosive combustion ensues that can cause serious damage to anyone who is in the vicinity of this fusion. However, when these two gases are merged together at minus forty degrees Celsius, there is no evidence of a reaction taking place at all. This is because the atoms present in the Trophine are unable to destabilise at this temperature and the combination of the two gases is rendered safe.

Rocket scientists, including the eminent Professor Giles, are now investigating the properties of these two gases to see if there is a proportional relationship between their level of combustibility and temperature. If this is the case, they may be able to apply this knowledge to the development of space launching technology. If, however, combustion occurs at a critical point, then the scientists will have to re-think their plans. The success of using the mixture will then depend upon being able to keep the gases at a low enough temperature to make them safe. Initial tests have found that some combustion occurs at minus 35 degrees, but then the explosiveness of the mixture seems to increase rapidly. One school of thought is that the way forward may lie in controlling the temperature of the Oxyhyphate, rather than the combined fusion of the two gases. It appears that it is the molecular structure of the Oxyhyphate that is prone to destabilisation, and its control under exact temperature conditions is of critical importance to the success of this project. Professor Giles' team is due to report next spring.

Test 1   Health

It is important for people to be healthy. Everyone should eat a good diet and get enough
exercise. In the UK, most people do not eat enough fruit and vegetables. Experts say that you
should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. This will help both adults and children
to get all the right vitamins and minerals that they need.

It is also recommended that everyone does some form of exercise every week. People should
be helped to do more sports. Swimming is very good for people of all ages, as you use lots of
different parts of your body when you swim.

Some people say that young people are less likely to do sports these days. They say that the
use of computers, videos, game boys, television and stereos has made young people sit around
a lot more. At the same time, many schools have had to sell off their playing fields to make
money. This means less sport, more sitting around and a less healthy younger generation.
These concerns have led to the Health Council starting a publicity drive. It starts next week and
is called 'Get up, Get out and Get Healthy'.

Accuracy:- Type and number of word errors

| Mispronunciation | | Omission | | Addition | | Substitution | | Refusal | | Reversal | |

| A) Word endings | | B) Plurals | | C) Prefixes | |

| Hesitations (not counted as errors) | | n.b. A), B) and C): not included in total.

Total number of errors = ...

Speed of reading = Number of words x 60 = __197__ x 60 = ...
                        Time taken to read   words/minute

Insert accuracy total errors and speed of reading into total score sheet

Further comments

Test 1 Health

Questions

1.	**How many portions of fruit and vegetables do experts recommend we eat each day?**
2.	*What happens if you don't eat fruit and vegetables every day?*
3.	What sort of people benefit from swimming?
4.	*Who could help people to do more sports?*
5.	**List three things that young people do instead of playing sport?**
6.	*What will happen if young people don't do any sports?*
7.	What have schools had to do to make more money?
8.	*Why do schools need more money?*
9.	Who is trying to make more people aware of health issues?
10.	**What is the Health Council's catch phrase?**

Answers   **Scores**

1.	5		**1.**
2.	*You might get ill / run down / you will have an unhealthy diet*		2.
3.	Everyone / all ages		3.
4.	*Health Council / government / local council / sports clubs / schools*		4.
5.	**Computers / videos / game boys / stereos / TV**		**5.**
6.	*They will become fat / unfit / unhealthy*		6.
7.	Sell off their playing fields		7.
8.	*They are short of money / resources governments have cut their budgets*		8.
9.	The Health Council		9.
10.	**'Get up, Get out and Get Healthy'**		**10.**
			Total =
			....

Insert comprehension total into total score sheet

Table 1. Conversion of total scores into centiles for the standard test version using Passages 1 to 5.

Centile	Reading accuracy	Reading rate	Reading comprehension	Writing speed
1	3	81	1	7
2	5	82	5	12
3	9	88	6	
4	12	91		13
5	13	94	7	13
6	15	95	8	
7	17	97	9	
8	18	101		14
9	20	102	10	
10	21	103	11	15
15	33	114	16	16
20	43	123	19	17
25	48	132	21	18
30	52	138	23	19
35	57	144	24	20
40	58	147	26	21
45	61	152	27	22
50	63	157	28	
55	65	161	30	23
60	66	167	31	24
65	68	172	32	25
70	69	177	33	26
75	70	181	34	27
80	71	184	36	28
85	72	191	37	29
90	73	197	38	31
95	74	206	40	33

Appendix N

Dear

I am hoping to undertake some study into how I can introduce new ideas and improve some things in the literacy project.

As one of the students in the project, I would value your help with this research. This will involve participating in level four communications and assisting with some questionnaires and reading and writing exercises which will give us some information on your literacy levels and your ideas about learning.

All of the research material is confidential and your name will not be used at any time throughout the research. When the work is complete, I will write up the study and report on the findings that came from what the young people said and what the level four teaching was like for them. A copy of this report will remain in the Youth Service and a copy will be in the library of the Institute of Education, London.

You can withdraw from the study at any time should you not wish to continue, and any questions you have about the work will be answered by me at any stage.

If you are willing to participate, kindly sign the enclosed permission slip below.

Thank you,

Literacy Project Manager

Permission Slip

I_____ am willing to take part in the research programme in the literacy section of YS during 2010 and 2011. I know the work is confidential and that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

Signed: _____

Youth Service Literacy Project

Research Participant Information Sheet

Investigating the Literacy Project at Y.S.

1. **Invitation to take part in the Project**

   You are being invited to take part in a research project. The following is some information about why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please let me know if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

2. **What is the purpose of the project?**

   The project is about what the experience is like for young people who take part in the literacy project at the Youth Service and what they have to say about it. The research project is part of a Doctor in Education degree carried out by this researcher at the Youth Service.

   Why have I been chosen?

   You kindly agreed to participate in this research by completing the form in the letter sent to you and indicated that you would like to take part in the Level 4 Programme. With your experience in participating in the literacy project so far, I think you are a young person who would have a great deal to offer to this research.

3. **What will I be required to do in the Study?**

   One interview at the end of the Level 4 programme arranged at your convenience. The interview will last between forty and sixty minutes, and will focus on your experiences in the literacy project. If you agree I would like to record the interview, so that I don't have to take notes while I am talking to you.

4. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**
    This is your chance to have your say in a research study about the development of curriculum that is offered to young people when they return to education and training, having left the formal school system.

5. **Will anyone know what information I have given?**
    All the information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential. When I write up the results of the study I will anonymise your personal details and name so that this information will be confidential.

6. **What will happen with the results of the study?**
    The results of the study will be written into a paper as part of this overall degree. Some of the results will also be talked about in presentations given to trainers in education and youth services. But as I said before, no one will be able to tell what individual people have said. You will be given a copy of the final report.

7. **Who is organising and funding the research?**
    The research in being organised by the Education and Systems Manger at the Youth Service.

8. **Contact for further information**
    Literacy Project Manager
    Youth Service

Appendix O

Post Priori codes used in the process of analysis

Post Priori Codes	
12. greater challenge (apriori)	44. power relations
13. frustration	45. learner voice (apriori)
14. anxiety	46. barriers to learning
15. resistance	47. not used to being asked
16. negative ed. Experience	48. stress
17. need for support	49. positive ed. Experience
18. structure	50. motivation
19. satisfaction	51 .progression
20. change	52. security
21. owning learning (apriori)	53. poor behaviour
22. responsibility	54. rejection
23. persistence	55. alienation
24. fatigue	56. tutor responsibility
25. swearing	57. taking control
26. efficacy (apriori)	58. patience
27. power relations	59. tutor anxiety
28. maturity	60. reflection
29. gaps in learning	61. need to be listened to
30. literacy skills	62. lack of consistency
31. ambition	63. achievement
32. tutor as coach	64. transferrable skills
33. autonomy (apriori)	65. proving themselves
34. maturity	66. relationship
35. physical tiredness	67. order in learning
36. being unwell	68. effort
37. nervousness	69. learner support
38. mood	70. tutor skill
39. external factors	71. confidence
40. making decisions	72. shock
41. need for structure	73. flexibility
42. tutor belief	74. tutor style
43. value of education	75. value of constructivist methods