# Understanding the education culture gap:

# Teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing ESOL learners for speaking tests.

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I, Jane Allemano, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this is indicated in the thesis.

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# Acknowledgements

There are many people who have advised and supported me on this project and I would like to thank all of them. I would, above all, like to convey my sincere gratitude to the 5 teachers who were willing to give up their time and bare their souls for this project with no word of complaint. I am also extremely grateful to my supervisors Tina Isaacs and Amos Paran for their endurance, patience and encouragement over the years. Their advice and wisdom have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Paul Temple, who has acted as a mentor, reading my drafts and sharing his extensive experience of vivas from both sides of the table.

# Abstract

Learners of ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) in England and Wales come from a variety of backgrounds including levels of previous education. Under current regulations, for reasons of accountability, learners on courses in Adult and Further Education institutions are required to undergo an assessment of attainment on completion of the course. Teachers are therefore faced with the challenge of preparing diverse groups of learners for nationally set assessment procedures while also equipping these learners to function and progress in the society in which they now live. Previous research has shown that learners do not always engage with the concepts and strategies of test-taking, especially if they have little or no previous experience of education and are studying English at beginner or low intermediate level. What are the factors affecting the extent of this engagement? One factor to consider is the role of the teacher and how teachers perceive this role.

This thesis uses a case study method to investigate how teachers approach the issue of learner engagement with tests and to probe the assumptions and perceptions that underpin the teachers' approaches. Qualitative research, based on individual interviews and classroom observations, provides information on three main themes: how the teachers position themselves vis-à-vis others in their professional environment; how far they are drawing on their own experience of test-taking; and how closely their actual teaching relates to their voiced perceptions. Implications are discussed for developing future teacher education strategies to promote self-discovery regarding the influences of the systems under which teachers are working and of their own educational backgrounds with particular reference to test-taking.

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# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **CEFR** | **Common European Framework of Reference** |
| **CELTA** | **Certificate in English Language teaching to Adults** |
| **DfEE** | **Department for Education and Employment** |
| **DfES** | **Department for Education and Skills** |
| **ECC** | **ESOL Core Curriculum** |
| **EdD** | **Doctorate in Education** |
| **EFL** | **English as a Foreign Language** |
| **ELT** | **English Language Teaching** |
| **ESOL** | **English for Speakers of Other Languages** |
| **FENTO** | **Further Education National Training Organisation** |
| **FOP** | **Foundations of Professionalism** |
| **GCSE** | **General Certificate of Secondary Education** |
| **ICT** | **Information and Communication Technology** |
| **IELTS** | **International English Language Testing System** |
| **IFS** | **Institution Focused Study** |
| **ITE** | **Initial Teacher Education** |
| **LESLLA** | **Literacy Education and Second Language learning** |
| **LLUK** | **Life-long Learning United Kingdom** |
| **LRTC** | **Language Testing Research Colloquium** |
| **MOE** | **Methods of Enquiry** |
| **NQF** | **National Qualifications Framework** |
| **QCA** | **Qualifications and Curriculum Authority** |
| **OED** | **Oxford English Dictionary** |
| **Ofqual** | **Office for Qualifications** |

# Statement

I began my journey towards an EdD in October 2010 after having been involved in a range of aspects of English language teaching to adults for over thirty five years.  During this time, I had seen many changes, both pedagogical and political, the most pronounced of which was the advent of the Skills for Life policy under New Labour.  I was immediately inspired by the first EdD module, Foundations of Professionalism (FOP), during which the reading and the sessions led me to ponder striking parallels with possibly the most substantial part of my career as a teacher of English for speakers of other languages and then as a curriculum manager in a large inner London further education college.  While the work had been rewarding in many ways, 25 years at the college had left me disenchanted and with a number of unresolved issues.  Throughout the module, I found myself drawing links with my previous work experiences at the college and drew the conclusion that it would be cathartic and instructive to theorise my experiences of being caught between teaching staff and management in the assignment for this module.  I therefore wrote my assignment under the title 'Professionalisation of ESOL teachers post-Moser, fact or fiction?'(Allemano 2010).

I was on a steep academic learning curve during this module as it was my introduction to study at doctoral level.  The module provided me with theoretical lenses through which to examine the position of ESOL teachers at the time.  I discovered the work of Foucault, in particular his references to increasing surveillance being used for the purposes of greater regulation and power and his idea of normalisation, whereby people eventually accept change in their lives when the new features become their normality.  I also adopted a view of professionalism put forward by Freidson (2001), which allowed members of an occupation to make a living while controlling their own work.

After carrying out a case study of the college where I had been working, I established that teachers had formed themselves into three main groups: the first simply left the profession, the second subverted the system to give themselves more control over their work, the third, however, maintained their sense of professionalism by joining communities of practice outside their organisations, such as on-line discussion forums, national conferences or projects.

For the initial specialist course, I chose Post-Compulsory Education, Training and Lifelong Learning, which enabled me to draw on my conclusions from FOP and bring in another aspect of my working life – as a teacher educator; a role which, in many ways, I have found the most fulfilling. The title of this assignment was 'the effects of the Skills for Life accreditation process on ESOL teaching and the implications for the teacher educator' (Allemano 2011).

This allowed me to explore the contradictions between principles of sound pedagogy as it is currently understood and accountability in the workplace, thereby including the effects on the learner as well as the teacher. I found it easier by now to select theoretical frameworks and chose Foucault's concept of governmentality, whereby by individuals or institutions can be made to comply if it is shown as being in their own interest e.g. by aligning funding with achievement, the government was able to ensure that education providers would be working towards set targets. I used Vygotsky's concept of tool mediated action as described by Lucas and Nasta (2009), where the tool was the qualifications devised to measure the standards. Wertsch's concept of cultural tools provided questions to frame the study: Where does the policy come from? Where does it go? What happens to it on route? I was also introduced to the benefits of using diagrams to support and clarify written text.

A crucial conclusion that I drew from this was that teacher educators should deliver the message that while the imposed accreditation tools may not always reflect the lives of the learners or encourage critical thinking, classroom activities do not have to reflect this. It was this notion that went on to spur my later research in terms of querying the implications of this for the teacher.

Methods of Enquiry (MOE) 1 and 2 formed the proposal and the pilot for the IFS (Institution Focused Study). This brought in another significant aspect of my career, in the form of my role as 'chair' of Entry Level reading examination papers for ESOL learners for a major awarding body. This entailed leading a team of item writers, editing and trialling papers. This had given me access to the detail of ways in which candidates dealt with these papers, and I saw fundamental gaps in their awareness of what was required of them. I chose to focus on the assessment of the reading skills of ESOL learners who are not literate in any other language, with the aim of determining whether it was possible to learn about the cognitive processes of these learners while taking a reading examination. I was considerably heartened by the amount of information the learners were able to give about the ways in which they had approached the examination tasks. The initial findings bore out my hypothesis that the construct and the rubrics of the examination paper are barriers to assessing the true reading ability of these learners and showed that there was scope for further research, which was the basis of my IFS. These modules also introduced me to the concept of phenomenological research. I learnt a great deal about data collection both in theory and in practice, which informed planning for the IFS and the subsequent thesis.

By this stage of the course I was reaping the benefits for my work as a lecturer at the Institute of Education. I had gained more confidence in supporting MA students not only through the input and the reading but from the experience of being tutored myself and given guidance and feedback.

The IFS continued the phenomenological research begun in the pilot and corroborated my initial findings that the construction of the readings tests was in fact a barrier to determining the reading ability of candidates with little history of education. This had implications for test preparation and therefore teacher education. By this time, I had read widely on the differences between learners who became fully literate in childhood and those who did not and what the wider implications of these differences might be for teaching.

I decided, therefore, to move onto another dimension, which was the teachers. In the welcoming speech at a Cambridge Assessment conference, I heard the comment: 'An awarding body can aim for as much positive washback from its examinations as it likes, but the degree of success ultimately depends on the teacher' (Milanovic 2013). This comment was made in the context of English language teaching and highlights a crucial factor that the more informed examination developers regard as their responsibility - the effect that their examinations will have on language teaching and learning i.e. washback. This comment was still in my mind when, through listening to my trainee teachers' experiences in their placements, I realised that there are serious issues with ESOL examinations, involving teachers and their perspectives. Good awarding bodies strive to ensure that their examinations have a positive washback in the classroom but this will ultimately depend on how teachers see their own role as intermediaries between the learners and the examinations. I therefore proposed to conduct my research into teacher perspectives with a view to informing teacher education on examination preparation, an aspect of their work that does not appear in the standards, old or new.

This time I chose to focus on the Skills for Life speaking and listening examinations as I have been a practising examiner for these tests since their inception and I have experienced candidate response first-hand. I set out to explore what teachers perceived the needs of their

learners to be concerning examination preparation, how they addressed these needs and what the influences on such perceptions were.

This research is very much informed by my findings and conclusions from the earlier parts of this journey and it brings together all aspects of my career thus far:   English language teaching, teacher education, management, and assessment.   Looking to the future my hope is to inform teacher education and awarding body support by providing guidelines for enabling teachers and trainee teachers to reflect on their own histories and the ways in which these may impact on their current and future practice.  This may enable them to identify how they may differ in this respect from their learners and therefore they will be better prepared to support the learners in their approach to the examination.

During the course of my studies towards an EdD, I have presented my work in progress at four international conferences.  The first of these was the LESLLA (Low-educated second language and literacy acquisition) conference held at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland in late August 2012. Here I presented my initial findings for the IFS concerning testing the reading ability of low-educated learners.  After the conference, my work was published in *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies'*, (Allemano 2013) which is a peer reviewed international electronic journal sponsored by the Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

The fact that I presented my work in Finland the previous year led to an interest being shown in my work by Vox, an adult education organisation in Norway, which invited me on two occasions to visit Norway to talk to teachers who were facing difficulties in teaching adult refugees in Norwegian as a foreign language. Through doing this I was able to streamline my presentation and meet fellow researchers who were beginning to work in the same field. It also highlighted to me that my work is of international interest and does not apply only to the

teaching of English but also of other languages spoken in countries who receive immigrants whose education has been restricted.

The second conference was in Beijing in October 2012 at the joint conference between IOE and Beijing Normal University. While this was only a small audience, it was useful to hear the perspective of educators from different parts of China, especially rural areas.

The third occasion was when I presented the background and rationale for my thesis at a major ELT conference run by the British Council in Moscow in March 2015. This was useful for me in terms of connecting my more recent reading with the proposal and consolidating my thoughts in advance of the data collection. It was at that time that it occurred to me that I might discover more about perceptions by asking my respondents to present their working world graphically and then to talk me through what they had drawn, which proved very fruitful - the respondents themselves were surprised by the fact that they had revealed more about their perceptions than they were aware of.

The fourth presentation was at an international conference run by LESLLA in St Augustine, Florida, in November 2015, where I talked about my work in progress after I had collected my data and done an initial analysis. This was very useful for me in terms of initial conclusions drawn from my data particularly as the discussion was at an international level with colleagues working in countries where the language taught is not English.

I hope to continue to contribute to the international forum as the importance of this work extends beyond the English-speaking world and there is ever-increasing migration of people who have had to leave their homelands to escape war, persecution, or natural disasters and whose education has often been disrupted by these phenomena.

# Chapter one: The matter in hand

## 1.1 Introduction

Throughout history, there have been refugees and other migrants leaving countries where political regimes, war, and civil unrest have led to whole generations being deprived of education. On entering their new countries they have been faced with having to learn a new language and acquire literacy for the first time through that new language. In order to broaden the skills of English language teachers in the UK to better address this situation, specialist training for teachers in what came to be known as basic literacy for learners of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was developed in 2000 (Spiegel and Sunderland 2006). The main focus of this has been the teaching of reading and writing with an element of study skills, mainly in relation to self-management and organisation. I will argue here that a lack of primary (ages 5-11) educational background means that these learners may have much larger gaps in their knowledge than teachers are aware of. This thesis seeks to focus on teachers and their understanding of what it means never to have been to school, with particular reference to language proficiency testing.

In this chapter, I present the foundations of the field explored in this thesis and how I situate myself within this, as a language teacher, teacher educator and examinations consultant. I introduce the current policies and climate in English language teaching of the immigrant population in England and Wales at the time of writing, and pose the questions that I wish to address.

## 1.2  The rationale and overall aim

We live in an era where, in many parts of the world, formal education is largely defined by assessment.  This is true of England and Wales, where positions in league tables, learners' opportunities, citizenship for immigrants, and in some sectors government funding, all depend on successful test results.  As asserted by Ball (2001): 'The interests of good schooling and good parenting are made antithetical by the demands of performativity.  And […] performativity can easily become divorced from service' (Ball 2001:220).  Here Ball uses the word 'performativity' to encompass the notion that 'nothing is seen as worthwhile unless it can be measured, inspected etc.' (220).  It is therefore to be expected that students as well as such stakeholders as teachers, employers, educational managers and parents will have the expectation that attendance at a course in a school or college will lead to success in the relevant examination.   It therefore seems to be a major omission that in teacher education for English language teaching in further and adult education there is limited discussion of preparation of learners for examinations, particularly those with little or no experience of education.

As Broadfoot (2005) points out in relation to teacher education: 'Assessment has been the Cinderella of the preparation family, much less important apparently than its sisters, curriculum and pedagogy, despite being, I would suggest, ultimately the most important' (2005:133).  This observation was made over ten years ago and I believe little has changed since.  While not necessarily the most important aspect of teacher expertise, summative assessment, which usually takes the form of an end-of-course qualification, informs both curriculum planning and pedagogical approaches.  It is the extent to which summative assessment may dominate these that is fundamental.  In my current role as a teacher educator, this is an area I wished to explore with a view to identifying ways in which English language teachers, by making appropriate judgements regarding their learners' needs, could be better

equipped to ensure successful achievement by their learners, in terms of improved use of English in their daily lives as well as gaining a qualification. Given the high stakes attached to many examinations throughout the education system for both the learners and the educational institutions, it is remarkable that this aspect of teacher understanding has not been formally addressed in setting standards for the training of teachers of language and literacy to adults. One possible explanation for this is that it has been expected that learners who are furnished with the necessary language knowledge and skills will apply these to the examination situation and pass. In my early career as an English language teacher, this assumption underpinned my course planning and that of many of my colleagues. For many years, when faced with a new examination to prepare learners for, teachers independently analysed past papers in terms of the language skills that were being tested, assessed the learners in order to identify the gaps in their knowledge vis à vis the test and prepared their course plans accordingly, integrating this required language development into activities that also prepared learners for the real world. There was admittedly some attention paid to examination skills regarding specific question types such as multiple choice questions, and helping learners to identify the traps set for them by the item writers (the people who write the tasks), but with no underlying introduction of the learners to the culture of examination. This experience is supported by the later writings of Inbar-Lourie (2008), who observed that 'students are viewed as active empowered partners in the assessment process who monitor their own learning, provide feedback to their peers and set criteria for evaluating progress' (2008:387). The learners I was working with at that time fitted this description as they were English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, who, as learners of English as an international language tend to be almost exclusively educated to at least secondary level and already engaged in an assessment culture with a history of being assessed, giving them transferable

test-taking skills. EFL learners are also mainly from advanced industrial countries and often from backgrounds not dissimilar to those of their teachers.

Since that time, I have moved into teacher management, learner assessment and now teacher education and I have realised that the same homogeneity does not always apply to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), as defined below.

### 1.3 The current situation faced by the Adult ESOL teacher

For the purposes of this work, ESOL is defined as the teaching of the English language in England and Wales, often including citizenship and employability skills, to adults who have come to these parts of the UK to settle. The ESOL learners in these two countries, as in many others, are extremely diverse in terms of prior education and therefore language and literacy ability, and experience of the examination process. There are three basic groups as defined by Allemano (2013) all taught in the same classrooms in Adult and Further Education programmes all over England and Wales:

The first group consists of well-educated learners (secondary level or beyond), highly literate in a language that uses the Roman alphabet, and with experience of an assessment culture. Such learners are attending classes in order to learn a modern foreign language. They display the characteristics of EFL learners, in that they tend not to have literacy needs, but may attend ESOL classes for cost reasons.

The second group consists of learners who are also well educated and highly literate but with a background in a language that uses another alphabetic script. These learners do have to learn a new written code, sometimes also a different direction of reading text on the page, as well as the language, but they have literacy skills to transfer. They have, in other words, developed metalinguistic awareness, an understanding of the general properties of language, including morphological awareness, and an understanding of the components of words when

represented in print (Kurvers et al 2006). They relate what they are reading to their existing knowledge and experience in order to aid understanding and enhance their knowledge and they may have many years of experience of interpreting print. Koda (2008: 80) calls this "top-down assistance". Most of these learners also arrive in the UK familiar with the Roman script and have experience of an assessment culture and so would be better placed in an EFL class.

The third group consists of learners who have had little or no schooling and, therefore, have limited literacy skills in their first language (L1). At the beginning of their studies, they would have no prior experience of an assessment culture.

ESOL teachers are often confronted with all three of these groups of learners in the same classroom. The recent influx of migrant workers from Eastern European countries has led to the disproportionate expansion of the first of the three groups described above in relation to the other two groups. This has led to the teaching of learners with such diverse backgrounds becoming further complicated by the fact that the learners in the first of the three groups described above find the language tests very straightforward because of their previous experience of education and testing. This means that they score almost full marks, thus affecting the 'facility value' of objectively marked test, such as reading, during pre-testing. The facility value is an 'index which represents how easy an item is for candidates taking the test' (Corrigan and Crump 2015:5) and is one aspect of item analysis. Another key aspect is item discrimination, which is 'the extent to which an item distinguishes between strong and weak candidates' (Corrigan and Crump 2015:5). An item with a higher discrimination index is more desirable than one with a lower index. The overall effect is to raise the difficulty of the papers, making them less accessible for the learners in the third group. Nevertheless, the expectation of institution managements is nevertheless that all learners who enter for the examination will pass it.

The ESOL examinations concerned are based on the learning outcomes as presented in the ESOL Core Curriculum (ECC) (DfES 2001), which was designed as a framework for English language learning and a reference tool for ESOL teachers in a range of settings. There are five levels: Entry 1-3 and Levels 1 and 2, Level 2 being equivalent to GCSE A*-C. These are said to equate to A1-C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which is a six-level framework published at around the same time to standardise language teaching across Europe (Council of Europe 2001). The Core curriculum is context (or topic) free and instead are based on generic communicative functions e.g. making requests, asking questions to obtain specific information. This general nature of the curriculum represented an attempt to recognise the different types of provision in which learners would be learning and using language and literacy, for example work-based learning, learning embedded in a vocational course, community learning and so on. However, the language tests need to be topic-based in order to give a basis for language use and so the topics chosen are those that apply to life in the UK, for example, housing, work, shopping, transport, and education, the assumption being that these will be accessible to all. The result of this is that whatever the type of provision, the teaching in classes working towards such tests needs to contain a significant 'life in the UK' element and ideally be context-based. It is the responsibility of the teachers to connect the communicative functions of the curriculum with the daily life contexts.

To further add to these expectations that are imposed on teachers, awarding bodies (or examination boards) see the teachers as the key to the effects of examinations on teaching and learning. The teacher's role is therefore to make the connection between the requirements of the examination concerned and the learners' wider experience and needs in order to design a course which gives the learners maximum benefit, which is one aspect of

examination validity (Milanovic and Weir 2005a). I return to the concepts of washback and validity in Chapters two and three.

## 1.4 Assessment literacy

There has been a recent and developing awareness among education practitioners and researchers of the concept of 'assessment literacy', a term which had become established by the middle of the first decade of this century (Broadfoot 2005, Boyles 2005, Hoyt 2005). The term refers to the knowledge base and competencies that those involved in educational assessment need to develop. These stakeholders include assessment designers, raters (or markers), institutions using the qualifications as evidence, teaching materials writers and teachers, as well as the test-takers themselves.

Pill and Harding (2013:3) rightly point out that the 'assessment literacy needs of practitioners' i.e. those who operate in the field of examination research, development, marking, and preparing learners, are different from those of non-practitioners such as the test-takers, policy-makers and employers. However, I suggest that the teacher needs to understand both sides of this divide. Teachers need information and skills that the test-taker does not need in order to design a preparation course and assess learners for readiness, while also being aware of the knowledge gaps of their learners in terms of the culture of test-taking and expectations of employers.

Bybee (1997) identified five stages of 'assessment literacy', which were connected to language assessment by Kaiser and Willander (2005) and discussed by Pill and Harding (2013:4). I will relate these to the area on which this thesis focuses.

The first stage is assessment 'illiteracy', which is defined as 'ignorance of language assessment concepts and methods.' This may well be the starting point of a learner who has

no knowledge of education principles, although this cannot be assumed as many learners will have children in the education system in the host country. They may in fact be at the second stage, 'nominal literacy', defined as 'understanding that a specific term relates to assessment but [it] may indicate a misconception'. Such learners are unlikely to be at the third stage, 'functional literacy', which is a 'sound understanding of basic terms and concepts', although their peers in the classroom with a background in secondary and often tertiary education will probably have this and even be at the fourth stage, 'procedural and conceptual literacy'. This indicates an 'understanding of central concepts of the field and using knowledge in practice'. Ideally, teachers would be at least at this level of understanding. The fifth stage is 'multidimensional literacy', which refers to 'knowledge extending beyond ordinary concepts including philosophical, historical and social dimensions of assessment'. This last domain is one inhabited mainly by researchers, test-designers and teachers who are motivated to explore this area, but it also would be useful if those in positions of power, such as policy-makers, had this level of awareness in order for them to be able create policies that facilitate work in this field.

There is another tension in the teacher's situation. As Inbar-Lourie (2008) argues, in order to ensure that the learners both pass the examinations and also improve their language skills for the real world, such teachers are asked to 'function within two non-compatible cultures: encouraged in their classrooms to pursue socio-culturally based classroom pedagogy while concurrently required by external authorities to abide by the rules of testing cultures' (2008:388). There are certainly two cultures seeking teachers' attention, but I suggest that these can be compatible. In the quest for ways of helping teachers to fulfil the role that is expected of them, it is important to establish their starting points, compared to those of their learners. In many areas of education, teachers are facilitating or leading their learners along the same path that they themselves have travelled, which may be appropriate for some

learners but not all.  The purpose of this research is therefore to investigate the ways in which teachers perceive and approach their roles in preparing ESOL candidates with little or no experience of any assessment culture for the examinations that they are required to take.

**1.5  The research questions**

For this research, I focused on the Cambridge ESOL Skills for Life speaking and listening test as I have been involved in examining and training teachers for this test since its inception in 2005.  In this role, I have observed trends in candidate and interlocutor performance and as a teacher educator on the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme at the UCL Institute of Education, I have an interest in identifying ways of improving both results and teaching and learning for life, through teacher expertise.

This thesis therefore addresses the question:  What are teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing learners for Skills for Life English speaking and listening tests?

 Sub questions which arise from this main question are:

- How far are teachers aware of the sub-skills that are required for success in a given test and the ways in which they may connect with real-life language use?

- How far are teachers taking into account their own life-long experiences of examinations gained and to what extent are they aware of this?

- How are teachers responding to any conflict between institutional requirements and their own professional judgement in respect of the provision of ESOL classes?

- How far are teachers aware that their learners' perceptions regarding examinations may be very different from their own?

## 1.6 Conclusion and organisation of the thesis

In this chapter I have situated this thesis against the current background in the further education structure and policies in England and Wales and discussed the concept of assessment literacy. I have put forward my resultant research questions for further discussion in the next chapter. In Chapter two, I lay out the rationale for each of the above four sub-questions by situating them in the challenges faced by teachers preparing ESOL learners with basic literacy needs in the post-compulsory sector in the England and Wales, as they face accountability based on the examination success of their learners. I situate the research in its wider context and examine the knowledge and competency base that teachers need.

Chapter three goes on to discuss the literature that arises from existing research and conceptualisations on closely related areas: the concept of washback, theoretical views of the testing of speaking, the response of learners to speaking tests, and research into teacher perceptions. The use of the term 'perceptions' in the main question will be discussed in this chapter. In Chapter four, I present the research design for accessing teacher perception and the theoretical framework underpinning it. I describe the rationale for the case study approach and explore the limitations and ethics connected with this and with the methods of data collection and analysis. In Chapter five, I present the findings from each case study in terms of the respondents' views of their position and that of others in the wider sphere of their professional environment, and their experience of and attitudes towards examinations in their lives in general. I also present the data on the extent to which those views are reflected in their practice in the classroom. In Chapter six, I return to the research questions to discuss how the data contribute towards answering them and the ways in which they relate to existing theories and research findings. Finally, I bring the case studies together to consider common themes and trends and discuss a possible way forward.

# Chapter two:  The challenges for teachers

## 2.1 Introduction

The first chapter introduced the fundamental challenge to the ESOL teacher of working with a heterogeneous group of learners.  This chapter will situate this in the wider context of challenges which face the teacher, from the political arena as well as what has now become the established practice of accreditation in ESOL.  I take the definition of accreditation that reflects the way it is used in the Skills for Life context: 'The award of credit, leading to qualifications of learning which can be shown through the successful achievement of learning outcomes,' (Hamilton and Hillier 2006: 125-6).

  The challenges I discuss are:

- attaching compulsory qualifications to previously informal, unaccredited learning
- adapting to the testing systems that were imposed
- connecting teaching for the test with teaching for language use in the workplace and in society.

 I also situate the four sub-questions in the context of these challenges.

## 2.2 Post-compulsory teaching and accreditation climate, past and present

The first challenge is the historical and political arena in which post-compulsory ESOL teaching and accreditation are situated.  The term post-compulsory (also known as post-16) is used to refer to education provision for learners who have passed the secondary school leaving age.  It encompasses academic and vocational courses at sixth form colleges, further education colleges, community providers, and in its wider application, universities.  Within

these institutions, the learner cohort is often divided into two distinct groups: 16-19 year olds (i.e. those with an entitlement to free, full-time education) and adults, which here means learners who are no longer automatically entitled to free education as they are over 19.

In 1999, the report of a working group chaired by Sir Claus Moser, *A Fresh Start*, was published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE 1999), bringing to public attention the literacy and numeracy skills deficit in the UK.  This set in motion a drive that resulted in the inception in 2001 of *Skills for Life*, a strategy that transformed the fields of literacy, numeracy and eventually English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).  An additional review was set up for ESOL and the report of the practitioner working group, '*Breaking the language barriers'* (Department for Education and Science DfES 2000), brought ESOL into the spotlight.

The government's main purpose of policy regarding language, literacy and numeracy at the time was to reduce the skills deficit in the workforce as a whole.  In order to measure the success of this policy achievement targets were introduced into this field for the first time. As a proportion of these adults would be ESOL learners, this move led to much-needed resources and status for ESOL but gave no indication of the levels to which the skills should be 'improved' or how the improvement was to be measured, so once the improvement targets and the money were in place, there was a need for standards against which to measure the improvement in skills.

The national standards for adult literacy and numeracy were published in 2000 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to ensure consistency of delivery and measurement of achievement across the country.  Subsequently, in order to help teachers identify the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to reach these standards, core curricula for literacy, numeracy and ESOL were introduced.  In order to formalise and value

learning, *A Fresh Start* also advised that 'all lifelong learners should have a nationally recognised qualification in English, mathematics and ICT' (Brooks 2004:34) and in a drive to 'raise standards and performance as measured by examination results' (Gewirtz and Ball 2000:255), a proportion of the funding was attached to success rates, thus fostering a drive for measureable achievement and provider accountability.  In 2004, therefore, new Skills for Life qualifications were launched, which were mapped to both the adult literacy and the adult ESOL core curricula (DfES 2001).

This marked the beginning of a new culture in a field where teaching and learning had previously focused on the learners' lives and needs in the areas in which they lived. Now the courses had to be taught within the framework of nationally-based examinations. There had been some accreditation schemes previously but these were not compulsory for all learners and nor did they prevent needs-based teaching.  It therefore became 'questionable how effectively this [attention to individual need] can happen in practice in a framework where outcomes are largely predefined' (Williamson 2011: 24).

 This legacy continues to this day with funding attached to achievement and teacher accountability based on examination results.  Although the Skills for Life strategy is no longer active, the Core Curricula and the examinations remain largely unchanged, as does the pressure on teachers to ensure learners' achievement .

To what extent are the teachers trained to face this challenge? The professional standards, which were introduced for teachers in the post-compulsory sector (FENTO 1999), were revised in 2007 (LLUK 2007) and again in 2014 (The Education and Training Foundation 2014).  In none of these sets of standards is there mention of how to prepare learners for examinations, although there is significant and commendable focus on assessment for learning i.e. diagnostic and formative assessment.

Examination preparation therefore seems to be absent from expectations of initial teacher education.  To illustrate the need for this, I take the model of the examination process as shown in fig. 1, which was first presented by the representatives of the awarding body, Cambridge English, at a Language Testing Research Colloquium (LRTC) in Arnhem, The Netherlands, in 1993.  Fig. 1 shows factors that confront the candidates.  The candidates are directly linked to a) knowledge and ability, in this case in the language skills being tested; b) examination conditions, which differ from real-life conditions; c) examination tasks, which have been designed to facilitate demonstration of knowledge and ability; d) assessment criteria, which depend on the level of attainment required; and e) sample of language, which should be produced with the appropriate degree of complexity for the level.

**Fig. 1: The examination process**
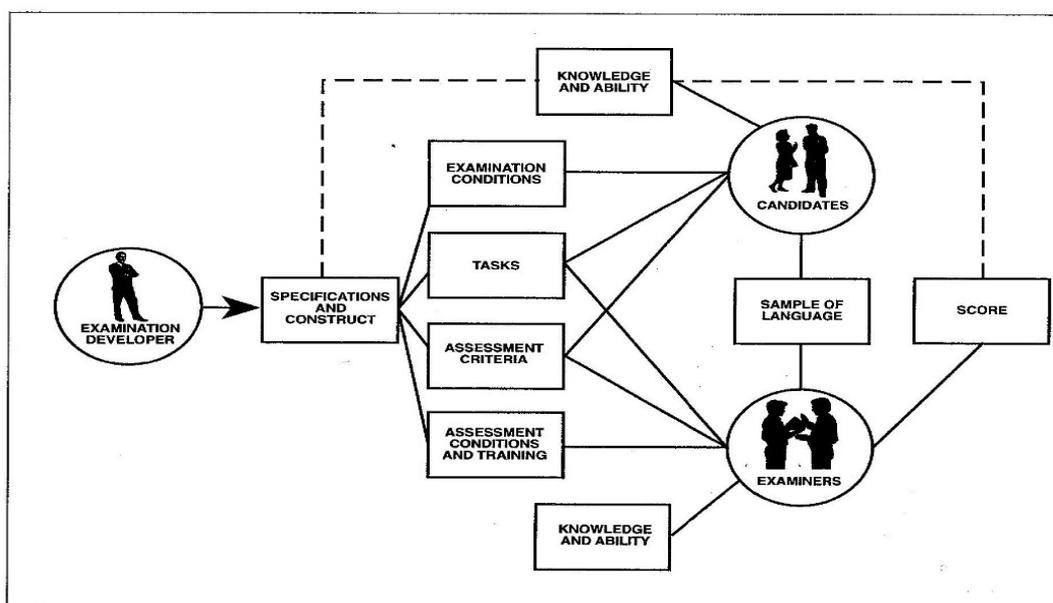


(Milanovic and Saville 1996: 6)

Fig. 2, shows where I see the teachers in all this – indicated by a blue band.  It could be argued that the teachers' part in this scheme is crucial and that they in fact appear between the candidate and all five of the boxes  connected to the candidates in figs. 1 and 2  a) to

ensure learners have access to knowledge and ability, b) to familiarise the learners with examination conditions, c) to ensure that the learners are familiar with the tasks and what is expected of them,  d) to inform the learners of the attainment level expected and e) to advise the learners in the production of a sample of language that meets the standard required.

**Fig. 2: The examination process including the teacher**
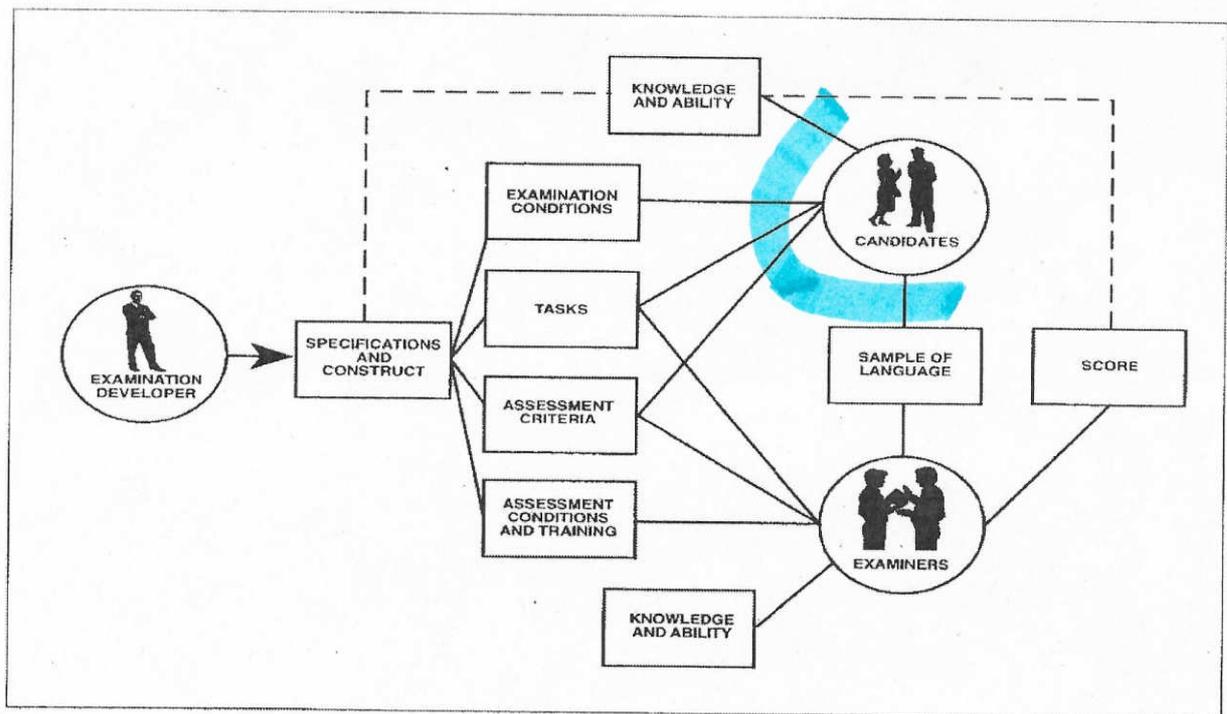


In order to be at the 'functional literacy' stage of assessment literacy, described in Chapter one as the minimum desirable level for teachers, and to prepare candidates satisfactorily for examinations, teachers at the very least need to have an understanding of:

- the content of the test

- the skills and sub-skills required to demonstrate ability in the examination

- possible techniques for handling tasks

- the ways in which their learners individually perceive the tasks set in the examination.

Teachers are supported to some extent in the first three areas listed above, as most awarding bodies do publish past papers and sometimes examination reports, mark schemes and sample lessons online, as well as delivering webinars and face-to-face seminars (www.cambridgeassessment.org), but these do not support teachers whose learners may have little or no experience of being examined and may perceive the task differently (the fourth bullet point above). These support systems also do not equate to the level of guidance provided by a published course book which is designed to prepare learners for a particular examination.

For international English as a Foreign Language (EFL) examinations, the first three points above would be covered in course books. For high-stakes tests, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is used by many universities as evidence of language proficiency for overseas applicants, the teachers do not need to interpret the examinations alone; they are guided by these course books, relying on the materials writers to interpret the requirements of the examination in question and break them down into manageable chunks for classroom delivery; the better ones also ensure a balance between examination skills awareness and practice and preparation for community life, work, or study.

This highlights another major difference for ESOL teachers, which is that, unlike teachers for international EFL examinations or GSCE or A levels, they do not have examination-based course books. For Skills for Life ESOL examinations in England and Wales, there are no course books as such, which would provide guidance. This is largely because there are several different awarding bodies involved, each with different interpretations of assessment and the market for each suite of examinations in this particular area is not large enough to be viable for publishers, especially as the institutions preparing candidates for these

examinations, mainly Further and Adult Education colleges, have very small budgets for materials and their students often cannot afford to buy their own books.

For language teachers, identifying the skills and sub-skills extends to an awareness of 'various facets of language knowledge and use' (Inbar-Laurie 2008: 391) and the ability to match these to the relevant forms of assessment. However, the following examples show that teachers without access to such course books do not always analyse an examination for the sub-skills required. My own work in recent years has included supporting trainee teachers in their placements. The process is that trainees are allocated to classes in a range of providers, where they have the support of a mentor, usually the teacher of the class concerned. It is in the mentors that I have encountered some evidence of a lack of awareness of the sub-skills their learners would benefit from. For example, one mentor, when preparing learners for a level 2 (CEFR C1) writing examination, told her trainee that the learners did not need to know how to construct a paragraph, although they needed to write extended texts. Another teacher in the same institution, who was preparing learners for the same test, objected to the trainee teaching her class to identify verbs in sentences as this was not needed for the examination. It may be true that they do not actually need to know the word 'verb' but it is a very useful concept when trying to construct a sentence. In my role as an assessor in speaking and listening tests, I also began to suspect that candidates had not been taught the importance of demonstrating key, level appropriate sub-skills of speaking such as back-channelling (using interjections to show engagement when someone else is speaking), turn-taking, and asking questions in the examination situation. A good course book writer for a course leading to a language examination would help to overcome this failing by presenting key language and communication skills in tandem with the relevant part of the examination. In the absence of such a course book, teachers therefore need to be aware of standards set in given frameworks e.g. CEFR, or the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), understand

the terminology used in these and use them to make judgements of their own students' performance.

To return to the 'functional literacy' stage of assessment literacy, the fourth point concerning learners' perceptions refers to the learners' observations and interpretations of the examination. The examination is a phenomenon which those learners who are experienced in the concept of test-taking can understand.  However, there is much more of an issue in a sector where the students come from a very wide range of cultural and educational backgrounds and may not have developed an understanding of the examination process. The level of understanding will also vary according to the individual.


## 2.3 Practice in the ESOL classroom

The questions then arise: What happens in the ESOL classroom and how successful is this in examination preparation?  Current practices in teaching, especially at beginner levels, tend to be based on humanist approaches (Rogers 1994).  These encompass approaches that nurture the feelings of the learner, encourage self-expression and in so doing reduce stress and anxiety, which can hinder learning.  The main focus of the teaching is a combination of social practice theory, which is related to adult literacy teaching in that it 'emphasises the uses, meanings and values of reading and writing' (Hamilton and Hillier 2006:17) and focuses on the 'overall context in which literacy is being used' (Hughes and Schwab 2010:11), and socio-cultural theory, which stems from Vygotsky's (1962) notion that knowledge is gained by interacting with others and then adding personal meaning to it. Speaking is integrated into activities which relate to the learners' lives and involve the other core skills of reading, writing, and listening, based on the premise that they are all essential components of our lives and are usually connected with other activities, which aid comprehension through context,

expectation or experience.  Examples of this might be discussing a menu, summarizing and discussing a news story read in a newspaper, reading to children, or following instructions. One reason that teachers of ESOL are encouraged to connect the teaching of language skills with contexts related to the learners' lives is so that the learners fully understand the ways in which language is used in these contexts.  In connection with this line of approach 'Reflect for ESOL' (Cardiff et al, 2005) was developed to disseminate strategies for using the lives and experience of learners at all levels as a basis for learning and allowing the teaching materials to grow out of the lesson or be chosen by the learners, as opposed to being superimposed on the proceedings by a course book or the teacher.  The 'Reflect for ESOL' approach takes, as a core principle, Freire's conception of empowerment (Freire 2000), where learners are given the means whereby they can assert their own rights and influence change in their positions in society.  This is done by allowing exploration of personal, social, political and cultural issues and encouraging critical thinking and reading, thereby engendering 'a democratic environment which takes the student experience as a starting point, provides access to the socially distributed knowledge of each member of the group, and thus common issues of injustice can be identified' (Williamson 2011:30). This does not mean that work in the classroom should always focus on oppression and injustice – it can also lead to an understanding of the cultural values of others and a celebration of what the individual learners bring to the learning environment.

Learners are thus given authentic reasons for approaching their learning, whether for pleasure, to learn something new, or to follow instructions.  As used in the classroom *Reflect* 'chimes with […] task-based learning' (Moon and Sunderland 2008:12), where collaborative decision-making is the springboard for teaching (Willis 1996).  Here, for example, learners might select and discuss leaflets about local places of interest in order to plan their class day out. The language teaching arises from the task as it does with *Reflect*.  Learning is thus

situated in the here and now.  In this context, these teaching approaches are learner-centred and focus on the primary aim of English language teaching to immigrants, which is to develop the language and literacy skills that they need to function as adults in UK society in all areas of life.  In fact, in spite of the pressure to pass examinations, the importance of relating teaching to everyday life is still recognised by teachers and teacher educators. However, change in the incorporation of examination skills within this work can only come about if teachers make the connection between real world knowledge and/or skills and the skills required for the examination in question and ensure that the learners are equipped to pass the examinations and apply their knowledge elsewhere.

 It can be argued that it is possible to integrate examination requirements into this mode of teaching and therefore make the link with the learners' day-to-day learning. There need not be two goals, preparation for life and preparation for the examination as two separate elements of the course. By exploring the communicative value of the examination tasks as well as the underlying language competencies required, it may be possible to integrate the two elements within the teaching programme.  Hence the first sub-question for this research:

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Sub-question 1

- How far are teachers aware of the sub-skills that are required for success in a given test and the ways in which they may connect with real life?

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ESOL teachers are effectively on their own in attempting to achieve this balance unless they have access to peers, teacher educators or awarding body support.  This is a role for which teachers are not systematically prepared and they are therefore drawing on their own resources in terms of knowledge, teaching materials and course planning.  This will vary according to their experience and their own perceptions of the learners' needs.  It is possible

that it is these individual  perceptions that, conscious or unconscious, are the roots of the differing approaches teachers take, and awareness of the background of their own behaviours may lead to greater understanding of the gap between their knowledge and that of their learners. This leads to the second sub-question:

Sub-question 2

- How far are teachers taking into account their own experiences of examinations gained throughout their lives and to what extent are they aware of this?

## 2.4 Current thinking on validity of assessment

The second challenge for teachers is the suitability of the testing tool itself, that is, its validity; and preparing learners for tests that may, either in their design or in their implementation, present obstacles to the kind of learner-centred language teaching referred to above.  I first discuss the concept of validity and relate it to Skills for Life provision before going on to discuss different facets of validity.

The fundamental role of validity as a testing concept has been a subject of debate since the 1920s (Newton & Shaw 2014) and the ideas behind it have been quite fluid.  The everyday meaning of the term 'validity' is fundamentally 'fit for purpose'.  If a passport is valid, it can be used as a form of identification; if an argument is valid, it is sound, logically constructed and based on testable evidence.  In educational assessment, it is used to verify the suitability of a procedure for measurement of performance and so 'the claim that a measurement procedure is valid is often tantamount to giving it the thumbs up or a green light or a stamp of approval', (Newton & Shaw 2014:11).  Much has been written on the subject of what comes under the heading of validity and Newton and Shaw (2014) list 151 adjectives that have been used to qualify 'validity' over the years, the main ones, as selected by Weir (2005), being

cognitive, consequential, construct, context (or 'content'), criterion related and scoring validity. However, validity is fundamentally seen as a unified concept and these 'types' are commonly used facets of validity for the purposes of investigation.

Why is validity an issue? It is important for all stakeholders that a measurement procedure should have demonstrable validity. It is important for those being measured that the results come as close as possible to reflecting their true ability in the area in which they are being tested; it is important for teachers so that they can exercise judgement of their learners' readiness for the examination; it is important for employers and receiving education institutions so that they are aware of the meaning of a certain score in a given test. 'This is a central aspect of the testing process and one on which its usefulness hinges' (Elliott and Stevenson 2015).

The exact nature of validity remains under discussion and no doubt will be for some time to come. However, the facets of validity that impact most on teaching and learning are, arguably, construct validity and consequential validity, as defined below, and context validity insofar as it relates to authenticity (see 2.6).

### 2.4.1 Construct validity

The validity of a construct or the fundamental concepts on which a test is based is not as simple as it may seem. A test may test what it purports to test for some test takers and not for others. According to Koretz (2008), there are three main factors that undermine test validity: 'failing to measure adequately what ought to be measured, measuring something that shouldn't be measured such as numeracy or world knowledge in a language test and using a test in a manner that undermines validity' (Koretz, 2008:220). Koretz describes these three points as 'construct underrepresentation', 'construct irrelevant variance' and 'consequential

validity', respectively. These notions arose from the seminal work of Messick (1989), whose writing on validity had a profound influence on subsequent thinking (McNamara 2006). McNamara posited that the main issue of test validity is that results should be a fair representation of a test-taker's ability in the relevant domain of behaviour, knowledge or skills (2006: 33). In Messick's matrix of validity, the 'relevant domain', or area of language use, is termed the 'criterion domain', which can appear in the wording of the scale descriptors used by an examiner or rater to grade a candidate's response, and therefore is underpinned by the intended construct of a test, but in itself it is open to different interpretations by policy-makers. An example of this would be the Skills for Life policy in England and Wales, which increasingly sees the criterion domain as the workplace, with social or academic language use being secondary. This follows from the prevalent aim that people should have 'economically valuable skills' (Leitch 2006:14).

There is a danger therefore of the construct of a test being the result of 'political forces rather than academic argument' (McNamara 2006: 37) or in the case of ESOL tests, rather than linguistic expertise. Shohamy's work on 'critical language testing' makes this clear when she says that 'critical language testing assumes that the act of testing is not neutral. Rather, it is both a product and an agent of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of individual participants, teachers and learners' (Shohamy 1998: 332). This process is enabled by government involvement in how learners are tested.

In order for any large-scale testing procedure to be launched onto the education system, it has to come under the scrutiny of a body that has been assigned the discretionary powers to recognise the tests. In the case of the Skills for Life ESOL examinations this body was the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) when the first examinations were launched and for the recent review this body was the Office for Qualifications (Ofqual). Such a body has the responsibility for devising the criteria by which an examination is deemed to be

suitable at the design stage.  However, this was done with little reference to the principles of language learning and testing.  An example of this is the QCA's stipulation that reading examinations from Entry levels 1-3 (CEFR A1 to B1) should have open-ended questions to which the learners had to write the answers in order to demonstrate that they can extract meaning from a text.  This has long been recognised as poor practice by, among others, Cambridge Assessment, one of the awarding bodies concerned, partly because candidates can simply copy the relevant words from the text without knowing what they mean, and partly because they may be poor writers and not be able to convey the answer in spite of having understood the text.  The designs of the papers were therefore recognised by the QCA against the better judgement of the awarding body under whose name the examinations were produced.  The awarding body was obliged to contravene the 'traditional' view that in order to have construct validity, a test should test what it claims to test (Koretz 2008; Lambert and Lines 2000).  By testing reading through writing, the true ability in reading is not assessed.

### 2.4.2 Consequential validity

Messick (1989) showed concern in terms of the consequences of tests for the stakeholders in terms of values and social significance.  This later became known as consequential validity, although it was not Messick's term (McNamara 2006).  It refers to how tests are used, how they affect the lives of the learners and what their impact is for stakeholders in general.  Newton (2012) presents the debate as to whether consequences are in fact about measurement and therefore about validity in its true sense and not a separate category.  However, in the context of this study, the uses of the tests and their consequences are significant.

Shohamy (1998), when writing about consequential validity, points out that tests are used for high-stakes ends such as employment, graduation, selection for further courses, and

immigration. They are also used to meet achievement targets, and to assure accountability on the part of providers in general and teachers in particular, all of which put the developmental needs of the test-taker in second place. This brings to mind Foucault's (1977) metaphor of a panopticon, a structure designed for surveillance. He used this metaphor to underpin a discourse of control, which, in the context of this thesis, can be applied to assessing the abilities of the population, record keeping, monitoring success rates, and performance reviews. Today all of this is greatly facilitated and diversified by the advent of information technology. This kind of surveillance will inevitably have an effect on teacher behaviour, the nature of which I discuss later in my findings. The process of implementation of the Skills for Life strategy, which uses achievement as a measure of success, and the range of consequences at local level, relate to Foucault's concept of governmentality 'by which governance is aligned with the self-organising capacities of individual subjects' (Olssen 2006: 214). There was the advantage of significant government investment in teaching literacy and numeracy but this was accompanied by increasing government control imposed by people who were professionally distant from the field of educational practice. By aligning funding with success rates, the government could ensure that the individual institutions would be working towards the targets by whatever means they thought most effective and thus address the skills deficit revealed by the Moser report. This is a cynical view of government involving the setting up of an environment where the individual would find it in their own interests to comply. 'The way in which the conduct of others might be directed ... is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1982 cited in Olssen 2006: 214).

Policy-driven testing is therefore not always designed exclusively with the consequences for the learner in mind. If a test does not relate to the skills needs of ESOL learners, then in order for them to pass it, too much time needs to be spent on teaching examination skills at the expense of true language and literacy acquisition. This can have a negative impact when

teachers 'start adapting their programmes and policies to service the targets, rather than keeping focused on the needs of the learners' (Derrick 2006:143). This is a major issue regarding consequential validity and construct irrelevant variance.

It is not just the underlying construct that is the issue here, but it is also the construction of the test instrument itself, that is, the procedures used for establishing test-taker ability and the testing materials (McNamara 2006). An examination usually contains a set of standard task types, which are made known to the teachers, who use past papers and course books which have been written with specific examinations in mind. In this way the construction of the examination also has a direct impact on what happens in the classroom. It would therefore seem to be in the best interests of all concerned if the tasks in the test mirrored real world skills, which learners could transfer into their everyday lives. In other words, the test would be measuring something that should be measured.

## 2.5  Policy and its effects on validity in practice

I now situate current practice in the wider political situation and bring together issues raised so far in this chapter. There was a substantial shift in the role of examinations in adult and further education in England and Wales in 2005, when funding was attached to learner achievement, as described in 2.1. I have explored the unintended consequences of this policy for teaching and learning (Allemano 2011), which stemmed from the fact that for the providing institutions, the main area of interest became achievement figures. On the basis of information from in-service trainee teachers, I established that, in order to improve these achievement figures, colleges had to be creative in their management of their testing policies and a number of strategies came into being, such as:

- entering learners for a level lower than their ability suggested, meaning that they were not given the opportunity to achieve the qualification that denoted their true level and also meaning that they were not stretching their skills to the highest level possible,

- not entering learners for tests if there was a chance they might not pass. This can affect motivation in the classroom if some are working towards a test and others are not,

- operating a mode-based structure: it is common practice for learners to take one mode (reading, writing or speaking and listening) at the end of each term to spread the load over the year and to give opportunities for resits within the academic year, if necessary. (Allemano 2011:12)

This last and arguably most damaging consequence of the providers' manipulation of the system for the ESOL qualifications was that in a significant number of FE colleges, management required that teaching was to be restricted to the mode being taken at the end of the term. In other words, if learners were due to take the reading mode, then writing, speaking and listening were not to be taught during that particular term. On my suggestion that she do some reading work during my observation of her teaching, a trainee responded 'I'm not allowed to – they are doing the writing exam this term' (Allemano 2011:13).

This raises the question of how teachers can help learners to improve their reading skills, for example, if they are only 'taught' reading for one term a year. This separation of the skills also ignores the fact that in real-life 'the skills are rarely used in isolation. For example, when attending a job interview, a person will read anything sent in advance, listen and respond to questions and most probably take part in further written communication after that' (Wilkins 2009:30). However, while teachers may object to the first two bullet points listed above, many are compliant with the third (Allemano 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that

41

the removal by management of their autonomy in designing their own schemes of work has led to teachers accepting this policy and no longer exercising their own judgement as to what is best practice for their learners.

This is a manifestation of Foucault's notion of governmentality (see 2.4.2). In this case, connecting funding to success in examinations or assessment ensures that individual management teams in the providing institutions would make every effort to meet government targets. This has meant that the examination results have become a tool for measuring teacher performance and accountability. Foucault's notion of normalisation (Foucault 1991:266) is also relevant here as is refers to the extent to which people accept change in regulations and systems so that it eventually seems normal, leading to compliance, transformation or docility. This was at the root of a paper (Allemano 2010), which looked at the professionalisation of ESOL teachers post- Moser. I drew the conclusion that teachers were divided into three main groups. The first group did not succumb to normalisation, resented the new culture of accountability and left the profession; the second group fully engaged in the new culture and carried out their duties in line with management requirements without complaint; the third group also resisted normalisation and worked against the requirements, breaking rules and trying to preserve what they believed in, which was the well-being of the learners. The question is whether this is still the case or not or whether, six years later, there is another response. This leads to sub-question 3:

> Sub-question 3
>
> - How are teachers responding to any conflict between the institutional requirements and their own professional judgement?

To illustrate the resultant power relations within the hierarchy affecting Skills for Life teachers my view of the current situation in 2017 as described is demonstrated in fig. 3:

**Fig. 3: Power relations surrounding the skills for Life strategy**

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Government policy   │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                      │                 │
                      ▼                 ▼
        ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────┐
        │  Awarding Bodies │◄────►│  Provider Management │
        └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────────┘
                   │                      │
                   ▼      ┌──────────────┐◄
                          │ Examination  │
                          └──────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                          ┌──────────┐
                          │ Teacher  │
                          └──────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                          ┌──────────┐
                     ┌───►│ Learner  │◄───┐
                     │    └──────────┘    │
                     │         ▲          │
     ┌────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
     │ Motivation │  │ Education background │  │ Cultural capital │
     └────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
```
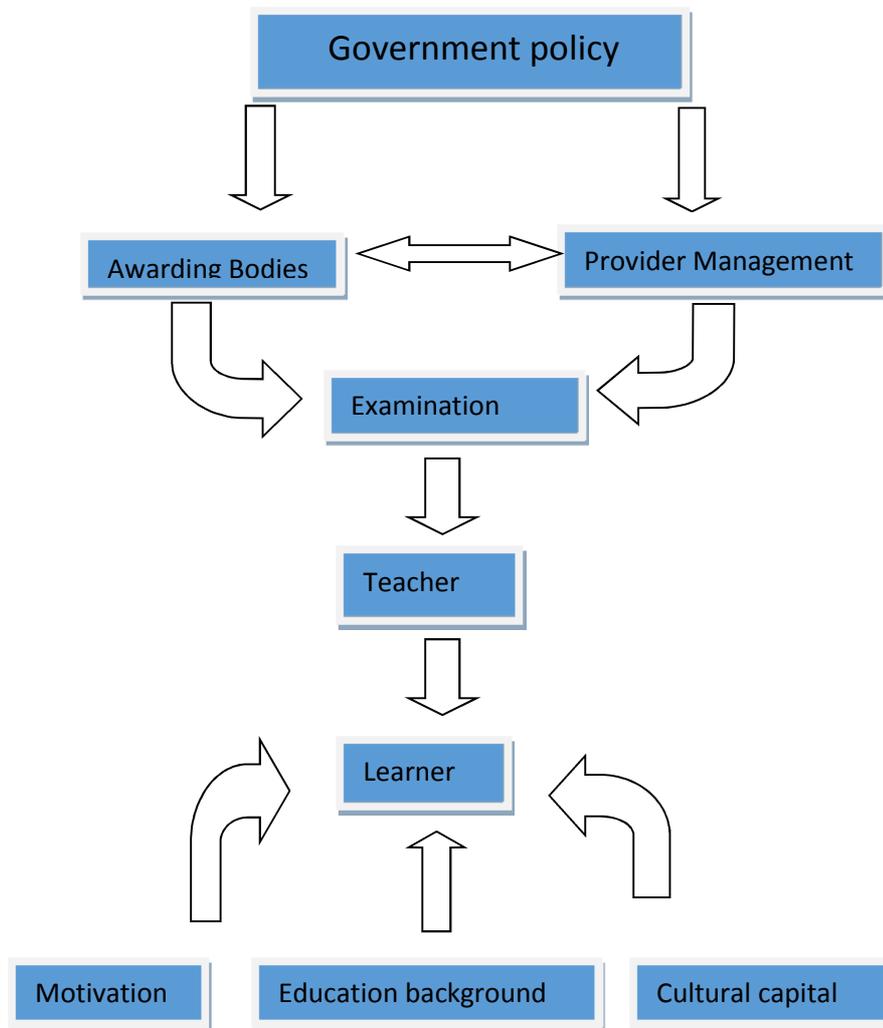
In this model, the government agency stipulates what examinations should be taken and oversees the awarding bodies down to the detail of the content and marking of the examinations (Ofqual 2011). As mentioned earlier, the government also bases some of its funding on achievement so that college management focuses on examination success as a priority. The teachers are therefore caught in the middle, on the one hand being under pressure from their employers to ensure that their learners succeed in the examinations and so having to take note of the requirements of the awarding body, and on the other, having a

responsibility to their learners in that they do not merely 'teach to the test' but also equip them to function as members of an English-speaking society.  For many learners the latter is the main priority but others must pass the tests in order, for example, to gain citizenship or entry to vocational courses and therefore ESOL Skills for Life examinations can be considered 'high-stakes' qualifications (Hughes 2003).

Figure 3 demonstrates the crucial role of the teacher, as mentioned earlier.  Here, nothing bypasses the teacher, who is constrained by the examining system and management on the one hand, while on the other hand carrying a considerable amount of responsibility both to employers and the learners.  This is before coming to the individual and personal factors affecting the teachers in their work, which I come to in Chapter three.

## 2.6  Authenticity – the test itself

The third challenge for teachers is the authenticity of the tests and therefore the influence of the examination itself and its connection with the learning needs of the learners.  Authenticity is closely connected with context validity.  Bachman (1990) described authenticity in testing as having two facets: situational authenticity and interactional authenticity.  Logically, in order to be authentic, a test of language should consist of tasks that mirror real-life target language use (situational authenticity).  If this were happening, then addressing the real-life needs of the learners would also prepare them for external assessment.  But can a speaking test ever assess a candidate's ability to operate in the real world?  First I will consider the ways in which the context of a language test differs from the real world.  There are three main facets here: firstly, the assessment criteria against which the candidate's performance is measured; secondly, the often artificial tasks, created specifically to elicit the evidence of ability; and thirdly, the relationship between the participants (in the examinations concerned

these are the teacher as interlocutor, the examiner, the candidates), which is not normally found in real life (interactional authenticity).

I illustrate these issues concerning authenticity by looking at developments in describing what communicative language learning means and setting this against the features of testing procedures. I take the assessment criteria first. Commonly, in English language tests these are based on some or all of the following foci:

1. Grammar - according to the syllabus for the level at which the candidate is being tested, which may state when the different grammatical elements are introduced, for example

2. Vocabulary - range and accuracy of use, again appropriate to the level

3. Coherence and cohesion (or discourse management) - at higher levels in a longer piece of discourse

4. Pronunciation - for comfortable intelligibility

5. Interactive communication - the ability to listen and respond appropriately and engage in interaction.

(UCLES 2016a)

It can be argued that the first three foci - grammar, vocabulary and syntactic discourse features - are mainly knowledge based, whether implicit or explicit knowledge, and are often taught as part of a language course. Grammatical progression in fact often forms the basis of a syllabus to this day and up until the mid-twentieth century, it was generally seen as the main focus of language teaching and testing, often with a grammar/translation approach. Interactive communication in teaching is therefore a more recent concept, as in the past this tended not to take place in a classroom where learners were often presented with knowledge about the target language through the medium of their first language. There was a significant

shift in approach when Chomsky (1965) observed that learning *about* a language was not always enough and so separated the concepts of 'competence' and 'performance' in language use. According to his definition 'competence' refers to knowledge about a language and 'performance' refers to actual use. He argued that one did not always reflect the other as 'knowing' a great deal about a language in terms of its grammatical formation, morphology and syntactical characteristics does not necessarily equate to good performance, especially in speech. Chomsky's view was that this was mainly due to a learner not having the opportunity to put the knowledge into practice.

Chomsky's interpretation was at the time revolutionary (Howatt 2004:330) in that it recognised that there was more than one dimension to language learning. However, it still echoed earlier grammar/translation methods of language teaching and learning in that the ideal was represented in the creation of grammatically correct sentences. A number of scholars felt that Chomsky did not go far enough in defining what a command of a language actually means in the real world. The first of these was Hymes (1972), who felt that Chomsky's view, although important, was too restricted; he put forward another dimension to the issue of successful communication, thereby coining the concept of 'communicative competence', a major component of which was 'appropriacy', or the socio-cultural significance of what is being said. He framed this in the context of child language acquisition:

> A normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner (1972:277).

Here Hymes was referring to the importance of the context or social milieu in which the language was being used, which could vary according to the relationship between participants, the setting in time and space, purpose, genre and mode of communication. These different contexts come with different 'rules of use' (Canale and Swain 1980:6), of which native

speakers gain a sophisticated understanding over a lifetime. In order to provide a framework for this concept, Hymes (1974) employed the notion of 'speech acts' and 'speech events'. The 'speech act' would be an utterance, which in an interactive situation would be a component part of a wider 'event' such as a private conversation or a lecture in a university. An event is then positioned within a 'situation', in these cases maybe a chat at the bus stop or a keynote at a large conference. The situation provides a 'community' of people who share rules for when and how to speak.

The notion of community and the fact that communication involves more than one person is further discussed by Gumperz (1982). He posits that 'only when a move has elicited a response, can we say that communication has taken place' (1982:1). A response may be verbal or non-verbal but it should demonstrate understanding, and maybe inference, within the scope of the shared knowledge of the context. An example of this is given by Gumperz:

> A: Are you gonna be here for ten minutes?
>
> B: Go ahead and take your break. Take longer if you want. (1982:1)

At surface level, these utterances may seem unconnected but shared knowledge of the particular workplace has led to B inferring the true meaning of A's question and has thus removed the need to ask a further question.

Canale and Swain also found 'the notion of sociolinguistic competence to be a crucial one in a theory of communicative competence' (1980:17) and used this as basis for further analysis. They endorsed the importance of both grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence (1980:27) but in order to recognise the difficulties faced by learners of a language they added the notion of strategic competence, 'made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in

communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence' (1980:30).

Canale (1983), in recognition of the fact that a speech act or utterance may be extended or part of a longer interaction, later added a fourth component, which he called 'discourse competence', and which involves fluency, appropriacy, coherence and cohesion. In conversational exchanges, these factors are also evident across turns. Meaning is negotiated and created by 'speaker and hearer and judgements either confirmed or changed by the reactions they evoke' (Gumperz 1982:5).

The implications of these competences for teaching were that language should be taught as far as possible in relation to real situations and published text-books became much more focused on this approach. It was therefore advisable that testing would follow along these lines. However, the distinction between 'competence' and 'performance' continued to be recognised as valid:

> Communicative testing must be devoted not only to what the learner knows about the second language and about how to use it (competence) but also to what extent the learner is able to actually demonstrate this knowledge in a meaningful communicative situation (Canale and Swain 1980:34).

The tasks and format of speaking tests were, and continue to be, redesigned to try and replicate real-life situations. One significant step forward was to test candidates in pairs so that they could interact with each other in a more natural way. Tasks were developed to incorporate a range of language functions *inter alia*: planning, recommending, suggesting, agreeing, disagreeing and these were assessed along with strategic competences under the heading of 'interactive communication', which is the fifth testing focus as listed on page 47.

It is communicative competence that is at the heart of this study and this extends beyond lexical, grammatical and phonological knowledge to include socio-cultural knowledge and strategic competence, both of which are important elements of successful language use in the real world and come under the wider heading of pragmatics. This is taken as the study of

how meaning is created in context (McCarthy 1991), and the important point here is that meaning is context dependent rather than context independent (Levinson 1983). The key word here is 'context' and this can be determined by many socio-cultural factors such as time and place, the purpose of the interaction, the relative status and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) of the interlocutors. A crucial factor of cultural capital in the case of language learners is that it extends across world cultures, in which conventions and social practices may be very different so that 'although the pragmatic conditions of communicative tasks are theoretically taken to be universal, the realizations of these tasks as social practices are culturally variable' (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982:12) in terms of, inter alia, structuring information and use of 'linguistic conventions to emphasise, and signal logical connections' (ibid). A level of awareness of different approaches to communication between world cultures or intercultural competence (Sercu 2010) is therefore incorporated under the wider heading of socio-cultural competence. I return to this in Chapter three.

In order to illustrate the paradox regarding authentic language use in the assessment of speaking, I now return to the framework underpinning Hymes' speech acts (1972), where the context is given in terms of the physical environment and the community involved. The speech act reflects the underlying function of an utterance within an 'event', which is the type of interaction that is taking place, with a beginning, a middle and an end, and which may well conform to a loose formula. Here, I give the examples of the speech acts of agreeing and disagreeing within the communicative event of a discussion about whether to live in a house or a flat and consider them in three different situations and communities. The 'situation' places the event in time and space and the 'community' refers to the other participants either active or passive, who share the rules of how to speak in the given situation. The first example (Fig. 4) takes place among family members in the home. I present this taxonomy as a pyramid in order demonstrate the way in which a speech event grows out of broader bases.

**Fig. 4: Speech acts in the community**
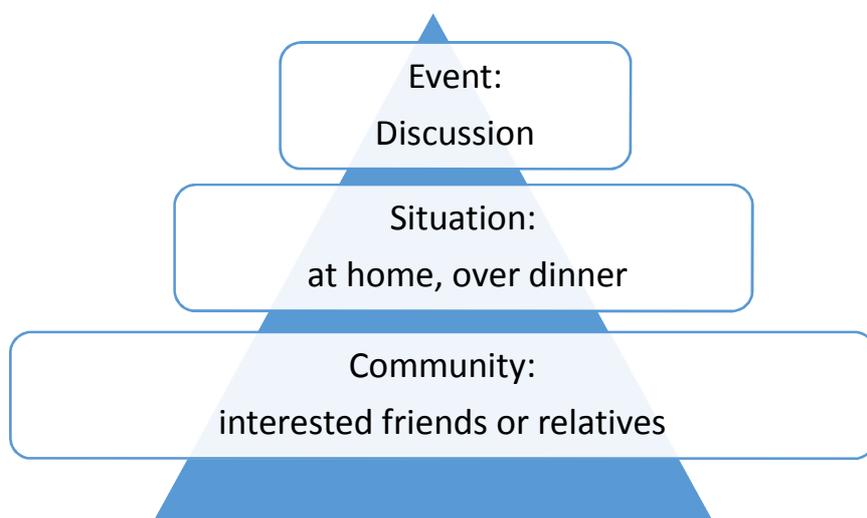


Here we have an ostensibly relaxed situation, a discussion between people who know each other well and therefore much may go unspoken. It is on a topic which may have arisen naturally because of a decision that has to be made. However, the participants might have very different views and a stake in the outcome, which might result in a decision affecting all or some of their lives. The focus here is on the decision and an ability to communicate well enough for views to be heard, which need not depend on accuracy and may even involve code-switching between two or more languages. There may be different positions of power within the family but the members will be very familiar with these. Depending on the culture, it may also be acceptable to disagree or challenge, although in some cases this may result in an argument, hence the event may not always be relaxed.

In Figure 5, we move to the scenario of the classroom where the same discussion takes place either in preparation for an examination or to empower learners in their everyday lives:

**Fig. 5: Speech acts in the classroom**
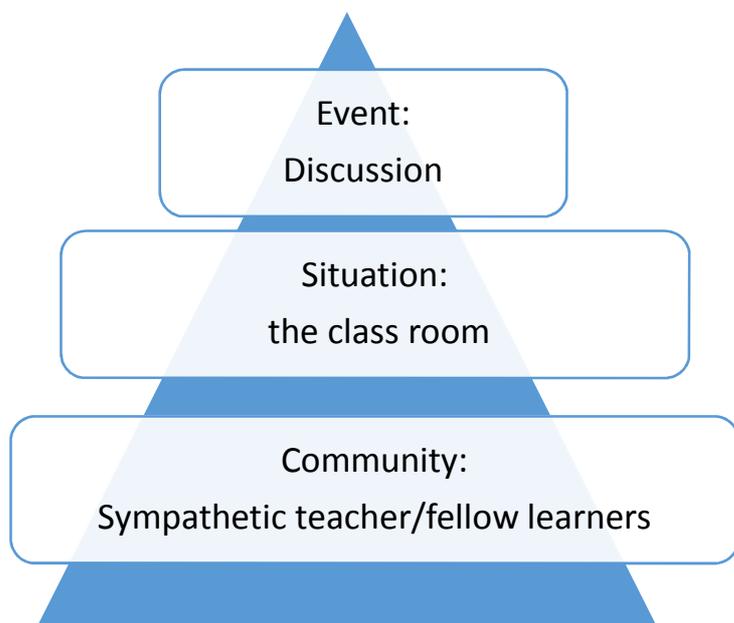


Here again, we have a relaxed situation but the question may have been chosen and therefore imposed by the teacher.  The participants are not strangers to each other but may not know each other very well.  They may not be particularly interested in the views of their fellow learners as the outcome is of no real consequence.  The real aim of the event is to practise using the language at the learners' disposal to become more effective speakers.  Some learners may be experimenting with language in order to receive feedback from their teacher but they may be reticent about disagreeing with their peers or the teacher.  English will probably be the sole medium as the common language for all those present.  In Figure 6, I take this one step further into the context of the examination room.  In the room, there may be two candidates, an examiner or teacher who sets the task or poses the question and an examiner who observes and evaluates.  This is an uneven field as the examiner may well be quite relaxed while the candidates probably feel nervous and unsure.  Again the topic would have been artificially chosen, this time by the awarding body, and at least one of participants, the examiner, is an unknown, who is not particularly interested in the views of others or the

outcome but is judging performance.  As in the classroom, the learners may not want to know what each other's views are.  A significant difference here, though, is the power relationship between the 'judges' and the 'judged', meaning that this time the event is not seen as supportive by the candidates, nor are they really aware of expectations in that they may, for example, feel that challenging a view could result in a penalty.

**Fig. 6: Speech acts in an examination**

Event:
Discussion

Situation:
Exam

Community:
Judges and judged
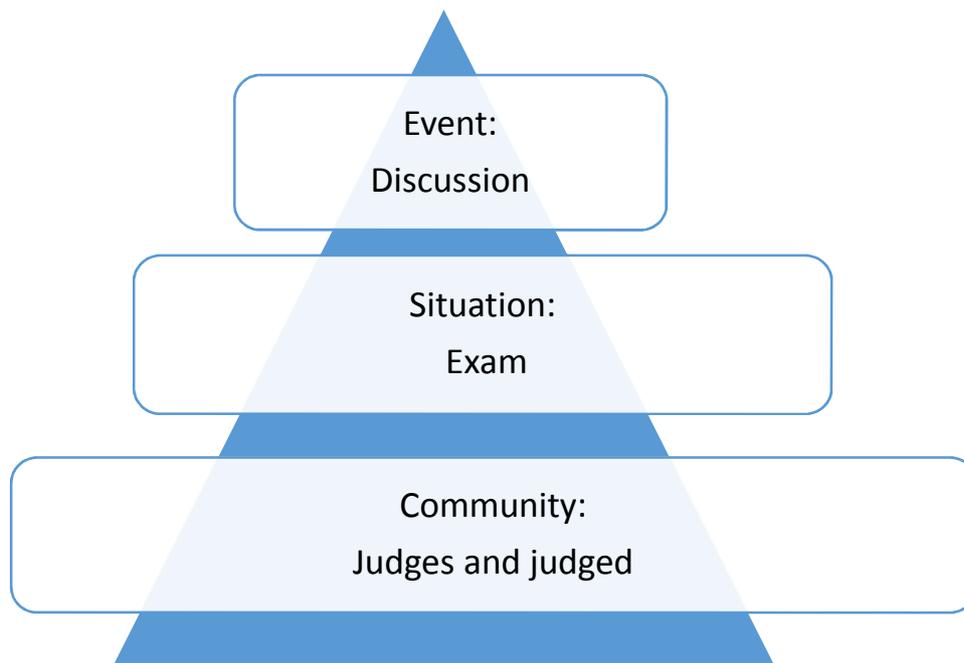
These three scenarios have very different underlying purposes, which are, respectively, reaching an agreement, practising language use, and using language in such a way as to demonstrate the highest possible level of ability.  As a result, they require very different pragmatic behaviour.  In their role of preparing learners for examinations, teachers need to be aware of these different behaviours and the ways in which they impact on the learners' performance in the examination.  During spoken interaction, a proficient speaker makes unconscious choices before an utterance: these will depend on cultural conventions, the

physical time and space, the perceived social status in the given situation, the degree of

shared knowledge, the required function – whether to warn, advise, suggest.

On the basis of these factors we make choices about volume, speed, register, accent,

relevance of content and framing.  In an examination, the candidates may be ignorant of the

required conventions.  The appropriate linguistic resources for a given context also vary

between cultures and it can be argued that a learner has to acquire a knowledge of the range

of ways in which language knowledge is applied in myriad contexts in order to avoid

misunderstanding.  Bachman (1990) followed in a similar vein, developing a more detailed

breakdown on language competence under slightly different headings:

**Fig. 7: Bachman's (1990: 87**) **map of language competence**
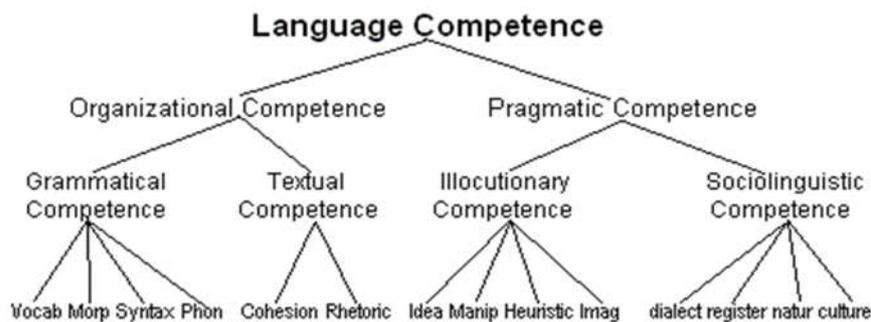


Interestingly, the term 'communicative competence' does not appear here.  This is arguably

because, as early as 1990, this was seen as the fundamental determiner of successful

language use i.e. language competence.  He presents the overall heading as Language

Competence with two main subheadings: Organisational Competence and Pragmatic

Competence.  Under organizational competence he includes Chomsky's notion of language

knowledge and use (here, 'Grammatical Competence'), and Canale's concept of discourse

competence appears to a certain extent under the subheading of 'Textual Competence'.

Hymes' and Canale and Swain's notions of sociolinguistic competence are sub-divided into

two concepts – functional use of language (here 'illocutionary') or intentions of utterances e.g. to advise, complain, instruct etc. and sociolinguistic competence, which covers knowledge of conventions of language use in certain situations.

Canale and Swain's concept of strategic competence does not appear in this model but was introduced later by Bachman and Palmer (2010) with the much broader meaning of 'a set of meta-cognitive strategies that manage the ways in which language users utilise their different attributes to interact with the characteristics of the language use situation' (44). In fact, Bachman and Palmer (2010) define language ability more concisely as consisting of 'language knowledge and strategic competence' (33).

This development has meant that the focus is much more on the individual learner when identifying the skills that need to be developed. The 'attributes' referred to in Bachman and Palmer's definition of strategic competence revolve around the individual language user and are not assessed as part of communicative competence. They fall into four categories:

- Personal attributes, which are factors related to the learner or test-taker. These are not related to language ability but may influence performance in a given situation (Bachman and Palmer 2010:40). For the learners featured in this study, these may include such factors as age, gender, native language, previous education in terms of length and quality, and experience of the classroom or examination culture in the UK. I return to these in Chapter three.

- Topical knowledge, which refers to knowledge of the real world. This knowledge base is crucial for reference to real life (Bachman and Palmer 2010:41). In language learning, this knowledge may have a cultural dimension.

- Affective schemata, which relate to the feelings evoked by certain areas of topical knowledge. If the feelings are positive or strong, the language user's performance

may be enhanced by a desire to communicate these feelings. On the other hand, if they are negative (e.g. traumatic) or weak (indifference), the performance may be impaired.

- Cognitive strategies, which are the strategies that 'speaker', in this case, uses in order to draw on the above attributes to 'co-construct discourse with another interlocutor'.

 (43)

There are clear messages here both for teachers preparing learners for an assessment. It involves being aware of their learners' personal attributes, especially in terms of education, background and culture; it involves helping learners to develop the cognitive strategies they need on the basis of this.

For the purpose of this thesis I have focussed on personal attributes and affective schemata as these are the factors which relate to the particular needs of the learners who have little or no experience of education. In an examination, the expectation is for the candidates to pretend that they are in a real-life situation, to play a game, but this is a conceptual leap that many candidates are unable to make and they and their teachers may even be unaware of the necessity for it. I now apply an example test-taker's attributes to the examination situation used for Hymes' model (fig. 6).

Take a young mother who came to the UK as a refugee three years ago. Because of the situation in her home country, her schooling ended after two years of primary education. She therefore has no understanding of the concept of assessment. As a young girl she had lived in a house in a rural area with plenty of space for the children to run around. She married young and fled the country leaving her parents and siblings behind. She now lives in a flat in London in a community of immigrants from her country, where there are very few houses, and where the idea of living in a house is unrealistic. She rarely leaves the area or the

community and therefore has no need for English in her everyday life. Her only contact with the language is when she goes to ESOL classes at the local Further Education College. These could be seen as her 'personal attributes', which arise from her childhood experiences. Her affective schemata also comes into play here as the topic of whether to live in a house or a flat is distressing to her because it reminds her of her childhood and her family members, who she is very concerned about.

Her 'topical knowledge' of living in a house is based on these memories; living in a flat is now her norm and she cannot envisage ever having a choice. She has never visited a house in London and so has not thought about what the benefits of one may be in a big city. It is not relevant to her at this stage in her life (affective schemata).

So if personal attributes are supposed to 'provide the basis on which the language user appraises consciously or unconsciously the characteristics of the language use task and its setting in terms of past emotional experiences in similar contexts' (Bachman & Palmer 2010: 42), this test-taker has little to draw on to inform any cognitive strategies or to motivate her to join in a discussion at all. This is compounded by the fact that her personal history means that she has a lack of experience of the context of the examination room. With all these factors working against her, there is little chance of her displaying any of the grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic or strategic competences (Canale 1983, Bachman 1990) called for in the assessment criteria. There are several layers of awareness needed here to develop the ability to adapt communicative competence to the examination situation. Hence sub-question 4:

Sub-question 4

How far are teachers aware that their learners' perceptions of expectations in the examination situation may be very different from their own?

## 2.7  Summary and a theoretical framework

This chapter has set out a theoretical framework for this thesis by situating the research sub-questions in the context of three major challenges confronting a teacher preparing ESOL for examinations in the post-compulsory sector in England and Wales: the current political arena, the nature of the examinations in terms of validity and suitability, and the dual task of preparing learners for real world language use as well as teaching for the examination.

To return to the situation referred to in fig 3, the teacher is presented as a pivotal factor in a structure with a number of players: the government agency, providing institutions, the awarding bodies and at the end of the chain, the learners with a number of factors influencing them.  For some this is a high-stakes examination if they are dependent on it for citizenship or access to the next level e.g. GCSE, or a vocational course; for others it is not the main reason for attending classes as they need above all the ability to function and succeed in an English-speaking society. The diagram below represents this three-way pressure on teachers, who differ in the extent to which they recognise these challenges; therefore they also differ in the way they approach them.

**Fig. 8: A theoretical framework**

Tests
Validity
Assessment
literacy

Policy
Accountability

Learner-
centred
learning
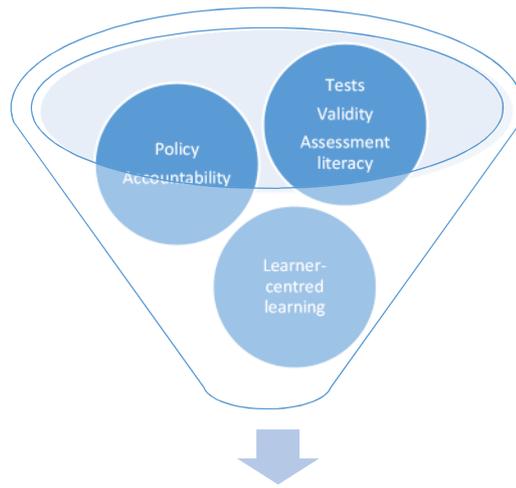
Pressure on the teacher

I see this scenario as a 'field' as defined by Bourdieu - 'a site of competing interest where there is struggle for recognition' (Rawolle and Lingard 2013:122). It reflects the wider context in which the stakeholders are situated and ways in which they interconnect through their practices and struggle to maintain their own professionalism.

# Chapter three: The literature

## 3.1 Introduction

Having discussed some of the challenges faced by teachers in ESOL in England and Wales, in this chapter I will review some of the research and ideas that relate to these areas. While there has been, I believe, no research that focuses directly on teachers who are preparing learners with little or no experience of formal education, there has been significant work on related areas such as washback, testing speaking, the learners' approach to the examinations, teacher cognition and their approaches to examination preparation in general. I will end the chapter by situating the main research question within the research already done.

## 3.2. The concept of washback

In Chapters one and two, I referred to the impact that examinations can have on the teaching and learning that precedes them. This is often referred to as 'washback' by researchers and awarding bodies (Alderson and Wall 1993, Messick 1996, Weir 2005, Hawkey 2011), and is defined as the impact of the test on, among other aspects, the classroom (Messick 1996, Shohamy 1998, Bachman 1990). Positive washback suggests that learners preparing for the examinations should also gain communicative language competency that will be useful for them in other spheres of their lives, for example, in the workplace.

Samuel Messick has been a major influence behind many studies into 'washback', (also known as 'backwash') in language tests (Hawkey 2011). Messick defines washback as 'the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise necessarily do' (1996:1). The important point here is that change in practice has to

take place, for better or for worse, in order for there to be washback, as maintaining existing practices would indicate that the introduction of a new test had had no effect.

Washback is seen as part of the superordinate of impact (Hawkey 2011), which relates to consequential validity as a whole and covers the broader spectrum of 'the total effect of a test on the wider community' (McNamara 2000:133), covering a wide range of stakeholders: learners, parents, teacher, employers, governments, college and university admissions officers and others. These effects apply to both before and after the examination has been taken. Washback is therefore seen as a hyponym of 'impact' and refers mainly to the effect on teaching and learning. It is now a guiding principle of ELT test design that a test should strive for a beneficial impact on classroom activities, course books and teaching resources and the attitudes and related practices of stakeholders towards the examination (Weir 2005). However, the term itself is a neutral one, used to refer to both positive and negative effects (Milanovic and Weir 2005b: xix).

For many years, most high-stakes test providers have striven for a positive impact on teaching and learning (Weir and Milanovic 2005a: xiii). By positive impact, they are referring to a shift towards communication-based learning which the awarding bodies see as primarily their responsibility. Therefore, many of them do endeavour to devise language testing instruments that replicate real-life performance and skills as far as possible (Taylor 2003). However, they are dependent on the teachers as intermediaries to understand and implement these changes. In some countries examinations have been set up specifically to encourage teachers to improve and/or update language teaching methodology in the country concerned, for example the introduction of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education in English in Hong Kong schools in 1996, with the assumption that the teachers would respond to the cue to match their teaching with the communicative nature of the examination. At the time, English Language teaching in Hong Kong tended to be grammar-based learning about

the language, with little practical application especially in speaking, which is needed for fluency and automaticity. Cheng (2005) carried out a major study into the effects of this change and her findings indicated that it could not be assumed that teachers would adapt easily or willingly to new approaches. This would indicate that, in order to raise awareness, more is needed than merely changing test design.

As described in Chapter two, in the Skills for Life sector in England and Wales there is a culture of learner-centred learning, as opposed to examination-centred learning. Underpinning this is a strong focus on the individual learner's life needs, abilities, aptitudes and motivations. The balance between learners' needs and examination requirements is a difficult one and teachers often find themselves isolated from peer support. As there are no text-books for the examinations, the onus is on the individual teacher to find strategies for combining learner-centred learning with examination preparation. There are a number of variables for the teacher to consider here: the learners may lack motivation for passing the test; they may have little or no experience of the concept of examinations in general; or they may have a very different idea of what an examination is from their own backgrounds. Added to this is the teacher's own motivation, linguistic ability, training, course hours, class size, and extent of classroom autonomy. According to Green (2007) all this of means that 'backwash [washback] can only be related to a test indirectly as effects are realised through the interactions between, inter alia, the test, teachers and learners' (Green 2007:3). This is true to a certain extent, but from my own observations, it is the teachers' interactions with the test that are fundamental here. Teachers, in my experience, respond very differently to the same test: while many teachers do manage to incorporate examination preparation into a successful learner-centred course, some teach to the test without focussing on the underlying language skills required; others continue as they always have done while paying lip service to the test; others practise the test tasks without actively teaching language skills at all. The

question arises as to how far the different responses are due to the culture within which the teachers are working and how far to their own attributes.

This leads to the concept of fairness and bias. A learner who has experience of western examination practices, and has a teacher who understands in depth the requirements of the test in question, is far more likely to succeed than a learner with the same level of language skills but without the above advantages. This further explains why an educated European learner, for example, stands a far higher chance of passing the test than a refugee with an interrupted or non-existent formal educational background. There are ethical issues here as claimed by Shohamy (2000) in her writing about critical language testing and its use for social, educational and political purposes, including gate-keeping, given that a test cannot be separated from the uses to which the results will be put, sometimes retrospectively.

The question is, who can rectify this? The ethical side of high-stakes testing has been discussed for many years by, among others, Spolsky (1981), Bachman (2005), and Kunnan (2008), but they stress the responsibility of the awarding bodies. Alderson and Wall (1993:116), rightly in my view, did not concur with this: 'It is not at all clear that if the test does not have the desired washback, that this is necessarily due to a lack of validity in the test'. I suggest that awarding bodies can only go so far and that the teachers' employers, teacher educators and the teachers themselves must take some of the responsibility; this is the basis of this research.


### 3.3 The Skills for Life speaking test

The underpinning phenomenon in this thesis is the speaking and listening test itself, and the degree of understanding of the rationale behind the testing items that the teachers have in order to fulfil their role in Figure 3 (Chapter two). This test constitutes one of the three

modes of the Skills for Life ESOL examinations mentioned in Chapter two.  I will be

focussing on learners at Entry 1 - Entry 3, which equate to A1, A2 and B1 respectively in the

CEFR.   The test takes place in the candidates' place of study.  There are four people in the

examination room: two candidates, an interlocutor and an assessor.  The interlocutor is a

member of the teaching staff from the same institution and is usually the candidate's own

teacher.  The interlocutor has a 'frame' or script to flow in the interests of parity for all

candidates.  The assessor is employed by the awarding body and sits at a suitable distance

from the interaction.  The criteria for the positioning are: the candidates should not be

distracted by the assessor; the candidates should not be able to see the marks being given; the

assessor should be able to hear clearly what is being said.  The assessor also has a mark

scheme against which to mark the candidates' performance.  The mark scheme is not in the

public domain so cannot be included here.  The content of the test is shown in Figure 9

overleaf:

**Fig 9:  Format of the Skills for Life speaking and listening test for ESOL learners**.

|  | **Entry 1** | **Entry 2** | **Entry 3** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1a | The interlocutor asks each candidate in turn simple personal questions designed to elicit factual information.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*LR to spoken language: questions*<br><br>*SC basic information* | The interlocutor asks each candidate in turn straightforward personal questions designed to elicit factual information, personal experience, wishes and opinions.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*LR to spoken language: questions*<br><br>*SC  straightforward information, feelings and opinions* | The interlocutor asks each candidate introductory questions. Candidates then ask each other questions on a given familiar topic, elicit factual information, personal experience, wishes and opinions.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*LR to spoken language*<br><br>*SC  straightforward information, feelings and opinions, using appropriate formality*<br><br>*ED responding to what others say* |
| 1b | The candidates ask each other simple questions on a familiar topic. Only the questions are assessed.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC basic information* | Candidates talk in turn for one minute on a personal topic, designed to elicit factual information and personal experience, before answering two questions prepared by their partner.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC information feelings and opinions on familiar topics* | Candidates talk in turn for one and a half minutes on a familiar topic, designed to elicit factual information, personal experience, wishes and opinions. They will each then answer three questions prepared by their partner.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC information, feelings and opinions on familiar topics, using appropriate formality*<br><br>*ED  responding to what others say, including feelings and opinions* |
| 2a | Candidates listen to two short recordings and answer questions designed to test gist and detailed understanding of simple factual information. The questions are presented orally, with picture prompts.<br><br>Assessment focus:<br><br>LR | Candidates listen to two longer recordings and answer questions designed to test gist, main points and detailed understanding of straightforward information. The questions are presented orally, with picture prompts.<br><br>Assessment focus:<br><br>LR | Candidates listen to two longer recordings with more complex information and answer questions designed to test gist, main points and detailed understanding of information, tone of speaker, intention, etc. The questions are presented orally, with prompts.<br><br>Assessment focus:<br><br>LR |

| 2b | Candidates speak together on a simple topic thematically linked with the previous task and designed to elicit factual information, personal experience and (dis)likes.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC feelings and opinions on familiar topics*<br><br>*ED in a familiar situation about familiar topics* | Candidates speak together on a straightforward topic thematically linked with the previous task and designed also to elicit opinion and justification.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC straightforward and detailed information*<br><br>*ED in a familiar situation to establish shared understanding* | Candidates speak together on a topic thematically linked with the previous task. In the first part of this phase, there is a prompt card asking them to plan an activity together. The interlocutor will then ask questions to lead the discussion into other related topics. The task is designed also to elicit speculation.<br><br>*Assessment focus:*<br><br>*SC information, feelings and opinions on familiar topics*<br><br>*ED  seeking opinions, making relevant points and responding to what others say, including feelings and opinions* |

UCLES (2016b)

Key:  LR – Listen and Respond, includes relevance of responses, asking for clarification

 SC - Speak to Communicate, includes grammatical accuracy, range of language, pronunciation (At Entry 3: organisation of discourse with common linkers)

 ED – Engage in Discussion, includes interactive communication (at Entry 3: seeking and responding to information, feelings and opinions

NB - The assessment criteria for grammatical structures, functions of language use, sentence structures etc. are all based on the requirements of the ESOL Core Curriculum.

The construct of the tests was drawn up with the intention of having positive washback on the socio-cognitive approach to teaching that currently prevails in ESOL classrooms in order to prepare learners for life in the UK (Taylor 2003).  In an attempt to address the issue of authenticity as described in Chapter two, the view was that, while a test obviously cannot replicate real life, it can come close to the types of interaction that take place in the classroom (Jones 2013). Taylor mentions three elements, the first of which is that the candidates are examined in pairs.  The rationale for this is that the classroom interaction that is now considered desirable is learner-centred and sometimes learner-led so that there can be

'candidate-candidate interaction as well as candidate-examiner interaction' (Taylor 2003:2).

The advantages of this are that as well as encouraging more pair work in the classroom, it better reflects the real world. During the test it creates more speaking time for the candidates and allows for a broader range of language functions e.g. agreeing, disagreeing and initiating.

Another aspect of the paired format which is still being researched is the effect of variables between the two candidates (Chambers et al 2012, Galazci 2014). A difference in language level was not shown to have a significant effect as this is overt and interlocutors and examiners can manage this. However, such personal attributes as personality, familiarity with the 'game', cultural capital, gender and status are less immediately obvious in their effects. These are not inauthentic as learners do encounter a range of such attributes in real-life encounters but the question remains whether they are fair in an examination context.

The second element is the multi-part test format, which Taylor justifies by claiming that it 'allows for different patterns of interaction' (2003:2). This partly solves the problem of the tendency for one-to-one speaking tests to become interviews instead of conversations, thereby showing 'features of formal interviews, for example asymmetry and interviewer control' (Simpson 2006:43). I say 'partly' because many current tests still contain an element of the interview in one or more parts, and these present particular problems. Also the candidate – candidate interaction can never really replicate real life as they are pragmatically in an examination situation and not really engaged in the content of the discussion as explained in the previous chapter.

The move towards a more varied format is part of a shift towards of 'learning oriented assessment' (Jones 2013) and applies the 'can do' approach of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) with its more explicit constructs of language ability. This is the basis of the third element of Taylor's outline of the 'concern for authenticity', which is 'the use of analytical

and global criteria' (2003:2). This refers to the point that it is not only lexical, grammatical and phonological accuracy and range that are being tested but also more pragmatic features of discourse and communicative competence such as turn taking and identifying feelings.

This is all with the best intentions on the part of test designers, but herein also lie problems for the learner and therefore the teacher. As I see it, these problems are rooted in the degree of intercultural competence (Sercu 2010, Byram 1997) that the learners have. Intercultural competence is an extension of the socio-cultural competence discussed in Chapter two as it incorporates the ability to 'interact socially with someone from a different country' (Byram 1997: 32). Byram presents four aspects of this ability: 'knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction' (1997: 33). Sercu (2010:22) describes 'intercultural competence' as having three facets: affective (intercultural sensitivity), cognitive (intercultural awareness), and behavioural (intercultural adroitness). Both of these analyses encompass awareness that social mores can differ and that intercultural competence involves the ability to identify differences and to behave accordingly. These skills are of particular significance in areas where ethnic diversity is a major feature. As far as assessment is concerned, there are differences in approaches and accepted behaviours in a test situation. An example of this is the acceptability of questioning examiners, which varies in different parts of the world. In the speaking examination that is the focus of this thesis, candidates asking the examiner for clarification is seen as a positive demonstration of communicative competence. Therefore, part of the intercultural competence that learners being assessed in a different culture need to demonstrate is an understanding of not only the examination 'game' but the western version of it. This is an issue which applies not only to those with no testing experience but also those educated in another culture where the approach may be different. The testing of language knowledge through its application for communicative purposes, while a move in the interests of

relevance and accessibility, creates a situation where, although not explicitly stated in the mark scheme, the interculturally competent candidate will score better than one who is less so. McNamara and Roever (2006) touch on the same ground when they refer to an aspect of pragmatic competence, which is 'sociopragmatic' knowledge. They define this as 'knowledge of the target language community's social rules, appropriateness norms, discourse practices and accepted behaviours' (2006:55). Learners now not only need to gain this competence in the domain of everyday life but also in the domain of the test, which is very different, as noted in the previous chapter. The testing of language knowledge through its application for communicative purposes, while a move in the interests of relevance and accessibility, creates a situation where, although not explicitly stated in the mark scheme, the interculturally competent candidate will score better than one who is less so. It is my observation as a teacher and an examiner that many ESOL learners who have been resident in the UK for a considerable length of time have acquired the former but not the latter. This presents for the teacher a new dimension to teaching. As intimated in Chapter two, teachers can teach learners how to respond during a consultation with the doctor but the 'pragmatic intention of a speaking test' is very different (Simpson 2006:44). When talking to the doctor, the main intention of the interaction is to impart or obtain information, whereas in a speaking test, the vehicle is an artificially created interactive situation where the aim is to demonstrate linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. The examination setting intrinsically does not and possibly cannot address this issue so if the examination room effect is to be mitigated, the solution would seem to lie in the classroom, to be identified and addressed by the teacher.

The artificiality of a speaking test is compounded by the existence of an 'interlocutor frame'. This has been introduced in several English language examinations and is essentially a script for the examiner in order to standardise the test for all candidates (Taylor 2003). The advantage of this is that the level of the interlocutor language is therefore fixed, as is the

cognitive complexity of the questions.  This is in the interests of reliability in an examination that is taken by large numbers of candidates all over the country; it does mean, however, that in the 'interview' question and answer phases, where in the real world there would be a response and/or follow-on questions based on the first reply, the interlocutor is restricted to such questions as 'why' or 'what about you?' (to the second candidate).  The result is that very often one question and answer exchange is followed by 'Thank you', and then by another unconnected and therefore uncontextualised question, thus unnaturally raising the level of difficulty. Another flaw in the interlocutor frame concept is that the input can only be standardised as far as it appears on the page; there is substantial scope for variation in delivery – in terms of speed, use of stress and intonation to aid comprehension and, very often, the interlocutor's own pronunciation (Lazaraton 2002).  Another related problem is that if the interlocutor deviates from the frame in order to support a struggling candidate, they can make the situation worse by confusing the candidate (Simpson 2006).  It has to be noted that in the Skills for Life speaking and listening tests, the interlocutor is a teacher at the institution where the tests are taking place, usually the candidates' own teacher.  This also confuses the candidates in terms of pragmatics as there is now a confusion between the classroom situation and the examination situation.  Their friendly, supportive, teacher unexpectedly becomes an impersonal examiner showing no real engagement.  The teachers, therefore, need to be very clear in their own understanding of what the test is in terms of how far it relates to the pragmatics of real life and how far to those of a test/interview in order to help the learners in this.  As the training of these interlocutors is the responsibility of the institution and not the awarding body, there will be considerable variation in how this awareness is raised, if at all.

### 3.4  The learners

The task of the teacher is also to support each learner based on individual cultural and social experience and background, which requires knowledge not only about the learners but also about the cultures and histories of the countries from which they come.  As with most adult education classes, there is a range of other variables across the three groups of ESOL learners, such as age, languages spoken in the home and at work, and length of time in the UK.  Koda (2004:7) adds to this other more directly learning-related variables such as 'second language (L2) linguistic knowledge, cognitive maturity, and conceptual sophistication', all of which may be more difficult to gauge in the initial stages of a course.

The manifestation of such variables in an ESOL classroom in England and Wales can be significant given that the learners may come from worlds, cultures and histories of which the teacher has no direct experience.  This is further complicated for teachers of learners with low levels of literacy as they 'cannot know what it is to learn that language and at the same time be acquiring first time alphabetic literacy as an adult learner' (Vinogradov 2013:17).  There has also been research in cognitive psychology suggesting that literacy and lack of literacy can result in cognitive differences (Paran and Wallace 2016: 443).

One aspect of this as shown in research is that alphabetic print literacy affects phonemic and phonological awareness and therefore  affects the performance of adults on oral second-language processing tasks (Bigelow et al. 2006,  Kurvers, van Hout, & Vallen 2007, Tarone & Bigelow 2005, Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen 2007,  Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen 2009).

For example, Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen (2007) studied two groups of learners at the same language level, but one group had high alphabetic print literacy and the other low.  The results showed that with the group with low alphabetic literacy, oral corrective feedback was less effective, ability to recall and reproduce spoken utterances was reduced and also the

more literate group produced more complex syntax and more grammatically correct sentences in term of verb morphology and plurals.

This indicates that the acquisition of grapheme-morpheme correspondence changes the way oral language is processed (Tarone 2010). It would seem that non-readers rely on 'semantic processing strategies as opposed to morphosyntactic processing strategies' (Bigelow and Tarone 2004:685) as they may not notice the detail of morphological or syntactic difference. This research led to the conclusion that non-readers learning an L2 have 'excellent strategic competence in using the interlanguage that they have but need more explicit feedback techniques in order to stimulate noticing' (Tarone et al 2007) and thus increase the accuracy of their language use. This would indicate that in the assessment process learners acquiring literacy for the first time are likely to achieve less well in speaking as well as reading and writing. This would apply particularly to criteria relating to grammatical accuracy and range; the ability to communicate may well be evident.

In a broader educational sense, Kurvers et al (2006) argue that non-readers actually think differently because they favour their own knowledge and experience over information that they a might read or hear. They followed on from earlier work done by Luria (1976) in presenting non-readers with syllogisms (Kurvers et al 2006:83):

> Syllogism posed: All stones on the moon are blue. A man goes to the moon and finds a stone. What colour is that stone?
>
> The answers from three respondents were:

- *Black because it's very hot there*
- *Surely there are no stones on the moon*
- *I have to see it first*

In connection with this 'they (non-readers) are pragmatic thinkers who look for the immediate relevance to their lives of what they are learning' (Vinogradov and Bigelow

(2010:3). This may also affect the activities they engage in in the class and ultimately their learning. Gunn (2003), researching adult migrants in Australia found that when learners were asked to locate their birthplace on a map and tell a story about their journey to Australia which included their birthplace, 'a new energy became evident' (2003:49). This was corroborated by Condelli and Spruck Wrigley (2006) in the USA, who found that such learners responded more readily to learning to read from authentic texts that relates to their everyday life. By using these materials 'for cognitive involvement, teachers can create interest, maintain high levels of motivation, engage students' minds and through this process build literacy skills that have importance in the lives of adults' (Condelli and Spruck Wrigley 2006:128). The same principle of relevance may apply to being assessed, as lack of education means not only a lack of literacy but also study skills and awareness of the fundamental concepts of assessment (Juffs 2006) as these factors appear neither in their life history or their current everyday life. Also the contexts covered in an external test, while similar to their own, will not connect directly with the individual learner's life.

Overall, lack of schooling leads to different stimuli experienced in childhood and adolescence for example, reliance on the spoken word and different processes of critical thinking. This means that such learners have different cognitive development paths, which the teachers do not relate to because of their own privileged educational history as teachers, which can be a considerable challenge for both learner and teacher, and may affect performance in tests of speaking as well as of reading.

### 3.4.1 The learners and the examination process

There are a number of challenges associated with assessing ESOL learners with limited formal education, which apply not only in the UK but in other countries where refugees apply

for asylum, and concern ever shifting policies on immigration and citizenship (McNamara 2012, Kurvers and Spotti 2015, Simpson 2015). I will consider three of these challenges: the need for assessment, the diversity of the learners, understanding the needs of the learners.

Firstly, in addition to funding strategies as described in Chapter One, immigration and citizenship policies that require a certain level of language and cultural knowledge have created a need for testing. In the US the citizenship tests are seen to disadvantage those with little or no schooling as they do not have the underlying skills for 'understanding or explaining theoretical concepts such as Constitution, Branches of Government and Balance of Power' ( Spruck Wrigley 2015:229). In the Netherlands, the washback of immigration tests on 'integration courses' in the 1990s meant that teaching was geared to passing the test rather than preparing migrants for life in the new country. Also there was 'the unlikelihood that unschooled migrants will pass the exams and get a residence permit' (Kurvers and Spotti 2015:182).

Secondly, the diversity of the learners in terms of cultural background, age, educational levels has to be seen in the context of the prevalent concept of national unity of which the essential ingredient is perceived to be knowledge of the language and culture of the host country (Hamilton and Hillier 2009, Kurvers and Spotti, 2015, Simpson 2015). This combines with the lack of appreciation on the part of governments of the educational and social value of multilingualism, which has led to the failure of teaching and testing regimes to identify with polylingual environments or language practices.

Thirdly, there is the challenge of creating awareness of the needs of such learners in terms of both teaching and assessment. The lack of awareness is manifested in many ways, for example, the current system in the Netherlands involves self-study toolkits, which require quite a sophisticated metalinguistic awareness as a foundation. 'Twenty-five years of

research on unschooled adult second language learners has brought ample evidence that learning to read and write for the first time in a new language cannot be done simply via a self-study toolkit' (Kurvers and Spotti 2015:181). An example of construct irrelevant variance (Koretz 2008), also coming from the Netherlands, is the introduction of tests of reading aloud, assessed through electronic speech recognition. The flaw in this is that those test takers who do not pronounce the words in a standard fashion, accepted fashion (McNamara 2012) are not credited with either recognising the words or understanding the meaning of the text. They are in fact being judged by their pronunciation which may have little bearing on their ability to gain meaning from written text.

In Australia, the main form of assessment is classroom based, whereby the teacher designs the testing tools, delivers them and assesses the students' performance according to a set of centrally provided standards. Research carried out into the validity and reliability of this has raised concerns about standardisation of the difficulty of the assessed tasks and the standardisation of marking, which indicates a need for more effective teacher education in the field of assessment (McKay and Brindley 2007, McNamara and Roever 2006)). Also the views of the teachers are that so much teaching time is taken up preparing for and carrying out the assessments that there is little time to devote to the skills the learners need in order to improve their life opportunities (McKay and Brindley 2007) .

In the context of these challenges, I will look more closely at the interface between current assessment practice and learners in England and Wales. Some research has been carried out in this area, focussing on learners' responses in the examination room. This research indicates the need for improved awareness of the examination culture (i.e. assessment literacy) to be engendered in the classroom. As described above, the learners provide a number of variables in the examination process during both preparation and the test itself. It is not just communicative language ability that varies, but also factors such as motivation,

age, examination experience, experience of interviews, experience of the target culture, confidence, personality, memory, concentration, cognitive style, and emotional state (O'Sullivan and Green 2011, Bachman 1990). An important variable is their background knowledge of the examination phenomenon or 'schema', defined as 'common knowledge of shared experience and conventionally sanctioned reality' (Widdowson 1990:102). These variables could be seen as 'construct irrelevant variables' (Koretz 2008) as they are being tested in facets which do not relate to general communicative competence. A previous study that I undertook (Allemano 2013) focused on the assessment of the reading of ESOL learners who are acquiring literacy for the first time. The learners who participated in the research had by this time learnt to read well enough to understand the texts on the paper and 73% of the wrong answers were found to be as a result of not understanding the concept behind the question, with such errors as answering the question from personal experience rather than the text, and not ticking the 'no' answers in yes/no questions as it is counter-intuitive to them to give a positive indicator (a tick) to the negative word 'no'. Although the tasks followed a standard format from paper to paper, the respondents had not grasped what was expected.

There have also been studies into the way learners with little or no experience of testing respond to a speaking test. Simpson (2006) carried out research consisting of an analysis of recordings of speaking tests and comparing these with post-test conversations between the learners and the interlocutor and the assessor. As in my research on reading, the results showed that the learners did not grasp the pragmatics of an examination. One example of evidence for this is that they would answer questions very briefly instead of extending their answers to demonstrate their competence. This is supported by a point that I have noticed as an examiner, which is that candidates tend not to interact with each other when asked to do so but continue to address the interlocutor. This may be because they are not aware that their ability to interact in a non-interview situation is also being tested.

Simpson (2006) also suggested that respondents who were refugees or asylum seekers might feel threatened by such questions as 'Why did you come to the UK?' as usually such a question is based on power and an underlying threat of not being able to remain. As can be seen in the previous chapter, in an examination the point is to answer questions fully and accurately, with the truth not being of interest. On the other hand, in real life a critical understanding of how much information to divulge may be paramount.

However, as with the respondents in my research on reading (Allemano 2013), Simpson's (2006) respondents showed much better communicative competence outside the examination room. Therefore, in both cases, true ability is not being tested. Simpson (2006) concluded that learners who 'have not had access to basic schooling... lack experience of what is expected in formal teaching and learning situations rendering the teaching of test taking techniques difficult. Ultimately, we may question whether it is fair to expect migrant learners with little or no previous educational experience to possess appropriate and adequate frame interpretations for a speaking test' (Simpson 2006:53). While I agree that it is not fair to expect this interpretative ability to be automatic, I would pose the further question as to whether, with appropriate guidance and awareness raising of their transferable skills, such learners can gain these attributes. The issue is, what kind of guidance is appropriate and what transferable real-life skills can be drawn on. Of course, this would vary from learner to learner and it falls upon the teacher to be aware of individual needs in this respect.

## 3.5 The teachers

McNamara (2000) argues that teachers tend to teach what will be tested; however, my question is to what extent this can be said to be true in the context of communicative language skills. Do the teachers always analyse an examination for the underlying sub-skills

tested? They know what the tasks in the test are and they know what is contained in the core curriculum, but are they aware of the true socio-cognitive nature of the test and are they aware of the educational and cultural capital of the learners?

My argument (Allemano 2011) has been that teachers are not being as pro-active as they could be because they are becoming deprofessionalised by the increasing managerialism since the introduction of achievement-based funding and the feeling that they no longer have control over their work. One reason for this may be that they have to abide by 'decisions made by leaders, not experts in the field, in order to implement aims set outside the institution' (Gewirtz and Ball 2000:255).

This has resulted in many teachers feeling demoralised. Whitty (2008) argues that the UK government has produced an alternative and increasingly dominant form of 'managerial professionalism' and that 'trends in decision making beyond the classroom have often restricted the extent to which teachers... have discretion' (29). As a curriculum manager during the initial years of this policy, I witnessed teachers, viewing the system as having been imposed by management, waiting for their managers to tell them how to prepare their learners for the examinations.

However, just as their learners are very different from each other, so are the teachers. Moon and Sunderland (2009) carried out some small-scale research into what shaped teachers' pedagogical practices in teaching basic literacy. The research took the form of a series of case studies investigating teachers' stories, that is, aspects of their past lives that had influenced their approaches to teaching. Baynham et al (2007) had already pointed out that 'Teachers' professional life stories and learning histories contribute to the stance that they take up in relation to their current professional practice and working environment' (38) . Ivanic and Tseng (2005) and Gertzman (2001) took a similar stance. Moon and Sunderland

(2009) highlighted 'the important role that wider life experiences play in shaping what is important to teachers, their views and professional practices' (2009:12). Baynham (in an interview with Mary Weir, 2006) linked this with the notion of professionalism by saying 'People would be less prey to the fluctuation of policy directions if they had a professional sense of who they were and what they thought was the right way to do things' (Baynham and Weir 2006:29). In order to help teachers to develop this 'sense', it would be beneficial for teacher educators to have awareness of the ways in which life experiences affect teachers' current attitudes towards examination preparation; hence the question about teachers' past experience posed by this research.

Another aspect of the teachers' role in the examination process, which may also be affected by past experiences, is the way in which they function as interlocutors in the Skills for Life speaking tests, as mentioned above. Simpson (2006:53), during his research, observed that teachers differed in their approach, sometimes trying to give support, thereby confusing the candidates more: 'A strong interpretation of such assistance would suggest that the interlocutor has not accepted the nature of the communicative event, and is assisting the learner as one might expect a teacher to do'.

The teachers can be seen as the main filter between the awarding body and the learner (fig 3), but they are also at the mercy of the system in terms of the effects of management strategy, washback, and lack of support, as discussed earlier. The focus of this proposed research is to explore what lies behind this position in terms of the myriad variables that form teacher cognition: linguistic ability, training, motivation and teachers' own cultural capital regarding examinations that form teacher cognition.

### 3.5.1 Teacher Cognition

Much research has been carried out into the ways in which teacher practice is shaped, based on the thought processes of the teachers themselves and the influences on these thought processes, and a wide range of terminology has been used to refer these components of teacher cognition. Borg (2006: 41-45) lists 35 of these components along with their definitions. The three in his list that are most relevant to this research are 'knowledge of learners' (Wilson, Shulman & Richert 1987) and 'theoretical orientations' (Harste and Burke 1977), which refers to 'belief systems and philosophical principles employed by teachers to develop expectations about students and make decisions about classroom life' (Borg 2006:45) and 'beliefs' with the definition of 'attitudes and values about teaching, students, and the educational process' (Pajares 1993: 46).

All of the terms are seen to inform teacher cognition (Borg 2003, 2006). The subtitle to Borg's (2003) article on teacher cognition is 'A review of research on what teachers think, know, believe and do'. The subtitle therefore may be taken as a definition of 'cognition' as Borg saw it at that time. It would seem that 'cognition' is used here to describe a culmination of thinking, knowing, believing and eventually doing. In my view, there is an ontological difference between the first three verbs and the last. The first three relate to thought and as such are unobservable, whereas 'doing' is potentially informed by some or all of the first three and is observable. This is represented to a certain extent in the model of thought and action drawn up by Clark and Peterson:
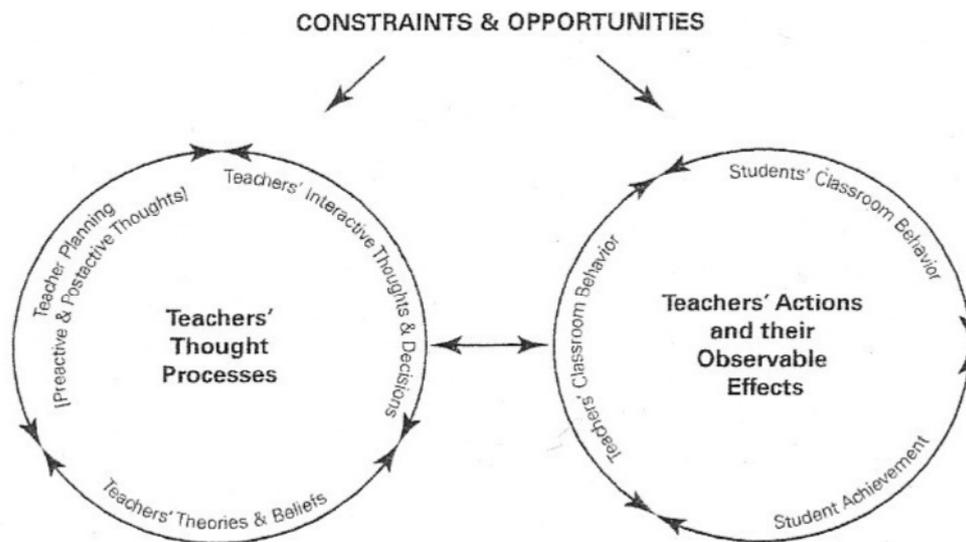
**Fig. 10: A model of thought and action (Clark and Peterson 1986:257)**

What this model does not explicitly include is knowledge. This could be seen as the foundation of theories and beliefs. However, what is important are the sources of teacher knowledge, which could be based on a combination of experience of teaching and instruction or study, as in teacher education. An alternative source of 'knowledge' is experience of being involved in the education process as a learner. This may be restricted in terms of context so that theories and beliefs can be based on 'an incomplete knowledge,' which may well not have involved conscious thought processes at the time.

Here there is a connection with the Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. This was defined by Bourdieu as a commodity formed of 'knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications' (1991:14), which is passed on through family background, peer groups and education. The implications of this definition is that these 'acquisitions are synonymous with advantage and are not equally distributed within society' (ibid). Although the notion was introduced originally to refer to the effects of social class: 'to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes' (Bourdieu 1986: 243), which is a huge area in its own right, it also has

implications for the multicultural classroom. There is usually a situation where the 'cultural capital' of the teachers is very different from that of their learners, who will also differ from each other. Learners who had disrupted education will have different cultural capital from those who did not. Even among those who are well educated there will be differences as their 'cultural capital' may not transfer from one country to another and so the expectations of education may be different; for example in some countries the acquisition of practical knowledge may take precedence over critical thinking, or in language learning, grammar and vocabulary are seen as more important than communicative competence. I argue that 'assessment literacy' is part of 'cultural capital' as it is something beneficial, in terms of 'knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions' (Bourdieu 1991:14), that is gained through taking examinations during one's educational career. This would suggest that in a multi-cultural and multilingual classroom, difficulties with the expectations of examinations may present themselves – not just for the learners with little experience of education, but for highly educated learners as well.

Bourdieu presents the world as accumulated history (1986:241). One of his three forms of cultural capital concerns 'long lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (243), the seeds of which are planted at the earliest stages of cognition in 'families endowed with strong cultural capital' (246), resulting in 'incorporation, assimilation and sustained accumulation, often unconsciously '(244). The effects of differences in learners' cultural capital inherited from their family background has been studied in a range of educational fields but the focus here is the teachers' awareness of their own cultural capital. Borg's (2003:82) model (fig.10) reflects this, in the top left-hand corner, as schooling appears here as 'shaping perceptions' before initial training.

**Fig. 11: Borg's model of thought and action**

*Extensive experience of classrooms which defines early cognitions and shapes teachers' perceptions of initial training.*

*May affect existing cognitions although especially when unacknowledged, these may limit its impact.*

**Schooling** → **Professional Coursework**

*Beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphors, conceptions, perspectives.*

**TEACHER COGNITION**

*About teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, self.*

**Contextual Factors** → **Classroom Practice including practice teaching**

*Influence practice either by modifying cognitions or else directly, in which case incongruence between cognition and practice may result.*

*Defined by the interaction of cognitions and contextual factors. In turn, classroom experience influences cognitions unconsciously and/or through conscious reflection.*

This is seen primarily as affecting pre-service teachers before they embark on teacher education but it cannot be assumed that these perceptions will change as a result of teacher education and experience of teaching. It is interesting that the word 'perception' does not appear in any of the 35 terms relating to teacher cognition mentioned above, but it does appear in Borg's model (fig. 11) 'in relation to experience and early cognitions'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), one definition is 'an interpretation or impression based on one's understanding of something'. It is on the foundation of these two references and connections with phenomenology that I now define the term 'perception' as I use it for the purposes of this work and indicate how it can be applied to the teaching role.

For clarity, I will henceforth refer to the 'something' in the OED definition as a phenomenon. A perception is seen as a response to or interpretation of **a phenomenon** which would first have to be observed by the perceiver. This **observation** stage, requires noticing in the first instance. The existence and extent of the noticing will already depend on the value attached to the phenomenon by the individual and on the lens through which something is observed. It

would depend, for example, on how informed the observer is of the context and how far the observer understands or retains this information. It also depends on the degree of attention the observer pays to the phenomenon in question. The second stage, **the interpretation**, almost certainly involves the application of criteria for measurement or benchmarks, drawn up by the perceiver. These could be influenced by the observer's own history in relation to similar phenomena (other examinations) or cultural capital (Bourdieu), related experience or current constraints such as pressure or relationships with other professionals, which would all combine to form an attitude. This relates to Heidegger's (1962) notion of 'Dasein', which presents individuals as 'beings in the world', who evaluate their surroundings in relation to their own histories and culture, either consciously or unconsciously.

The two stages can then be brought together in different ways to form an **overall perception** depending on how the perceiver places 'self' in relation to the phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty 1962); on a practical level, this could be as someone who is an impartial observer, someone who will be affected by the phenomenon either directly or indirectly or someone who is a potential catalyst in its success, change etc. The level of awareness of this process in the mind of the perceiver may also be affected by their role. In Fig 12, I present the above in relation to my research question: What are teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing learners for Skills for Life English speaking and listening tests?

**Fig. 12: Perception in relation to research question**

**Phenomenon:**  An accreditation system imposed on a group of learners and their
          Teachers.

Teacher **observation** of and response to the phenomenon vis à vis their work,
their  personal histories, learner needs etc.

      Teacher **interpretations** in relation to learner views, attitudes and needs.
This is relative to the teacher's own workload, views of their role (and stake) in
the outcome.

**Perception:**  The view of the phenomenon and its context, which influences the
strategies teachers use, as potential catalysts, for achieving the desired outcome.

The research question is therefore set to investigate the ways in which the teachers respond to

the above-mentioned phenomenon given the factors influencing their observations and

interpretations.  It looks at teacher cognition as it is manifested in the washback of the

examinations in their classrooms, their awareness of the factors involved in testing speaking,

and their depth of understanding of the learners' perceptions of a testing system. In this

chapter I have situated this within current research and understanding and in the next chapter,

I establish how this research was formulated.

# Chapter four: What was done

In this chapter, I return to my research question about how teachers perceive their role in preparing their learners for examinations. Given the pivotal role of the teachers and the cultural and/or educational gap between them and their learners, a deeper understanding of their approach is required.

## 4.1  Overview of the research design

The research consists of case studies of five ESOL teachers who were preparing classes for the ESOL Speaking and Listening test that I was focussing on. The classes were all attended by learners with differing circumstances including those with little or no previous education. I conducted a 30-40 minute semi-structured interview with each participant teacher in order to find out how they positioned themselves in relation to government agencies, institutional management, awarding bodies and their own work. As preparation for the interview, they were asked to create an image to show this positioning. I recorded and transcribed the interviews and also wrote explanatory notes on their images as they talked about them. The interview was followed by a one hour observation of each one teaching their class. I wrote notes on the lesson as well as a series of questions to ask for clarification later. This was immediately followed by a second 30 minute interview, which was focused on the lesson, establishing their rationales, evaluations and comments on learner response and answering any questions I had.

## 4.2  Theoretical perspectives

A key concept in the research question is 'perception' as defined in chapter 3. It must be reiterated at this stage that the perceiver may not even be aware of their true perceptions on

which they may be basing their actions.  In order to gain greater understanding there may need to be conscious introspection, which may be self-directed or initiated with the support of others (e.g. a counsellor or trainer).  This thesis seeks to identity possible ways of implementing this.

The information I sought was therefore not directly observable or necessarily objective; it was only accessible through dialogue and actions; it was complex and open to multiple interpretations by both the respondent and the researcher, which were susceptible to change over the course of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).  These are not measureable through positivist paradigms, therefore a quantitative approach did not seem appropriate. This research needed a methodology that would lead to an awareness of the process (influences/factors) by which teachers' perceptions were formed and implemented by probing their inner thoughts and attitudes.  This led me to a qualitative approach.

This is a piece of research that stems from a social constructionist epistemology as there is an attempt to construct and establish meaning from the evidence that is apparent in teacher perceptions and actions.  The main point here is that the meaning is constructed from encounters in the world; thus different people will construct meaning in different ways depending on their experiences and external influences. Therefore it is important to know the social origin of the data given by the respondents so that their views are not seen in a vacuum but as a reflection of and maybe influence on the respondents' perception of their surroundings.  This should be applied not only to the present in the site being studied but to the past and over a broader range of sites.  'Because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object' (Crotty 1998:45).  This concept reappears in sociology in, for example,

Bourdieu's ideas of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986); in anthropology as Geertz's (1973) notion of culture being the source rather than the result of human thought; and in philosophy as through Husserl (1931) with his existentialist conception of humans as beings-in-the-world.  Because of this interdependence between a conscious subject and their world, it is necessary to take each respondent first as an individual with their own standpoints vis à vis the socio-cultural object, in this case the examination, and draw comparisons with others only if the data presents scope for this.

One way to uncover perceptions is through dialogue as 'only through dialogue can one become aware of others and interpret their meanings and intent' (Crotty 1998:76).  The theoretical perspective of this research situates itself best as symbolic interactionism, given that the 'emphasis (is) on putting oneself in the place of the other and seeing things from the perspective of others' (Crotty 1998:77).

 However, the underlying element of the research is phenomenology, as it refers to ESOL learners' interface with the phenomenon of the examination process and the ways in which the teachers relate to this. Bearing all of the above in mind, I chose to be guided by the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is 'committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith et al. 2009:1). As phenomenology concerns the ways in which people make meaning, it is seen as closely associated with cognition. 'IPA aims to understand how people make sense of events, relationships and processes in the context of their own particular lifeworlds' (Larkin et al 2011:330).  This is connected with hermeneutics, defined by Crotty (1998) as an interpretation of meaning, sometimes beyond the respondent's own understanding.  IPA in fact involves a double hermeneutic': 'the researcher making sense of the participant, who is making sense of the x' (Smith et al 2009:35).  However in the case of this research there is a

triple hermeneutic, that is the researcher making sense of the teacher, who is making sense of the learner, who is making sense of the examination.

It is important to note that for the purposes of IPA, cognition is not restricted to what takes place in the head, as it has influences and effects elsewhere. According to (Wilson 2002) one way of framing such investigations is to take six lenses: 1. situated, 2. temporal, 3. distributed, 4. engaged in the world, 5. action-oriented and 6. embodied. For the purposes of my research, four of these were relevant: 'situated 'as the research centres on the defined context of the workplace; 'distributed' as the cognition directly affects others, in this case the learners, and 'engaged in the world' and 'action oriented', as it can result in action. (This in fact would support Borg's (2003) use of 'do' in his subtitle 'what teachers think, know, believe and do', referred to in Chapter three). By using these lenses, I could ensure that the findings were clearly rooted in the cultural and historical context to which they applied.

Other features of IPA that apply to this research are:

- A commitment to the use of 'verbatim transcript data' with close attention to the functions of language.

- A focus on the social and cultural value of experience, therefore allowing for difference between respondents and valuing variables, which are often seen as limitations in research terms.

- A recognition of the restrictions of language as a means of expression and therefore interpreting actions as well.

- A recommendation of a case study approach and of a relatively small number of participants in order to allow for an in depth account of individual experience.

(Larkin et al 2011, Smith et al 2009)

I will return to these in the remainder of this chapter.

The fact that IPA offers an established, systematic and phenomenologically focused approach, which is committed to understanding the first person perspective from the third person position (Larkin et al 2011: 323), means that it is has some features of grounded theory, which 'seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data and not from some other source' (Crotty 1998:78). In line with the philosophical emphasis of phenomenology the aim is to establish truth of the 'phenomena in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears' (Moran, 2000:4). To this end, Husserl (1931) refers to the 'reference of phenomenology back to its own self' (189); thus, the investigation should be carried out from the respondent's perspective without preconceived notions on the part of the researcher, as these may impede understanding of the subject of investigation. As the researcher is almost certain to have preconceived notions, this in itself is a challenge which, in order to be overcome as far as possible, requires 'examination and then suspension of all suppositions about the phenomenon under investigation' (Larkin et al 2011:322).

In order to do this, because the focus of the research was the information gained from talking to and observing the work of the teachers, the observations drawn from the data collected had to relate solely to this information. The research sought to construct an emergent theory from the way in which teachers respond to the imposition of the examination on their courses with regard to their position in the 'field' and their personal cultural capital. The ways in which this was done are explained in the section on data collection later in this chapter.

## 4.3  The case study approach

Multiple, exploratory case studies were used as a focus for this research; multiple, in order to gain a wider view of possible influences; exploratory because, as yet, little is known about

the subject.  As I mentioned earlier, one feature of IPA is that it tends to be based on a small number of case studies.  This raises the reliability and validity issue of generalisation of the findings.  I used case studies precisely because there was to be no attempt at generalisation; their role is to produce a context through which to carry out an in-depth exploration of processes for establishing a range of potential individual perspectives.  This process may later inform techniques for enabling new teachers to develop awareness of their own approach to working with learners with different perspectives from their own.  In line with IPA, I elected to restrict the research to a total of five case studies in order to allow for a full and detailed analysis of the data at an individual level.

To follow Merriam's (1998) view of a case being a 'bounded system' in order to define the area of study, there needed to be, in this research, individuals and a site in which to operate (Hood 2009:68).  The site was the workplace, incorporating the learners, colleagues and management in the context of the examination in question.  It must be recognised, however, that the boundaries are somewhat fluid depending on the degree to which other factors in the teachers' lives, past and present, may arise and need to be considered.

The justifications for a case study approach are that the research sought to establish a narrative from a naturally occurring situation (Denscombe 2010); in other words, an exploration of an existing phenomenon, which the research process did not set out to affect.  In so doing, and by situating the research within the boundaries of the teacher perceptions, case studies provide the opportunity to explore the 'detailed workings of the relationships and social processes, rather than restrict attention to the outcomes of these' (Denscombe 2010:53).

They also focus on individual subjects and recognise difference by 'maximising our understanding of the unitary character of the social being or object studied' (Dörnyei 2007:152). This was important in this research as from the outset the purpose was not to generalise from the findings but to focus on individual narratives.

**4.4 The selection process**

The sites of the  research were two inner London ESOL providers, each of which was typical of its genre but differed from each other in size and complexity as one was a large further education college and the other was a local authority-run adult education service.  They were selected on the basis of convenience as they are both institutions where I have sufficient contact with the Heads of ESOL to gain access to programmes and the teachers.  My view was that taking teachers from two institutions would widen the scope and teachers in each were likely to have had different types and levels of support. The teachers taking part are representative of their profession in that, as with most teachers, they have a subject specific qualification and some experience of examination preparation.

Within the institutions, there was a need for an element of purposive sampling as it was important that the teachers were fully qualified for UK Qualified Teacher Status and that they had experience of teaching learners on ESOL courses which are accredited by the examination in question.  There was therefore some homogeneity in order to 'identify common patterns in a group with similar characteristics' (Dörnyei 2007:127).  However, in order also to gain a broader view, respondents varied in age, length of experience, gender, and ethnicity, in addition to being from two institutions.  Another common factor was that all of the respondents were known to me either as ex-colleagues or ex- trainees.  I was aware that this factor could have had two very different consequences, the first of which being an adverse effect on their confidence and honesty due to embarrassment.  I felt, however, that

the second consequence was more likely:  the respondents would see me as an outside ally in whom they could safely confide.  It was important that I was no longer active in either role and had left the institution where I had been a colleague.  I therefore no longer had any influence on their work but they all knew me well enough to be comfortable and trusting. They were all informed of the purposes of the research, were supportive of it while knowing that they could withdraw if they so wished at any time.

## 4.5  Data Collection

Overview: In the light of the previous discussion, Borg's (2003) subheading 'What teachers think, know, believe and do' provides a starting point for planning data collection.  In order to establish what teachers think and believe, interviews were set up to probe their thoughts about their own histories, their work and their learners.  Subsequent observations of classroom teaching established whether what the respondents think, know and believe were transferred into what they do.  Where available, I also looked at the respondents schemes of work in order to establish how and to what extent, the examination preparation was embedded in the course and whether this preparation was combined with integrated skills and communicative language teaching.

### 4.5.1 The interview: structure and rationale

The main data collection was done through in-depth, one-to-one interviews conducted face to face.  The interviews were based on a semi-structured format, thereby allowing for a significant amount of exploration into issues that arose during the interview.  There was an initial exploratory interview to encourage respondents to talk about their interpretation of their role in the wider field of the education infrastructure, their past experience of

examinations (particularly but not exclusively, speaking tests), their perceptions of how their learners view these tests, their educational and cultural history and current response to examinations and the best ways to prepare their learners for them.

However, there were two key issues here that needed to be taken into account. The first is the philosophical view that in research into perceptions certain problems arise as all of the above takes place within the mind and can only be revealed as far as the perceiver chooses or is able to reveal it. 'One person has no direct access of any sort to the events of the inner life of another' (Ryle 1949:16).

The second issue is that as well as having the capacity to reveal information about a respondent, language can also limit or distort (Heidegger 1971). In order to mitigate both of these issues to some degree, it was expedient to create a situation where the respondents could probe their own perceptions, in other words, to access their sub-conscious through analysing their own depictions. Therefore, in preparation for the interviews the respondents were asked to produce a picture or a diagram with the prompt: 'Please produce a graphic representation of your view of your role vis à vis the awarding body, management, the government, your learners and the examinations.' The ordering of the stakeholders in the request was random so as not to privilege any of them according to my own views. However, a prompt for the drawing was important so as to give them a brief that would ensure that each respondent was depicting the same subject without leading them in any particular direction. The use of a drawing had three further benefits: firstly to give them an opportunity to reflect before the interview so that they were in an analytical frame of mind from the beginning of the interview; secondly, to help ensure that the interview was focused on the respondent from the outset and they took the lead in providing the springboard for the rest of the interview. The third benefit was in connection with the instruction, which helped to position each

respondent within the site being investigated.  I pursue the value of drawing as a research tool in section 4.5.2.

The interviews were semi-structured in that there were some topics that needed to be covered in order to gain some congruity between the interviews and to address the research questions: examination experience as a narrative, feelings related to this, and the perceived effects on teaching.  The questions were divided into 'event' questions and 'perspective' questions (Richards 2009:188) and it was important that the former preceded the latter within each subject area in order to allow the respondent to situate the issue within their own experience first by describing or narrating (event) and thus lay the ground for introspection (perspective).

The semi-structured questioning was framed around the following questions and requests:

1. *Please talk me through your drawing* – This was an open, unbiased request.  As it was drawing on thoughts that the respondents had already processed through the action of doing the drawing, it meant that the respondent would combine the 'event' and 'perspective' angles in their own way.  Also, as mentioned above, one of the reasons for giving the drawing task, was to give the floor to the respondents for a considerable amount of time.  They were encouraged to talk further by such simple, clarification-seeking prompts as 'Why do you say this? What about (the students)?   What does this signify?'  This was in an attempt not to lead the respondents in any way and to allow them and therefore the data to speak for themselves as far as possible.

2. *What courses do you teach?* (Event).  What do you consider to be the purpose of the courses you teach? (Perspective).  This was an open question, again, to allow the respondents to go in any direction they wished.

The interview then moved on to the site under analysis:

3. *How do you incorporate exam preparation in your course?* (Event)

4. *How do you feel about the impact of the exams on your work?  Is there any conflict here?* (Perspective).  Some of the answers to the first question appeared in the explanation of the drawing but the second one required more introspective analysis.

5. *What is your experience of taking exams?* (Event).  This was taking the respondents outside of their current situated workplace.  After an initial answer this was then probed with further 'perspective' questions which followed the cues given.

6. *What experience do you think your learners are drawing on?*  (Perspective).  This and the next question were aimed at requiring the respondents to reflect on differences between their own worlds and that of their learners.  They were free to view this through any lens they chose: cultural capital, social capital, language learning etc.

7. *Do you think your own experience impacts on the way you teach?* (Perspective). This was a culmination of the previous four questions and required the respondents to probe areas they may not have thought about before.  There the possibility that the introspection that had taken place through the whole process so far, from drawing to interview may have led to a self-realisation which is a surprise to the respondent.

At the end of the interview I revealed my pre-research view of the position of the teacher and asked the respondents for their reactions to the positioning of the teacher in fig: 3 in Chapter two.  This was a further opportunity for reflection on their part vis à vis  their positioning and also it allowed me to see how close or far away from their thinking I was and to suppress or suspend my own preconceived notions as appropriate.

### 4.5.2  The use of drawings as a research tool

> Drawings offer a different glimpse into human sense making from writing or spoken texts because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not yet thought through, the subconscious (Haney et al 4004:241).

Subject-produced drawings date from the late 19th century and were initially used in the realm of child development (Ganesh 2011). They have continued to be used in order to elicit the perspectives and perceptions of children and young people in particular (Wheelock et al 2000, Haney et al 2004, Ganesh 2011, and Mitchell 2011).  It is clear that children may be less able to express their inner feelings through words alone but it is not clear why they have been less popular when researching the perceptions of adults as they too may find they can express the truth more accurately through an image.

While this may be so, the danger is then the accuracy of the interpretation as creative works are seen through the mind of the viewer.  As a consequence, the main concern regarding the 'validity of the subject produced drawing technique is the standardisation of the different coders or raters (Ganesh 2011: 11). In any case, it is often not possible to discern the subjects' true intent without speaking to them, especially where there is the use of metaphor, or, more importantly, where the subject is also learning about their own sub-conscious while analysing the picture.  These are mainly problems which arise with very large numbers but for a limited number of case studies, it is possible to ask the subject to produce the interpretation. This had the added benefit of engendering further reflection and giving the subject control when asked to interpret their picture in the interview without being led by questions from the interviewer, providing 'a tool to see how the participants constructed meaning from the images' (Mitchell 2011:124), and matching the principles of IPA.

The validity of drawings as a research tool is seen to be enhanced when they are analysed alongside other sources of data, which could be the subjects' verbal description, interviews observation, questionnaires or other data collections tools (Haney et al 2004, Ganesh 2011).

### 4.5.3   Observation

For triangulation purposes, in order not only to establish that teachers do what they say they do (Dörnyei 2007:185), or act according to their beliefs, but also 'to gain the broadest and deepest view of the issue from different perspectives (Hood 2009), each teacher was observed when teaching their classes.  The observations covered half of a three-hour class in each case, and so were roughly one hour and twenty minutes long, allowing for a break.  Some took place during the first half of the lesson and some the second.  The observation process also provided the 'distributed' and 'engaging with the world' lenses for the IPA approach.  This took the form of fieldwork observations in an attempt to observe lessons as far as possible as they normally happen (Denscombe 2010).  There is always the danger in such situations of the presence of the observer changing the behaviour of the respondents, who may feel they are being judged on their teaching skills and also of the respondents' teaching in accordance with their view of what the observer is looking for (Cowie 2009).  Furthermore, as observation is the first stage of the perception framework outlined in Chapter three, there is the danger of the observer's interpretations, and thus perceptions, affecting the validity of the research.  Denscombe (2010) outlines three ways in which this can happen:  first, selective recall, where the observer only remembers certain parts or aspects of what has been seen. Second, selective perception, where the observer only processes certain aspects of the proceedings, while 'putting up barriers to many others' (2010: 198).  Third, accentuated perception, where what the observer experiences is shaped by feelings at the moment and by significant lifetime experiences (198).   In order to prevent this happening the observer's data

from the observation took the form of a detailed narrative of what the teachers did, 'overt, observable behaviour '(Denscombe 2010: 201). The lessons were not recorded as the focus was not on detail but rather an overview of the teachers' approaches with reference to examination preparation and the views they stated in the preceding interviews.

As the focus of this research is teacher perceptions, which are not easily observable in an objective manner, the observations were immediately followed by 'retrospective interviews' (Dörnyei 2007:147), where the respondents again led the agenda. In these interviews there was an element of a form of stimulated recall (ibid). Prompted by the observer's narrative, the respondents provided a rationale for their actions and their perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness for their learners. Although the observer posed some questions such as 'Why…　?' or 'How did you feel about…?' the main focus of the interviews was the voice of the respondents as they can reveal aspects which are not visible to the learners such as their own underlying strategies and knowledge of the learners.

These interviews probed the teachers' reflections on the teaching again, beginning with narrative and rationale. The observations focused on the juxtaposition and balancing of language or skills work with direct examination skills, as well as the respondents' views of the responses of their learners.


## 4.6  Data analysis

As a result of the procedures for data collection described above, there were available for analysis, five of each of the following:

- Drawings
- Initial interview transcripts
- Observations notes
- Post observation interview transcripts

N. B There were also some schemes of work. (These were not forthcoming in most cases).

All the findings from each case study were kept separately from the others. This was because I was more interested to see how the data from each stage of the data collection for any given individual were inter-connected rather than how the cases related to each other.

As the data collection and the analysis were iterative with each stage informing the next and data being reinterpreted in the light of later findings (Dörnyei 2007:243), I transcribed and analysed each initial interview before I carried out the observation. The transcription process was the beginning of immersion in the data as this was followed by re-reading and checking against the recording.

The first part of the interview concerned the respondents' positioning of themselves and others, implying their notions of 'self' in the context of their work environment; therefore, I used an adapted version of the framework for analysis of identity as it emerges in interaction described by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) and also used by Simpson (2011) in an analysis of a manifestation of learner identity in a dialogue. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's version was based around narratives and there were three levels of analysis: the first level focuses on the way in which the speaker positions the players in their story vis à vis each other and within the wider context; the second level refers to the way in which the speakers in the interaction align themselves with each other; and the third level refers to the way in which the participants construct their own position during the narrative. My research is less about narrative and also the alignment with the interviewer was not of prime interest, although I planned to be aware of it in my discourse analysis (see below). For that reason, for the purposes of my data, I followed Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's model by establishing three levels but with a focus on one speaker rather than both. In my amended version, the first level is the respondents' views of their own position in the workplace; the second level is the way in which they position the other players in relation to each other and the wider context and the third is the development of self-realisation during the interview process. I then

considered the ways in which these levels of positioning related to the answers to later questions.

I used a first level form of open coding (Robson 2002) within each case study but it was used in order to provide a framework for the findings, rather than as a means of comparison because, as I mentioned earlier, in the first instance the case studies were approached as separate entities in order to retain the individuality of the cases. The coding was done on the basis of the three levels adapted from Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) described above. In order to do this I highlighted parts of the transcripts to show all references to three main themes: the respondents' view of their own position, their positioning of the other players in relation to each other and the wider context and lastly, the development of self-realisation. This coding was not restricted to the part of the interview which centred on the drawings as the above-mentioned three themes appeared as threads throughout the remaining questions in the interview. The responses on other themes, i.e. the purpose of the course, experience of examinations, and the learners' experience of examinations, occurred in conjunction with the questions.

For the observations, I first drew on my own written narrative taken during the lesson to give a descriptive overview and then coded the notes to cover references to each of three areas that I was interested in comparing with the outcomes of the initial interviews. These areas were: language and skills work, direct examination skills, and the teacher's view of the learner response. I then also used the analysed post-observation interviews transcripts using the same coding to explain, mitigate or elaborate on what I had seen and deduced during the observations themselves.

With the findings, I created two charts (see appendices 1 and 2) to provide an overview of the data from each respondent to try and establish their individual narratives. I added some fields which connected the initial interview with the focus on practice: planning, awareness of

examination needs, connections with their own experience, and connection with their professed view of self. It was at this point that I was able to view the findings laterally across all the respondents and identify trends or links at some level or other, explicit or implicit, factual or theoretical, psychological or philosophical.

### 4.6.1 Discourse Analysis

'Our interpretations of experience are always shaped by, limited and enabled by language' (Heidegger cited in Larkin et al 2011).

When reading the transcripts, I observed that a significant number of the respondents' viewpoints came over in the language that they chose to use. I had already considered drawings to allow the representation of ideas that the representation of experiences and perceptions that the respondents may feel are not best conveyed through language; I had already researched what the respondents 'do' to verify or question what they said but another important consideration was the way in which they said it. During interaction, especially when unplanned, a speaker makes spontaneous choices according to the genre, the socio-cultural context, the situation (Thornbury, 2005, Carter, 2002). Many of these choices are made subconsciously, and so in certain contexts a speaker uses words, structures or manner of speaking (register, pitch, volume, speed) to indicate reactions and emotions, often implicitly.

Therefore, as well as considering the content of the transcripts, I applied some principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2015) in order to gain enhanced meaning from the transcripts. The analysis was based on a framework provided by Fairclough (2015) and uses his terms to describe the use of lexis and grammatical structures in terms of their experiential and expressive values. For this purpose, 'experiential', refers to the way in which the

speaker's experience of her professional world is represented and encompasses knowledge and beliefs.  Some of this, in particular metaphor, can be used to refer to the visual images. 'Expressive' refers to the speaker's 'evaluation of the reality it relates to' (Fairclough 2015:130).  It has to be borne in mind that Fairclough designed this framework in the field of 'discourse and power' with a view to analysing discourse created for purposes of such kinds of influence as persuasion and domination.  He therefore also includes relational values in his framework, which are to do with the social relationship with the intended recipient of the discourse.  I did not find this relevant in this situation as the discourse was not designed to have a direct power-based impact on the recipient in terms of power relations as I, as the recipient, set out to be impartial.  The discourse was, however, intended to convey strength of feeling, possibly in order to secure empathy.  As the focus of this research was the ways in which the respondents connected with their role within the workplace, I focussed on Fairclough's terms 'experiential and 'expressive', which are used in the following way in my analysis:

**Fig. 13  Model of discourse analysis**

|  | **Choice of Lexis** | **Syntactical choices** |
|---|---|---|
| Experiential use | Synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy (including 'overwording' i.e. using many near synonyms indicating preoccupation  with an aspect of reality (Fairclough 2015:133) | Agency (including absence of agency) including the use of active or passive, nominalisation, word order |
|  |  | Positivity/negativity (to establish what is or is not the reality) |
|  | Collocation | Connectors (to indicate how the speakers see the relations between points made) |

| Expressive use | Implicit and explicit reference | Modality |
|---|---|---|
| | Positive and negative connotations | Coordination and subordination |
| | Metaphor | Syntactic referencing |

Adapted from Fairclough (2015:129-133)

It must be noted that a danger in critical discourse analysis is the subjectivity of the analyst, leading to assumptions about meaning which may be unfounded. Fairclough (2015) refers to three stages of discourse analysis: description, interpretation and explanation (128). The stages of concern here are the interpretation and explanation. In terms of the interpretation, is has to be recognised that the personality of the speaker also plays a role in language production, in, for example, intonation patterns and use of hyperbole, or understatement. This means that responses may seem stronger and weaker than they are in the speakers' minds. In this research, knowing the respondents quite well meant that to a certain extent I was able to identity deviation from or extension of their norms, but this is not necessarily reliable. When considering the explanation for language choices made by the respondents, it was essential for me to confront my own views, suppress them and approach the language used through the lens of the speaker.

**4.7 Ethical considerations**

The respondents in this case were qualified and experienced professionals, which made it more straightforward to explain the purpose of this research. There were, however, a number of ethical considerations to be taken into account. On the one hand, the researcher was an outsider working with the respondents and there was first and foremost concern over the power relationship between the respondent and the researcher. The teachers were being

asked to explore their histories and explain their practice and as a result there was a possibility that they would feel threatened regarding the motives of the researcher and thus have questions about the destinations and anonymity of data being recorded, for example, will this affect their future employability?  As part of the initial face-to-face approach to the respondents, it was made clear to them that the purpose was not to establish right or wrong methods or to investigate good practice. It was to explore with them the roots of their own perceptions and attitudes and to establish means of harnessing this to inform the approach taken by teacher educators.

In the classroom there were also the learners to be taken into account.  It was made clear to them in advance by their teachers that they were not being judged or inspected but this work was being done as part of good practice and development of knowledge.

There was a question concerning what the teachers themselves will gain from this.  It is important to present this work as the opportunity to take part in an interesting project and that they will be instrumental in the development of new techniques in teacher education.  It is important that they take part on an 'opt-in' approach based on interest.

It was important to make clear in a written document to the teachers that the information was confidential and the recorded data would be destroyed.  They were, naturally, assured that they could withdraw from the project at any time or request that their data not be used.


## 4.8 Challenges and limitations

One challenge here is ontological: that the research process itself may have affected the evidence available and therefore the evidence may not be a true reflection of respondent cognition.  The very fact of being asked about their practice was very likely to change the way in which the teachers responded.  'Humans react to the knowledge that they are being studied 'and 'there is the very real possibility that they acted differently from normal

(Denscombe 2010:19). The teachers may well have been embarrassed about the possibility of revealing that their practice was not acceptable or have been unwilling to endorse their actual association publicly in a drawing.  There was therefore a possibility that a picture would produce stereotypical images to meet the expectations of the viewer (Mercier et al 2006).  It remained important to be aware of this and to present the research in the light of exploration rather than judgement in this thesis and in any future publication.

Another point is hermeneutical:  I am taking hermeneutics to mean the understanding and interpretation of text in a way that may be 'deeper or go further than the author's own understanding'  as often 'authors' meanings and intentions remain implicit and go unrecognised by the  authors themselves' (Crotty 1998: 91).  This becomes a sharing of meaning, during which, in order to make sense, the interpreter will draw on personal history and experience.  If phenomenology is to be taken as back to the things themselves (Husserl 1971), researchers need to make every effort to avoid the interpretation being affected by their own cultural background.

This means that when doing this research I had to be aware of my own bias.  With several years of being involved in the examination process as a candidate, a teacher, an item writer, a rater and a teacher educator, I have my own schema and may have set ideas as to how the teacher role is to be approached.  'The nature of this kind of research is that there is scope for alternative and competing explanations' (Denscombe 2010: 21).  It was important to consider authentication of voice.  At the analysing data stage it was important to recognise the possibility that the words of the teachers could be interpreted in different ways especially as their perceptions may have been expressed implicitly e.g. through choice of language used or through omission.

This issue is compounded by the 'double hermeneutic', as explained earlier in this chapter, as at some stages the teachers were speaking for the learners and the researcher was speaking for the teachers, i.e. it involved the researcher making sense of the respondent making sense of the phenomenon. It therefore has to be recognised that when my respondents are talking about what their learners have said or done, they are again interpreting, possibly based on their own cultural capital.

It has been argued that in order to set aside the understandings we are 'already saddled with' (Crotty, 1998:79), it is advisable to confront them as we cannot ignore them or unlearn what we have already learned. The basis of phenomenology is that as observers, we are what we are, which is 'beings in the world.' Neither the researcher nor the respondent can be described apart from their world. Confronting one's own experience and beliefs creates the opportunity to dispel or at least suppress them for the purposes of the research. This was my rationale for presenting my position of the teacher to my respondents at the end of the interview. I chose to do this at the end so as not to influence what they said about themselves. They responded in very different ways, some modified my depiction, some turned it around completely and some agreed with it. This process helped me to focus my attention on them and what they said.

The generalisability of the findings has also to be considered. The small scale of the study means that the findings are not necessarily generalisable. The findings may be 'specific to, or dependant on the particular context in which the study took place' (Robson 2002:107). If the research is repeated with a different group in a different institution or with a different teacher, then other factors may emerge.

It is recognised that a case study approach per se can be criticised for not being generalisable but generalising from large number of responses about such personal perceptions can in any case be misleading, especially as the purpose is to explore variation. Dörnyei (2007) takes

the view that 'qualitative research is not overly concerned with generalisability as long as the researcher believes that the specific individual meaning obtained from the sample is insightful and enlightening' (153). I would argue that this is the case in this research as it did not seek generalisation; it was looking for potential issues that can affect teachers in their work (Moon and Sunderland 2009) and ways of helping them to probe and question their own perceptions.

## 4.9 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it has to be stressed that the research was iterative in that the stages were interdependent. In the lesson observations and the subsequent second interviews there was influence from the first interview, as I was seeking to verify or disprove what the respondents had said in their interviews. This was in order to ascertain the extent of both the real influence of their own cultural capital and of their perceived awareness of their role. The intention was for the research to take place in each case at a stage in the course where the learners were preparing for a speaking and listening examination in the near but not immediate future in order to avoid a specific examination practice lesson. Because of constraints of timing, there was one exception to this, which I refer to in the next chapter.

# Chapter five:  What was revealed

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from the data analysis described in Chapter four.  I give a very brief biography of each respondent in order to situate them within the 'field' that is under scrutiny.  I then give a narrative of the process for each one, describing the evidence, which is organised for each one according to the coding already laid out.  I also embed within the narrative an analysis of the respondents' choice of language according to the discourse analysis framework detailed in the previous chapter.  In the first instance, the individual cases should be considered as separate entities, any convergence is discussed in Chapter six.

For each case study, I begin with an analysis of the graphical illustration that the respondent had prepared in advance, under the headings of 'positioning of self', 'positioning of others' and then 'repositioning of self' (if applicable) as a result of the process of production and narration of their illustrations and then responding to my own representation.  This is followed by an analysis of the interview question by question, and then of the classroom observation, at each stage relating the findings to the previous stages.

The names of the respondents have been changed.

## 5.2 Case studies

**Case study one - Claire**
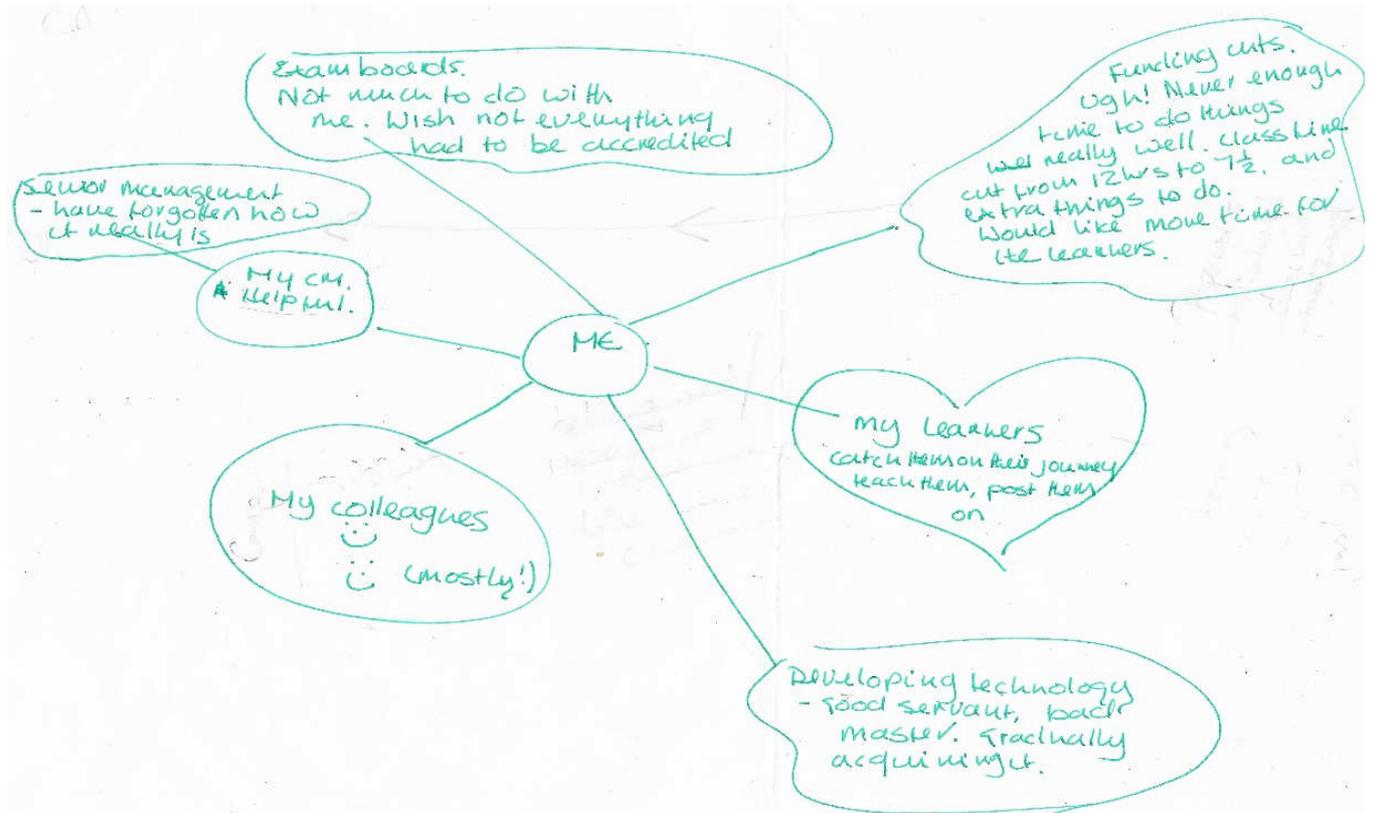


**Fig. 14  Claire's drawing**

Claire is a graduate who has been involved in English language teaching for about 15 years. She completed training up to Diploma level and she has a wide range of experience as a teacher of ESOL in the FE sector.  She has been preparing learners for Skills for Life English language examinations for over ten years.

**Positioning of self**

For the requested graphic representation, Claire positioned herself in the centre of a spidergram with the other players coming in from all angles. Her rationale for this is 'it's all from how I see it.' When describing the other players, she does so from the point of view of

their interaction with her and their resultant effect on her.  Her view is often more emotional than practical; for example, she refers to 'my lovely learners', who she had placed inside a heart shape in the spidergram.  Her colleagues are also viewed positively:  'I really like the people I work with, my room is lovely', 'and 'He's a nice guy' (her immediate manager).  On the negative side, senior management 'have lost the plot' and regarding the government, 'They don't understand.'  The effect of their actions on her is that she feels 'beleaguered' by demands that she feels interfere with the real purpose of her work. She also feels judged by her success rates.  She sums up her feelings as follows:

> I always like being on my feet in the classroom and that's the core thing isn't it? And I like the people I work with.  I just wish they [senior management and the government] would go away and let us get on with it, basically.

This use of 'we' and 'they' is a thread throughout the interview and is indicative of her stance.  Claire does not really see the world revolving around her as her spidergram might suggest, since in her speech she presents herself as working towards a common goal with her colleagues, although not necessarily as part of a team (see below for her positioning of her colleagues). She also sees management and the government as detached from her sphere of operation.

Her discourse indicates that she feels confident and secure in the position she has created for herself in spite of constraints: 'We understand and you [the government] don't, so just listen a minute!'  However, she feels she has little agency in decision-making regarding college and national policies. She confirms this towards the end of the interview in her response to my diagram: 'The teacher has bugger-all influence on what goes on'.  Her own position within her immediate environment is strong; she is an expert in her field but this is enclosed within a boundary that she feels is impenetrable.

**Positioning of others**

From Claire's positioning of herself is it clear that her colleagues are a positive element, her immediate (curriculum) manager is 'nice' and her learners are 'lovely'. The negative elements are the senior managers and the policy makers. In the spidergram, she places her learners, her colleagues and the curriculum manager nearest to her. These are the people who she is in face-to-face contact with and with whom she is happiest. Her learners are 'the best thing about the job' and provide her with motivation and job satisfaction: 'I never run out of interest in them'. They also give her a defined role:

> …. you've got this year to help them sort themselves out and deal with any basics that they missed and get them a bit more sophisticated in their English and all the rest of it and then kind of post them on to the next stage really.

The colleagues she refers to most are those in physical proximity rather than those who teach the same subject. 'I'm the only ESOL teacher in there (sharing an office with her) and we're a kind of co-op basically, I swap stuff with the literacy lot all the time.' Within her narrative, their positioning is dependent on desk allocation in the first instance and mutual support in the second. The support that they can offer each other is based on the fact that literacy classes contain learners whose first language is not English and ESOL classes contain learners with basic literacy needs (the third group described on page 17). Interestingly, Claire gives precedence not to the help she receives but to the help that she can offer literacy teachers in understanding the errors made by different language groups and the reasons for them. Her enthusiastic tone suggests that she feels empowered and valued through this. Her ESOL colleagues seem to be quite peripheral to her sphere of operation because of geographical location within the building: 'Most of the ESOL teachers are very nice. But they're not the people I spend my time with because I don't live with them'. She describes the curriculum manager in terms of his direct management of her as an individual:

In general, he's a nice guy - he's no trouble and he doesn't press me and in fact when I was under hours he said to me "OK, which of these arrangements would suit you best?" Rather than saying "you have to do this", which I thought was nice of him.

Understandably, Claire wants to be able to manage her life and do her job so that anyone who facilitates this is empowering her to operate in spite of higher level constraints.

The difficulty comes with the imposers of these higher level constraints, seen in the outer circle of her spidergram, outside her immediate sphere. Here her rhetoric changes: I have already mentioned 'beleaguered' and 'judged by success rates' (of her) and 'they don't understand' and 'lost the plot' (of them), which appear amongst such other words and expressions as 'ridiculous' (of things she is asked to do), 'stupid' and 'short-sighted' (of policy), 'undignified scramble' (to meet requirements), a 'going through the hoop exercise' (of examination preparation).

Although she has little or no direct contact with the senior management, the government or the awarding body, she is directly affected by them, particularly in terms of distraction from teaching:

> It's everything has to be recorded, monitored, checked, measured because some really useful aspects of teaching are very difficult to measure. I'm not saying that nothing should be measured but I think it's got a bit disproportionate. And would like not everything to have to be accredited all the time, mapped to a particular curriculum reference. […] And of course, now we can't put them into exams unless we're sure they're going to pass. Then we have to do a summative assessment which has to be mapped to the learning goals that you've picked off that arbitrary sheet. [...] I can see why you have to measure some things but it has got a bit out of hand.

**Repositioning of self**

By the end of the interview, Claire was quite scathing about the situation regarding examinations in particular and her own position regarding them. She did see the teacher as

the filter between the examination and the learners, when looking at my diagram (fig 3

Chapter two), but on the other hand she was unwilling in her acceptance:

> In a way, the exam board feels almost like an irrelevance, something that you have to deal with, like the weather. We know perfectly well that we have to do whatever it is that we have to do as far as we can to get them to pass the exam because that's how it works. We have no influence except maybe to say 'oh I'm not sure about that collaborative question, you know.' But there is no formal way of influencing what it is.

These views are fundamental in her approaches to teaching her learners for the examinations, which I explore below.

**Purpose of the course**

When asked for her view of the purpose of the courses she teaches, she is supportive of the idea of progression and therefore employability, but she also attaches importance to improving the quality of her learners' lives in other spheres:

> The idea is that sometimes you could just be teaching people because there is stuff that they need to learn to go about their daily lives better, and I feel sad that… And just being about to communicate with other mums at the school gates. All the stuff that you can't put your finger on. I feel that it's not the only purpose but it used to be for social inclusion and all the rest of it was acknowledged and now it's not. And I think that's wrong. And I also think it's stupid because people have to go through that before they can go through the next bit sometimes.

**The examination**

She does not mention examinations as part of the purpose, although she alludes to 'formal progression', which could be interpreted as including an examination system. She does, however, see a conflict between examination preparation and social inclusion as she feels that there is overlap but not a direct match between what they need to know in general and what they need for the examinations. The skills in the speaking and listening examination that she

describes as transferable between the two are 'engaging in discussion: 'cos you know, in real life you do have to talk things through with people.' And 'the bit where they have to listen to what somebody's saying and then ask a relevant question is very transferable. That's really useful.' She sees these activities as directly relevant to the learners because even in the examination, they will be talking about their own lives, views and feelings. However, she does make a point about the following collaborative decision-making activity, of the kind that has been used quite successfully in international EFL examinations for many years. Figure 15 is an example of this task format, including the interlocutor frame (script) and the information that the candidate is given:

**Fig. 15  Sample communicative task**

Interlocutor:

Now you're going to plan something together.
I'd like you to imagine that you are helping a teenage friend to find part-time work in the evenings or at the weekend.
First talk together about the part-time jobs and choose the one you think would be best.
Then plan and decide what to do about these things.

Candidates' information:

| Which part-time job? | Plan and decide |
|---|---|
| shop assistant | where to find information |
| waiter/waitress | how to apply |
| cleaner | what to say at an interview |

Claire's response is as follows:

> This planning a project thing that they have to do now is going to lead to trouble, I think, because they can't get their heads round the fact that they don't really know somebody. They get stuck, I think on the idea that they don't really know somebody called Mohammed who is thinking about being a shop assistant. And everybody says that particularly some groups of student have terrible trouble with questions that aren't truthful, if you like.

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This last example highlights the assessment literacy issue of the examination concept being alien to many learners with little education or with an education within a very different culture. The idea of role play is very much a cultural issue as well as being counter to current learner-centred, teaching methods which draw on learners' and world reality. This relates to the point made by Inbar-Lourie (2008) referred to in Chapter one, about two non-compatible cultures i.e. socio-cultural teaching methods versus the culture of testing.

**Examination experience**

To take Claire's standpoint with regard to her own life experience (cultural capital of examinations), she takes this back to her father and her when she was a young child:

> When I was about 10, my Dad said to me, very helpfully, I think, exams are a game and you're playing against the examiner to win, and I have always taken that view a bit. It's a very bolstering attitude.

This experience was to her a positive one and her facial expression showed enjoyment of the recollection. The role play presented above could well be classified in this context as a 'game' which has to be played in order to succeed in this form of assessment. She acknowledges, however, that her learners are coming with very different cultural capital in this respect and sometimes none at all so she shares her own with them. It is significant that she is remembering her level of awareness at a young age when she would have just been beginning to deal with high-stakes testing. She would therefore have been closer to her learners in terms of assessment literacy at that point and seems to take little for granted:

> And I think to some extent, I try and pass it on to my students. I say to them, for example, you don't have to tell the truth. If they ask you 'Do you have any pets?' and you don't, but you know a lot about rabbits, then tell them you have a rabbit. I'm passing on to them the idea that you are trying to show yourself in a good light. I also say to them, keep it simple, if you really think it's quite complicated and you can't

express it clearly, don't even try.  Just say something reasonable that you can say properly. They are testing your English, not you.

She also acknowledges that in order to play this game they have to know the rules and that there needs to be differentiation in this respect in her classes to cater for different life experiences of her learners.

**Claire's practice**

*Overall*

The observed lesson was an E2 adult ESOL class lasting one hour and a half. There were ten learners, all women with limited educational backgrounds.  The context of the lesson was modes of transport. The lesson followed a standard format of a warm up conversation about transport and travelling to places, with the learners being asked to find out from each other how they like to travel.  During monitoring, Claire corrected the learners and asked them also to talk about disadvantages of the different modes of travel.  The notion of planning a journey was introduced and then there was some introductory work around understanding timetables and different fare structures.  This was followed by a listening activity based on understanding departure times and fares. The listening activity proved to be quite difficult and there was some ad hoc remedial work around hearing and understanding numbers. The learners then discussed the best mode of transport for a particular trip using the information from the listening activity.

This connected with Claire's scheme of work as part of the week's topic of planning a class trip, which also included reading information about possible destinations, revising comparatives and superlatives, with the life skill of cooperating on a project.  This design integrates the skills in a realistic way and is in line with Claire's view of the purpose of the course being social inclusion and empowering the learner – in this case through informed

decision making.  It does, however, also serve as interactive scaffolding in preparation for the collaborative task in the examination.

*Reference to language skills:*

In this particular lesson, there was little direct work on language except her corrections during the monitoring of the discussion work and the feedback, where the issue of 'I like…' versus 'I'd like' arose.  This language point was isolated from the general discourse of the lesson and some ad hoc practice work was done on this.  During the post-observation interview, Claire said that the learners still needed work on the discussion function of asking for other people's opinions and that she referred to a future unit containing a listening activity based on a discussion: 'I think I might listen to that both as a detailed listening and also to get them to notice how the conversation moves round', an inductive approach that focuses on learners noticing and learning from language in use (Schmidt, 2001). There was also some focus on listening skills in the form of predictive strategies through eliciting what type of clues they should listen for when they want to know the train times, fares etc.

*Direct examination skills*

The work done in the lesson came under the heading of 'Exam Practice' in Claire's scheme of work.  The stated main aim was to give the learners practice in the collaborative activity that she had expressed concerns about in the previous interview.  Also when asked how she felt about the outcome of the lesson she said, 'I think they could do a bit more practice with the discussion thing.'  In that sense it was examination focused; however, she did not use sample paper material but based the lesson around adapted material from a published course book, which is designed for general language teaching and does not put them in a hypothetical situation, which was Claire's main concern about this task in the examination.

However, the collaborative task in the lesson could also be seen as interactive scaffolding for the collaborative examination task as long as the learners see the link.

Although the material was not specifically designed for examination preparation, Claire overtly reminded the learners of the connection with the examination at certain points: before the initial warm up discussion, Claire gave the instructions using phrasing directly lifted from the examination interlocutor frame asking the learners to 'find out from each other about how you like to travel'. She followed this with 'when they (examiners) say 'find out' you have to ask your partner some questions', thus reinforcing understanding of the 'code' used in the context of the examination, which correlates with her view of an examination as a 'game'.

When asked whether the listening activity was meant to be practice for the examination or a lead in to the next activity, she very quickly and emphatically pronounced 'Both. Because we get so few hours now, you don't feel you can do many things for one purpose'. Her idea of asking the learners to notice how the conversation on the recording worked is also useful for a speaking test. In this respect, she might seem to be very successfully addressing her perceived mismatch between the examination requirements and the teaching of language for life in the UK, as stated in her interview. However, there remains the question whether her learners will transfer this learning to a hypothetical situation in the examination.

*Learner response*

In the listening activity, the learners had difficulty interpreting numbers when heard in a fairly complex dialogue. This is an issue for the listening aspect of the examination in question. In tandem with this was the difficulty in identifying what they were listening for, i.e. understanding the question. Claire was aware of this, as she highlighted in the interview that she works on the key words in a question as well as using their predictive skills in order to help them identify the distracters, which she called the 'elephant trap'.

The discussion quickly became a whole group discussion as the pair work was not productive in terms of the learners giving opinions or asking for and giving reasons for their views.

Claire's main concern was that the learners should be convinced by the importance of interacting with each other during a conversation or discussion in an examination situation: 'They're so keen to make sure that they've spoken enough that they just go on like steam trains'. In order to try to ensure that they focus on this, she frequently asks them to pass a pencil back and forth between them as they exchange turns, with the instruction that they should have the pencil two or three times and about half the time overall'. She also presents the analogy of a pizza to them: 'If they are at a party, they don't eat all the pizza, they make sure everybody has a slice'. Both of the above scenarios are further manifestations of her view of the examination as a 'game', the rules of which she strives to make clear to her learners in the knowledge that their cultural capital may not have included this.

**Conclusion**

Claire's practice supports the views expressed in her initial interview. She has adopted the role of a filter between the examinations and her learners and uses the agency that she has identified in her classroom role to minimise the effects of the examination on socio-cultural teaching and learning. The extent of this is arguably greater than she realised in two ways: firstly, she is passing on her awareness gained in the early years of her educational journey when she was close to the position that her learners are now in, i.e. the first or second stage of assessment literacy, illiteracy or nominal literacy (Pill and Harding 2013); secondly, she is transferring the examination activity to a semblance of real-life interaction in the hope that her learners will then be able to draw on the skills acquired even if they are put in hypothetical situations.

## Case study two - Karen
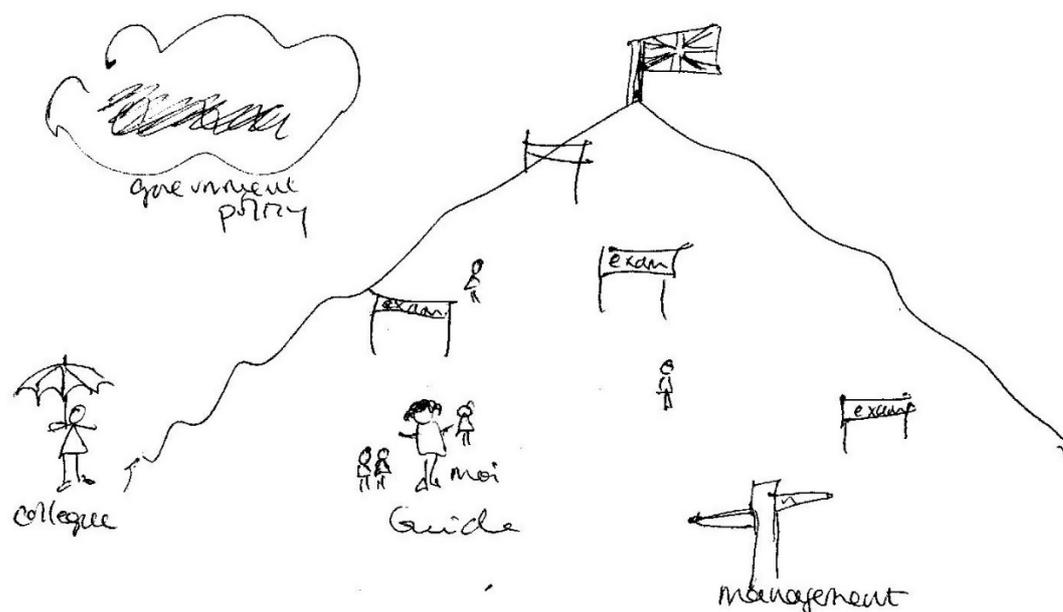


**Fig. 16 Karen's drawing**

Karen has been teaching for over 20 years. She is a graduate who began her English teaching career in EFL and moved into ESOL about 15 years ago. She completed training up to Diploma level and she has a wide range of experience as a teacher and teacher trainer and she is also an external examiner for an international English language teaching qualification. Her experience of preparing learners for English language examinations is extensive, covering both EFL and ESOL.

**Positioning of self**

Karen framed the picture she drew within a mountain scene and during the interview, she continued to use the same metaphor. She gave prominence to herself in her description of her picture. 'Here I am; I'm a guide'. Here she immediately assigned herself a proactive role with agency, even the use of the 'moi' as a label in the picture, communicates confidence. If we take the experiential (Fairclough 2015) value of the word 'guide' to be someone who

shows the way to others, the implication is that she is in the empowering position of having knowledge that 'others' do not have. The word also has the connotation of being supportive so that the power of the knowledge is not being used to judge or coerce but to help. It implies an interactive relationship which allows for negotiation and instruction.

This notion is supported by the fact that in the overall drawing, a mountain, a metaphor for the challenge that the learners face, with the learners dotted around on the slopes, in effect takes centre stage. She describes the Union Jack flying at the summit of the mountain as representing UK citizenship, which her learners are aiming for. She positions herself close to the bottom of the slope helping her learners to achieve their goals in spite of management: 'They never have any contact with management. I exclusively teach that class so I'm the only point of contact.' The repeated 'I' as the agent in the last two sentences indicates that this was not presented as a negative standpoint but rather as her using her own experience and capabilities to empower herself and mitigate outside intervention. In her own words, she is not climbing the mountain because she has no need to - she is facilitating.

**Positioning of others**

In the 'discourse' of the picture, there is a clear positioning, although Karen does not express this verbally. She places other elements such as management, the government and even her colleagues at some distance from herself, even though her colleague 'has an umbrella to shelter me' implying some kind of mutual support. There is a lexical link between 'umbrella' and the metaphorical hyponymy of 'cloud' and 'rain': government policy is depicted as 'a cloud threatening to rain at any time'. However, it is not overhead or of immediate concern in the activities. There is a signpost at the foot of the mountain pointing in two directions showing college management 'reflecting the sort of contrary instructions we get sometimes – 'Do this, don't do that.' In this utterance, 'Do this, don't do that' are synonymous with 'contrary' which could be seen as 'overwording', indicating that this is something that

impacts on her at some level (Fairclough 2015:133). In spite of this she has depicted all of these factors as separated from her and her work and from each other. Her work is situated on the mountain, which has hurdles distributed at various points. These are labelled 'exams', which clearly do impact on her learners and on her professional world.

Having described the above features of her drawing, she stopped talking 'I think that's more or less it'. After a prompt 'So where are the learners?' she became reticent: 'Well, I don't like to er…' This is the beginning of a thread that is evident throughout the interview of her reluctance to describe her learners as a group. She has placed them as individuals, with the repetition of 'some', but with the common goal of climbing the mountain:

> They could be dotted all over the place – all over the mountain. **Some** of them are hanging about with me, you know (laughs) **some** of them are striding forward making their own way without too much of me, **and some** of them have done exams already. They're all climbing the mountain.

This view is echoed later when she talks about preparing her learners for the examinations. When asked about the purpose of the courses she teaches she mentions citizenship first as this is to do with management and government policy but she felt the real reason why people go to the courses is 'social interaction with each other', which could be interpreted either as the classes being social events in themselves or a means to gaining social skills in English. She also sees a language learning element:

> And to even out their skill areas, I suppose. To make them more of a complete person in English. Some of them, their speaking is really good and their writing is quite poor – you know typical thing.

**The examination**

Karen has a two-sided response to the examination, one from her own point of view and the other from her learners'.  On the one hand, she does not see the examination process as being helpful and her reaction shows negativity especially as it is used to determine progression.  A point she feels needs to be noted is that for the college data, it is preferable for a learner not to take an examination rather than to fail.  Whether or not they are entered is at the discretion of the teacher. The discourse of the following quotation highlights this: there is a high incidence of negative sentences; the modality and repeated use of 'you will' indicates removal of power from the learners, which is something Karen is unhappy about; the words in bold all refer to the learners, indicating this view is about the learner experience:

> …. but if we didn't have the exams they would be quite happy to go to the next level
> with my permission.  The exams are a sort of barrier in that certain way – what I'm
> doing just now is writing out bits of paper: **you** will do E1 this exam, **you** will do E2
> this exam.  I always find it very difficult telling them that **they**'re not going to be able
> to present themselves at that gate this time because **they**'re not ready and I don't think
> **they**'ll pass.

This is a view of the process that is reinforced later in the discourse, being described with such negative terms as 'not fair', 'unfortunate', 'really bad', with learners being 'frustrated', in response to individual cases of learners who have not been able to enter for the relevant examination.

However, from the point of view of her own work, her response to examinations is not negative.  In spite of the paperwork '**I** quite like having them to work towards, actually, because it gives some kind of structure.  **I**'m not against them.'  Here she uses 'I' as the agent in positive or neutral sentences. Although the phrase 'not against' has two potentially

negative words, both together make a rather guarded positive and serve to draw a contrast with the other side of her response.

In terms of her own experience of examinations, her view is described using positive expressive terms: 'I'm quite **good** at exams', 'I **enjoy** pressure,' 'I usually perform **better** in exams'. She always knew what was expected and had a 'systematic' approach to revision. During the examinations themselves she enjoys the pressure of time: 'I like getting it all splurging out'. She did not regard the system as pressurised and had not felt the need for specialised examination training, as she devised her own systems such as placing cards around the house with key notes on them. She described this in quite dogmatic experiential terms, drawing on her cultural capital with 'I' and 'we' as agents as well as 'you' in the sense of 'one' and therefore encompassing herself:

> I don't think **we** were under pressure at that time. That's the way I felt – **I** just did them. I think **you** were good at things or **you** weren't good at things, there wasn't the kind of study habits thing that goes on now and all this... **I** didn't even know what exams were about. **I** just remember thinking oh, y'know... **We** didn't do things like practice papers or anything like that. Maybe mocks but there wasn't the focus on exam training like there is now.

Karen's preparation of her learners for examinations seems to be influenced by both her own cultural capital and the differences in the needs of her learners. However, at one point, she posits that the former is not true, albeit with some modality indicating uncertainty: 'I think I've probably moved on because the nature, the type of exams that they're doing is very different from the ones that I was doing, which are academic; these are more practical'. I would argue, though, that when she says, 'I really do insist on them being organised and filing things and looking back and correcting their own work and that kind of thing', she is drawing on the 'systematic study habits' she mentioned in relation to herself. There is

hyponymy in her use of language as 'being organised and filing things' would come under the category of 'systematic study habits'.

**Self-realisation:**

Towards the end of the interview, Karen describes two main cohorts within her classes, representing a difference in assessment literacy:

> **Some** learners are conscious and they have knowledge about exams.  They don't need to go via the teacher. They grasp what you tell them and if you say "Look do you see how you did that?" they will kind of absorb it and move on, but **some** people just don't, they're not ready. They kind of surprise me in that they seem quite powerless, if you know what I mean, about their own fate.

Karen began to reflect on the issues affecting the second group described above, she uses such near synonyms as 'powerless', 'helplessness', 'not able to progress' and she expressed her own consternation at this: 'They're not able to progress themselves given all the same tools that the other people have been given and having a similar ability level.  I don't know what that is.'  However, she did try to rationalise this with some suggestions as to why this group has difficulties: 'They don't have study skills'; 'they may be nervous so they don't see links'; 'it's more of an attitudinal thing'; 'maybe they're not ready emotionally or mentally.

Karen's repetition of 'I don't know', echoes the 'powerlessness' she used to refer to her learners and renders the tone of her discourse less empowering of herself than it was at the beginning of the interview in that she has uncovered an area where she feels less able to guide her learners.  Here, she comes to the crux of the issue, the awareness and handling of the gap in assessment literacy between the teachers and the learners.

Interestingly on looking at my version of the position of the teacher, she does repeat her original position but this time with more controlling powers: 'You are the gatekeeper to a certain extent because if you don't say 'yes', then they can't go forward.'  'You have an

understanding of both sides of the picture'. Here she is referring to also the management point of view, which leads to the teacher having other, more controlling roles than a supportive guide. There seems to be a discrepancy here in that 'gatekeeper 'and 'guide' do not sit well together as their socio-cultural roles in relation to power are very different.

**Karen's practice**

*Overall*

The lesson was with an E2 Adult ESOL group, with fourteen learners, half of them being 'beginner readers and writers, even in the mother tongue'. The context of the observed lesson was housing and the main objective was that the learners should be able to use comparatives to discuss places to live. It began with a standard a one-minute warm-up conversation in pairs about neighbours to situate the context within the learners' own lives. This was followed by each learner being asked to say one thing about their partner's neighbour. There was then a staged listening activity centred on two conversations between neighbours. The learners were given a worksheet with three questions about each conversation. These questions resembled those asked in the examination that the learners would be eventually be taking, the main differences being that here the questions and answers were written, there was more than one possible answer to each question and soe inference was involved. The first conversation was played and learners and the learners wrote the answers on column one of the worksheet followed by peer correction. This process was a repeated with the second conversation. There were 3 further questions about each conversation, which these were handled in turn as above. During the feedback process, Karen checked the learners' understanding of the use of comparatives. The recordings were then played a third time with the learners following the tapescript and underlining the comparatives use in the dialogues. The feedback on this activity included some drilling for

pronunciation, especially stress patterns and weak forms.   The learners then worked in pairs to arrange a list of features of houses or flats and in order of importance when choosing a place to live. During the subsequent discussion about what is important when looking for a place to live, Karen elicited the features that were most important and asked the learners to make sentences with this information.

While the learners were engaged with this, Karen overheard the frame: 'In my opinion …. is very important because …' . She adopted this as a model to present to other learners to frame their views if they wished, when doing the final activity, a freer interactive discussion along the lines of that required in the examination.

This was an example of an observation providing a significant amount of information that had not been apparent to the observer but emerged during the subsequent interview.  Karen is a very experienced and confident teacher so it was not immediately evident to me that she was taking her cues from the learners at several points and managing the lesson accordingly. For this reason Karen's lesson was minimally planned at the micro level of such aspects as detailing language input, sequencing activities, group work.  She had merely prepared a worksheet covering questions on the two recorded extracts of conversations followed by prompts for the discussion. However, at a macro level she was quite clear in her own mind what she wanted to emerge from the lesson and allowed this to 'evolve' according to the ideas of the learners following a learner-centred approach based on interaction and mediation (Vygotsky 1962, Long and Porter, 1985).  It is possible that she was steering the interaction (as a guide) in the direction she wanted but this was difficult to perceive as an observer and therefore also for the learners. The lesson was, by Karen's admission, examination-based but as the content was also based on real-life skills and the examination was only mentioned once, the lesson did not seem to be dominated by the examination.

The lesson echoed Karen's idea of herself as a guide as it embedded a more humanist focus on the learners expressing their own ideas and experience within a structure provided by the teacher. It was a cohesive integrated skills session with revision of examination skills embedded within it. The lesson resulted in a 'linguistic formula' for potential use in the speaking test they were working towards, but this had not been selected in advance – the actual wording evolved through the interaction. There was encouragement of study skills as they were asked to refer to a reference sheet from a previous session containing useful expressions for a discussion. This was used as a reminder during the student-centred discussion work and was reminiscent of the cards she had placed around her house for her own revision, an indication that there was an element of her drawing on her own experience of examination preparation.

*Reference to language or skills work*

In Karen's scheme of work, references to speaking are mainly introduced by 'talk about…'. There was no reference to strategic focus on different speech functions either for life or for the examination. Her explanation for this is that they are 'embedded' and she 'feeds them in as and when… if people are not using them or giving them the correct term.'

This concept of basing learning on what the learners actually say is also applied in her work on the comparatives in the lesson. According to the scheme of work, this was revision from the previous week's work. The lesson culminated in a formula to express what is important in a place to live: 'In my opinion/For me x is more important than y because z.' This was preceded by a directed activity where the learners had been asked to underline the examples of comparatives in the tape script followed by feedback, which contained drilling for pronunciation. However, it was during a freer pair-work activity that she overheard the above formula and thought 'Oh, that's a good model' and so chose to adopt it for the rest of

the class to practise.  Both of these examples confirm her self-view as a guide rather than teaching 'top down'.  She created an environment where the learners could work together, and produce the necessary language to express themselves in the given context along the lines of the 'output hypothesis' (Swain 2000), where the challenge of producing appropriate language to convey the desired message fosters the development of active language use.

*Direct examination skills*

Karen clearly had good underpinning awareness of the sub-skills required in the examination. Her learners had in their folders the reference sheet mentioned above with expressions that can be used in a discussion. They had previously categorised the expressions under the headings of asking for opinion, asking for clarification, agreeing, keeping the conversation going.  They had also previously worked on the pronunciation of these expressions.  They were asked to refer to these before a discussion activity throughout the course because in the examination 'they haven't got the big run up that we normally have, which is a few warm-up exercises and a bit of vocab.' When they have a lead-in to the topic at the beginning of a lesson, she 'tells them (the learners) to use them (the expressions)' as 'in the exam you have to hold a conversation and you have to respond'.  In this particular lesson there was no further reference to it.  This is very much in line with her own approach to examinations ('systematic study habits') and seems to counter-balance her notion of allowing language to emerge as was seen in the rest of the lesson.

The comparison work 'is something that they're often asked to do in the speaking test' and the listening activity, which involved them identifying key information from the dialogues, was also designed to be examination related as 'being able to listen and get the key information from one exposure is really difficult.'  However, it also had the function of

introducing language and ideas for the subsequent discussion and as such added to the cohesion of the lesson.

*Learner response*

The learners seemed quite confident at the initial discussion stage using the sheet of expressions to use as a support. 'They bring this (sheet) out and they know what it's about'. Although she expressed the belief that being quite competent speakers they would be all right as in general they like speaking and are good at interacting, Karen felt that they did have to be reminded to 'ask each other, look at each other, and be interested in each other' as they don't always make the connection between this work and the examination. This again highlights the crux of the issue of the assessment literacy gap.


**Conclusion:**

Karen's views as expressed in the first interview are supported in her practice. She does operate as a facilitator, which is arguably part of the work of a 'guide'. On the other hand, she has certain systems for encouraging the learners to focus on examination skills. Providing support in this way could also be seen as an additional, more proactive role of a guide and therefore is not necessarily a contradiction. She is very aware of the requirements of the examination and of the fact that her learners have difficulties with these concepts, although they are good at speaking in the classroom. When talking about her own experience of assessment, she is referring back to a stage where she was at the third or fourth stage of assessment literacy i.e. functional or procedural (Pill and Harding 2013). This may contribute to her asking what is missing from the assessment literacy of her learners.

## Case study three- Anna
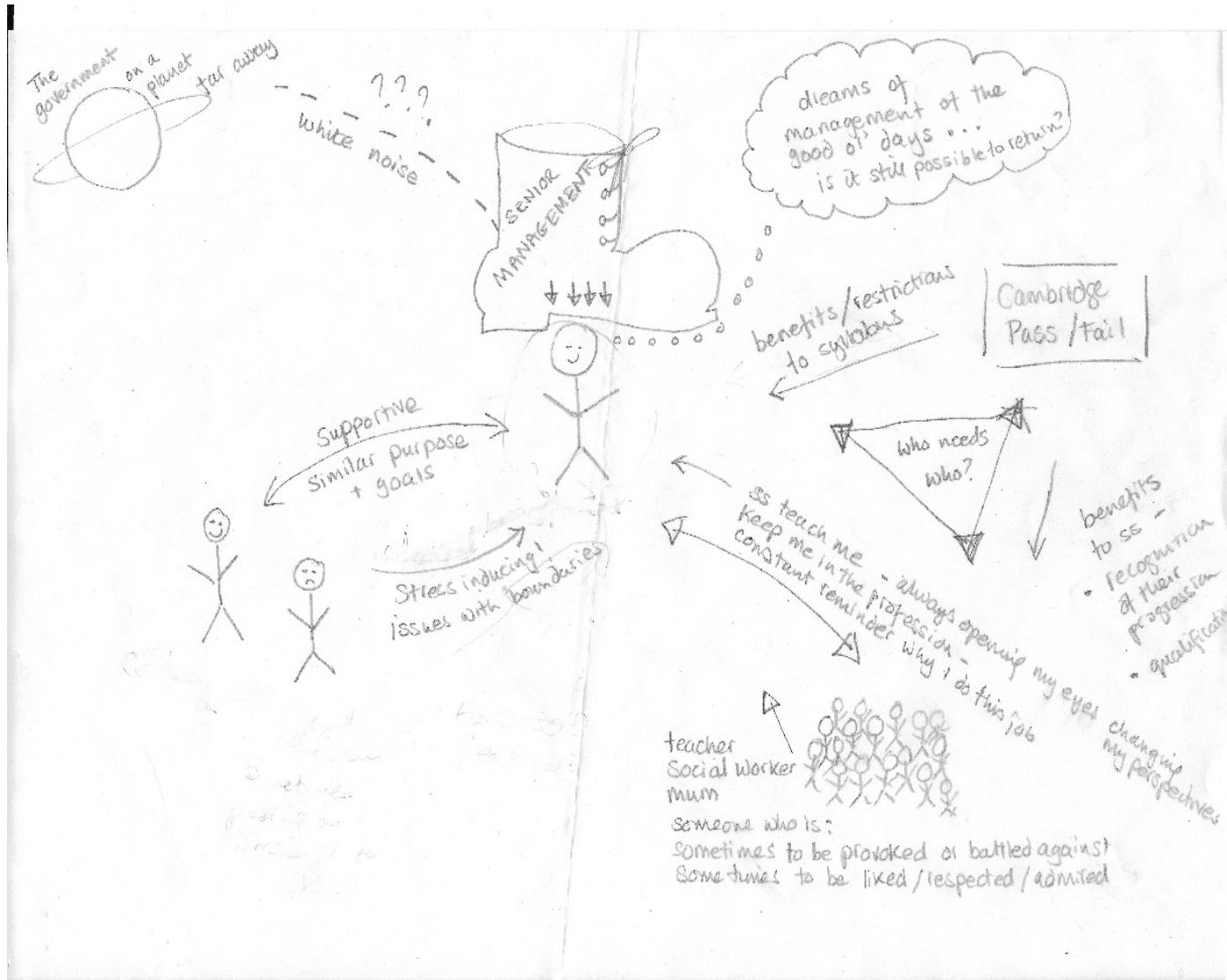


**Fig. 17 Anna's drawing**

Anna has been teaching English language for about 25 years.  She is a graduate who began

her English teaching career in ESOL about 20 years ago.  She has completed training up to

PGCE level and she has a wide range of experience as a teacher of adults and 16-18s.  She

has been preparing learners for English language examinations for over 15 years.

**Positioning of self**

As in the first two case studies, Anna put herself in the middle of her picture, with the other influences in a circle around her, all producing different emotions in her. There is suppression from senior management in the form of a boot pushing her down. This analogy gives the impression that there is no dialogue ('we're not colleagues any more'), and that there is weight on her head. The boot blocks her view of the government, which she labels as 'white noise' coming from a 'planet far away … because I wonder how interested I am'.

There is a sense of alienation here but she is not altogether detached, as she has a place for the interactive management relationships of the past and wonders whether there is any way back. She has not completely accepted the world as it is, but seems to deal with her lack of agency in this sphere by ignoring it. 'I don't look in the direction of the government very much and why they make their decisions and why senior management have to make their decisions'.

To continue with the analogy of the 'boot', it directs her vision towards students and colleagues. Anna has thus clearly positioned herself in her immediate sphere of influence, which she depicts in more detail and more positively. 'I guess my perspective is looking down at the students. They're my direction.' She gives herself many roles in relation to her learners: a teacher, social worker, their 'mum' and 'sometimes I become someone to be provoked and battled against; sometimes I'm someone to be liked/respected/admired'. Here there is a mixture of the professional and personal, which is reinforced in her positioning of them.

**Positioning of others**

Anna places her students below her but with a two-way arrow, indicating that as well as the roles she allocates to herself, her students play a significant role. She values the influence of her learners on her 'always opening my eyes, changing my perspectives', 'A constant

reminder of why I do this job'. There is an emotional response here, which goes beyond the need to improve success rates and secure progression.

The situation she puts her colleagues in is more complex. There are two arrows, one is bi-directional and the other is mono-directional. This positioning stems from the fact that she has a coordinating role and therefore her colleagues behave differently towards her depending on the role she is in at any given moment: peer or coordinator. Sometimes this is a supportive relationship but there are issues with the boundaries between the two roles: 'Partly because of my role as a coordinator, I get things thrown at me which aren't my role but I'm an easy target because I'm in the office and things end up going through me to my line manager.'

Interestingly, she does not include her line manager in the picture, mainly because she did not know how to position him. There is more dialogue here but she describes him as 'squashed in the middle' and therefore as someone who also has little agency, almost a peer.

She sees the role of the awarding body as more complex, interestingly not linked to management but part of a triangle with the teacher and the learners: 'Who needs who?' She does see the examinations as beneficial for the learners as recognition of their progress and giving them useful qualifications. On the other hand, there is a danger of the college becoming an 'exam factory'.

**Purpose of the course**

Anna sees the ultimate function of the course as giving 'them the English that they need to function in their daily lives, to progress in whatever paths they choose to take whether it's education, work or …'. While appreciating the value of the examinations, as mentioned above, she expresses the view that they require the teaching of some skills that are 'not relevant'. She gives the example of the presentation, which involves structuring a short talk

and using formal register, as something that, in life, would not have to be done without considerable preparation.  It could be argued that some aspects of this activity do relate to work or study, for example when making an extended, reasoned contribution to a seminar or meeting, or an extended response in a job interview.  The fact that this is labelled as a 'presentation' in the interlocutor frame for the examination her learners were preparing for (Level 1/B2) may in fact be misleading.

**Own experience of examinations**

 Anna's own experience of examinations is of success (distinction) but as a result of 'cramming' and therefore poor retention later. On later reflection, she realised that 'A lot of what I still can remember are the things that interested me and made sense to me and all the technical details – names of muscle groups in particular.  I didn't need to know it so I learnt it for the exam and that was it.'

She has learnt from this that it is important to gain the skills first and then focus on the examination.  She remembers advice given to her by her driving instructor: 'You can drive now, and now I'll teach you to pass the test' and uses this as the basis of her teaching:

> And that is very much my approach. I try to dig out of the exam things that are relevant to them and apply tasks that would fit both the exam and things that are relevant to them. In my teaching but also in the sort of 'cram' bit before the exam I say 'right this is what you have to do [in the examination].


**The learners' experience of examinations**

Some of her learners have 'zero' experience of assessment but on the other hand some have been through an education system where they are being tested 'on a weekly basis'.  She is also aware that many of the latter group have only been tested on reading, writing and grammar and not communication skills as such.  Anna approaches this in an organised,

strategic way by using peer support and 'having a third person during pair work, another student, as the examiner, just listening and commenting on the non-verbal communication, the body language, the utterances, interrupting. Eliciting an analysis from the observers and feeding that back to their peers, helped make them aware of how to engage and led to improved assessment literacy.

**Anna's practice**

*Overall*

The observation took place with a group of fifteen 16-18 year olds preparing for SfL Level 1 and was the second half of a three-hour session. They were taking a relatively high level for speaking and listening as they had acquired quite good spoken language in their time in the UK. However, six of the learners had had minimal or interrupted previous education and their literacy skills were lower. Anna's aim for the lesson was to 'get them thinking about the difficult decisions that politicians need to make and how it affects them as young people.' The lesson was based on a citizenship package to engage young people in government and politics, specifically in terms of the economy. The learners watched a video about the importance of young people voting. This was followed by group work where each group of three or four learners was given a notional sum of money and asked to discuss how they would divide it among the different areas of government spending. After feedback, 25% of the money was taken away and they were given cards with the consequences of cuts in the different areas. They had to decide where they would make the cuts.

This, like Karen's, was a lesson where a considerable amount of information about the teacher's rationale was not visible to me, as the lesson did not seem at first sight to have any specific connection with the examination apart from the fact that that any practice in free speech is valuable for this purpose.

*Reference to language or skills work*

In this lesson language input had not been prepared as Anna felt that the necessary language had been covered before and this was a productive task to give learners the opportunity to consolidate their learning and to incorporate it within their pre-existing knowledge. It was also a socio-cultural approach, incorporating mediation, interaction and output (Vygotsky 1962, Long and Porter 1985, Gass1997, Swain, 2000)

*Direct examination skills work*

This lesson took place shortly before the examination. In the first half of the three-hour session, the class had covered more structured examination preparation tasks for the different stages of the examination. For example, in order to prepare for the discussion task, they had been working in groups of three, with one taking the role of the examiner with the instruction to look for the aspects that the examiner would be looking for as well as using prompts that the examiner might use to broaden the topic. This activity had been followed by the 'examiners' feeding back to their peers on their performance vis à vis the assessment criteria. As the observed lesson was the last lesson before the examination, Anna had chosen to give them more freedom to develop and express their own ideas as they would be required to do in the examination, in accordance with the 'output hypothesis' (Swain 2000). One principle of this is that the effort of composing utterances is more likely to drive learners to form new hypotheses about target language syntax and thus raise the level of their language production. Anna also considered that the sub-topics of the budgeting activity, such as health and education, were likely to feature in the examination. However, she had combined this with an element of Freirean empowerment as they were discussing political issues, with a view to encouraging them to use their right to vote in the general election the following day.

*Learner response*

According to Anna, in the previous lesson, the learners had 'loved being the examiner and being able to give each other constructive criticism'. When asked if the learners had performed as she had expected in the actual examination, her response was 'As I expected or better – they used all the techniques I had prepared them with and were having really interesting conversations, which was very enjoyable'.

During the observed lesson, most of the groups were focussing on the task from a 'political angle including recognising how much the benefits system costs the country' and were able to express how shocked they were. Others did not really rise to the challenge and merely allocated the money without expressing the justification. However, those that did were clearly stretching their powers of expression in English, which was a principal potential benefit underlying the session, although Anna did not include this as an aim. The learners whose previous examination had been the first oral examination they had ever taken, were now 'much stronger and more confident,' indicating that her strategies were working.

**Conclusion**

The task set supports Anna's previously stated intention to include activities that are relevant to the learners with a strong focus on the examination when it is needed. She is thereby ensuring that the learners put the language learned to a use that is relevant to their lives and their education overall, as opposed to merely cramming for an examination as she had done in her past. In terms of her own cultural capital in relation to assessment, she is drawing on a stage where she was operating at the third level of assessment literacy 'functional literacy' (Pill and Harding, 2013), which she has critiqued from her later experience of the fourth level of 'procedural and conceptual literacy' (ibid). This has proved useful in helping her to have some understanding of her learners' needs.

## Case study four - Simon
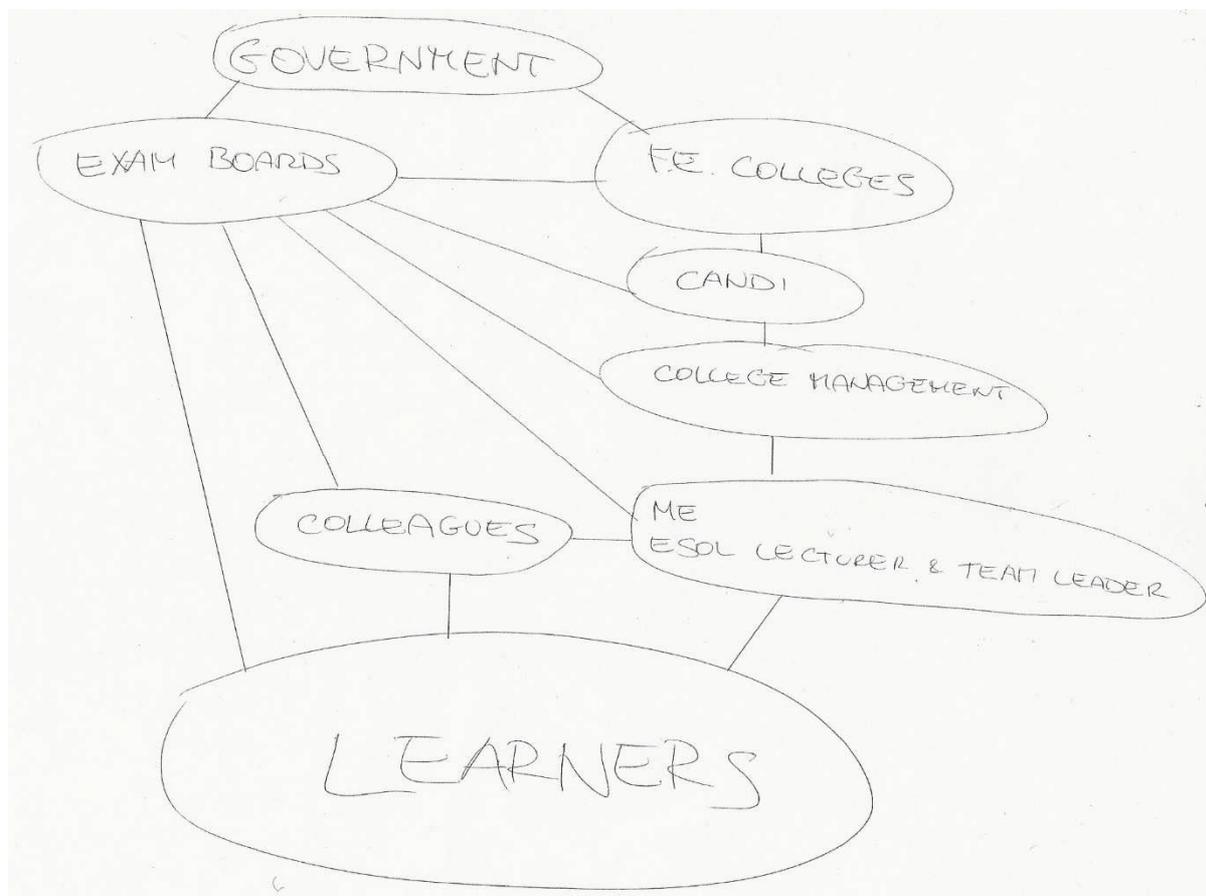


**Fig. 18 Simon's drawing**

Simon is a graduate who has been teaching English for about 15 years. He completed training up to Diploma level and he has a wide range of experience as a teacher of adults and of preparing learners for English language examinations. He is also an external examiner for the examinations for which he is preparing his learners.

**Positioning of self**

In his representation of his professional situation, Simon did not mention his own role until after he had placed the learners and the awarding bodies in the scheme as he saw it. Even when he did begin to include himself, he did not appear in his narrative as an individual but

more as a part of a system: 'That's me there with my colleagues, management, the college itself and FE colleges in general'. The system was drawn as a hierarchy with the teachers at the bottom. Therefore it would seem that he did not view himself as being in an important role or having any agency. Although he placed the learners lower down, this was not necessarily because they were inferior (see below). This was clearly his first response to his own reflection into his role, but it was not completely borne out by his later reflections during the interview.

**Positioning of others**

Simon initially positioned learners in the largest oval 'at the base of a system which he described as 'bottom up', saying that 'they (the learners) are the biggest element in the whole thing, the basis and everything starts from there'. He also singled out the awarding bodies as being central to the scene. In his rendition, the awarding bodies were the only players that had a direct link to all the other players in the diagram:

Interestingly, Simon placed the government at the top of the page exerting power over FE colleges in general and over the awarding bodies but chose not to mention this in his verbal description as he said he saw the awarding bodies as the main factor in his sphere.

While explaining his diagram, Simon changed his direction to reflect the position of the awarding bodies: 'To be honest, when I drew this, I started from the bottom, the learners, but it does look like it's the other way round'. However, he was not necessarily convinced by this: 'Although I started drawing it from the bottom, I think it could be looked at this way or that way.' His positioning of the students at the base of his diagram in fact reflected the view that their existence underpinned the whole framework rather than the notion that they were the least empowered.

**Self-realisation**

After this last partial reversal of the positioning of the other players, Simon began to look at his own role more positively: He saw the teachers as having the pivotal, 'important role' of forging links between the learners and the other 'stakeholders'. 'They (the learners) do come in and their first point of contact is the lecturer'. He was referring to the assessment literacy of himself and his colleagues when saying 'We have a certain awareness of the awarding bodies that the students don't have. That's why it's very important', thereby giving himself a position of value within the structure and thus agency in the direction of his teaching: 'One of our roles is to make them aware of how exams work and the importance of taking exams. And then there is the point that we have to integrate exam skills within our teaching and learning'. Here Simon is gradually empowering teachers with their own responsibilities and seeing them as a separate entity from management. His continued use of the pronouns 'we' and 'our' indicate that he still sees himself as part of a cohort rather than as an individual.

During the remainder of the interview, Simon brought in both aspects of his stance as described in relation to his picture. To a certain extent, there was a Foucauldian acceptance of the imposition of examinations in the context of normalisation (Foucault 1991:265) as mentioned in Chapter two: 'Obviously, we need to have exam skills sessions'; 'obviously, there is a lot of pressure on us because we need our students to pass their exams, to achieve, to be able the get the government funding…'.

On the other hand, when asked what he thought the purpose of his courses was he mentioned the establishment goals of integration, citizenship, and employability but also the more learner-centred goals such as 'to improve the quality of life of our students… inclusiveness'. He did not mention the purpose of passing examinations. His choice of language was around compromise between the demands of the system and what he felt was his real purpose: 'You

have to strike a balance between what we want and what the students need'. When he uses 'we' here and in the previous paragraph, it is significant that he means the college as whole, of which he had presented himself as an intrinsic part in the first instance.  There is again an acceptance of the situation in conjunction with a willingness to strive to provide the learners with what they need in terms of the outside world.

 He talks later about integrating examination skills into lessons which focus on 'real-life situations' thereby 'killing two birds with one stone'.  The example he gives is bringing in a text that the learners could be expected to encounter in their everyday lives and incorporating some questions in the style of the examination within the lesson.  While presenting this as an ideal, however, he does not seem confident in his ability to do this well:

> I'm amazed by how some colleagues are able to actually integrate so surreptitiously, the exam skills with their lesson.  They use authentic materials, they do activities that could somehow – that the students might come across in real life and they sell it to the students as what they are but at the same time they manage to integrate it with activities that could be found in an exam paper. And it's amazing.

When asked about his own history of examinations, his first sentence contains the word 'nervous' three times and the word 'stress' or 'stressed' twice, but he is reluctant to say more about his experience.  This, however, seems to be the aspect of his own history that affects the way he approaches examinations with his own learners.

> I think maybe I do [draw on his own history] but not consciously. Maybe subconsciously, I think, like, I almost feel for my students for example, when they've got an exam and when I do mock exams for exam practice, I tend to feel sympathetic because somehow, maybe subconsciously, I'm thinking about when I was a student, I would've wanted somebody to be sympathetic with me to feel more confident.

It is interesting here that he says his expectation that his learners will have similar attitudes to his own could be 'subconscious'.  His lead-in 'I think maybe I do' suggests that being asked

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to reflect on his own experience has made him aware of this.  On the other hand, he is quite conscious of, and even puzzled and frustrated by, what his learners lack in terms of examination skills:

> They don't have exam skills for example.  They don't understand, they can't really follow instructions or what they are supposed to be doing.

> Why don't they get it?  Why do I have to tell them that they have to tick just one box?  Not three boxes or the other way round.  Is not possible to understand that that's the way it is – what else can I do to explain it to you, I mean how many times have we done this.

These observations led him to reflect on the difference between his own history and that of his learners and then to access and analyse more information about his own experience:

> Because obviously, we just did exams, we were never taught exam skills, in a formal way but I guess for them, it's something that they need to have.

This indicates that past experience, not always in the forefront of a teacher's mind, is an important factor here.  Like Claire, he brings in the idea of examinations being a game: 'I always tell them it's like a tennis match.' 'Sometimes I give them a rubber and I get them to throw it at each other so that they can realise … make sure that they are talking to each other rather than a one-sided conversation'.  This is interesting in terms of authenticity of the classroom and the examination room. The conversation is not spontaneous in either situation and one learner may be either more engaged or keen to practice English to demonstrate ability than the other.  The use of the rubber reduces the authenticity further, yet may make learners aware of this and let them see that examinations can be viewed as a game.  Simon goes some way towards making this point when he recognises the difference between examinations and real life: 'It's not as spontaneous as it would be in a real-life situation'.

By the end of the interview Simon's view of himself and his role is further strengthened when looking at my depiction of the relationship between the players in the system:

> I guess if it's related to exam prep the teacher would be more at the centre of the whole process than the actual learner because the teacher has the onerous job of getting to know the students and seeing how far they are with all that… I do see what you're saying here when it comes to motivating the students and getting the best out of them, the teacher has a vital role.

**Simon's Practice**

The observed lesson was the second half of an ESOL Entry 3 (CEFR B1) class of 18 learners, four of whom had had little or no previous education. It was centred on the topic of the week, which was 'lifestyles'. In this lesson the context was set in the first half of the lesson by a short text based on longevity in a remote part of Japan and its dependence on lifestyles, which was then used as a focus for language work. Simon introduced the structure of sentences beginning with 'as soon as/if/when' when referring to the future using examples from the text they had read. The learners were then given a number of sentences containing these forms and after underlining the verb forms, they rewrote the sentences so that they were all true of themselves. There was then a card game to practise the first conditional. They matched pictures of actions and results and described the situation using the first conditional. Phrases of probability were introduced such as 'I'm sure, I expect, I doubt'. Students were then asked to work in pairs and take turns in picking up cards and asking first conditional questions using the clause on the card; their partner was to answer using on of the phrases of probability. This lesson was placed in his scheme of work as part of a grammar sequence: 'Last week we looked at 'going to' and present continuous to refer to the future and so this week I thought it appropriate to introduce 'will' to refer to the future.' The lesson was fairly learner- centred as it drew on the learners' own ideas as language examples.

*Reference to language or skills work,*

The objectives of the lesson were language based: 'Students will be able to a) recognise and use collocations from the text to present their own views and b) recognise and use 'will' with 'if/as soon as/when'.

The text was used to focus on the use of lexis (particularly collocations) and then used as a springboard for teaching the first conditional in the sense of consequential actions (If you do this, this will happen). It was fundamentally a 'Presentation, Practice and Production' (PPP) lesson (Harmer 2015), where the target language was presented inductively and controlled practice was given in the form of a 'game'. In the post observation interview, Simon focused his responses heavily on language use as when asked about the rationale for the lesson he said that 'the activity was to get new language from the text' in the form of the first conditional as 'we have covered 'going to and present continuous for future reference'. The presentation stage was 'how to form the first conditional' and in commenting on the practice stage of the lesson he said 'they had the structure there'.

The first two stages (presentation and practice) were not planned as communicative activities in a realistic sense, in that the learners were using isolated sentences to practise the form. Although they were working together to match the pictures, most of their shared suggestions were phrased as first conditional sentences to match the chosen pair of pictures. The effect of this stage was to provide a safe and engaging environment (Thornbury 2005) for some fluency practice of a compound sentence structure. As the lesson progressed, in order to give the learners a frame for more realistic communication, Simon introduced the question form.

He had prepared them to ask closed questions (If x happens, will you….?) and given them a range of ways to frame their answers to this kind of question, in the form of lexico-grammatical chunks of language (Lewis 2002) which are usually followed by 'will' when

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referring to the future, for example, 'I'm sure….', 'It's possible….', 'I doubt if….', and 'It's unlikely that …'.  The teaching approach changed at this point as these 'chunks' were presented on the board in the context of the communicative task they were about to do and without any grammatical explanation.  The learners in fact started to ask open questions, which Simon had not predicted (see below).

*Direct examination skills*

Examination skills were not the focus of this lesson but such a language focus presented through spoken practice, would always be applicable to a test of productive skills. Interestingly, when the learners were given a brief to engage in conversation with their peers asking them about future possibilities, Simon had not predicted the range of questions they would ask.  Although he had set up a 'production' phase asking the learners to pose closed questions, they very quickly started to ask open questions (e.g. if x happens, what will you do?).  Simon quickly adjusted his thinking to the direction in which the learners were moving and harnessed this by taking some examples of their productive use and discussing with them the merits of open questions, particularly in an examination situation.  He also made a mental note to focus on converting closed questions to open ones at some later stage in the course.

> I guess probably throughout the year when you have activities where they ask closed questions, try to ask them to make it into an open questions… trying to get them to engage more in conversation.

This last utterance relates closely to the criterion of the examination mark scheme 'Engage in discussion,' where candidates are expected to express a view and seek and respond to those of others.

*Learner response*

The learners took opportunities to transfer the ideas from the text and the language input to their own lives and those of their peers and were engaged in genuine communication as a result.  The language presented was conceptually straightforward but structurally challenging.  They were, however, keen to practise and perfect their use of the structure, especially when using it to apply to themselves.  It is doubtful whether they understood the relationship between what they were doing and the examination, but Simon himself had done so and resolved to return to this.

**Conclusion**

The observed lesson could be seen as integrating examination skills within a language teaching context, albeit unplanned.  By the end of the lesson, Simon was applying a strategy which he had admired in his colleagues and felt he did not apply himself.  It could be argued that his in-depth knowledge of the examination requirements gave him an advantage that he had not been aware of, which was to enable 'reflection in action' (Schön 1983) and the subsequent combination of his knowledge of both the examination requirements and features of interactive discourse.  As an experienced teacher and an examiner for the examination in question, Simon is at least at the fourth stage of assessment literacy and because of the training he receives from the awarding body, he may have some elements of the fifth stage: 'multidimensional literacy' (Pill and Harding 2013).  He is aware enough of what he knows to give the learners some useful strategies or advice, but he still expressed a lack of understanding of their starting point.

## Case study five -  Susan
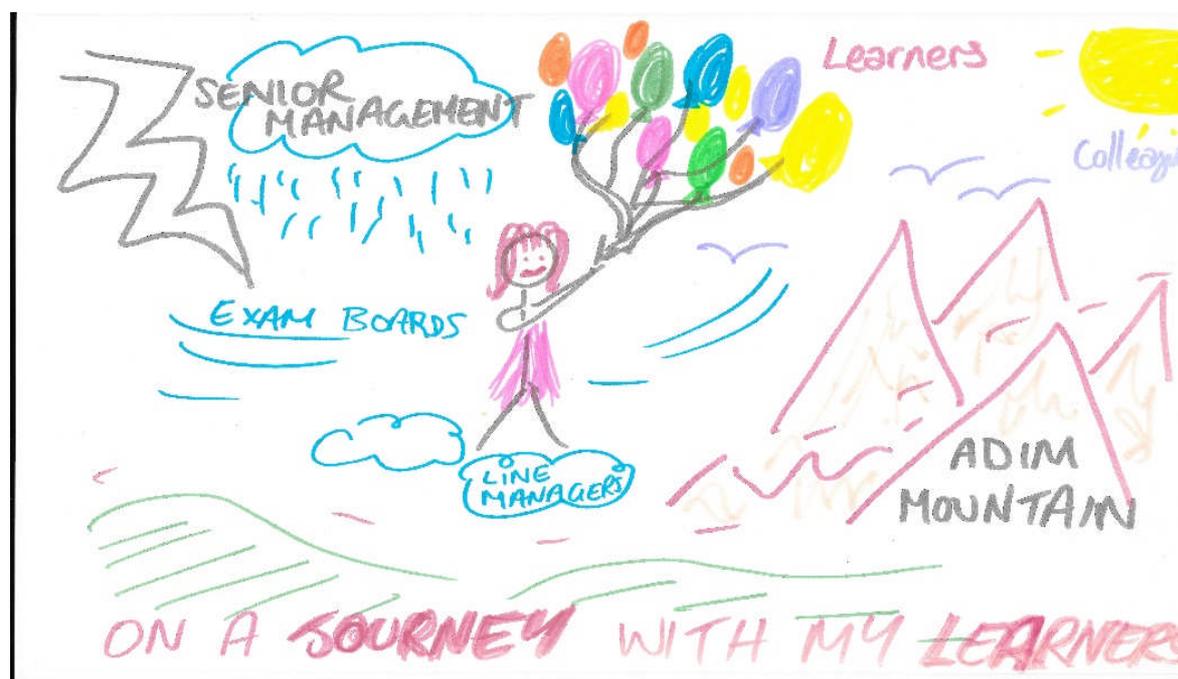


**Fig. 19  Susan's drawing**

Susan is a graduate who is relatively new to English language teaching.  She has been teaching ESOL for about three years, having completed a PGCE course in Literacy and ESOL teaching, and has had experience of teaching learners with a range of abilities and backgrounds since then.  Her experience of preparing learners for English language examinations is quite recent.

**Positioning of self**

Like Karen, Susan based her picture on a metaphor, this time of a journey.  Susan put herself in the middle of her picture, floating on a couple of clouds and holding a number of balloons. The clouds and the balloons represent her line managers and her learners respectively, who are therefore her main points of contact.  Both of these relationships were described in positive, supportive terms:  'They [the learners] are a bit fragile but at the same time they're

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the thing powering me along cos I need them otherwise I'd fall to the ground'. 'My line managers also try to keep me up a little bit. They're like mini clouds that I can kind of bounce along to kind of help me stay up in the air'. She therefore gives the impression that she is dependent on both groups of people keeping her afloat. She is also not static in her picture and to express this she uses the analogy of a journey: 'I feel like I'm on a journey with my learners'. As well as being supportive, this relationship is therefore collaborative and she reinforces this by using the pronouns 'we' or 'us' on their route through 'admin mountains where you have to get through all the big scary obstacles and genuinely that holds us back quite a lot as well.'

**Positioning of others**

The other players in the scene are more detached from her and but nevertheless have an effect in the form of further 'obstacles', a word which she repeats many times. Senior management are depicted as a raincloud as they 'thwart the whole time […] constantly causing obstacles basically'. Later in the interview, she laments that 'I feel very, very unappreciated and undervalued by senior management. They have no idea what we do on a daily basis'. It is noteworthy here that the expressive nature of the language used here is unequivocally negative with the prefixes 'un' and 'under' and the use of 'no' instead of the less emphatic 'don't have'.

The awarding bodies are also seen as one of the elements, the wind: 'The exam boards for me are kind of like changing in the wind because the wind is always there but it might change or it might change its mind or something like that.' Tellingly, the wind and the rain are phenomena that she has no power to control or influence. Her colleagues are more neutral in her depiction of them as birds in the sky, who 'can help, give me direction kind of like, giving hints of go this way or that way or something like that. But generally, they're not able to help that much because they're busy doing their things, to deal with their own balloons and

stuff'. Again she gives herself no influence in this relationship, which she presents as one-way.

The government was omitted from the picture altogether, a factor she had not considered. However, when prompted she gave them a very powerful and invasive role in her world, describing them in Orwellian terms:

> Horrible black crows who would be trying to burst my balloons because they are constantly trying to take the money away and the funding away so that they are trying to reduce the number of learners we have; …. trying to pop my balloons… I would say, probably. And sometimes they give you new balloons but not very often and they're like balloon control… the number of balloon control.

## Purpose of the course

Susan's focus on the learners in her positioning of herself in her picture is reinforced by her learner-centric view of the course. 'My concern is to help learners feel that they have achieved'. This altruistic phrasing indicates that it is their sense of well-being rather than achieving concrete goals that is important to her. However, she does allow for the latter, as she points out that learners are striving for different goals, which could be an examination but could equally be improved confidence, or recognition of progress. She is aware that this view does not connect with that of senior management, who are interested in 'retention', 'achievement', 'statistics', 'attendance and punctuality.' She calls this difference 'complete conflict'.

## Impact of examinations

In spite of her views expressed concerning the purpose of her courses, the way Susan approaches the examination has a 'massive impact' from the beginning of the course. She was in fact positive overall about the concept of examinations as learner feedback told her

that they helped the learners gain a sense of achievement and move towards their goals. In order to prepare her learners for the examination, she scrutinises the outcomes required for the relevant examination and designs her course around these. She also stresses the importance of examination technique.

**Own experience of examinations**

Susan's use of language to describe her own experience of examinations is largely positive: 'Actual exam days often went quite well.' I always knew I was quite good on the day'. However, this was tempered by her poor self-discipline ('disorganised') at the revision stage, which she describes using different morphological formations of the same word: 'massive procrastination for ages',' I start procrastinating', 'procrastinate for ages'.

Susan's own experience does have an impact on her teaching in the sense that she does not want her learners to behave as she did. She is very aware that her learners do not necessarily have prior experience and that they need 'the tools so that when they're sat there on the day, they don't go into a blind panic, they do ok'. She encourages 'self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses', 'revision' and 'independent study'. She prepares them for the day of the examination so that there are no surprises:

> We do loads of role plays. We do lots and lots of exam practice where we're just practising exactly what the scenario would be [...] Speaking in little groups, recording it, listening back to it straightaway, giving each other feedback, what you did well, what you did pretty well, what do you need to improve? […] If I had had that, I would've done more practice earlier on and I wouldn't have procrastinated. I'm hoping that they're not procrastinating – I'm not giving them the opportunity to procrastinate.

**Self-realisation**

While surveying her picture, Susan made the observation that 'I don't feel empowered at all, do I?' It was clear from her delivery that she was realising on viewing the picture that 'It

looks like others are helping, or pulling me along, or pushing me along or whatever and I don't have huge control over our... like there's no job security, for example, it is literally the wind and there's not a huge amount of control about who I teach or when I teach. That's all up to other people, it's not really me. The only constant is that I'm holding a bunch of balloons.' She did concede that the last sentence in this quotation was crucial and that in the classroom the world took on a different guise, 'peaceful', 'sunny' and 'no rain clouds'. She constructed a dichotomy between the positivity of this world and the negativity of her picture and described herself as 'an adventurer' as a result of this.

In response to my chart (fig. 3 in Chapter two), Susan was at first in agreement, seeing the teacher as an 'intermediary' having to 'break down what is needed in the exam in order for them to understand what they have to do.' However, on reflection she pointed out a change she would make to the positions in the chart, giving herself a crucial role and returning to the idea that she does have some agency within the classroom:

> I'd put the teacher where the exam is. It's like the exam is here and the teacher's got to get through the exam to the learner, almost. Like that modern word – you've got to unpack it. In a way the teacher's role is not to have the exam looming above you but to have the exam as something that you physically mould and break it down into manageable chunks and you almost like portion it out to the students…. Chopping it up into a puzzle or something.

She also raises the point about the interlocutor role of the teacher in the speaking tests, giving them extra control and involvement: 'And also we're the ones who actually do [as interlocutors] the exams for the centres. We're the ones who do the exams on the day'.

She went on to further substantiate this view of her own agency by describing her way of engaging her learners. She had devised this approach herself during her PGCE placement through observing the disaffected behaviour of her teenage learners who had very little

motivation to achieve in the language examination they were preparing for as this was an adjunct to their art and design course:

> I allow the learning outcomes of the lessons and the focus of purposeful learning to be connected with the exam but often the contexts or the topics weren't connected to the exam at all because I wanted to do topics that the students had come up with or that they were able to relate with rather than impose a topic on them.

The learners had chosen topics that connected with their art and design interests and therefore seemed relevant to them. The result was a very noticeable change in behaviour and engagement:

> You can still use the same discussion language but with something more interesting that they'd prefer. … I didn't just want to pump them full of language about the environment for about 10 weeks. That would've been terrible. The approach that I seem to have developed is to make sure that they are very aware of the meta-language and of the different skills ….so that they've got this kind of system of problem solving and then they can put it to any topic.

This method had come from careful consideration of her learners and their backgrounds, aspirations and aptitudes and the decision that replicating her own experience was not going to appeal to them. She had learnt from this experience and has endeavoured to apply the same approach thereafter.

**Susan's practice**

The observed class was an ESOL Entry level 1 (CEFR A1), part of the 16-18 provision. Five of the eleven learners had had limited schooling and the others were new to teaching methods in the UK. 'Many of the learners seemed not to be aware of the role a learner should play in the contract'. This could have been due to interrupted schooling or experience only of the 'banking' style of education (Freire 1970), where the teachers merely transfer knowledge into

the learners' minds without active contribution from the learner. This seemed to influence the learners' response to this lesson. (See below)

The lesson took place about a month before the speaking and listening test and although it was an integrated skills session, the aims were to 'build up confidence and encourage learner autonomy for the exam.' The lesson was centred on a topic of looking for accommodation, which had already been the focus of a sequence of lessons. It was also to 'consolidate existing knowledge from previous classes'. The lesson began with the introduction of a fictional character called 'Tom' and some information about him. The learners then read some cards around the room and collaboratively selected five which they thought contained his key requirements in terms of shared accommodation. There was then some comprehension work on two advertisements followed by controlled speaking and listening practice in pairs with two further advertisements. This was done as an information gap activity where each has a different advertisement and they asked their partners key questions about their advertisements. They did this back to back to simulate a phone call. They then worked in small groups to compare the four advertisements and decide which one was most suitable for Tom.

*Reference to language or skills*

The main spoken language focus of the lesson was asking and answering factual question relating to the accommodation advertised in the texts used for the reading activities. A key testing point in the examination at this level is asking and answering questions, one aspect of which is identifying the focus of a question i.e. differentiating between 'where', 'how', 'who' etc. Another aspect is the structure of the question form particularly using the auxiliary 'do'.

Later in the lesson there was an attempt at discussion work on the relative merits of each flat, using the frames ' I think…. because …', and 'I like …. because …', with their own ideas from earlier in the lesson.

*Direct examination skills work*

Although there were reading and writing elements, the lesson was framed around the interaction patterns of the speaking and listening examination, while using a scenario that was of relevance to the learners' lives – the relative merits of different accommodation options. In the first part, accommodation advertisements were used as a basis for 'interview style' questions and answers.  Firstly, the learners were identifying key question words in order answer questions and then they took part in a controlled 'information gap' activity involving asking such questions with their partners (standing back to back to replicate a phone call). The later part of the lesson was devoted to more open discussion work for which the learners were given a scaffold (see under language skills).  This covered the interaction patterns of two parts of the examination: interview-style questions and answer and engaging in discussion.

*Learner response.*

Susan's ideas about this were mixed but insightful: 'The freer speaking was a little hectic, but a fun atmosphere'.  But, in the discussion activity, 'they were unclear about what they had to do, and the student-centred approach, which meant decisions were coming from the learners, was unfamiliar to them so they were unsure and hesitant.'  This is a crucial point, as one key feature of the speaking and listening examination is that at some stages, control of the interaction is transferred to the candidates, which can present problems arising from different educational experiences and levels of cultural capital.  By the end of the lesson, the situation was resolved to a certain extent:

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Despite the slow start I managed to support the learners and encourage them to give their opinions and as a class a choice was made to select the best option. The lesson objectives were displayed on the board, but it wasn't always clear to the students why these were relevant. These should have been referred back to their personal targets, - speaking in a discussion is helping to improve speaking skills (for the up-coming examination).

**Conclusion**

Susan has a clear vision of the way in which her teaching is organised. She strives to incorporate the teaching of real-life skills within a detailed examination preparation framework. She does this well mainly because of her ability to identify the ways in which the skills tested relate to real life. In many ways, her language teaching encourages natural interaction and attempts to replicate authentic settings (the back-to-back phone calls). Although Susan's aim was to familiarise the learners with a learner-centred approach, the question remains whether her learners will make the transfer to the examination as they may feel that their status does not allow them to take control from the examiner. Susan is operating at the fourth stage of assessment literacy, while her learners range between stages one and two: 'illiteracy' and 'nominal literacy' (Pill and Harding 2013), particularly in relation to the communicative nature of the examination, either through a lack of education, or through coming from a more traditional background. She goes some distance towards addressing this difference but when drawing on her own experience of examinations she tends to refer back to a time when, as a student, she was at stage three: 'functional literacy' (ibid 2013).

# Chapter six - Discussion, implications and the future

(Note:  The findings are summarised for reference in appendices 1 and 2).

## 6.1 The research question

In this chapter, I return to the research question:

*What are teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing learners for Skills for Life English speaking and listening tests?*

I will discuss the ways in which the data from the case studies can be used to address this.  In the first instance, I will revisit my chosen definition of perception and then discuss the sub-questions, before addressing the main research question.  In order to identify the perceptions, I situate the findings within the framework first introduced in Chapter three as a definition of the concept of 'perception' as it is applied to a given phenomenon.  It was defined as the combination of observation and interpretation, which led to the formation of attitudes.

The phenomenon under scrutiny here refers to a language testing framework which has been imposed on the groups of learners being taught by the teachers taking part in this research. To take the first stage, observation, the teachers view the phenomenon from their individual standpoints.  In all of the case studies (except Simon's), the source of the imposition of the accreditation, i.e. the government, was seen as remote, 'lurking, detached' (Karen).  Susan saw it as having a more immediate pro-active effect:  'Crows trying to burst my balloons [students]'.  However they all saw it as an agency over which they had no influence or even dialogue, although Anna and Susan did recognise the value of the qualifications for their learners.  'It's giving them recognition and may be a useful qualification' (Anna); 'then there's a certificate at the end of it, there's something at the end of it – they feel that they've achieved' (Susan) and Karen liked the structure they gave the course.

On the other hand, the respondents all aligned themselves very closely to their learners as the focus of their working world and the reason for their existence within the field of the case study (the workplace). The respondents were more varied in the views of their learners and in relation to themselves. Karen, Claire and Susan all described being on a journey with their learners in positive terms. Simon and Anna, while being more static in their descriptions, situated the learners as the foundation of the whole system and the source of their job satisfaction.

There were similarities, however, in the ways in which they viewed their learners in relation to the examination. Karen, Claire and Anna, however, all mentioned a division in their classes between learners with experience of education, and therefore examinations, and those without. They are aware that the latter have difficulty in carrying out the tasks in the examination but it none of the respondents seem to have explored exactly what the more assessment-literate learners have that the others do not, or indeed what knowledge they, as teachers, have.

To further investigate what may be happening here, I come to the second stage, the interpretation. This almost certainly involves the application of criteria for measurement or benchmarks, drawn up by the perceiver. These were in part influenced by the observers' own history in relation to other examinations. Although the case studies set out to explore the teachers' observations within the workplace only, this was shown to be unrealistic as they could not and did not confine their viewpoint within the field of work but drew on their view of who they were in the wider spheres of their lives, bringing in their past histories and cultural capital insofar as they felt these had influence on the way they behave now. In other words, even when operating in a particular field they are still who they are: situated in the wider sphere of the world around them and their own past experiences. 'Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the [...] fore-

conception. An interpretation is never a pre-suppostionless apprehending of something presented to us' (Heidegger 1927 cited in Smith et al 2009:24).

The fore-conceptions in four of the case studies were mainly based on positive experiences of examinations, involving success. Karen and Claire both mentioned copying strategies from their families (posting notes around the house and viewing the process as a 'game'). Anna and Susan had developed their own strategies without direct support from their families or teachers. It is worth noting that these factors were privileged over their professional training and work experience. This arguably distances them from some of their learners and confirms the view expressed by Pajares that 'beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling or experience.' (1992:327)

This naturally underpins the interpretation of their learners' needs in relation to the examinations but it is very difficult to analyse knowledge that has been built up subconsciously over a lifetime or possibly even to identify what it is they know. I return to this issue later in this chapter.

The interpretations also seem to depend on how the perceivers placed 'self' in relation to the phenomenon: none of the respondents was an impartial observer as they all had a view of the phenomenon or imposition of the accreditation policy.

It could be said that they all see themselves as directly affected by the phenomenon in that they agree on their position in the system as 'filters' or 'buffers' making the examinations palatable for their learners. Claire, in particular, was very negative about this ('stupid, short-sighted taking them through hoops'). However she, in common with Simon, accepted the need for a 'compromise' (Simon) between the system and their purpose: 'An irrelevance, like the weather, but we have to deal with it' (Claire).

In the end it is the pivotal role in fig. 3 (Chapter two) that gives the teachers their power as catalysts in effecting change: They are 'central to the plot' (Simon) 'empowered by knowledge' (Karen). They do have the opportunity to affect the influence of the policy as it is up to them to give the learners what they need to gain social and employability skills as well as gaining a certificate. Karen and Simon made this point.

So far the interpretations have all been based on the teachers' views from the standpoint of themselves, of their inner cognition. However, there are attempts to view the situation from the standpoints of the learners. There is evidence that these attempts have led to two contrasting interpretations of the learners' positions:

The first of these is a sympathetic view in that there is a sense that the learners can be given guidelines based on the background knowledge that the teachers have: 'They need tools', 'I encourage self-awareness' (Susan) or the 'rules of the game' (Claire).

The second interpretation suggests that the gap in understanding of the examination phenomenon between the learners and their teachers is wider and not understood. Two of the respondents express a feeling of not being able to help their learners: 'I don't understand why they don't get it', (Karen); 'They don't understand, I can't get the message across,' (Simon).

Neither of these responses is right or wrong. They could be seen to culminate in two sets of attitudes to the learners' needs, the former being optimistic in that they can pass on their experience through the teaching of a set of strategies or taught behaviours. The latter attitude is more pessimistic in that they see their learners' starting points as unfathomable, they feel that giving the learners strategies does not work, as they often do not adopt these behaviours.

To consider the work of the teachers in the classroom, it is striking that all the observed lessons reflected the teachers' views of self and their own experiences of test-taking expressed in the first interview. Karen took the role of a facilitator and encouraged

organisation and the use of a 'crib sheet'; Claire reminded her learners of the examination at intervals and encouraged them to look for the 'elephant trap' in the light of a game. Anna, Simon and Susan all tried to prevent the learners from feeling or acting as they themselves had done. This evidence further supports the point made in Chapter three that original experiences can take precedence over later pedagogical training because people do not leave their fore-conceptions behind.

How far does this relate to learner need? There are different answers to this question. For learners who are in the first and second groups described in Chapter one, and have similar educational experiences to those of their teachers some of the approaches will be very accessible, as their needs are restricted to the requirements of a particular rating system and the attendant tasks. However, for those with little or no experience of education there could well be a gap between their experience and that of their teachers which is not being addressed.

I now consider the findings as they relate to the four sub-questions.


### 6.1.1. Sub-Question 1:

*How far are teachers aware of the sub skills that are required for success in a given test and the ways in which they may connect with real life?*

The teachers are aware of the complexities of the tasks in the examination in question but do not always feel that the constituent 'underlying language competencies' relate to the real world. Here they would seem to be questioning the validity of the test in that it is not seen to be consistent in testing what it purports to test and therefore there are elements of 'construct irrelevant variance' (Koretz 2008:220).

Take for example Anna's comment about the two-minute presentation that her learners have to deliver after one minute's preparation: 'The main purpose is demonstrating the use of formal register and structuring a short talk but when on earth to they do that in real life?'(Anna). It is true that the construction of the task itself could be seen as creating a vehicle for ensuring the test-taker produces a piece of extended discourse, and as such it does not set out to be an authentic task. However, organising a longer utterance, which is coherent, cohesive and instructive and delivering it in a suitable register, without too much hesitation and or inaccuracy, could be seen to resemble the competencies required for a seminar at university, a job interview, or a meeting in the workplace where differing points of view are considered. It is sometimes these sub-skills that are more beneficial than the task itself and these could be practised in the classroom within the scenarios of interviews, debates or general discussion.

Claire's dislike of the collaborative task is another example. In a national examination, a topic for negotiation has to be presented through the testing materials to ensure appropriacy of level and also standardisation of the experience. However, in the classroom the teacher can practise the same skills of giving and seeking views, agreeing and disagreeing, and turn-taking in making real-life decisions. Claire in fact did this in her lesson, but doubted the effectiveness of this in that her learners either may not make the connection with the examination or not engage with the hypothetical nature of the testing tool. Karen, on the other hand, was sure that her learners would make the connection. It could be argued that both are making assumptions that could be addressed or verified through classroom interaction with the learners in order to identify and confront misunderstandings.

Another point that arose from the case studies is the fact that there can be behaviourist drilling and rote learning of potential responses for an examination. This, however, does not allow for spontaneous, 'real-life' language use, which would give a good impression to an

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assessor. For example, it is considered commendable if a candidate self-corrects as it demonstrates a sufficient awareness of language in use to identify errors, which is a positive aspect of the learning process (Krashen 1982). Also responding to another speaker by 'back-channelling' demonstrates engagement in an interaction and also listening skills.

However, there was also evidence in the case studies of teachers spontaneously recognising when an underlying competence relevant to the examination came up of its own accord in the observed lesson and they drew the learner's attention to this (Karen, Simon). This demonstrates that teachers may have these competencies in their heads ready to draw on when appropriate. Others may find it difficult to transfer the underlying language competencies from an examination task to the kind of learner-centred task they wish to do in the classroom and this can be a barrier to integrating examination requirements into a learner-centred mode of teaching. Hence the tendency, particularly as the examination day looms, is to tackle them separately through past papers without making the link with the learners' day-to-day learning. Sometimes teachers and their learners see the goals of preparation for life and preparation for the examination, as two separate elements of the course.

### 6.1.2. Sub-Question 2

*How far are teachers taking into account their own experiences of examinations gained throughout their lives and to what extent are they aware of this?*

It emerged from the data that the teachers were all influenced by this in some way, but they were not all aware of this at the beginning of the interview process. Simon reflected, 'Maybe I do' referring to transferring his own nervousness without having realised it before. The prominence in UK culture of examinations, often high-stakes ones, meant that most of the respondents had highly developed strategies for approaching them, which gave them a certain

level of confidence.  Only two, Anna and Susan, consciously wanted their learners to approach examinations differently from the way in which they had done.

Susan very deliberately steered her learners away from her procrastination 'I'm not giving them the opportunity to procrastinate'. Anna also rejected her own 'cramming' method and instead drew on the preparation method used by her driving instructor, which was to teach her to drive first before thinking about the test. The remaining four did follow the strategies or approaches that they had used as test-takers themselves.  Claire differed from the others in that she drew on an attitude she had been given at an early age, at the beginning of her test-taking experiences.  It could be argued that she was then closer to her learners in her awareness of test-taking as she stressed quite heavily that she knew she needed to reinforce in her learners' minds the idea of the examination being 'a game'.

It is possible that it is these individual perceptions, conscious or unconscious (for example Simon), that are the roots of the differing approaches teachers take and awareness of the background of their own behaviours may lead to greater understanding of the gap between their knowledge of those of their learners.  In short, there could be an advantage in improved understanding of what they 'know' and how they know it, down to the most basic level of awareness.


### 6.1.3 Sub-Question 3

*How are teachers responding to any conflict between the government and institutional requirements and their own professional judgement?*

There is generally a negative or removed attitude towards the decision makers. 'Threatening to rain' (Karen), 'Lost the plot' (Claire), 'They have no idea what we do' (Susan), 'I don't look in the direction of the government very much' (Anna).  The existence of the

accreditation system produced various levels of conflict expressed: 'Obviously we need exam skills sessions to get the government funding but they are not the main purpose of the course' (Simon). Susan, on the other hand, said that there is 'complete conflict' as management is only interested in figures: 'retention, achievement, attendance and punctuality'. However, while the teachers in these case studies object to this and other such policies as entering the candidates for a lower level, or not entering them if they might fail, they all feel that they have no choice but to comply. Almost universally they take the view that they have to make the system work for the benefit of the students to ensure that the 'washback' (Messick 1996) is positive.

### 6.1.4 Sub-Question 4

*How far are teachers aware that their learners' perceptions regarding examinations may be very different from their own?*

The teachers were all aware that there is a difference here, but were not always able to identify the specific cognitive gaps that the learners may have had. It could be argued that just the awareness of difference is useful as there were strategies in place to address this. For example, Anna used the technique of instructing learners to take on the role of assessing their peers to give them the idea of what to look for in their own performance. Susan said 'they need tools', Simon was aware that 'we were never taught exam skills but I guess for them, it's something that they need to have', 'one of our roles is to make them aware of how exams work' and Claire instilled the idea of the examination being a game. In an examination, the expectation is for the candidates to pretend that they are in a real-life situation, but, as I have said earlier, this is a conceptual leap that many candidates are unable to make and that their teachers may take for granted and even be unaware of the necessity for it.

I would like to look at this through the lens of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (See Chapter three). Cultural capital is accumulated over a lifetime from early childhood onwards. It is therefore closely linked to identity as it is so much a part of a person that they may not even realise that they have it. My case studies indicate that many teachers consciously or subconsciously draw on their own cultural capital regarding assessment literacy when they approach examination preparation in the ESOL classroom. For most, this will include their own success in examinations, which they may not have reflected on in relation to their learners' experience. Their learners will not all have the same advantage as their cultural capital may be very different in that they may have little experience of education and even if they do have some, this will have been in a different setting. To differing degrees, some teachers are looking at the examination phenomenon though the lens of their own cultural capital rather than that of their learners. Some, however, do step aside and indicate that they take nothing for granted in terms of learner awareness.

Throughout this discussion, I have shown that there were patterns in the manifestations of the teachers' perceptions. Their responses were different but connections were similar, for example, teachers' own histories differed but they all had an influence on teaching in one way or another. Their awareness of difference between their histories and those of their learners was present but their awareness of the extent of this differed.

## 6.2 Main conclusions

From this thesis there have emerged two fundamental education culture gaps between ESOL teachers and their learners with little or no previous formal education: firstly, the way of learning and secondly, assessment literacy. These combine to create considerable disadvantage for such learners in the current assessment culture.

*Way of learning*

Earlier research on the effects of a lack of background in literacy has found has found that this engenders a way of learning that is based on real life experience (Freire 2000, Condelli and Spruck Wrigley 2005, Gunn 2003) and relevant to current needs (Vinogradov and Bigelow 2010) as discussed in Chapters one and three. The work of Tarone, Bigelow and Hansen (2007), Bigelow and Tarone (2004) and Tarone (2010) has shown that learners with low alphabetic literacy can be hampered in their acquisition of spoken language in that during the language learning process they do not necessarily recall or even notice morphological and syntactical detail, as discussed in Chapter three. This thesis complements these findings by looking at two main implications for assessment that arise from them. The first implication concerns the notion of relevance in the eyes of the learners. This can prevent learners from engaging with externally set exam tasks as a given scenario may be incomprehensible to them and therefore lead to poor demonstration of speaking skills. The second implication is that through a lack of morphological and syntactical detail, the learners will be unlikely to score highly on the accuracy and range scales in the mark scheme. The conclusion is therefore that the effects of educational background on language test success is quite deeply rooted in early experiences of life and learning and as a result more difficult to overcome.

*Assessment literacy*

This thesis has also shown that the, the depth of the gap between the classroom and the examination, for learners with little or no history of formal education, is less well recognised as it is connected with the level of assessment literacy of the teachers in comparison to the learners'. It is also not universally recognised that the components of assessment literacy vary across different world cultures and so learners who do have experience of education may

also be disadvantaged. The thesis has provided evidence that teachers are attempting to balance examination preparation and the teaching of language skills for life and in many ways they demonstrate a sound awareness of the target skills for both scenarios. However, it has also emerged that experience of being tested and what it encompasses is based on educational and cultural capital that is so embedded in teacher cognition that they do not always know what they know and therefore what their learners do not know. For example, teachers may take it for granted that the purpose of taking a test is to demonstrate ability in a particular area. Not all learners will be aware of this, and even if they are aware in principle, they may not know what it means in practice. Teachers (and examiners) may also assume that the pragmatics of testing are universal and not be aware of the need for intercultural knowledge and competence.

This thesis therefore provides research evidence of an extra difficulty that teachers have in that their own assumptions about assessment literacy lead to a lack of understanding of the instruction needed to bridge the assessment literacy gap. Unfortunately, teachers are not helped by government, management or even awarding bodies as they too do not always recognise this gap according to the work of McKay and Brindley (2007), McNamara (2012), McNamara and Roever (2006), Kurvers and Spotti (2015), Spruck Wrigley (2015). This supports the notion of the assessment literacy gap described in Chapter one between assessment professionals and candidates and further strengthens the incompatibility of the cultures of 'socio-culturally based classroom pedagogy while concurrently encouraged to abide by the rules of testing cultures' (Inbar Lourie (2008: 388), as quoted in Chapter one.

 A way of approaching the position of the teachers is to return to the triple hermeneutics referred to in Chapter four, whereby the researcher is making sense of the teachers' perception of the learners' perception of the examination. To take the process of perception (as defined in Chapter three) from the standpoint of the teacher, there is firstly a need to

recognise that the learners' perceptions might be different. According to the principles of phenomenology adopted for the purpose of IPA (Larkin et al 2011), teachers would be advised to identify and put aside their own knowledge of assessment literacy and then try to see the target examinations through the lenses of the learners (I return to this in section 6.4).

Awareness of the assessment literacy gap needs to be addressed in order to increase teacher awareness of their role in developing the assessment literacy of the learners, thereby giving them a fairer chance in the accreditation culture that now prevails in the post-compulsory education sector in England and Wales.

## 6.3. Limitations of this study revisited

In Chapter four, I mentioned three limitations of this research process, which related to the research design. Firstly, there was the issue of how the process of being questioned and observed changes the behaviour of the respondents. They all knew me fairly well and they also knew what my views were concerning the government and management climate in further education at the time. Their openness, which began with the drawings and continued in the interviews, indicated that this knowledge gave them confidence to give full expression to their negative views as well as the positive ones. Secondly, my own views and bias regarding how learners should be prepared for examinations may have influenced my interpretation of the interviews and of their teaching, in particular. Here, it was important to strive to allow respondents to lead the post-observation interview to ask them to give their reflections and analysis of what they were doing. It must be recognised that it may not have been possible to repress my own view altogether.

The third limitation I discussed in Chapter four was the generalisability of the findings. The work originally sought to reveal possibilities regarding teacher cognition and their

approaches to working with learners with little or no history of education and in particular to highlight difference. Although there were underlying trends emerging, the nature of research in the form of a small number of case studies is that it can only reveal the cognition and approaches of the respondents and there are as many other approaches as there are teachers.

If I undertook this research again, it might be useful to extend the data collection to hold several focus groups with teachers from different institutions to establish whether the above-mentioned underlying trends still emerge. It would also be interesting to compare the findings of this research with those arising from working with teachers who do not know me.

## 6.4. Implications and the future

This thesis aimed to identify teachers' perception of their role in examination preparation with learners with little or no history of education. Through a series of case studies, it focused in particular on the ways in which the teachers concerned perceive their role, from the point of view of their own position regarding examinations, stemming from attitudes and experiences gained throughout their educational and working lives.

I revisit the framework of challenges leading to pressure on teachers in Chapter two. The first is government policy. In Chapter one, I described three groups that had emerged among ESOL teachers, relating to Foucault's theory of normalisation, in response to the new accreditation climate. These case studies reveal the possible emergence of a fourth group, who, now that the policies have become firmly embedded, accept the requirements, albeit with varying degrees of resentment, but are proactive in finding ways of limiting the effects on the learners and meeting their perceived needs. There is a genuine belief in positive washback in the classroom and these teachers attempt to secure this.

The second pressure is the examinations themselves. How far are they fit for purpose? Simpson (2006) raised the question of whether learners with little or no history of education should be required to take examinations at all. My initial response to this was that, with a shift in the approach to teaching such learners, this could be done. However, Simpson is right to suggest that the current situation is unfair especially as the validity of an examination depends not only on the original construct as intended by the awarding body but also on the interpretations and strategies of each individual teacher. Test designers need to assume that those being tested would appreciate that they had to answer the questions in a certain way. If they could not assume this, then the test could be said to be invalid. It is unlikely that assessment policies will change so the options open to educators are either to change the means of assessment or to ensure that teachers fully prepare their learners for the examination 'game'.

One approach to this arises from the third pressure, which is balancing the need for authenticity in relation to learners' lives with the different kind of authenticity based on assessment literacy. From the case studies it clear that teachers differ in the way they see the distinctions and overlap between the two; this is a useful area for discussion in teacher education.

The case studies also raise the question here whether any of us really know what is like not to have been formed by the world of study from an early age. The knowledge that teachers possess concerning the examination process and the examiner versus examinee relationship, may be being used to support the learners. Alternatively, the learners' possession of this knowledge may be being taken for granted. As we, as teachers, have had the benefit of education throughout our childhoods, adolescence and early adulthood at the very least, we now find it challenging to take ourselves back to the starting point, or even to identify where that might be. However, potential strength lies in realising that some learners, while on the

same journey as their teachers, are at an earlier stage than anticipated and teachers need to be able to take cues from their learners in order to notice the gaps in their experience and the strengths that they do have.

A more fruitful solution, however, lies in a further conundrum: in order to address the gap in assessment literacy, we as teachers need, firstly, to analyse what we know about examinations starting from the most basic level; secondly, to confront our own views of examinations and their origins; thirdly, to put these to one side and try to see the point of view of our learners. There is a need to explore with the learners the fundamental question of what an examination is from the point of view of the test-takers. This could include the notion that it is a demonstration of ability, that it is a snapshot only and that examiners can only credit what they see or hear. Exploration of these concepts would have other benefits for learners, for example regarding job interviews. A future project would be to develop strategies for achieving this on teacher education courses.

## 6.5. What I learnt from this research

As a teacher and teacher educator, the most humbling fact that I learned from doing this research is that I do not know myself how much I know about the examination process, and I include myself among the practitioners described above, who are at the higher levels of assessment literacy. As an experienced test-taker and also an examination rater and writer, there is a great deal of knowledge and experience that I draw on without having analysed what it is. Added to this, in my early years of teaching, I was working with EFL learners with similar backgrounds to my own in terms of education and so there was no need to consider an assessment literacy gap.

As a researcher, I learned from experiencing the IPA process that respondents also learn about themselves. The process of producing a graphic representation and then talking freely about its meaning revealed to them aspects of themselves that they had not been aware of.

Discussion of the observation also revealed to them how closely they are responding to their own experiences. This was evident particularly as a reflection of the philosophical view and positioning of self as they sometimes realised that they had more or less agency than they had realised, even that they were less confident than they thought. This highlights the need for opportunities to reflect and probe our reactions to phenomena that impact on our lives and to recognise the importance of our own histories.

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# Appendices

| | K | C | S | A | P | S | Summary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self | Guide on a mountain Central, empowered by knowledge. *Later also a gatekeeper* | In the middle (beleaguered ) all strands feeding in directly.  *Little agency at decision level* | The link between the learners and the other stakeholders The main focus of the learners. *No agency but part of a team* | In the middle Teacher, social worker. Mother  Alienation from gvt and management. No agency or dialogue | Squashed at the bottom of a hierarchy Has no say *Recog his value. Some agency and autonomy with regard to teaching His experience and world knowledge* | On a journey With an admin mountain in the way Carried along by learners, supported by line manager No control over the wind and rain. *Realised how little agency* | In the middle 4 Suppressed 2 Guide, empowered 1  Agency at beg 2 Agency at end 3  Changed down 1 Changed up 1 |
| students | Climbing the mountain over the hurdles (exams) All different: some around her some self propelled | On a journey. She catches them, teaches them and posts on' Fuelling, lovely | The base/foundation of the system | Teach her, The reason she stays in the job/ uplifting | Between management and the teachers | (her balloons) With her on the journey | Seen as indivs 1 Reason for being 3 |
| Colleagues | Also sheltering from the rain | Positive support Teamwork Empowered by giving support | Uses 'we'. Part of a team | Stress inducing. Issues with boundaries in her 2 roles | System depends on teamwork.  Not always supportive | Birds flying in the sky? Absorbed in own problems | Positive - 3 Negative - 3 |
| Manage-ment | Signposting in different directions | Have forgotten how it really is Line manager, sympathetic | Make decisions re awarding bodies but otherwise they don't get in the way | A 'boot' standing on her. | Top down, makes all decisions | Rain cloud. feels undervalued Line manager supportive Goals conflict with hers | Negative - 5 Neutral - 1 |
| Govern-ment policy | A threatening raincloud Lurking,detached Funding approach not helpful | Stupid, short-sighted. Taking through hoops. Accepts but unwillingly | Acceptance but strives to compromise between the system and his purpose | on a planet far away detached | Resentful but didn't question | Crows Trying to burst the balloons (check) Balloon control | gvt B Negative - ALL Acceptance 3 |
| Awarding bodies | Providing obstacles Likes exams for teaching structure | An irrelevance like the weather. Have to deal with it. | Central to the plot. Direct link to all | Triangle with teachers and learners. Beneficial as recognition of progress | Mutual dependence with learners | The wind - changing | Negative - 1 Neutral -  1 Positive – 2 Mixed - 2 |

….cont.

| | K | C | S | A | P | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotive reaction to exams | Good at them, enjoyed time pressure.  Never taught exam skills | Her father told her it's A game.  Didn't mind them confident | Nervous/stress Never taught exam skills | Successful.  Forgot it quickly.  Interest important for memory | Successful. May not always be able to apply it | Stressful Procrastinated and |
| How tackled them | Systematic.  Made notes using flash cards | Learnt the game. Some transferable skills | | Cramming | Plan,plan,plan. Strategy, strategy | regurgitated |
| Perceptions of learners | 2 cohorts. I don't understand why they don't get it. | More interested in good marks rather than learning. Some have diffs re the role play but is non judgemental | Feels for his learners- sympathetic- reflecting self. They don't understand.  I can't get the message across | Some zero experience, others lots but often not communicative testing | Recognised differences in terms of culture an education | Need tools. Encourage self- awareness |
| Strategies in class | (Worksheet to refer to for e.g. useful expressions in a discussion)  Draws on her earlier study habits | Tries to pass on the rules of the game.  Need for differentiation according to life experiences  Focuses on transferable skills | Integrating exam skills into Lesson for life. | Teaches life skills and exam skills, then has a period pulling both together. Last 2 weeks- exam skills only.  Uses peer support/feedback | Hard to prepare learners with little or no experience Drills them in strategy – not sure they can transfer knowledge . Looks at exam type questions/embeds in lessons Sets aside last month for exam papers | Gives them the tools Encourages revision Doesn't want them to be like her |
| Purpose of course | Citizenship (gvt and policy) Reality: social cohesion | Progression, employability- would prefer more social inclusion | Integration, citizenship, employability | For them to function in everyday life. Recognises the value of exams | For him to send them off on the right path | To help learners feel they've achieved. Learners-different goals so sometimes exams good for improving confidence and recognition of progress |

## Lesson:

|  | Karen | Claire | Anna | Simon | Susan |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class | E3 Adult | E3 Adult | E3/L1 (16-18) | E3 Adult | E1 16-18 |
| Topic | Housing | Transport | Government spending | Lifestyles | Housing |
| Exam skills | Making comparisons and expressing preference | Listening for numbers<br><br>Collaborative discussion task<br><br>Turn taking | Discussion on a range of topics | Asking open questions in interactive tasks | Asking and answering questions |
| Real world skills | Fluency in discussion | Collaborating on a project | Citizenship – political awareness for voting | Ditto | Ditto |
| How connected to exam from learners pt of view | Intentional, embedded in an integrated lesson.<br><br>Exam mentioned only once | Embedded in an integrated lesson.<br><br>Reminder of the exam at key points. | No mention of exam.<br><br>Opportunity to develop and express ideas | V little mention of exam. inclusion. Thinking on feet to bring it in<br><br>An integrated lesson | Learner centred<br><br>Little mention of exam<br><br>Integrated lesson |
| Planning | Overall end point in mind but route not specified | Planned in detail as exam practice | Planned with subliminal exam practice (not an aim in LP). | Unplanned exam practice.<br><br>Lesson planned around PPP grammar | Detailed planning |
| Awareness of exam needs | Very aware | Aware that this was, not hypothetical sit. | Very aware | Very aware | very aware |

| Relationship to own experience | Own systematic study habits – use of crib sheet | Links with her view of exams as a game | Goes against self view as a crammer | | Trains her learners so that they won't do as she did |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Connection with view of self | Took the role of a facilitator (ie. Guide) | Filter between the exams and herself | View as a parent – giving them some freedom to practise with | He was integrating exam skills more efficiently than he had thought | |

Introd: talking about transport & travelling to
places.
(Follow on from talking about places & so)
Find out from
Talk to each other about how you [like to travel]

Remember you have to ask! When they say
'find out' you have to ask.                    expect

Monitoring pairs — correcting/asking —
what's the disadvantage.

Feedback — talking about their partners.
Clarifying diff btw I'd like + I like
opinion vs 'I want'.

• H/O Planning a journey — ESOL mats.
                        DT        Time        info
( Train        Fri 18th  late m
                        11·30    —    13·33 .            £7 adv
              Sun 20th  11·35       13·79.            £6
                                                      £3 child    6-21
                                                   Saver 36·50
                                                   on the day. 18·50.

( quite complicated      gives 'otws info' not
    precise )

• Set up the listening. What do you
listen for when you want price/dates/time

Discussion of answers. / listening in chunks
to clarify numbers.
work in single. check 'in advance'

Sample·extract from an initial interview

JA   Can you talk be through your picture?   What this?

A     A big boot on my head  - squashing all

JA    Is that all management or just senior management?

A     No, I didn't know what to do about line management.  It brought into mind  a photo of the good old days when management was very different.  Everything was very different and wondering how we would ever get back to the relationships that we had with each other. Whether there is any way back.  It's just us and them now, we're not colleagues any more.  I didn't really know what to say about line management, I mean he's just squashed in the middle.  Yes, there is some up and down but now I'm much more aware of the down management.  It's taking more and more precedence, I think.

JA  So what's the white noise,

A   It's just the government to me because I wonder how interested i am.  I guess my perspective is always looking down at the student.  They're my direction.  I don't look in the direction of the gvt very much and why they make their decisions and why s management have to make their decisions.

These are my colleagues, which most of the time I'm happy to say are supportive of each other.......
because we have the same goals but partly because of my role as a coordinator, i get things thrown at me which aren't my role but I'm an easy target because I'm in the office and things end up going through me to [name of line manager]

And now we have the students!  And this is a 2-way street in that I get a lot from them – they're the ones keeping me in the job.  I'm their teacher and sometimes I become a social worker, sometimes I become their mum and sometimes I become someone to be provoked and battled against.  Sometimes I'm someone to be liked.

 JA   What do you feel is the purpose of your courses?

A    The exams for the students it's giving them recognition and maybe a useful qualification  but it does restrict the syllabus especially in the run up to exams,   it just becomes exam, exam classes and not what you want to be doing.  Sometimes it fits learner needs but often it doesn't.  I'd like it to be to give them the English that they need to function in their daily lives, to progress in whatever paths they choose to take whether it's education or work.

Sample post observation interview

Claire 2

JA   You began by talking about transport – travelling to places and it linked in to what you were doing before, didn't it?

C   Yes.  About the class trip.  The reason I did it is that I'm trying to get them all practise in this discussion about what's the best thing to do.   There isn't much to practise with (new activity in exam)

JA   You were getting them to talk about how they like to travel.  What were you expecting them to do there?

C   I was trying to get them to think about…  activate their brains a bit about the advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of travel and also to prep your brain to thinking in that kind of way. And also to get them properly into the classroom and not still wondering if the kids have settled down alright. So it was really just a relevant settle down and wake you up activity.

JA   So, then you went on to the listening… can you tell me about what you felt about the listening

C   Not happy…. For a whole variety of reasons. First of all, the quality of the recording is poor now and that didn't help but actually, I was in a hurry, I had heard it once or twice before and I'd forgotten how complicated it is.  if we'd been doing it again, I would probably have pre-taught a bit of vocabulary, maybe with a match so you're not just telling them and then maybe I would've asked them another 2 or 3 words 'what do you think this might mean?'  so give them practice in working it out, but it was too difficult basically.  It was too difficult in that it took up too much time.  Not enough time for the discussion activity.

JA   What was the purpose of doing it – was it to practise for the exam or was it just leading into the next activity?

C   Both. Because we get so few hours now you don't feel you can do many things that … for one purpose.  It is detailed listening and also it led onto something that I particularly wanted to do.

JA  One of the issues was hearing numbers

C   Yes, I had trouble with it too and I'm not deaf , as far as I know, yes, speed and it was a bit garbled actually. But of course those things also are in real life

JA   You started off asking them to do what they might have to do in the exam – dates, times, price

C   Yes, that kind of very specific asking them each time what  kind of thing they're looking for.  It's one of the things I sometimes in classes that are having real difficulties, I put the exam question up on the board – I actually write it up and then we go 'OK what are the important words in this question? What time, when train leave.  We point out that you can also say 'when train arrive' and you need to listen to the slight stresses to the interlocutors voice – if they're doing their job properly – to pick up the important words and I encourage them to note them down and if their first language English, I say, that's fine! If their f, first alphabet isn't Roman I say ' if it takes you forever to write the Roman alphabet, write it in Arabic.  The important thing is to understand the question.  So I'm trying to train them what to listen for, what kind of information.  I liked the thing you spoke about using your general intelligence – what's possible and what isn't…

JA   Then you had a discussion.  I think I left around this point… Can you tell me what happened?

C    We talked about people's experiences of travelling with children, which is part of the point of it and why you m…. they all interestingly in the end came down on the side of the train, because with the pre-booked tickets, it was the cheapest and also because.. , although a couple of people were clearly wedded to their cars.. the idea that the children can walk up and down and you can bring food them and they can go to the loo …

JA   Was it a paired or group discussion?

C   Group discussion.  It was quite difficult to get it going, in terms of them giving reasons

JA   So what did they end up with?

C   I think their detailed listening improved.  They got the idea that there's usually, what's it called? A distractor. And there was a distractor in this.   I say to them 'there are the really horrible people and they dig holes in the ground for you to fall into – you must look out for the elephant trap.  At E3 there will probably be 2 sums of money or two times. So listen carefully'.  I think they could do a bit more practice with the discussion thing.  I think we'll just have to do another one.

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Dear ..............,

I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education  the UCL Institute of Education in London. For my thesis I am carrying out a research project, which focuses on teachers' perceptions of their role in ensuring the positive impact of a language examination on the classroom.  Thank you for showing interest in this project.  The research will be based on a case study approach and will involve two  interviews and an observation.  The purpose is not to establish right or wrong or to investigate good practice. It is to explore the roots of teachers' own perceptions and attitudes and to establish means of harnessing this in order to inform the approach taken by teacher educators.

Audio-recordings will be made, however they will not be published and will be erased at the end of the project In order to maintain confidentiality and privacy, all names will be anonymised and I will not use any information that could identify respondents or their institutions.  I hope you will welcome the opportunity to take part in an interesting project and that you will be instrumental in the development of new techniques in teacher education.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the slip below to indicate whether you agree to participate in this project. If you would like any further information about the research, I would be happy to answer your questions. You can contact me via email: j.allemano@ioe.ac.uk or mobile phone: 07932694290.

Many thanks in advance,

Kind regards,

Jane Allemano

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Name _____

Date _____

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time:   Yes     No

Signature: