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**The erosion of good education? The impact of  
liquid modernity on trainee teachers'  
experiences in further education**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**The University of Huddersfield**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the question of what constitutes 'good education' in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, particularly in the context of the further education (FE) sector, and argues that an intensified regime of performativity in FE colleges has resulted in the dominance of an increasingly impoverished model of education. This ethnographic study, undertaken from 2009 to 2012, analyses the experiences of two cohorts of trainee FE teachers as they progressed through their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) years. The methodology explicitly foregrounds the role of serendipity in the research, and its role in revealing critical moments in the students' encounters with the FE workplace. The data include field notes of PGCE class discussions, students' reflective diaries and my own reflections.

An initial literature review explores the notion of 'good education' and the socio-political policies which have reshaped it, with a particular focus on their impact on FE teachers. My readings of other relevant literature are then integrated with the research findings, providing a context against which to interpret the data. The thesis also draws on an eclectic range of theory including critical pedagogy, social theories of time and analyses of consumerism in contemporary culture in order to offer a multi-layered explanation of the findings and to identify three key themes: the scripting of teachers and their practices; time pressures on teachers and students' sense of consumer-driven entitlement. These themes are then synthesised using the overarching framework of Bauman's (2000) concept of liquid modernity. I argue that this concept offers a holistic explanation of the forces impacting negatively on teachers and their practices. The study concludes by exploring opportunities for teacher resistance to such negative impacts and recommending strategies which might be adopted in a bid to reinstate a model of good education in colleges of further education.

The thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in a number of ways. It is innovative in its explicit use of serendipity in the field of FE research. It contributes new knowledge about the recent *intensification* of instrumentalism in FE, showing that this is not simply a static phenomenon. It provides evidence of new intensifications of managerial control over the teacher and his/her practice, shifting from broad prescriptions to direct scripting. This is linked to an innovative application of social theories of time to FE teachers' initial education and workplace experience, revealing the intensification of time pressures and their impact. I also link these to the emergence of a consumerist sense of entitlement among students, and its impact on student-teacher relations and the nature of education, which have not previously been discussed in depth in the literature on FE. Finally, the thesis offers an original and holistic interpretation of all three themes using Bauman's (2000) concept of liquid modernity, and utilises this synthesis to offer strategies for transforming the nature of education in FE.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

When trainee teachers are asked why they want to enter the teaching profession, a common response is 'I want to make a difference'. When asked to expand on this statement trainees will often allude to the transformative power of education which can be harnessed by teachers to bring positive change to people's lives. They often comment that the 'difference' which they wish to make is not restricted to the acquisition of qualifications or subject knowledge, but extends to encouraging independent thinkers who are able to make a positive contribution to the society in which they live, a contribution which extends beyond the economic imperative of preparation for work. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly common for trainees to be thwarted in this aim as they encounter college cultures which adopt an instrumental approach to education that places an emphasis on end product qualifications and target grades. Trainees often express disappointment at this narrow model of education which dominates the further education sector and the impact it has on their professional practice. At the heart of this study is the question of what constitutes 'good' education: the research study investigates the mismatch between nature of the education which trainees would like to provide for their students and the nature of the education which they are expected to provide for them. The thesis examines notions of good education and how an instrumental culture has led to its demise.

The thesis draws on the day-to-day experiences of trainee and newly qualified teachers and the structure of the thesis reflects the organic and serendipitous nature of the study: following an initial literature review to provide a background to the study, other relevant literature is then integrated with the research findings to offer a context against which to interpret the data. Of particular importance to this study is a holistic examination of the forces impacting negatively on teachers' practice and this is provided in a discrete chapter in the latter part of the thesis: Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity offers a unifying and illuminatory framework which synthesises the data themes and offers an explanation for the 'erosion' of good education and the impoverished model which has replaced it. The study will argue that this impoverished model has fettered teachers to the extent that they struggle to realise the transformative effects of education to which they aspire.



## **Painting a picture of 21<sup>st</sup> Century education**

This thesis can be viewed as a picture of 21<sup>st</sup> Century education: much as an artist creates a painting with layers of paint, from broad brush strokes for the background, through more detailed markings for the middle ground and finally, to fine markings for foreground detail, the following chapters build a picture of the forces which have moulded the lot of the modern day teacher.

In this picture of education, the two-part literature review in Chapter 2 forms the background and the middle ground of the picture, whilst the technique adopted to create the picture is provided through a discussion of methodology in Chapter 3. The foreground detail is provided in Chapters 4 to 6, through a depiction of the everyday working experiences of trainee teachers during their PGCE and NQT years, interwoven with theory to contextualise the findings for the reader. Chapters 7 and 8 entail standing back from the picture, to put it into perspective and to make sense of it, as a whole beyond its constituent parts.

### **Outline of the thesis**

#### **The background of the picture**

The literature review (Chapter 2) examines the impact of socio-political influences on good education and is presented in two parts, the first focusing on the purpose and practice of education and the second focusing on the impact of educational change in the further education sector. The first part of the chapter begins by considering the impact of the business lexicon on education and how the language of business has come to shape the way we conceive education as well as the way we discuss it. The adoption of such language reflects the economic imperative placed on education, with its emphasis on employability which views students as economically productive units. This instrumental model of education is contrasted with alternative notions of what constitutes a good education: Biesta's (2009a) three functions of good education are compared to the model offered by Mary Warnock (Hyland and Merrill, 2003) and notions of the aesthetic value inherent in good education are also considered (Winston, 2010; Coffield, 2008). The chapter continues by considering the language of learning which has come to dominate education and which presents education as something which can be 'delivered' to the learner by the teacher. The adoption of such language has flourished under the influence of the neo-liberalist

agenda which has placed a premium on the acquisition of world class skills (Leitch, 2006) in order to remain competitive in the global race for survival (Bauman, 2007a). The chapter considers how these influences have restricted the power of teachers to effect positive societal change and how this might yet be achieved through empowering students to act as critical social agents (McLaren, 1995).

#### The middle ground of the picture

Against the backdrop of the first part of Chapter 2, the second part of the chapter focuses on education and training in the further education sector. It begins with a brief historical overview and then considers how the skills agenda, with its accompanying 'skills talk' (Hyland, 2006), has impacted on education in the sector, creating a schism between notions of education and training, and putting at risk a wider vision of learning (Pring, 2010). The chapter continues by considering the false promises of the knowledge economy which have led to the assumption that higher qualifications mean more highly paid jobs: the fact that too many employees are chasing too few elite jobs has resulted in intense competition and a focus on the promotion of the self in a bid to secure such jobs. The unsuccessful find themselves in poorly paid positions, victims of Digital Taylorism, who are denied permission to think (Brown *et al*, 2011). The chapter concludes by considering the dilemma of teachers who are caught between two notions of what constitutes good education: one based on grade acquisition and subject to the quality assurance and audit culture which accompanies it, and the other based on a wider vision of learning which places emphasis on the needs of society rather than the self.

#### The technique used to create the picture

Chapter 3 turns to the methodology for conducting the research study and is presented in two parts. The first part of the chapter describes the ethnographical approach which was adopted during the research period and the role of serendipity in shaping the study which, from the start, was fuelled by a focus on possibility rather than prediction. The decision to adopt such an approach is explained through the employment of a poetic metaphor which emphasises the advantage of remaining open to the unexpected. Part two of the chapter explains how the approach was put into practice and the benefits which were yielded from it. In addition to discussing the research sample, ethical strategy and methods of data generation, this part of the

chapter pays particular attention to the data transformation, which was achieved through an iterative process of description, analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). The chapter continues by explaining how the transitions between these three stages of data transformation have been facilitated by integrating a literature review into the data discussion in Chapters 4 to 6 and how setting the data against a backdrop of theory allows for a contextualised analysis and interpretation as well as allowing links to be made to the themes raised in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes by acknowledging that there is no golden key to unlocking qualitative data (Colley, 2010) and recognising that researchers can only strive to find the most appropriate ways to make sense of it.

#### The foreground detail of the picture

The experiences of trainee teachers are examined in Chapters 4 to 6, with each chapter focussing on a separate data theme. The data findings are contextualised against a backdrop of relevant theory, and the literature relating to them is woven through the accounts of the findings.

Chapter 4 focuses on the theme of the scripted teacher and explores the rise in standardisation and quality assurance which has extended its influence from the factory floor to the classroom. The data findings demonstrate the degree to which this has intensified in recent years, with trainees being encouraged on the one hand to be creative, but on the other hand to comply with standardised methods of delivery. The findings suggest that the dominance of behavioural outcomes and standardised planning and assessment regimes has led to a form of templated education (Furedi, 2006) which offers little freedom for teacher autonomy. The increasing rise in criteria compliance (Torrance, 2007) which has emerged through the transparency of assessment criteria has resulted in students working specifically towards these criteria at the expense of wider study and the data suggests that some students expect to be told what to do by teachers in a bid to achieve the highest possible grades. The chapter considers the dangers of scripting for teachers, in particular the need to have 'permission to think'. The apparent division between those employees who are allowed to think and those who simply implement the ideas of others is examined against the notion of Digital Taylorism (Brown *et al*, 2011) which is affecting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce, including teachers. The chapter

concludes by discussing the impact of scripting on teachers and includes data which suggests that whilst some trainees are reconciled to accepting the restrictions which scripting places on them, others are leaving teaching in a bid to find professional fulfilment elsewhere.

The discussion in Chapter 5 focuses on time, and considers the way in which target-driven college cultures, with their emphasis on results, create an academic year punctuated by assessment points and driven by the need for students to achieve high grades. In addition, curriculum change, a culture of learner-centredness and the demand for increased workplace flexibility, have intensified, exerting multiple demands on teachers' personal and professional time. The chapter considers how this has resulted in the commodification of time and the worship of speed, with teachers being expected to work fast so that more can be squeezed into limited amounts of time: prescriptive specifications and assessment schedules have been compressed into ever tighter time frames, while teachers have been required to respond to an increasing number of curriculum revisions and educational initiatives. By applying social theories of time to the data findings, the chapter argues that education is being squeezed into temporal frameworks which exert toxic time demands on teachers and which foster, in students, a culture of instant gratification which puts at risk the value of slow thinking in education.

Chapter 6 begins by considering the extent to which the language of business and the language of consumerism have combined to create a customer service culture in colleges. The data demonstrates the impact which this has had on trainees and the way in which it has shaped their students' expectations. Such expectations include a desire for lessons to be entertaining whilst also providing speedy routes to success. The chapter argues that a focus on the needs of the self has undermined the traditional relationship between teachers and students: the data suggests that teachers are being held increasingly responsible for student results (to the extent that their job prospects and security are dependent on them) while student responsibility is less well defined. Reasons for this are explored with particular reference to the rise in the language of learning (Biesta, 2009b). The chapter considers the apparent rise of entitled attitudes in students which appear to have been fostered by a consumerist culture and the personalisation agenda. It is suggested that such attitudes have blurred the work roles of students and teachers

to the extent that the 'contract' between student and teacher needs to be more explicit (Barlow and Fleischer, 2011) to address issues of poor student work ethic and lack of student responsibility towards others.

### Putting the picture into perspective

Chapter 7 offers an explanatory framework for the findings in Chapters 4 to 6: it identifies three concepts from Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity and applies them to the data chapters to offer an explanation for the phenomena which are evident within them. The data is analysed against the concepts of individuality, time/space and work; and these offer a means by which readers can better understand and make sense of the data.

The first concept of liquid modernity against which the data is analysed is individuality. Of particular importance in exploring the relationship between diminishing teacher autonomy and rising levels of teacher responsibility is Bauman's (2000) notion of the individual *de jure* and the individual *de facto*, the latter being the condition to which individuals aspire through having control over their fate, and the former being the condition in which individuals find themselves, namely being held personally responsible for any shortcomings in performance and for effecting continuous improvement in such performance. The emphasis on individuality has allowed the public space to be colonised by the private with the result that collective action to address shared problems has been largely extinguished, leaving individuals to solve problems for themselves. The chapter draws a comparison between the belief in a 'good society', which Bauman (2000) argues has been lost and the 'good education' which Biesta (2009b) argues for, and which has also been lost amid the emphasis on the language of learning.

The second concept of liquid modernity against which the findings are analysed is time/space. Bauman (2000) argues that 'instantaneity' is the result of a society which has been continuously speeded up. Instantaneity leads to an expectation of immediate fulfilment and gratification: effectively the short term takes precedence over the long term, a phenomenon which is evident in the data in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7 continues by suggesting that the phenomenon of instantaneity goes some way to explaining the rise of fast time and fast thinking in education which allows little time for reflection on the past or planning for the future, the foundations on which

education has traditionally been built. The chapter considers how an emphasis on learning outcomes in lesson planning fails to take account of learning which occurs over a period of time and which cannot be predicted in time specific terms. Bauman (2000) argues that instantaneity makes every moment seem capacious so that as much as possible must be squeezed out of each moment: this observation is considered against the data in Chapter 5 which evidences that as more 'outcomes' are squeezed out of lessons, more wider educational content is squeezed out resulting in an impoverished educational experience for students.

The third concept of liquid modernity against which the findings are analysed is work. Bauman (2000) argues that work no longer has associations with long term collective endeavour but is now focused on short term gratification and is evaluated by its capacity to be entertaining. This argument is considered against the data in Chapter 6 which evidences an increasing expectation from students that lessons be entertaining and that work be focused on the product of qualification. Bauman (2000) posits that work has shifted from a producer model to a consumer model and this has parallels with the research data which suggests that students prefer to be told what to do – effectively consuming the ideas of others rather than producing ideas themselves. Chapter 7 continues by returning to Biesta's (2009b) argument that the language of learning has obscured the work role of the student: he argues that the term 'learner' does not denote a work role; the term 'student', however, confirms the work inherent in the term: that of study. The chapter continues by considering the effects of consumerisation, not only on the teacher-student relationship but also on peer relationships between students which the data suggests has been adversely affected in those subjects requiring group collaboration. Chapter 7 concludes by suggesting that the fluid forces of liquid modernity have washed over the solid foundations of good education, eroding it and reshaping it so that a palimpsest of modern education emerges: it bears traces of its original form, but is considerably altered.

### Conclusion

The thesis concludes in Chapter 8 by discussing how the harnessing of human agency could be a first step towards reconnecting the individual *de jure* and the individual *de facto*. The chapter argues for a return to the collectivisation of private

concerns and action based on co-operation and collaboration. The notion of modern education as a palimpsest is extended in this chapter, which argues that the palimpsest is composed of three layers which must be removed if a picture of good education is to emerge. The three layers, as discussed in the data chapters, relate to scripting, time pressures and the shift in the working relationship between teacher and student, which has given rise to the emergence of entitled attitudes. The chapter argues that the three layers of the palimpsest are inter-related: the existence of each layer strengthens the others. By removing one layer, it will weaken the others: by removing all three layers, a model of good education may be allowed to emerge. The chapter concludes by making some tentative suggestions as to how the removal of the palimpsest might be effected.

### Postscript

As this thesis has progressed I have reflected on my part in the story which has unfolded. This postscript describes how I began to question my own role in the education system which I was critiquing and the extent to which I had been complicit, albeit involuntarily, in creating the conditions which allow such a system to flourish. The postscript is a personal reflection on the manner in which such conditions are reproduced through involuntary complicity and how this might be challenged.

### Contribution to knowledge

Before considering the contribution to knowledge made by the findings of this research study, I would first like to consider the contribution made by its methodology. The study illustrates how a serendipitous approach to research can yield rich data which may have been missed by adopting more traditional, formal research methods. The discussion around serendipity in Chapter 3 aims to convince the reader that this rather stigmatised approach is not merely a 'game of chance' but, when combined with vigilance and sagacity, can open avenues of possibility which span disciplines across the arts and the sciences. To embrace serendipity is to acknowledge that we do not always know what we are looking for, therefore we cannot always know what to look for or what to ask, and if we try to contain our enquiry within the parameters of existing knowledge we limit the scope for discovery. What serendipity allows us to do is build upon this existing knowledge by looking beyond these parameters and pushing the boundaries of knowledge by observing

and listening closely to what is happening around us and, perhaps most importantly, not falling victim to the stigma which critics attach to serendipity, but challenging such critics by presenting evidence of its value and contribution to research. Openness to possibility not only shaped and directed the research study during its development but also from its inception: Chapter 3 details how the original idea for the research was reviewed and revised in light of early data findings and how this led to the emergence of unexpected, yet significant data themes.

The study begins to build originally on existing knowledge by examining the rise of instrumentalism in education. Attention to instrumentalism in education is nothing new in and of itself and in FE, since incorporation, learning has been regarded as a business in colleges (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). What the data presented in this study suggests is new, however, is that the prevailing notion of learning as a business has intensified to the extent that education is now consumed rather than produced by students: the language which is used to describe education has consolidated the notion that it is a product to be 'delivered' to students rather than worked towards through study and this has resulted in an expectation that speedy results can be achieved through the application of success formulae provided by teachers.

This study contributes to knowledge by highlighting three key themes which are impacting on teachers' everyday practice with greater intensity and individualisation than ever before: the first of these is scripting: the teacher role has become intensively scripted by planning and assessment regimes, to the extent that end product qualification becomes the central aim, leaving an impoverished model of education. The competition between colleges which was sparked by incorporation has now extended to competition within colleges, between departments and between individual members of staff. The competition is focused on who can achieve the best grades, and individual teacher survival is dependent on it. A reliance on scripting in planning and assessment has developed to the extent that many students now expect to be told what to do, rather than experimenting; and teachers, who are held increasingly accountable for students results, are tempted to 'play safe' by responding to this expectation with prescriptive guidance. The reliance on teacher 'delivery of learning' to students has replaced the traditional teacher-student relationship with a supplier-consumer relationship which has an emphasis on expediency and end product satisfaction.



The effects of scripting are further exacerbated by the second theme highlighted in this study, which is time pressure – an aspect of teaching and teacher education which is rarely considered in any depth. This study provides an original contribution to knowledge in its application of social theories of time to the experiences of trainee teachers. In an age when we are encouraged to work fast, speed has assumed an importance which affects many aspects of our lives. However, education requires thinking, which does not necessarily benefit from being fast. This study contributes to knowledge in this area by highlighting the detrimental effects which fast time can have on teachers and the quality of education which they wish to provide for their students. The study points to the dangers of trying to squeeze an increasing amount of assessment activity into limited time frames: as more is squeezed in, other important activity is squeezed out, leaving an impoverished curriculum model in its place.

The third theme which emerges from the data relates to the shift in the teacher-student relationship alluded to above: as ‘suppliers’ of education, teachers are held accountable for the results of their students and this leads to an expectation that they will deliver the desired results. Such an expectation places the focus of working activity on the teacher rather than the student and the adoption of the term ‘learner’ to replace ‘student’ fails to acknowledge the effort required on the part of the student to effect their desired end results. The culture of competition in colleges divides rather than unites and puts a premium on the self: co-operation and collaboration are replaced with self-focused action which undermines the importance of teacher-student and peer relationships in education. The competitive drive places an emphasis on speed with the intention of staying ahead of the game. The personalisation agenda with its emphasis on learner-centredness, has put the learner ‘self’ at centre stage and the emphasis on the need to achieve, combined with the focus on competition, has created conditions under which entitled student attitudes are able to thrive. This study makes an original contribution to knowledge by examining this emergence, and the impact it has on both the student-teacher relationship and the nature of the education which results from it.

A further original contribution to knowledge is made not only by examining the impact of the three key themes on education, but also by offering theoretical explanations for the intensification of these trends, which are eroding good education. The study

offers these explanations through the interpretation of data generated by trainees and newly qualified teachers, and the intention is to share these explanations with practitioners working in the field of education so that they may better understand the phenomena which are impacting on their working lives. Three key concepts of liquid modernity: individuality, time/space and work (Bauman, 2000) provide lenses through which practitioners can view the trainees' experiences explored in this study and recognise that concerns they may have envisioned as individual to them are actually shared concerns which can be addressed through joint action. Essentially, through understanding the root causes of problems encountered in the classroom, practitioners should be better placed to consider possibilities for collective action and change which have been concealed by the focus on the individual self.

In summary, then, the thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge in the following ways:

- Evidence of the *intensification* of instrumentalism in FE
- Evidence of new and intensive forms of scripting teachers' selves and practices
- Evidence of time/speed pressures on teachers and how they are manifested, as well as the innovative application of social theories of time in this context
- Evidence of the emergence and development of a culture of entitlement among students
- The holistic interpretation of trainee teachers' experiences through the theoretical lens of 'liquid modernity'.

The effects of liquid modernity are experienced through the whole of society but when they erode the foundations of good education they erode the very thing which has the potential to protect society from these effects. The trends which emerge from this study are presented as a palimpsest of modern education which has been created from the combined effects of scripting, time pressures and student entitlement. However, it is important to remember that a palimpsest can have its layers removed to expose the picture, or shape, which lies beneath: good education has not disappeared, it is merely hidden; this study argues that the work of the many rather than the few can help it to re-emerge.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The influence of socio-political influences on 'good education'**

Just as an artist begins to create a painting with broad brush strokes to form the background of the picture so will this picture of education begin by examining the socio-political policies which form the background against which further education has been developed and shaped. The background of the picture will be provided by an exploration of what constitutes 'good' education and how this has metamorphosed under the influence of political and social change, in particular the application of business principles to education. The language which is used to describe education will be examined, in particular the language of 'delivery' which has affected the way in which education is perceived and practised.

The middle ground of the painting will add detail to the picture of education by focusing on the further education sector and its curriculum which has been shaped by the policies and initiatives discussed in the first part of the chapter. The academic and vocational divide will be examined alongside the impact of the skills agenda which has put at risk a wider vision of learning (Pring, 2010). The middle ground depicts a teaching profession which has had its autonomy undermined by the prevailing culture of accountability in colleges and which finds teachers caught increasingly between the instrumental model of education which they are *expected* to provide and the transformative model which they *wish* to provide.

The background and middle ground of the picture which are painted in this chapter form a backdrop to the foreground detail provided by trainee experiences in Chapters 4 to 6. They will still be visible as the picture develops and they will provide a context against which the foreground detail can be analysed and interpreted.

### **Background: the purpose and practice of education**

#### **Education as a business**

In recent years education policy has become increasingly couched in terms more familiar to the business world: education has become a *commodity* to be sold on the open market. Students have become *consumers* who are urged to be *competitive* in striving for the best possible grades. Teachers are urged to set *targets*, meet

*performance criteria, add value to student achievement and to continuously improve their practice.*

The concept of continuous improvement, or Kaizen, emerged from the approach adopted to operations management in the factories of Japan where increased productivity was admired and emulated in businesses around the world. The idea that small but regular changes to practice would improve and refine the quality of production has now transferred to the field of education where the *product quality* is judged by exam results and league table positioning. Ball (2001) compares this approach to a 'black box, input/output approach to educational planning' – the inputs being national strategies and the outputs performance scores:

Locked inside the black box, an absent presence, out of sight in this policy panopticon is learning. (p.51)

This 'input/output approach' brings to mind the Taylorist approach to factory production which gave rise to Fordism – mass production with highly prescribed tasks allocated to workers with their work being checked by supervisors. Despite post-Fordist attempts to empower workers through flexible working practices, what has emerged in education is a neo-Fordist model which features the worst of both worlds (Hodkinson, 1997). Thus, teachers are required to take the modern day student through a production process where the end product is the meeting of a set of criteria, the passing of an exam or the completion of a competence assessment which will be quality assured. It follows that not only is the education provided to learners regarded as a commodity, but the learners themselves also become so, each being regarded as an economically productive unit (Avis, 2007a; Brown *et al*, 2011). However, human beings are not machines and cannot be treated as such, so it could be argued that we need:

a view fit for the twenty-first century, a world view that understands that we are not machines, not just organisms, but persons. The understanding of persons requires a different intellectual model with quite different practical arrangements and policies that flow from it. (Fielding, 2003, p.294).

The reference to a different intellectual model invites consideration of the purpose of education - whether it be to promote independence of thought and freedom of action or to prepare individuals for an economic role in society, as the following quote illustrates:

Socrates taught me that knowledge would set me free; Peter Mandelson tells me that its modern function is to make employers rich. (Coffield , 2008, p.9)

The economic imperative has shaped educational discourse to the extent that it has been 'infected by all sorts of economistic metaphors, practices and assumptions' (Stronach and Clarke, 2010, p.16). Terms such as targets, added value and knowledge economy have crept into the world of education and have taken ownership of it. The choice of the word 'infected' in the quote above reflects the viral spread of the business/economic lexicon which has stealthily come to dominate educational discourse with the knowledge economy being regarded as a key driver of change. This deification of the knowledge economy has led to education being measured by its impact on the economy, where economic prosperity is a key aspiration. However, as Stronach and Clarke (2010) argue, the economy has experienced a crash and recession which are signifiers of our lack of control over events and future 'outputs'. While this has undermined confidence in government reassurances about no more boom and bust and a realisation that the economy is not scientifically predictable, such confidence in the knowledge economy does not seem to have been similarly affected. If some institutions are failing to meet performance targets, then perhaps the foundation on which such targets are based should be questioned, the key question being: must our education system 'crash' before we acknowledge that the government's confidence in the micro-management of outputs and performance targets was possibly misplaced?

It has been argued that ministers who talk with false confidence about our education system are in a similar position to financiers who failed to predict the economic crash of 2008: they do not understand the educational problems which their actions helped to create:

There is an urgent need to abandon central government's money centred obsession with functional skills and efficiency and establish a new progressive vision concerned with students' personal growth and needs. (Barker, 2010, p.43)

The current orthodoxy would also have us believe that the private firm offers the most appropriate model for public-sector organisations, and that to succeed educational institutions should be run like businesses. But exactly what characteristics of business are we to emulate? The financial incompetence of the former directors of Northern Rock? The alleged bribery of Saudi princes by BAE? (Coffield , 2008, p.1)

Fielding (2001) raises some key concerns pertaining to the metaphor of economic production in education, one of which is ontological. He argues that 'within government policy there is no adequately articulated understanding of human being, of what it is to be and become a person' (p.8), the emphasis on economic production having obscured this human element. The focus on employability ignores other crucial facets of human life, for example the ability to forge relationships and connect to our social environment. This leads to a second concern of Fielding's which is existential - the joy and spontaneity of education is being replaced by a focus on economic activity to the extent that learning becomes instrumental and disconnected from enjoyment and fulfilment. These concerns can apply equally to learners and teachers, as teachers find themselves reduced to the role of 'deliverer of knowledge'. The role of the teacher in working with learners to foster understanding of our world and the feeling of wellbeing inherent in such learning has been replaced by an emphasis on learning outcomes which dominate the lesson and leave little opportunity for exploration of emerging themes. An emphasis on the measurement of achievement has an inherent danger related to values:

The danger here is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value. (Biesta, 2009a, p.43)

#### The functions of 'good' education

Biesta (2009a) suggests that there are three functions of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification (or individuation, as Biesta also refers to it). Qualification relates to preparation for the world of work and is, perhaps, the dominant function in current educational practice but Biesta sees this as extending beyond the acquisition of qualifications:

The qualification function is, however, not restricted to preparation for the world of work. Providing students with knowledge and skills is also important for other aspects of their functioning. Here we can think, for example, of political literacy –the knowledge and skills needed for citizenship – or cultural literacy more generally – the knowledge and skills considered to be necessary for functioning in society more generally. (Biesta, 2009a, p.40)

The socialisation function relates to the ways in which education prepares individuals to become part of social orders:

Through its socialising function education inserts individuals into existing ways of doing and being and, through this, plays an important role in the continuation of culture and tradition – both with regard to its desirable and its undesirable aspects. (Biesta, 2009a, p.40)

The third function, subjectification (or individuation) encourages independent thought:

The subjectification function might perhaps best be understood as the opposite of the socialization function. It is precisely not about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders; ways of being in which the individual is not simply a 'specimen' of a more encompassing order. (Biesta, 2009a, p.40)

Biesta acknowledges that there may be a tension between the latter two functions with education working as both a normaliser and a vehicle for independent critical thinking but notes that it is the subjectification function which has the potential to realise the transformative powers of education and elevate it above and beyond the narrow boundaries of instrumentalism:

In all cases a concern for good education rather than a concern for effective education or for learning as such, that is without any specification of the learning 'of what' and 'for what', should be central to our considerations. (Biesta, 2009a, p.44)

Biesta's three functions highlight the fact that good education is about the development of the whole person and it is this holistic approach which seems to have suffered at the hands of an economic model of education. He is not alone in attempting to define the facets of a 'good' education. If 'good' education is to prepare individuals to play a role in society then it is important first to consider what kind of society, and life, would be considered to be a 'good' one. Hyland and Merrill (2003) suggest a model of education founded on Mary Warnock's three principles of Virtue, Work and Imagination. The first principle of Virtue is envisaged not as a thing to be taught as part of a formal citizenship curriculum, but something to be embedded into all curricula, whether academic or vocational. It would encourage consideration not just of individual values based on an economic role but also encompassing community values. Likewise, the second principle of Work would extend beyond the economic and would emphasise 'the personal development and communicative-collaborative aspects of work' (Hyland and Merrill, 2003, p.168). The third principle of Imagination is linked to the human capacity to think, feel and

experience differing emotions and would facilitate the development of a critical approach which would have possibility and alternatives at its heart.

Warnock's model has echoes of Biesta's three functions of education: Virtue has echoes of socialisation, Work resonates with qualification, and Imagination with subjectification. Most importantly, however, both models conceive of education holistically, moving beyond the economistic and towards a transformative model. Other educationalists share the concern that an economistic and instrumentalist model of education based on performativity has had a reductionist effect, and conceptualise this as a loss of aesthetic in education, an aesthetic which has been erased by the dominance of 'the disfiguring language of performativity' (Fielding, 2001, p.8). An example of this is the lesson planning proforma which dominates classroom practice and prescribes a tick list of learning outcomes that the lesson must deliver. This not only restricts spontaneity but also deprives the lesson of any inherent aesthetic or beauty:

It is difficult if we insist that they [*lessons*] must always begin with a statement of objectives and be predictable and repetitive in the way their narratives unfold. No good novel or play does this - instead, they plunge us into a story fashioned around a plot and make as much use of surprise as they do of explanation, often leaving us to wonder; they attend to the sensuous qualities of words and do not just treat language as purely transactional. To think of teaching in this way - with lessons plotted rather than planned, performed rather than delivered - requires more than a change of vocabulary but a radical change of perspective, one informed by the charms and the power of beauty. (Winston, 2010, p.2)

In the analysis above, teaching would be open to improvisation and not limited by a script. The joy of spontaneity would be rediscovered and with it a freedom from the shackles of performance criteria and targets.

Other educationalists use the metaphor of artistry and creativity to communicate their interpretation of good education and this has been extended to the inherent musicality of education:

I learned from my father, as he learned from his, to hear the music, the excitement and the hope in the word 'education'. I also learned that it is the job of teachers to help other people's children to hear and respond to that music. We do it because teaching is a noble profession, which dedicates itself to the lot of those who have not had our advantages. We do it because we



believe in social justice and, like our parents and grandparents, we want a better world for ourselves, our children and all children. That is the meaning of our lives as teachers. (Coffield, 2008, p.61)

The latter reference to social justice and a better world is a common thread running through the notions of what constitutes a good education and it is one shared by many trainee teachers at the start of their courses when they often state that they entered the teaching profession in order to *make a difference* to young people's lives and help them achieve their ambitions. This aim is, however, often compromised very early in their careers as they realise that current education policy is focused on functionality and targets, features which will be explored in the following paragraphs.

### Target dependency

A potential problem with a criteria culture in education is that teachers might become reliant on it. Over time their personal passion and creativity can be stifled by the need to meet targets to the extent that some teachers may eventually become reliant on them and insecure in their absence. An emphasis on targets and criteria can lead to the 'idolatry of measurement' (Fielding, 2001b, p.146). The image of 'idolatry' is reminiscent of Stronach and Clarke's (2010) reference to cult worship of the knowledge economy. It is as if through indoctrination into the worship of measurement, teachers might become less able to make independent decisions and become reliant on performance criteria to guide them. The risk is that they then take on the role of servant to master, a role of deference, devoid of independence:

We are all familiar with current practice: ritual genuflection is made to the central importance of learning, but the sermon swiftly becomes a litany of what the government considers to be the really key elements of transformation – priorities, targets, inspection grades and funding – and the topics of teaching and learning disappear from sight, as if they had no momentum or dynamic of their own. (Coffield, 2008, p.1)

Instrumentalism undermines the intellectual capacity and autonomy of teachers and raises ethical arguments about intellectual and professional freedom and choice. The tyranny of sub-servience becomes self-perpetuating and is a difficult cycle to break. It can have a profound effect on teacher self-esteem and can contribute to a culture of dependency. Performativity not only affects the job which educators do but also affects who they are. As teachers find their values challenged they often find that

their motivation to 'make a difference' to their pupils is replaced by an externally imposed requirement to make a difference in another way – by meeting performance criteria and set targets:

Value replaces values – commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime. (Ball, 2003, p.217)

The dangers of performativity raised by Ball are reminiscent of Fieldings' reference to the 'disfiguring' language of performativity: teachers are expected to enter this discourse but, as they adopt the language, so might they disfigure their values and personal motivations. Ball (2003) refers to this as a form of ventriloquism – teachers appear to be speaking but it is the government's words which are being heard – the professional discourse of teaching is being displaced by the discourse of policy making.

This displacement of professional discourse can mean that teachers become unsure of themselves, questioning whether or not the language which they use to reflect their own value system is acceptable under the prevailing regime. This can lead to 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003, p.221) which can result in some teachers feeling that they need to compromise or put on a performance in order to meet external requirements. As they feel compelled to leave behind their own values and adopt language and actions which are not their own, this perpetuates the artifice rather than the art of teaching: the potential 'beauty of education' (Winston, 2010) is lost.

### Teaching or delivery – does language matter?

The language which we use to describe education matters because it has the power to shape how education is perceived and practised:

Language shapes our experience. The words we use embody a particular way of seeing the world, of understanding other people and their relationships and of what is worth pursuing. By adopting the language drawn from business management, we have come to see learning success to lie in the hitting of targets, and to see efficient teaching to lie in enabling young people to hit those targets, hence, the constant complaint of teachers and students about 'training for the test'. (Pring, 2010, p.86)

The language of delivery can be traced back to the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the Labour government established a Delivery Unit responsible for ensuring

the delivery of the Prime Minister's public service priorities (Barber, 2007). Barber's account of his leadership of the Delivery Unit indicates that the focus on delivery was influenced by business management principles; however, the application of such principles to education prompts a fundamental question surrounding the current condition of our education system: should it be viewed as if it were a large profit-making business? Handling a budget, everyday administration, marketing and buildings maintenance are but a selection of school/college functions which might benefit from business management principles, but the education of people within the institution is unlikely to benefit from such an approach.

The language of delivery has entered the day-to-day vocabulary of the teacher but delivery suggests a limiting approach to education:

We still talk about 'delivering'—the curriculum subjects, learning—and much else besides. And yet we know when we reflect for a moment and step back from the busyness of our work and the bruising of our imagination that to talk about 'delivering' these things is utter nonsense; we know with our hearts that it is a deep betrayal of education in even the most minimal sense. (Fielding, 2003, p.292)

The concept of *delivering* learning is linguistically complementary to the *target setting* which dominates education: effective delivery supposedly achieves targets within a set time frame and it has been argued that targets are necessary for government in order that it can explain what it is planning to do:

By stating the target or goal publically you create pressure on the system to deliver it and a timetable which drives the urgency. (Barber, 2007, p.80)

The message of 'pressure' and 'urgency' drives policy rhetoric and contributes to the assumption that we are in a race against time, as indicated by the following quote from a policy document:

Our nation's skills are not world class and we run the risk that this will undermine the UK's long term prosperity...the case for action is compelling and urgent...there is a consensus that we need to be much more ambitious. (Leitch, 2006, unpagged)

When targets assume urgency they also assume importance which is often over and above their central aim. For example, in the case of education the target to attain a

certain skill level becomes more important than the quality of the skills or learning which have been achieved. A particular example might be assessment target grades which assume more importance than the learning which is supposed to have taken place. In this example, the assessment grade becomes the focus of activity to the extent that assessment as learning (Torrance, 2007) is the result (see detailed discussion in Chapter 4).

When teaching is replaced by *delivery of learning* the teacher becomes the deliverer – almost like a messenger from government sent to deliver the latest missive of government policy. This functional role reduces the teacher to a technician:

Within English education we now see strict levels of control and assessment. It could be argued that this has been a factor in an apparent deprofessionalisation of teachers' work, which renders them governable rather than autonomous in this respect, and that subsequently they have become technicians rather than professionals in the true sense of the word. (Leaton Gray, 2007, p.194)

The quote above raises an interesting point regarding compliance within the teaching profession: in the hierarchical world of the educational environment teachers have limited opportunity to behave in a truly democratic manner, as career advancement is often dependent on compliance with managerial diktat. Thus, those who aspire to promotion may limit their contribution to staffroom debate while others may be wary of expressing their views within earshot of those who are known to be aspiring managers. The fear to speak out against the dominant regime has led to the suggestion that teachers have abdicated their professional responsibility:

This abdication of responsibility on the part of many teachers may have played an important part in ushering in the dominance of the Government in education as a whole, and contributed to the fact that it has been relatively easy for the Government to position teachers as passive implementers of externally driven changes. (Leaton Gray, 2007, p.194)

The suggestion that some teachers must bear responsibility for the current compliant state of the profession begs some consideration but the notion of compliance is not a simple one. Wallace and Hoyle (2005) identify three types of compliance: the first is compliance (where policies are accepted, reluctantly or otherwise); the second is non-compliance (ranging from retreatism to resistance) and the third is mediation

(where staff try to accommodate policy within their existing professional values).

Within the mediation category sits the notion of 'principled infidelity':

Workplace studies imply that such mediators are principled, sincerely endeavouring to work round externally imposed requirements. They express what we regard as *principled infidelity*. Infidelity follows from not fully adhering to policy-makers' expectations, and principled follows from attempting to sustain their professional values instead of embracing the alternative values under-girding reforms. (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005, p.12)

Principled infidelity has echoes of Shain and Gleeson's (1999) notion of strategic compliance which recognises that teachers often try their best to maintain professional integrity and commitment to values within the parameters of policy edicts. These categories of compliance are important as they shape not only individual teacher professionalism but also classroom practice. The degree to which teachers are compliant could be translated as the degree to which they are able to compensate for the effects which neo-liberalist influences have had on education.

#### Neo-liberalism and its impact on education

It is easy to forget that there was a time when education, although state funded, was not under state control. Whitty (2000) remembers a period from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s when teachers were regarded as professionals who were best placed to make judgements on pupils' educational needs. He notes that this attitude shifted in the 1970s however, with the suggestion that teachers were motivated by self interest rather than the needs of the state. Education was swept along in the rise of neo-liberalism which aimed to produce economically productive citizens who were educated in an environment where market forces and competition would dominate. However, neo-liberal policy seems to be dominated by paradox and contradiction, both in the UK and the USA:

Many have noted the contradiction between both countries' stated goal of promoting education innovation through competitive markets while at the same time limiting innovation through curriculum and assessment requirements. (Hursh, 2005, p.9)

Another apparent contradiction is the promise of increased employment opportunities through education. However, as Hursh points out, opportunity does not

equal equality since, in a capitalist culture, ‘those who have capital are in the best position to gain from it’ (p.12). Put simply, the rhetoric does not match the reality and calls into question the supposed link between world class skills and the promise of prosperity in the global economy (Leitch, 2006).

There are both contradictions and tensions within the neo-liberal approach, one of which is monopoly power, as when stronger organisations drive out smaller, weaker ones (Harvey 2005). Neo-liberalists would defend this, arguing that efficiency is thereby maximised. However, this competitive business approach, when applied to education, can have a damaging effect on those institutions in disadvantaged areas which struggle to meet government standards compared with those in less challenged areas. Even when value-added measures are taken into consideration it is far from a ‘level playing field’ and does not account for daily pressures which will be met in one institution but not in another. Neo-liberalism assumes ‘no asymmetries of power’, but this is rarely evident in practice:

The neo-liberal presumption of perfect information and a level playing field for competition appears as either innocently utopian or a deliberate obfuscation of processes that will lead to the concentration of wealth and therefore the restoration of class power. (Harvey, 2005, p.68)

The emphasis on competition in the global economy suggests that there are winners and losers, and we are informed through official reports such as the Leitch (2006) report that if we do not achieve world class skills our nation will suffer and we are at risk of falling behind our competitors. The fear of losing drives the continuous improvement agenda: Bauman (2007a) acknowledges the fear element of being left behind, of becoming the hunted rather than the hunter, and suggests that we are in a game where survival of the fittest becomes the driver and where we have moved ‘from the discourse of shared improvement to that of individual survival’ (Bauman, 2007a, p.104). This requires one’s undivided attention and becomes an end in itself, obscuring the true goal of one’s endeavours and requiring swift response with little time for thoughtful reflection. The fear of being left behind places an emphasis on speed which, in terms of educational policy, is evidenced by the frequency with which new initiatives are introduced, often without regard for the time needed for such initiatives to bed in effectively or for the teaching profession to reflect on the deeper meaning of the changes. Teachers have become so accustomed to constant

change that they rarely consider the meaning of it or its impact on a personal level and if change is to be effective, time is the key to the solid embedding of policy, which in turn allows teachers the opportunity to claim ownership of the change (Fullan, 2007).

A paradox resulting from the culture of continuous improvement is that the speed with which change is introduced can result in, not improvement, but merely more of the same. This can result in:

the unquenchable thirst for creative destruction (or of destructive creativity, as the case might be: of 'clearing the site' in the name of a 'new and improved' design; of 'dismantling', 'cutting out', 'phasing out'... all for the sake of a greater capacity for doing more of the same in the future - enhancing productivity or competitiveness). (Bauman, 2000, p.28)

The emphasis on competition has contributed to a fear of failure which has come to dominate our education system: fear of failing to meet targets (colleges and students); fear of failure to achieve a grade 1 for a lesson observation (teachers); fear of failure to be identified as at least a good college (managers); fear of not attaining high examination grades (students and teachers). To illustrate the potential for harm when competition dominates, Fielding (2003) makes reference to the social justice movement of the 1880s which recognised that competition restricted human flourishing:

Competition was seen as a zero sum game, as something that inevitably entailed winners and losers, not in some race or piece of harmless fun, but in terms of lives lived and lives lost. Emulation, on the other hand, was seen as a concept and a set of practices that delighted in the talents of fellow human beings, but, instead of treating them as a source of envy or threat, they were seen as a source of inspiration and joy. Competition was seen as inherently bad, not something that was neutral and that only acquired a positive or a negative moral character according to circumstance and intention.(Fielding, 2003, p.290)

Despite the negative effects of competition it continues to drive future planning and goes hand in hand with an emphasis on meeting targets. These targets are often euphemistically referred to as a 'vision', for example the 2020 Vision (DFES, 2006). However, visions 'evangelise' the future and neglect lessons learned from looking at the past and present to see how teachers can work in progressive ways 'whilst

avoiding the kind of revisionist zeal that warps rather than liberates their imaginations' (Winston, 2010, p.8).

The impact of neo-liberalism is succinctly summarised in the following words:

Neo-liberalism requires and enacts a 'new type of individual', that is a 'new type of teacher and head teacher' formed within the logic of competition. The apparatuses of neo-liberalism are seductive, enthralling and overbearingly necessary. It is a 'new' moral system that subverts and re-orientates us to its truths and ends. It makes us responsible for our performance and for the performance of others. We are burdened with the responsibility to perform, and if we do not we are in danger of being seen as irresponsible. (Ball and Olmedo, 2013 p.88)

Neo-liberal policy is guilty of disfiguring the creativity of the teacher and aligning their responsibility to performance targets rather than to a wider interpretation of education and social responsibility. In a world of *learning outcomes* and *targets* where we are encouraged to think that 'if we do x then y will happen' is to ignore the latent power of uncertainty. If we engineer our lessons so that activities are 'constructively aligned' to produce prescribed learning outcomes then we will never know what might have resulted from our teaching in a less prescribed manner. Professional discourse and debate has been at the heart of education for many years but its value has been diminished by state control and imposed change to the point that many teachers who are new to the profession have been denied the freedom to realise its potential. For such new entrants to the profession, it is useful to adopt a historical perspective in order to shape a view of education which is founded in a politics of possibility.

### Education and democracy

The emphasis which a culture of change has placed on the future risks a neglect of the lessons which can be learned from the past and can result in a form of social amnesia (Jacoby, 1975) or policy amnesia (Hodgson and Spours, 2003). The argument that we should consider the past and present to see how teachers can work in progressive ways for the future is a theme which is prominent in Giroux's (1988) work and is worthy of some discussion here. He recognises that historical struggles for a better world, envisioned in the language of hope can provide insight into possibilities for the future:



Insights through which to locate the past in the problems of the present and the present in the possibilities of the future. (p.xiii)

The future which is presented in such documents as the 2020 Vision for schools (DFES, 2006) or the Leitch (2006) report on World Class Skills is one which is very much focused on the functional and economic role of the citizen rather than a socially conscious community role, and it is the teacher who is expected to be the vehicle through which these visions are realised. However, Giroux (1988) argues that we must be reminded of what it is to be human and aim for a public philosophy which embraces an understanding of historical struggle and democracy and which uses the language of hope to fashion 'forms of social action that expand rather than restrict the notion of civic courage and public life' (p.35). He looks to the work of the social reconstructionists who believed that schooling could not be divorced from politics and morality, and that the role of education was to develop the critical faculties of students to develop them as socially responsible citizens; the moral and intellectual working together for democracy and demonstrating clear links between school and community life.

Many would argue that today's teachers are indeed encouraged to develop socially responsible citizens through the prescribed citizenship curriculum, however, it is debatable whether or not awarding body specifications allow opportunity for the advancement of genuine critical debate as advocated by social reconstructionists. Central to their arguments was the need for dialogue and communication, which they felt were vital to the appreciation of difference and mutual understanding in society. Giroux notes that John Dewey was

adamant in defining teachers as intellectuals, that is reflective thinkers whose social function demanded that they be given the ideological and material conditions necessary for them to make decisions, produce curricula and act out of their own point of view. (Giroux, 1988, p.86)

Redefining the 'teacher as intellectual' could be the key to producing alternative models of education. This would be in contrast to the intellectuals who have been reduced to 'technical intelligentsia performing a wide variety of functions' or 'hegemonic intellectuals...furthering the reproduction of the dominant society' (Giroux, 1988, p.88). A more democratic model sees the teacher as a key

protagonist in empowering students to be critical and active citizens: the teacher adopts emancipatory authority, which focuses on practice related to the everyday issues and concerns of students. The teacher takes on a transformative role:

The concept of teacher as intellectual carries with it the imperative to judge, critique and reject those approaches to authority that reinforce a technical and social division of labour that silences and disempowers both teachers and students. (Giroux, 1988, p.90)

As discussed above, in recent years the teacher role has been increasingly prescribed by government and the gradual erosion of autonomy has resulted in a passive and compliant role which assumes a lack of power to challenge the status quo. Giroux (2001) believes that teachers need to assume the role of critical agent and move towards a more emancipatory pedagogical approach. He feels that a first step is to raise social awareness and encourage students to act as 'engaged citizens willing to question and confront the structural basis and nature of the social order' (p.200). Giroux's approach to citizenship education begins from the premise that it does not aim to fit students into an existing societal framework but to

stimulate their passions, imaginations and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social, political and economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives. In other words students should be educated to display civic courage, ie the willingness to act as *if* they were living in a democratic society. (Giroux, 2001, p.201)

This idea is echoed in McLaren's (1995) work which emphasises the role of teacher as a 'critical social agent' who is open to possibility:

Living as a critical social agent means knowing how to live contingently and provisionally without the certainty of knowing the truth, yet at the same time with the courage to take a stand on issues of human suffering, domination and oppression. (McLaren, 1995, p.15)

This assumes a willingness on the part of teachers and students to adopt the role of critical agent, a challenge which will not sit easily with all. Many of today's students and teachers have become passive in their acceptance of our education system and any motivation to bring about change is stifled by systems and a general view that *this is the way it has to be*. Some students and teachers may even feel threatened by the suggestion that there is an alternative, preferring to live with existing systems:

Critical Pedagogy becomes, for many students, an uncomfortable and self-contesting exercise. They are reluctant or refuse to question meanings, preferring instead to live them. (McLaren, 1995, p.19)

Like Giroux, McLaren urges us to look towards critical pedagogy as having transformative effects. He acknowledges the courage that may be necessary to do this when he asks:

Dare we conspire to create a critical pedagogy that is able to provide conditions for students to reject what they experience as a given... (McLaren, 1995, p.21)

This choice of the word 'dare' is yet another reminder of the compliant stance that many teachers and students have learned to adopt as a result of our highly prescriptive education system; it suggests that teachers must muster courage to contest the prescribed policies of the day and requires a show of resistance to the persuasive rhetoric of neo-liberalism which has fashioned the mould of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher. If teachers are to resist the prevailing common sense of neo-liberalist policies then it entails 'bringing the teacher back into the sphere of the *political*, as an actor who takes up a position in relation to new discourses and truths and who looks critically at the meaning and enactment of policy' (McLaren, 1995, p.92).

The notion of the teacher as critical agent is also at the heart of Giroux's thinking: he discusses their role in acting as citizens of a wider community who work together to learn from each other. The question which emerges from this discussion is: if teachers are to make the transition from technician of the state to radical educator how can this be done? A starting point could be to examine one's own ideologies, to understand what and who has influenced them and to minimise any negative effects that these may have on others:

As teachers we need to reach into our own histories and attempt to understand how issues of class, culture, gender and race have left their imprint on how we think and act. (Giroux, 2001, p.241)

A democratic approach to education will require teachers to work and debate together and this may mean relearning the principles of collegiality which have been lost for some in the competitive target driven culture which dominates education. This culture has led to some teachers competing rather than co-operating with each

other in a bid to achieve the best results for 'their' students. A return to collegiality could be achieved by the development of a more democratic institutional culture achieved through working with external groups as well as with colleagues to minimise the isolation of individual teachers. In contrast to government visions of global competitiveness this is one of 'concrete utopianism' (Giroux, 2001) which offers possibilities for all, a view echoed by McLaren who argues:

The pedagogy of the concrete...is grounded in a politics of ethics, difference and democracy. It is unashamedly utopian in substance and scope and articulates a vision of and for the future, maintaining that if we do not know what we are working towards, we will never know if, in our struggle for human freedom, those conditions have been met. (McLaren, 1995, p.24)

It is perhaps the challenge of working together to produce this which is the greatest challenge of all for teachers as they will need to reclaim the autonomy and professional identity which have gradually been taken from them. A democratic alternative would see them working co-operatively towards a wider goal than the limiting and divisive performance targets which have acted as a competitive force to fragment rather than unify the profession.

### **Middle ground: education and training in the further education sector**

This chapter now turns to the middle ground of the picture of education: it adds detail by focusing on the further education sector and how it has been shaped by the background policies discussed above.

#### **A brief history**

The connection between education, social justice and the economy has been present throughout the twentieth century and beyond, and there is an underpinning notion of education providing individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to take advantage of work opportunities which will in turn contribute to prosperity and well being (Avis, 2007a). However, the threads of education, social justice and the economy have not necessarily been evenly woven into the fabric of further education over the years and in the early part of the twentieth century there was a narrow conception of FE providing technical education for a predominantly male clientele of semi skilled workers in Municipal Colleges. These colleges, which built on the legacy of Mechanics Institutes, maintained a focus on providing skills for everyday

occupations (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). The curriculum offered in today's FE colleges is much wider, offering both academic and vocational courses and higher education degrees through university franchises. However, unlike the compulsory school sector there is a historical absence of planning in FE with the result that 'there has never been any agreed and generally understood assertion of the value of FE in its own right' (Ainley and Bailey, 1997, p.4). A turning point came in the 1970s when a combination of changes (the raising of the school leaving age, the move towards non-selective comprehensive schooling and unemployment rises) brought a focus on the needs of school leavers. However, attempts to bring post-compulsory education under one roof in the form of tertiary colleges were not successful in all authorities as some were adamant to retain school sixth forms with their focus on A level provision (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). The resistance to housing post compulsory education under one roof is an illustration of the divide between the academic and the vocational which continues today, with vocational education being seen as the predominant preserve of the FE college. The origins of separation which dominate the academic and vocational divide might be traced back to the tripartite education system, introduced in the 1940s and comprising grammar, secondary and technical schools: this system was predicated on a narrow notion of ability and divided young people into thinkers or doers, which might be translated as academic or vocational, a division which is still with us today and is bolstered by the existing framework of qualifications (Pring, 2010). Further education has historically been viewed as a poor relation to other education sectors and this has given it a Cinderella-like image (James and Biesta, 2007). Ainley and Bailey make an interesting observation about the perception of further education:

In the pronouncements and promises of most politicians and pundits, education still means compulsory education, ie schools. When the use of the word 'education' is occasionally stretched in public debate to include non-compulsory learning it reaches only to nursery schools or sometimes universities but rarely to further education colleges. (Ainley and Bailey, 1997, p.7)

Although written in 1997 this comment still rings true as the term 'educated' tends to be narrowly interpreted as pertaining to academic success reflected in a limited type of qualification and grade (Pring, 2010). The numerous changes which have affected Further Education may have resulted in misperceptions about what it provides and

who it is for (Hyland and Merrill, 2003) and the recent emphasis on the acquisition of 'skills' may have consolidated a divide between the academic (education) and vocational (training), precluding the development of a more holistic notion of good education for all:

Today, we are indeed seeing the extension of education *and training* to all from the age of 16 to 18. But what of the vision of *education* for all? (Pring, 2010, p.84)

The need for a wider vision of learning was identified by the Nuffield review of 14-19 education and the review concluded that there was a need to redefine the aims of education to develop a clear picture of what counts as a 19 year-old educated person in our age (Pring, 2010). The following discussion will consider the rise in an emphasis on skills acquisition in further education and the limitation which this has placed on achieving a wider vision of learning.

#### The emphasis on skills in further education

The business lexicon and the language of delivery which dominate education have been accompanied by an additional linguistic focus in further education which has been described as 'skill-talk' (Hyland, 2006). This has been given momentum by policy initiatives and documents such as the Leitch report (Leitch, 2006) which put an emphasis on world class *skills* for the global economy. Skill talk is problematic for two reasons:

It is neither a well-founded nor clearly articulated notion, and there is no consensus of understanding about whether it applies to the cognitive, affective or psycho-motor dimensions of human activity...and...it belittles the role of knowledge and understanding in education and training thereby seriously impoverishing all forms of learning. (Hyland, 2006, p.4)

The term 'skill' commonly goes hand-in-hand with the term 'training' and the further education sector is commonly referred to as 'Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET); but the term 'education and training' suggests a difference between the two, rather than training being a subset of education. Separating them creates a schism which is not only unhelpful in that it promotes 'a false dualism between academic and vocational' (Pring, 2010), but also because it fails to acknowledge the interaction and symbiosis of the two.

The distinction between education and training has been described as the difference between 'know how' and 'know why' by Essenhigh (2000, p.1):

It's the difference between *know how* and *know why*. It's the difference between, say, being *trained* as a pilot to fly a plane and being *educated* as an aeronautical engineer and knowing why the plane flies, and then being able to improve its design so that it will fly better. Clearly both are necessary, so this is not putting down the Know-How person; if I am flying from *here* to *there* I want to be in the plane with a trained pilot (though if the pilot knows the *Why* as well, then all the better, particularly in an emergency).

The difference, also, is fundamentally that *Know How* is learning to Think Other People's Thoughts, which indeed is also the first stage in education -- in contrast to learning to Think Your Own Thoughts, which is why *Know Why* is the final state of education. Indeed, both Know How and Know Why are essential at one moment or another, and they interact all the time; but at the same time, the center of gravity of education is and must be in the Know Why.

Essenhigh's comments raise a number of points with regard to the difference between education and training, some of which invite debate, but they highlight some of the limitations in maintaining a distinction between the two. Of particular significance to this chapter's discussion are his remarks relating to the interaction between the two. He acknowledges that the 'know how' and 'know why' 'interact all the time' yet the NCVQ framework, introduced in the 1980s, placed emphasis on the 'know how' in NVQ qualifications and, despite identifying underpinning knowledge required for qualifications, were based on the competences required in various industries (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). As a result the 'know why' became neglected.

There are a number of problems associated with competence based qualifications, one being the limited application of knowledge:

as a result of their focus upon learning outcomes and competency they tend to be retrospective in nature. That is to say, vocationally they are concerned with what learning outcomes or competences employers deem to be relevant and therefore they operate with a truncated and instrumentalised notion of knowledge. (Avis, 2012 p.7)

Associated with this instrumental truncation is the problem that competence based learning reduces assessment to a series of performance criteria to be 'ticked off' when achieved and results in a narrow conception of learning and a 'systematic narrowing of vocational focus' (Hyland, 2006, p.8).

A further problem with narrow conceptions of training which provide people with skill competence is that, while the importance of demonstrating practical skills in the workplace is acknowledged:

At the same time they should have access to other forms of knowledge that offer a critique of the performative logic of work based learning in order to avoid habituation to the disciplines of the workplace. It is here that insights derived from academic and disciplinary forms of knowledge have a part to play. (Avis, 2007a, p.59)

Avis's comment echoes that of Hyland's below which highlights the significance of the wider moral dimension which affects working practices:

Such occupational roles and descriptions need to incorporate the crucial ethical dimension of working life in which virtues, dispositions, values and attitudes shape social practices in determining how people actually use the skills they have acquired in pursuing aims and goals. (Hyland, 2006, p.6)

It is easy for the dominance of skill-talk to mask the importance of a more holistic education of individuals, one which has a wider vision of learning and is about the development of the person, focusing on the living of fully human lives (Pring, 2010). In the absence of such an education the rhetoric of the skills agenda establishes a common sense in the public consciousness and even if we accept the notion that upskilling will bring 'prosperity for all' (Leitch, 2006) the nature of the required skills begs some consideration.

From 'basic skills' to 'world class skills' the rhetoric of skill talk suggests a universal panacea for economic problems. However, the nebulous nature of the word 'skills' calls into question what we actually mean when we use the term in relation to the demands of a global economy.

The skills which were in demand in the early twentieth century when manufacturing industry thrived, have been supplanted by a supposed demand for 'knowledge skills' to meet the demands of a globalised economy. Globalisation has been facilitated by the exponential rise in information technology which has eradicated the national boundaries which previously restricted economic activity (Esland, 1996). This has exacerbated the presumption that competition is key and has leant an urgency to the need to upskill in order to meet the demands of globalisation which are 'construed as an irresistible force' (Avis, 2007a, p.2). The demand for high skill workers has,



however, neglected to consider the role of semi-skilled work in the economy and has led to an assumption that only high level skills are the key to competitiveness (Avis, 2007b). The result is that an increasing number of well qualified knowledge workers are competing for a restricted number of jobs despite the promise that gaining higher qualifications would lead to better paid jobs. The problem is one of supply and demand: there are too many knowledge workers for too few knowledge jobs. The result is that an elite of employees is employed in jobs which forge decision making while others, despite being well qualified, simply implement the decisions of those above them, resulting in what Brown *et al* (2011) define as Digital Taylorism. Essentially the rhetoric does not match the reality: gaining good qualifications and high skills in the knowledge economy simply drives up the level of competition and leaves many job candidates disappointed and frustrated. The expectation that the gaining of high level skills and qualifications will bring greater job opportunities has not been fulfilled and the message that 'learning equals earning' has proved to be a fallacy (Brown *et al*, 2011). To compound the employment opportunity divide, the prevailing job opportunities are unskilled ones which belie the rhetoric of upskilling:

The implication was that VET should accommodate such changes and develop a workforce suited to a knowledge-based economy, together with the suggestion that low waged and unskilled work would be relocated to the emerging economies. However, low waged work remains pervasive in the west and to the extent that the service sector has expanded this has not necessarily resulted in upskilling in anything other than a superficial manner. (Avis, 2012, p.3)

The scramble to attain elite jobs has created a level of competition which has compounded the effects of individualisation, eroding collectiveness and placing an emphasis on the self. The culture of self has, perhaps, been fostered by educational policy which promotes personalisation and which centres on the individual. An example of this is the emphasis which has been placed on individual learning styles: this results in a psychologisation of learning (Avis *et al*, 2003) which removes the learner from the social context and puts an emphasis on the needs of the self. The focus on self has also been intensified by a move towards therapeutic education (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009) with initiatives such as SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) highlighting the well being and emotional needs of the individual. This has resulted in a paradox:

Paradoxically state policy, whilst firmly located within a neo-liberalism that emphasizes and validates the pursuit of positional advantage whereby the winner takes all, simultaneously evinces a concern for the well being of learners. (Avis, 2007b, p.203)

However, addressing a concern for well being by adopting therapeutic techniques has placed the focus once again on the self and personal feelings, turning the spotlight inwards to personal needs rather than outwards, to the needs of others. This has given rise to what has been described as a narcissism epidemic (Twenge and Campbell, 2009) and the emergence of students with a bloated self (Craig, 2007). It could be argued that these attempts to address the well being of learners are exacerbating a self-serving culture rather than compensating for it and the focus on self coupled with intense competition can result in an attitude of entitlement with the result that some individuals adopt whatever tactics it takes to stay ahead (Brown *et al*, 2011). In the race to achieve success some individuals adopt player tactics such as conforming to employer behavioural competences and seeking advantage by whatever means possible. This has given rise to what has been described as a 'cheating culture' (Callahan (2004) cited in Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle Section 10: A New Opportunity). Examples of 'cheating' cited include plagiarism and cheating in exams in a bid to secure the grades necessary to stay ahead of the competition.

The emphasis on being competitive in order to secure the best jobs in the knowledge economy has resulted in individuals becoming increasingly self-centred and doing what is necessary to achieve success rather than for any intrinsic purpose. The emphasis on grade acquisition has resulted in a move from inquisitive learning to acquisitive learning, learning only what is necessary for examination success or to impress potential employers (Brown *et al*, 2011). The emphasis on economic imperative and upskilling has placed the emphasis on extrinsic rather than intrinsic need with the result that the curriculum is being divided into economically worthy and less worthy subjects, often described as hard (eg Maths, Science) or soft (eg performing arts) subjects with the former having more kudos in terms of league table value (Pring, 2010). The emphasis on knowledge skills for the knowledge economy seems to have created an opportunity trap (Brown *et al*, 2011), one which promised opportunity through upskilling but which has resulted in an instrumental curriculum focused on economic extrinsic need.

## Performance targets and the audit culture

One of the consequences of an instrumental target driven agenda is that it creates an audit culture, whereby regular checks are made to ensure that performance targets have been met. The audit culture in further education can be traced back to incorporation which ushered in new funding mechanisms and placed a premium on economic efficiency and competition (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). This gave rise to the emergence of quality assurance agendas designed to help colleges reach their designated efficiency targets (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

Quality assurance is at the heart of the audit culture in further education and has given rise, historically, to a variety of external inspection regimes being adopted by the Learning and Skills Council, the Adult Learning Inspectorate and the Office for standards in Education (Ofsted) (Hillier, 2006). These external regimes have, in turn, given rise to internal quality assurance systems which have at their heart the observation of teaching and learning and the subsequent grading of lessons. The inspection of further education colleges, which was previously conducted by local authorities and was predominantly developmental and advisory in nature, changed after incorporation to a centralised form of inspection by the Further Education Funding Council which resulted in the publication of reports and, consequently a focus on accountability (Hillier, 2006).

The current Ofsted inspection framework follows the latter pattern and the concept of good education as defined and discussed in part one of this chapter, takes on a very different meaning when put into the hands of Ofsted which defines 'good' according to specified performance criteria and a resulting grade for overall college performance as well as individual lessons. The drive for continuous improvement has led to a situation where a grade 3 (previously described as 'satisfactory') is now described as 'requires improvement' (Ofsted, 2012). The result of this decision is that good is the minimum grade which will be considered acceptable for individual lessons and overall college performance. However, for many colleges 'good' may not be good enough and 'outstanding' will be the desired grade. The continual drive to become better and better places the ultimate responsibility for improved performance on teachers:

The use of key performance indicators is widespread throughout the public sector in general and education in particular. These are tied to institutional targets that are, to use the vernacular, “drilled down” to the department and then to individual members of staff. They serve as a technology of control. (Avis, 2011, p.430)

This technology of control extends to all practitioners of education and trainee teachers are also subject to the ‘drilling down’ of performance targets as the assessment of their practice is based on a set of standards which must be met during the course of training (LLUK, 2007). These standards are underpinned by knowledge and understanding, but retain an emphasis on evidence based competence and also fulfil a performance management role:

Standards of this kind can support a range of activities to raise quality across the workforce, including: qualification provision, individual professional development and performance management. (LLUK, 2011, p.15)

The fact that practitioners at all levels are subject to performance targets results in a mirroring effect: the experience of trainee teachers mirrors that of the students they teach and the experience of teacher educators mirrors that of the trainees, subject as they are to a set of Ofsted grading criteria (Ofsted 2012). Effectively a vicious spiral is created whereby performance targets are handed down from one group to another with little or no scope to resist the hegemonic nature of such targets:

The success of an individual learner can be readily assessed against measurable learning outcomes that themselves have been benchmarked. Processes such as these reflect the emphasis placed upon performance management, which embodies appraisal and the development of targets which can then be used to assess and motivate the performance of the individual lecturer. (Avis et al, 2003)

The mirroring of performativity makes it a regime which is very difficult to escape as the meeting of one group’s (teachers) performance targets are dependent on another group (students) meeting theirs. This interdependence creates a further pressure on teachers as their performance is being judged by the results which are achieved by their students and is, therefore, partially dependent on student effort, a factor which is out of teachers’ control. The relentless pursuit of improvement exerts a permanent control and pressure on teachers to achieve and perform to targets which are predominantly related to student grade acquisition. This fails to recognise the wider vision of learning which extends beyond the qualification function:

What is central to educating young people too often gets marginalised in a system that needs to measure and standardise performance and that values the attainment of qualifications over the transformation of experience. (Pring, 2010, p.90)

While teacher performance targets remain so closely aligned to student grades it may prove difficult to achieve this wider vision of education in a formal arena and it will be left to teachers 'who, despite all the pressures they face, insist on 'closing the door' and teaching a 'secret curriculum' (Furedi, 2009, p.ix).

Teachers find themselves meeting dual demands in their working lives: they strive to meet performance targets but also strive to achieve a wider vision of learning. One is not necessarily conducive to the other which results in a moral dilemma for many teachers who must choose between the two imperatives. The moral dilemma can arise when teachers find that their notion of professional practice is tested by the demands of performativity to the extent that they feel they are required to behave unprofessionally in order to meet these demands. Colley *et al* (2007, p.12) suggest that this might be viewed as 'conduct unbecoming' and that refusal to engage in it might be considered a form of 'conscientious objection'. The ethical dilemma which confronts teachers when placed in this situation can be so intense that they choose to leave the profession rather than compromise on their own ethical construct of professional practice. Whilst this may be an indicator of their 'authentic professionalism' (Ball, 2005, in Colley *et al*, 2007, p.15) it is significant that they seek such a model of professionalism elsewhere. Teacher losses can be to other sectors of education but some choose to leave education and seek alternative employment elsewhere (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). Such losses to the profession can only undermine efforts to improve the quality of teaching and therefore tutor professionalism should not be divorced from the quality agenda but should, rather, be viewed as a key driver in providing improved teaching and learning. Indeed:

Inadequate models of professional trajectories support inadequate conceptions of teaching, learning, and the issues pertaining to their improvement. (Colley *et al*, 2007, p.15)

Those teachers who remain in college education will often find themselves adopting strategies which allow them to maintain their commitment to student learning through

educative process rather than a focus on product. They are therefore compliant, but it is a strategic compliance, as discussed in part one of this chapter:

The response of strategic compliance can be 'read' as offering possibilities of such a reworking of professionalism by lecturers in preferred ways...[*These*] include the commitment to student learning agendas with an emphasis on a particular model of quality that is defined through process rather than outcome, and a genuine commitment to widening participation that also recognizes the need for collaborative modes of work. (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p.460)

Strategic compliance is a pragmatic approach which may offer the potential to struggle for improved working conditions whilst also attempting to improve the quality of teaching provision. The effort to achieve such improvement must be set against the demands which performativity places on teachers which points to an intensification of labour and a subsequent need to work over hours (Avis and Bathmaker, 2001).

Trainee teachers often find themselves placed in colleges where staff are under considerable pressure to meet conflicting demands and the development of their own practice may be shaped by their placement experience which is constrained by what the workplace offers and permits. There is, therefore, a risk that:

Dysfunctional practice may be reproduced through experience of dysfunctional workplaces. Even learning to cope with the vicissitudes of a workplace may involve assimilation of poor practice. (Dixon *et al*, 2010, p.391)

Trainees are therefore, having to reconcile their own personal vision of good education, not only with the realities of national sector expectations, but also with local college expectations or constraints. Despite such demands many trainees demonstrate resilience and attempt to stay true to their personal vision. The teacher struggle for improvement is often rooted in a belief in the transformative power of education to 'make a difference' to student lives and to effect social justice. However Avis and Bathmaker (2009, p.215) argue that in order to effect such social justice a more 'expansive or politicised conceptualisation of practice' is needed, one which seeks to change the social conditions which lead to inequalities in our education system. In order to arrive at such a conceptualisation of practice it will be necessary for teachers to find the time and space to debate such issues. It is the creation of

such time and space which will allow teachers to reflect personally and collectively on their work in a way which helps develop their professionalism (Colley *et al*, 2007).

### Conclusion

Teachers working in the further education sector are under constant pressure to achieve: most courses on which they teach lead to an externally awarded qualification, whether this be academic or vocational. Therefore their success rates (defined by students' grade acquisition) are under constant scrutiny. Teachers are effectively caught between two notions of what constitutes good education. On the one hand is the externally imposed model of upskilling modelled on grade acquisition and on the other hand is a wider vision of learning for students rooted in

*the knowledge and understanding that enables them to live fully human lives (or, as John Dewey said, 'the intelligent management of life');*

- *the practical capabilities that enable them to flourish both as individuals and within the broader social and economic community;*
- *the moral seriousness through which they might think responsibly about how life should be lived and about the big issues which confront society (for example, social justice, racism, environmental change); and*
- *the belonging to a wider community through appropriate actions and commitments.* (Pring, 2010, p.86)

The latter reference to community commitment is one which will be dependent on reversing the self-serving effects of neo-liberalist policy. Teachers face pressure not only from college management but also from parents and students to deliver the desired results and while ever the rhetoric of competition and upskilling prevails, teachers will find themselves negotiating the obstacles to providing a good education which extends beyond the limits of instrumentalism.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **What If This Road**

What if this road, that has held no surprises  
these many years, decided not to go  
home after all; what if it could turn  
left or right with no more ado  
than a kite-tail? What if its tarry skin  
were like a long, supple bolt of cloth,  
that is shaken and rolled out, and takes  
a new shape from the contours beneath?  
And if it chose to lay itself down  
in a new way; around a blind corner,  
across hills you must climb without knowing  
what's on the other side; who would not hanker  
to be going, at all risks? Who wants to know  
a story's end, or where a road will go?

Sheenagh Pugh

The research journey can take a number of different roads to its conclusion: the rise of methodological pluralism has generated a diversity of approaches to educational research which continue to elicit conflicting responses and a lack of consensus on the ideal approach to adopt (Hammersley, 2012). A starting point for my own research was to consider the binary oppositions of 'quantitative versus qualitative; scientific versus naturalistic; empiricist versus interpretive and so on' (Smith, 1989, cited in Sparkes, 1992, p.10). The paradigms debate (Sparkes, 1992) surrounding which of these oppositions constitutes 'valid' research can lead the novice researcher to assume that one approach may be better than another, diverting from the more pressing question of which approach is most appropriate for a particular study. In order to locate my research within the most appropriate paradigm I considered the key features of my research: I was not setting out with a theory which I wished to prove or disprove; my initial aim was to understand how the everyday experiences of trainee teachers impacted on the development of a teaching persona.



This focus shifted during the course of the research (see later discussion in part two) as new findings emerged and I found that, like the road in Pugh's poem, there was much to learn if I was willing to embark on a journey of discovery and possibility, rather than one of prediction or control. These key features helped me to locate my research within an interpretivist paradigm and, more specifically, within an ethnographic methodology. The first part of this chapter will discuss the ethnographic and serendipitous approach which has shaped the study while the second part of the chapter will demonstrate how this approach was applied, and how it allowed me to follow a research road which has taken twists and turns and which has revealed unexpected data themes along the way.

### **Part one – The symbiosis of ethnography and serendipity**

#### **An ethnographic approach**

The term 'ethnography' begs definition as it is not without some ambiguity. On the one hand, it is a term which is used broadly to capture qualitative approaches (Hammersley, 1990 in Pole and Morrison, 2003) and the term is used to describe both an action (doing ethnography) and a research result (an ethnography). On the other hand, Brewer (2000), cited in Pole and Morrison (2003) suggests that there is a dichotomy between ethnography as a collection of research methods and ethnography as a methodology, the former being a collection of research methods and the latter a philosophical orientation towards research. The following definition is offered as an attempt to capture the essence of ethnography:

An approach to social research based on the first hand experience of social action within a discrete location in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location. (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.16)

The term 'subjective reality' in the quote above invites some discussion, as a positivist would adopt the ontological position that the real world is not subjective but made up of hard, tangible facts which can be observed and measured, a position which can be termed external-realist. The ethnographer, working within an interpretivist paradigm, would be more likely to adopt an internal-idealist ontology, with its emphasis on subjectively constructed reality (Sparkes, 1992). This binary division is, however, somewhat oversimplified, as paradigms can overlap and an ethnographer adopting a critical stance would argue that social reality is shaped by

organisational power relations and structures which result in a material reality that is all too evident in the lived experiences of research subjects (Anderson, 1989). It follows, therefore, that an ontological fusion of the internal-idealist and external-realist is possible during the course of an ethnographic study as, I would argue, it is in this research study: the data presented in chapters 4 to 6 indicate that the impact of internal and external education policy is not only evidenced through the subjective reality of trainees but is also evidenced by real examples of how this impacts on their working lives (Appendices 4 and 5).

For the purpose of discussing the ethnographic principles which underpin this research study it is useful to consider the following set of characteristics:

- 1 People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts rather than under conditions created by the researcher
- 2 Data are gathered from a range of sources, including informal conversations
- 3 Data collection is relatively unstructured: it does not follow a fixed research design and categories for interpreting are generated out of the process of data analysis
- 4 The focus is generally small scale, perhaps a group of people
- 5 Analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices and how these are implicated in local and perhaps also wider contexts.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

My research study meets these characteristics in the following way: it has charted the experiences of trainee teachers as they progress through their PGCE and NQT years; their experiences and responses through these years have been gathered and synthesised in a bid to identify the challenges facing teachers as they enter the teaching profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Characteristic three is particularly pertinent to the study: the approach has been firmly grounded in a naturalistic approach which has not followed a strict design but has evolved out of day-to-day encounters and experiences. Historically, a classic ethnographic study has its roots in anthropology and it still retains these associations, with researchers immersing themselves in a culture or community in order to arrive at a new understanding of it. However, ethnography has many mutations and is an effective research approach for a study

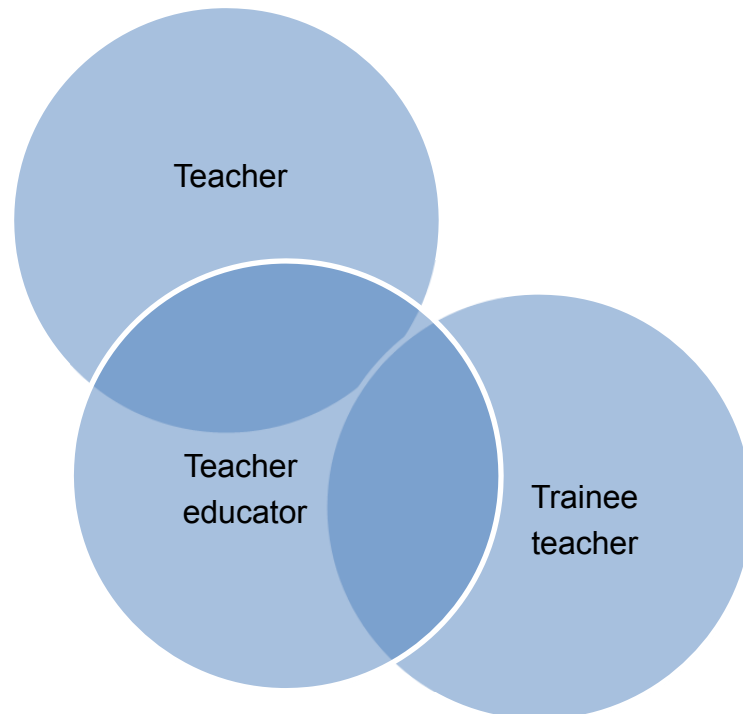
of any group which the researcher is able to observe in everyday naturalistic settings.

At the heart of ethnography is curiosity on the part of the researcher and a desire to understand 'what is going on' (Pole and Morrison, p.18). The ethnographic approach allows the researcher to learn through everyday interaction with others and, in an educational setting, researchers are learning in the same way that many of their subjects are: through everyday relationships, interactions and the building of knowledge and experience. The symbiotic relationship between learning and ethnography can generate rich data and bring additional understanding to the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The processes of learning and ethnography are synthesised in such a way that researcher and subjects are learning *with* each other to create new knowledge:

Although not usually acknowledged, learning involves a process of theory development and testing which is closely aligned to the processes made explicit in ethnography. Ethnography should thus be a good tool for understanding elements of learning. (Walford, 2007, online: unpagged)

While the adoption of an ethnographic approach may extend understanding of the learning process, critics of the approach highlight the danger of the researcher 'going native' and becoming too close to their research subjects and assuming a familiarity which would jeopardise the learning process. Tedlock (2000) refers to the 'polite distance' (p.457) which is necessary between the researcher and subject/s to avoid this. In the case of a teacher educator carrying out research with trainee teachers this polite distance could be translated as the professional distance which is inherent in this particular relationship and which, in turn, translates to the relationship between the trainee teacher and their learners. Whilst 'going native' may occur in a traditional anthropological study where the researcher is immersed in a culture, it is unlikely to occur in an educational study such as mine, where the polite distance is maintained. However, while I may not have been an insider who was immersed in the trainee culture, I was in the unusual position of shifting between the positions of insider and outsider researcher, having experience of three key role sites during my career: trainee teacher, teacher and teacher educator. In the diagram below, my teacher educator role as outsider is represented by the lightly shaded area whilst my role as insider is illustrated by the darker intersections. On many occasions the

experience of trainees and teachers echoed my own experiences and I felt myself being drawn into an insider role; on other occasions new discoveries were made which placed me firmly in the outsider category, as did my professional role as tutor.



This shuffle between insider and outsider perspectives might be conceived of as problematic, with the insider role risking bias. However this insider perspective allows for *verstehen*, defined as ‘an empathetic understanding of the lived experiences of people in their natural settings’ (Henn *et al.* p.197). In respect of my own research study, as teacher educator I was able to achieve this *verstehen* relatively easily having experienced the roles of both trainee teacher and teacher. The insider perspective also helped me to interpret data with a historical perspective. For example I was able to chart the rise of some prescriptive classroom practices which were ‘taken as read’ by trainees but which have not always been common classroom practice (for example template lesson plans). However, while it is true that the researcher’s self, shaped by past and present experiences, will inevitably impact on their interpretation of events and can have positive effects as discussed above, it might also be argued that any potential for exaggerated bias should be regulated. A method of achieving such regulation is to ensure that there is an adequate base of descriptive data for whatever degree of analysis and interpretation might follow

(Wolcott, 1994). It is also argued that because the research self is inextricably linked to the research, the researcher must constantly ask themselves how their own part in the research is affecting it. Woods (1996) suggests that the self must be regulated to some degree:

The ethnographer, thus, works to develop research skills in situ and to 'fine tune' the self'. (Woods, 1996, p.52)

This fine tuning may be achieved by reconciling the 'Me and I' of the self. These two aspects of self work in tandem in social situations: The 'I' is impetuous, creative and novel, qualities which have the potential to make social drama lively and unexpected with the potential for unforeseen developments. However it is tempered by the 'me' which lends routine, convention and predictability to the drama of life (Lyman and Scott, 1975). This can lead to a certain tension in how much freedom should be given to 'I' and to what extent it should be reined in by 'me'. 'I' keeps the mind alert to a range of possibilities and interactions but must at times be subject to the discipline of 'me' (Woods, 1996). In terms of research:

The 'I' scanning freely detects critical items and themes for study; the 'Me' locks them into place. (Woods, 1996, p.63)

This is particularly important for the ethnographer who adopts a naturalistic approach as naturalism cannot of itself identify significant and critical events: it is the ethnographer who makes these identifications and acts upon them, making things happen as well as 'hanging around'. The researcher gets access to people in a bid to 'penetrate beyond the outer layer of reality' (Woods, 1996, p.52). All of this requires *vision* (to scan the field for relevant activity over time) and *discernment* (to decide on the significance, or not, of events).

The intervention of the researcher into events may appear to contradict the argument for a naturalistic approach. However, as Woods notes 'the research is always a construction' and there will inevitably be a tension between 'naturalism and arrangement' (Woods, 1996, p.54). This poses a dilemma for the ethnographic researcher as conceived by Woods: if social management skills are being employed to gain access to data, can ethnography ever be truly naturalistic? The answer to this is probably rooted in the issue of balance: an ethnographic study is not without structure, even if the design is emergent. Even where data is generated through

everyday working practices, its gathering and analysis needs organisation and method. A framework of analysis is created by the insights and interactions which occur during the study, a characteristic of emergent design:

Rather than relying on a preconceived framework for gathering and analysing data, ethnographers use their interactions with informants to discover and create analytical frameworks for understanding and portraying that which is under study. (Walford, 2007, unpagged)

In this analysis the researcher and subjects are learning together and building new knowledge through a reflexive approach which plays a key role in the ethnographic research process and which can transcend the positivist/interpretivist binary in social research: it 'can produce accounts of the social world and justify them without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism of either positivist or naturalist varieties' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.18).

A naturalistic approach to research can help to avoid the well documented disadvantages of formal research methods such as interviews and focus groups which can lead to what Henn *et al* (2006) refer to as 'behavioural adaptation'. This is often manifested in respondents giving the answers which they believe the researcher wants to hear or to conform to peer response. This is minimised with an ethnographic approach. Where trust exists between the researcher and researched, the naturalistic approach of ethnography means that subjects may feel free from the element of surveillance which is a feature of more formally planned research methods. The result can be richer, more valid data generated by subjects who are freed from the constraints of self-consciousness which are often experienced with more formal research designs.

The fact that the gathering of ethnographic research data is not restricted to timetabled encounters and interactions means that the researcher must be alert to the serendipitous encounters and experiences which have the potential to generate valuable data. Serendipity plays a key role in ethnography and the researcher should be aware that chance encounters may occur and must be prepared for, and open to, their occurrence to avoid the filtering out of potentially important findings.

## By chance or design – harnessing the potential of serendipity

Realist social researchers tend to regard serendipitous events within the research process with great suspicion. One result of this has been the virtual absence of any serious analysis of the role that serendipity plays in the generation of research ideas. (Garratt, 1998, p.1)

Although Garratt's observation was made some years ago, the suspicion around serendipitous events persists, with little written about it in texts focussing on qualitative research. However, rich data can be generated by a serendipitous approach if researchers adopt an open and prepared mind.

When undertaking research, a researcher is usually expected to describe their research design and to justify the methods they have used to generate data. Typical qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, observations or questionnaires) have to be pre-planned, often with the expectation that a pilot study be conducted to 'test' the research tools. The nature of this careful planning may give the impression that the results will be more reliable. However, a drawback of such methods is the fact that research participants will often be tempted to give researchers the answers which they think they are expected to give or may conceal rather than reveal significant data. In addition, participants who are flattered by being involved in research may give exaggerated answers (Humes, 2010). Other problems can also affect results: perhaps the researcher may use leading questions; peer pressure may be a problem with focus groups; questionnaire respondents may tire of questions, giving cursory attention to questions and answers; response rates may be low or those being observed may act very differently when an observer is present. These problems can obscure real meaning and can therefore affect the value of research findings.

In respect of my own study, the format of the PGCE course provided what might be termed 'embedded' methods by which data could be collected: for example tutorials were held regularly and provided one-to-one discussion opportunities while small and whole group discussions took place in scheduled teaching sessions. Both provided data which was recorded and developed in the form of field notes (see Appendix 5). Perhaps the richest source of data was trainees' written reflective logs which evidenced the notion that writing allows teachers to 'articulate themselves and their practice differently by opening up spaces of doubt' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013,

p.93). The logs provided a critical facility through which trainees could articulate their concerns without pressure or time limitations and without the drawbacks associated with traditional research methods, as discussed in the previous paragraph (see Appendix 2 for examples).

The problem with using traditional research tools is that they can stifle creativity and limit possibility during the research process which can lead to a situation whereby educational researchers run the risk of becoming complicit in their own containment (Humes, 2010). This might be avoided if we acknowledge the value of the unpredicted encounter or serendipitous event which might yield more valuable and naturalistic data. This would, however, require a 'root and branch re-conceptualisation' of research endeavour (Humes, 2010, p.13) in order for serendipity to be more widely accepted as a legitimate approach to qualitative research.

#### The versatility of serendipity

Perhaps the root of the scepticism and distrust which surrounds serendipity is the fear that we are acknowledging the unknown. For some sceptics there may be links with superstition (for example, luck and chance): the fact that the word serendipity has its roots in a folk tale may augment this distrust, yet it cannot be denied that the phenomenon has manifested itself in both the social and scientific sphere to the extent that the concept continues to attract debate and interest.

Serendipity is versatile in its application: it spans disciplines; for example art, science, business, and information seeking. It is part of everyday life yet its associations with chance and luck detract from its value and result in a perception that it lacks the necessary gravitas to be acknowledged as a valid research approach. The literary origins of the term perhaps suggest to some that it is an apochryphal concept. Serendipity can be traced back to a tale from the 1500s which inspired Horace Walpole to adopt the term to describe chance encounters. Fine and Deegan (1996, p.1) cite the tale as follows:

Three goodly young princes were travelling the world in hopes of being educated to take their proper position upon their return. On their journey they happened upon a camel driver who inquired if they had seen his missing camel. As sport, they claimed to have seen the



camel, reporting correctly that the camel was blind in one eye, missing a tooth, and lame. From these accurate details, the owner assumed that the three had surely stolen the camel, and they were subsequently thrown into jail. Soon the wayward camel was discovered, and the princes brought to the perplexed Emperor of the land, who inquired of them how they had learned these facts. That the grass was eaten on one side of the road suggested that camel had one eye, the cuds of grass on the ground indicated a tooth gap, and the traces of a dragged hoof revealed the camel's lameness. (Adapted from *The Peregrinaggio* [1557] in Remer, 1965)

Fine and Deegan emphasise Walpole's recognition that it is both 'accident and sagacity' which combine to create the significance of the discovery. It can be argued that it is the role of sagacity which elevates the chance happening to a significant event. Creativity also plays its role, as does application: 'In this way, courting serendipity involves planned insight married to unplanned events' (Fine and Deegan, 1996, p.2).

Examples of serendipitous findings include:

- Rontgen discovered by chance rays which would penetrate black paper which led to X-rays
- An ineffective glue developed by 3M which was used to create post-it notes
- Internet browsing which reveals information which was not intentionally sought (Van Andel, 1994).

As can be seen from these examples, the serendipitous discovery can be a result of a mistake, a chance event, or an unexpected discovery, but can also yield valuable results. More traditional research approaches tend to favour control over the research process which is often achieved by keeping to a carefully planned strategy. However, McBirnie (2008) comments that because unpredictability is so central to human existence, however much we try to control it we will never achieve complete success. It would follow, therefore, that serendipity is inevitable and should be exploited for its research potential.

#### Journeying along the research road: unleashing possibility

The disadvantages associated with formal qualitative research design suggest that perhaps 'less is more' when it comes to planning. I would like to argue for minimal planning and the use of naturally occurring evidence in ethnographic research: a serendipitous approach of chance coupled with design. This may seem an unlikely

alternative to convince those who are already critical of an interpretive paradigm and who consider that only positivist approaches can be classed as serious research, yet it is in the scientific world that the chance or accidental discovery has proved to yield some of the most valuable inventions (as described above) from the everyday (post-it notes) to the more elevated (X-rays).

It is often when we are looking for something else that the chance discovery is made. By adopting an overplanned approach it is possible to overlook the more serendipitous discovery which could ultimately be of more value: there is a danger that chance opportunities are filtered out because the mind is so set on finding out what it was looking for. McBirnie (2008) identifies pressures such as time, need, responsibility and the environment which act as 'serendipity filters'. She describes researchers who, because of time pressures, when confronted with unexpected findings, felt they had to make a decision either to act on this or to overlook it in order to find the information they were originally seeking: 'serendipity was essentially filtered out' (McBirnie, 2008, p.609), leading to missed opportunities. Van Andel argues that serendipity requires the flexible use of 'loose blinders':

Serendipity is the art of 'loose blinders'. Even a serendipitist needs blinders, whether he is searching, researching or managing, but he is able to put his blinders off, when he does a serendipitous observation, in order to make a right abduction or to find out an optimal emergent strategy. (Van Andel, 1994, p.645)

The researcher must be able to see how the new knowledge connects to existing knowledge and how it creates new insights (Humes, 2010): the role of perception and insightful interpretation are key to the effective harnessing of rich data by the researcher.

### Serendipity and ethnography

Serendipitous events can occur quite frequently in the field of ethnography: important discoveries may occur as the result of mistakes as well as chance events. It is the 'open spaces' in research which enable surprise discoveries and the 'stumbleings' which often lead to these (as evidenced by the examples discussed in part two of this chapter). 'Learning *how* to learn from mistakes is critical for using serendipity in qualitative research' (Fine and Deegan, 1996, p.5) as indeed it is in teaching and

learning. Interestingly, the culture of accountability which prevails in our education system has led to a situation where mistakes are regarded as unacceptable, but perhaps an acceptance that it is natural to make mistakes, and that much is learned from them, would facilitate a more honest approach to teaching and learning as well as to research discovery. The importance of learning how to learn from mistakes is also echoed by McBirnie (2008) who identifies process-perception duality as key to serendipity: perception must be applied when unexpected results occur or there is a risk that such results may be dismissed as simply wrong. Perception takes a mistake and turns it into an opportunity if effectively applied: perceptive insight is the key to making fruitful judgments about chance encounters and findings. Perception is within the control of the researcher whereas the process of serendipity is not (McBirnie, 2008). In other words, the chance encounter is not within the control of the researcher but the perception of whether or not to act on it is: it is the role of the serendipitous ethnographer to make this judgement. In order to benefit from the potential of serendipity, preparedness is just as important as openness in order to prevent the 'filtering out' of chance encounters (Foster and Ford, 2003).

#### Attempts to 'framework' serendipity

Some theorists have attempted to apply a framework of analysis to the concept of serendipity, perhaps in an attempt to legitimise the approach and demonstrate that it is not 'just chance' which leads to valuable discoveries. Three principles of serendipity identified by Fine and Deegan (1996) are:

- Temporal serendipity (happening upon a chance event: the ethnographer happens upon the event and recognises its significance)
- Serendipity relations (the unplanned building of social networks): the relationship between the researcher and the researched is key here. Each relationship then provides a piece of the puzzle
- Analytic serendipity (discovering concepts that produce arguments): making connections between data and theory. This requires insight to identify significance and links to previous reading and current reading and an openness to new ideas to create new theories.

For an educational ethnographer, relationships play a key role and the serendipitous relationships which build during the research process, combined with temporal

chance events lead the researcher to understandings which can combine with existing knowledge to generate new theory. The role of analytic serendipity in the creation of new theory has significant potential, with the insights of the researcher providing the interpretation.

Serendipity involves planned insight coupled with unplanned events, core to the philosophy of qualitative research. By recognizing the centrality of serendipitous findings and events in qualitative research, we come closer to understanding how research products are created and appreciated in practice. In a methodology that so values insight, the thin line between brilliance and nothingness is both a powerful image and vast chasm: our fear and our salvation. When a researcher prepares to enter a field setting, the worry exists that *nothing* interesting will be discovered. Such fear, however, fails to reckon with the intellectual preparedness necessary to make sense of the power of an ongoing social reality. (Fine and Deegan, 1996, p.12)

Other attempts have been made to identify patterns of serendipity and Merton and Barber (1968) made an early effort to apply these to social research. They suggest three elements which are required of events to fulfil the pattern of serendipity in research. They must be: *unanticipated, anomalous and strategic*:

- *unanticipated* acknowledges the chance element;
- *anomalous* refers to surprising finds which seem inconsistent with current theory and which provoke further research and
- *strategic* which require that the researcher relate new findings to existing theory.

The latter element echoes the analytic serendipity of Fine and Deegan and consolidates the notion that serendipitous encounters, while occurring by chance, must be analysed and related to existing theory. Hypotheses appear in 'uncharted by-ways of thought' (Medawar, 1963, cited in Merton and Barber, 2004, p.276) and perhaps most importantly it must be acknowledged that the researcher who embraces the concept of serendipity is not merely sitting back waiting for events to happen but is vigilant in identifying the opportunities where serendipitous encounters may occur and then acting on them:

the key point is that serendipity does not of itself produce discoveries: it produces *opportunities* for making discoveries. (Ziman, 2000, cited in Merton and Barber, 2004, p.297)

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to serendipity gaining the recognition it deserves as a research approach is stigma: this stigma is attached to the notion that serendipitous approaches, such as ethnography generates, lack rigour as they describe events rather than quantify them. However these criticisms, which tend to emanate from positivists, should 'be viewed not as technical criticisms or challenges to what ethnography is able to achieve but as epistemological challenges about the nature of the knowledge which ethnography yields' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.15).

Essentially, the naturalistic ethnographic approach, which encompasses serendipity, should not be judged by the same criteria as a positivist approach: to do so would be to 'fall into a technical trap of judging ethnography by characteristics to which it does not aspire' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.15). By recognising this fact researchers may be able to resist falling prey to the stigma which is attached to a serendipitous approach. The divesting of this stigma might encourage researchers to be more honest about their serendipitous findings which, currently is not always the case:

Studies among scientists have found that few "tell it like it is" when chance plays a role in their findings. Only those with solid professional reputations appear willing to discuss their serendipitous findings. Apparently most prefer being seen as meticulously planning experiments to confirm their own hypotheses rather than coming across something by chance. (Liestman, 1992, p.9).

Unlike the aforementioned scientists, my aim in this research study is to 'tell it like it is' and in part two of this chapter I have acknowledged the role that serendipity has played in my research. The researcher who adopts an ethnographical approach is responsible for identifying the conditions within their research environment in which these opportunities are likely to be generated. If the aim is to generate natural data then artificially constructed methods of data collection are more likely to suppress than create these opportunities. Openness to possibility and the unknown is key to an ethnographic and serendipitous approach: to repeat Pugh's words from the start of this chapter:

Who wants to know  
a story's end, or where a road will go?

## **Part two – Putting theory into practice**

### The first twist in the road: a shift in research focus

My research road has taken a number of unexpected turns since I began to follow its path. Unlike a mapped route which signposts its destination to the traveller, the road which I chose has led me along a route to an undisclosed destination and has revealed surprising and unexpected vistas along the way.

The initial aim of my research was to investigate how trainee teachers developed their teaching personae during the PGCE year. This was prompted by an article in the Times Educational Supplement in which a newly qualified teacher identified what, in her opinion, was a flaw in her teacher training experience, namely that:

the role of the teaching persona was practically ignored (Doyle, 2008, p.1)

The article went on to suggest that course modules could be dedicated to the acting skills necessary to carry out the teacher role effectively. My initial key questions were:

- How might we define the term ‘teaching persona’ and what is its purpose (eg confidence, protection, front)?
- Are teachers likely to adopt one persona or multiple personae in response to differing educational contexts?
- If it is possible to develop a teaching persona in others, is it necessarily desirable and should it form part of teacher education programmes?
- What might be the socio-political reasons for wishing to develop a teaching persona?
- Is the use of artistic and dramatic metaphor helpful in developing the teaching persona?

As a starting point I explored the notion of teaching as performance with the 2009-2010 trainee cohort and we considered the teaching persona as a construction. A theatre professional led sessions in voice and ‘stage’ (or classroom) presence and the notion of a teaching persona began to take shape as trainees began to consider their teaching as performances during which a ‘front’ can be presented to an audience (Goffman, 1959). However, as trainees spent longer in placement colleges

it became apparent that the development of a teaching persona was less a personal construction and more a social one which was shaped not only by their everyday encounters but also by internal college and external government policy. It became evident that these influences shaped the persona to a degree which created considerable tension between the teacher that trainees wanted to be and the teacher they were allowed to be. It became clear in the early days of the research that the development of a teaching persona could not be divorced from the wider political policies which impact on education and my reading at the time supported this notion. Alexander, Anderson and Gallegos (2005, p.4) argue that teaching is brought to fruition by at least 5 co-dependent variables:

- 1 the presence of acting bodies
- 2 the practice of audiencing (or reciprocal enactment between students and teachers)
- 3 the aesthetized transactional communication process of any theatricalised event that is crafted with intent with many backstage performances that affect content, form and function
- 4 the overarching political influence of society on curriculum
- 5 the tension and tensiveness of cultural and political resistance to and of knowledge negotiated with passion and necessary compassion

Whilst the notion of variables is somewhat alien to interpretive research they could be thought of here rather as influences, with the first three variables having clear links to the 'teacher as actor' metaphor while the latter two variables point to the wider influences which elevate teaching beyond the notion of performance. Pineau (1994) acknowledges that teaching as performance is a problematic metaphor and results in a reductive model which impoverishes teaching and devalues the intellectual work inherent in it. Pineau is not dismissive of the adoption of acting skills in the classroom and, indeed, advocates the practical application of these. However she emphasises that the model of teacher as actor is limiting if taken to extremes.

It was at this stage of my research that the first twist in the research road appeared: trainees were sharing experiences of restrictive teaching practices imposed in colleges which they felt were limiting both their intellectual and creative energies. From template lesson planning to prescriptive assessment strategies there were frequent references to the tension experienced as a result of teaching in an instrumental, target driven culture. It was apparent that my initial aim to explore the

metaphor of teaching as a performance could be opened up to encompass a wider examination of the nature of the challenges which face trainee teachers and how these impact, not only on the teacher persona, but also on the nature of the education process in which teachers are engaged:

The extent to which people enact assigned *assumed-to-be-natural* roles and the degree to which they enact counter roles or modify existing ones provides an analytical space in which to rethink current conceptions of pedagogy, policy and leadership. (Alexander, Anderson and Gallegos, 2005, p.3)

I decided to research this 'analytical space' through trainee accounts of their experiences and it became clear that the development of a teaching persona was not straightforward but was shaped by a complex set of internal and external policy influences. Many trainees were surprised by the level of prescription in the curriculum which limited the scope for explorative study and placed emphasis on end product assessment. This emphasis led many trainees to question the drift towards assessment as learning rather than assessment *for* learning (Torrance, 2007) and prompted a class debate around what constitutes a 'good' education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As a result of this debate, a new set of research questions evolved:

- How has social policy reshaped education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?
- How might we define a model of 'good' education in an age of increasing instrumentalism?
- To what extent do prescriptive practices limit trainees in providing a good education?
- How have target driven college cultures impacted on the expectations which are placed on teachers?
- How does a culture of accountability shape the development of the teacher persona?

The remainder of this chapter describes how I set about answering these questions during the research period.



## The research sample

Two successive cohorts of PGCE students formed the research sample, with 20 trainee teachers in each cohort. These cohorts constituted an opportunity (or convenience) sample to which I had easy access and which might be described as a 'captive audience' (Cohen *et al*, 2007, p.114). The selection procedure adopted when recruiting to the PGCE course ensured that the research sample had a spread of age, gender, subject specialisms and industry experience. Within the sample the trainees were on placement at a mixture of sixth form colleges and FE colleges, and taught on a range of academic courses (A level, Access courses and HE courses at level 4) and vocational courses from entry level to level 3. This heterogeneous sample proved helpful when synthesising data and allowed analysis across and within disciplines and qualification levels. The heterogeneous spread also contests, to some extent, the criticism that the parameters of generalisability are negligible in opportunity sampling (Cohen *et al*, 2007) because an opportunity sample cannot be characterised as representative of the population (Henn *et al*, 2006). The concept of generalisation is problematic in qualitative research as this type of research tends to focus on case studies, which by their very nature focus on the particular rather than the general. However the notion of fuzzy generalisation (Bassey, 1998) offers the following possibility for qualitative researchers:

The theory of fuzzy logic suggests a way of encapsulating the claims to educational knowledge of qualitative empirical research. A fuzzy generalisation replaces the certainty of a scientific generalisation ('it is true that ...') by the uncertainty, or fuzziness, of statements that contain qualifiers ('it is *sometimes* true that ...'). (Bassey, 1998, unpagged)

Bassey distinguishes between 'predictive generalisation' which involves the study of samples (as in the data gathered in the sciences) and 'retrospective generalisation' which arises from the historical accumulation of data in case studies. The latter may have a role to play in educational research of a qualitative nature as case study data can build upon previous studies to illustrate, for example, patterns or trends. In the case of my own research study I have discussed, amongst others, the work of Ainley and Bailey (1997), Torrance (2007) and Ecclestone (2007) who conducted research in the FE sector and found evidence which is echoed in my own findings. My findings suggest an intensification of the instrumentalism which was evident in the data findings of the above researchers and in this sense I felt justified in making some

retrospective generalisations (albeit tentative) based on this historical perspective. Bassey (1998) suggests that generalisation and application are more often matters of judgement than calculation and

while predictive generalisations claim to supersede the need for individual judgement, retrospective generalisations seek to strengthen individual judgement where it cannot be superseded. (Stenhouse, 1978 cited in Bassey, 1998, unpagged)

Where qualitative researchers may feel uncomfortable to speak of generalisations they may prefer to adopt the terminology suggested by Stake (1995), cited in Bassey (1998, unpagged) and to draw from their findings to make 'assertions,' a form of generalisation which he also refers to as 'propositional generalisations'. In Chapter 7 I have suggested some 'fuzzy' generalisations based on my findings which may be variously termed retrospective or propositional and, to use a qualifier (as fuzzy generalisations do) I would posit that the research findings from this sample could, *to some extent* be said to be representative of, and applicable to, other trainee teachers following a similar PGCE course of study.

In addition to the opportunity sample provided by the PGCE cohorts, those students who had gained employment in colleges at the end of the PGCE year were invited to participate further in the research by contributing their experiences encountered during their Newly Qualified Teacher year (the NQT year). This constituted a purposive sample which allowed me to choose a sample for a specific purpose which does not seek to represent the wider population but to access 'knowledgable people' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, p.114) who can provide in-depth knowledge of their experiences: in the case of my research study this refers to the experiences encountered during the NQT year. Although only a small number of NQTs provided data, respondents represented a mix of gender, age, subject specialism and industry experience. Some were employed in a sixth form setting and others in an FE setting so although the purposive sample was small it did allow for some degree of heterogeneity.

### Data generation

Just as the recruitment process to the PGCE course provided a naturally heterogeneous sample, so did the mechanics of the course provide a natural

framework of methods for data generation. My aim was to choose data generation methods 'which do not seek to create artificial situations or require those at the focus of the research to change their behaviour in any significant way' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.6). Such a naturalistic approach is not without its critics who, as discussed in part one of this chapter, tend to favour a positivistic approach. However, it is argued that it would be inappropriate to adopt positivistic approaches to a qualitative study as they are unworkable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Indeed, in response to claims that ethnographic research lacks rigour it is important to remember that 'as long as ethnographers do not claim that their research can meet what are essentially positivistic characteristics, then such charges are largely irrelevant' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.15). Suggested sources for qualitative data generation might include observation, conversation, written sources and internet sources (Pole and Morrison, 2003). The sources which were used in my study, and which echo the above examples, consisted of:

- trainee reflective logs
- class discussions
- tutorials
- lesson observation

This combination of sources provided the opportunity to make an examination of 'talk, text and interaction' (Silverman, 2001, cited in Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.18) in order to provide a holistic picture of trainee experiences. Methods shape, limit and define the study (Pole and Morrison, 2003) and in my study it was important to retain openness to possibility in order to avoid the potential filtering out of serendipitous findings, as discussed in part one. It was essential, therefore, to conceive of data being generated through everyday practices; this also entailed no extra work for the data respondents who already experienced a heavy workload during the PGCE year, a burden to which I had no wish to add. The sources used provided a continuous generation of data which would not have been achieved by adopting an episodic, structured data collection approach (for example scheduled, structured interviews). The advantage of using sources which generate data in a natural and continuous way is illustrated by one of the findings in Chapter 6: a trainee was confused by a job application form which she was completing which asked her to provide details of her

students' examination results. She initially emailed me to ask for advice and subsequently brought the application form into University for further discussion. As a researcher I was unaware that some colleges were asking for such details to be provided by job applicants and I decided to investigate further. It transpired that some other trainees were completing application forms which asked for this information and several concerns were raised about how this might affect trainees' chances of employment and to what extent it was an appropriate method to judge suitability for employment (see Chapter 6 for a full discussion). If I had not been alerted to this recruitment trend by the trainee I would not have known of it and the subsequent class discussion would not have taken place. A more structured data collection approach, such as an interview, would have required me to be aware of the trend in order to elicit trainee views about it. A scheduled interview only allows questions to be asked on topics which are known; it does not allow exploration of the unknown. This is where the data generation approach adopted in my study has a key advantage: it reveals the unknown in everyday practices and allows serendipitous findings to be further explored and mined to reveal rich data. In such an arrangement I am the key instrument of the research.

The notion of researcher as instrument is perhaps best illustrated by the following quote:

Not only do researchers go into unknown territory, they must go unarmed, with no questionnaires, interview schedules, or observation protocols to stand between them and the cold winds of the raw real. They stand alone with their individual *sel/ves*. They themselves are the primary research tool with which they must find, identify, and collect the data (Ball, 1990 cited in Sparkes, 1992, p.29)

In ethnographic studies data has to be selected, a decision made on how to elicit more data and a decision made on the significance of the gathered data. (Sparkes, 1992). As Wolcott observes:

Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note – and often makes note - of some things to the exclusion of others. (Wolcott, 1994, p.4)

The sources listed above generated a wealth of potential data and I needed to decide what to include in my study and what to leave out. I had my key questions to guide me but I needed to remain alert to any emerging themes. This involved close

scrutiny of written data but also alert vigilance and note-taking during class discussions (see Appendix 3 for a description of how field notes were developed). Over time, not only was I able to identify three commonly recurring themes in the data but I also noted how these themes were inter-related (see discussion in Chapter 7). I also needed to be aware of which respondents had provided the data: as the trainees in both cohorts were teaching a variety of subjects which spanned both the academic and vocational it was important for me to ascertain whether certain themes were particular to certain subjects or whether they spanned disciplines and I was careful to represent this spread in my data analysis. The fact that the ethnographer is making decisions about the significance, or otherwise, of particular data is what makes them vulnerable to the criticisms levelled by positivists, as discussed above. However, ethnography, as with other interpretive approaches is about uncovering meaning and understanding through lived experiences rather than seeking to establish universal truths:

Therefore, according to interpretivists, a 'God's eye view' of the world is impossible, we cannot hope to see the world outside of our place in it - all that we can ever have are various points of view that reflect the interests, values and purposes of various groups of people. In view of this, interpretivists focus on the interests and purposes of people (including the researcher), on their intentional and meaningful behaviour, then by attempting to construe the world from the participant's point of view they try to explain and understand how they construct and continue to reconstruct social reality, given their interests and purposes. (Sparkes, 1992, p.27)

For the reasons given above, it is important for qualitative research to be faithful to principles which are characteristic of the interpretive paradigm rather than positivist principles. Therefore positivist principles such as controllability, replicability and predictability might be replaced by such principles as:

- There should be holism in the research
- The researcher rather than the research tool is the instrument of the research
- The data are descriptive
- There is a concern with process rather than simply with outcomes
- Data are analysed inductively rather than using a priori categories
- Data are presented in terms of the respondents rather than researchers
- Seeing and reporting the situation should be through the eyes of participants
- Catching meaning and intention are essential

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.134)

The latter of Cohen *et al*'s principles, the catching of meaning could be substituted with the word 'understanding'. This word is offered as a more appropriate substitute for the term validity when discussing qualitative research (Wolcott, 1994). When undertaking such research, other people's perspectives are as important as those of the researcher whose job it is to uncover them and for the qualitative researcher it is more important to understand than convince. Validity for positivists is methodological but for interpretivists 'validity is more personal and interpersonal, rather than methodological' (Reason and Rowan, 1981, cited in Sparkes, 1992, p.30). Validity, for the ethnographer, is more likely to have a focus on avoiding pitfalls such as subjectivity, reactivity and going native, which might threaten the credibility of the research (Henn *et al*, 2006). However, rather than thinking of subjectivity as a problem and aiming for objectivity it is helpful instead to aim for balance and a disciplined, or rigorous, subjectivity (Wolcott, 1994). Peshkin (1988, p.17) posits that 'One's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed' and that an acknowledgement of subjectivity by the researcher is not enough: they should be continually seeking out their subjectivity during the course of the research process rather than simply acknowledging it in the process of writing up the data. He suggests that the discovery of one's subjectivity might manifest itself in a physical reaction or an arousal of emotion and that subjectivity may be situational (changing according to research setting) and pluralistic : what he terms 'subjective I's' (p.18). Among the examples he discusses are his 'Nonresearch I' which might soften his judgement when he has become close to research subjects or his 'Pedagogical-meliorist I' which tempted him to be judgemental about the teaching at a research location when this was not within his remit. Peshkin argues that these multiple subjectivities need to be monitored and tamed to avoid the research becoming researcher focused. He also warns against work which becomes authorised in nature:

The in-house stamp of authorised work conveys the sense that the writer not only has permission to write but also has the subject's best interests at heart. By unwittingly assuming the role of special pleader, defender or lauder, I may move away from the cooler edges of the world I investigate to its emotional core where hazards of over-identification or going native lie. (Peshkin, 1988, p.20)

In terms of my own research I had a number of subjective I's: 'The teacher educator I'; 'The former teacher I'; 'The political I', among others. It was important for me to acknowledge these and to recognise that my interpretation of data may be filtered through these subjective lenses. These subjectivities are closely related to my insider perspective which I discussed in part one of this chapter and which, rather than being problematic, can offer a valuable historical perspective. However, I remained alert to situations where I experienced a physical or emotional reaction, as alluded to by Peshkin. Where, for example, I experienced excitement at uncovering a potentially significant piece of data this was an indicator that I should take a moment to consider if this excitement might have been induced by one of my subjective I's and, if so, whether or not this might have affected my judgment as to the significance of the data. The excitement which I experienced when making discoveries was also a prompt to remain mindful of the dichotomy of self into 'I' and 'me', as discussed in part one: my impetuous 'I' had to be reined in by my conventional 'me'. For example I had to remember to monitor any potential ethical dilemmas inherent in my research discoveries, especially when using specific trainee data.

### Ethical issues

'All research raises ethical issues' (Henn *et al*, 2006, p.79).

Research requires decision making based on what is morally correct and should put research participants at the centre of such decision making (Henn *et al*, 2006). In a bid to address ethical issues such as consent, anonymity and confidentiality, codes of practice are drawn up by research-appropriate organisations, such as BERA (2011) to offer an ethical framework which will avoid common dilemmas.

Interestingly, not all social researchers adopt the purist approach to ethics; some adopt a realist approach which recognises that we do not live in an ethically perfect world and that operating in a social world which is far from perfect requires a similar approach from social researchers:

Profound conflicts of interest, values, feelings and activities pervade social life. Instead of trusting people and expecting trust in return, one suspects them and expects others to suspect us. Conflict is the reality of life; suspicion is the guiding principle. (Douglas, 1976, cited in Henn *et al*, 2006, p.81)

This rather dystopian view illustrates a typical research dilemma: namely, to what extent researchers can maintain their ethical obligations whilst seeking social truth,

meaning and understanding. Douglas (1976) cited in Henn *et al* (2006) goes further by stating that ethical codes of practice might actually limit researcher freedom to seek the truth in social situations. While ethical codes might be assumed to restrict the researcher, the opposite might also apply: that while offering general guidelines they cannot account for all ethical dilemmas which might be met by researchers. There will always be unpredictable situations for which an ethical blueprint will not provide a solution, and that is when the researcher has the freedom to make a decision. However that freedom also requires the researcher to take responsibility for their actions.

At the heart of an ethical research approach is the notion of informed consent which has been described as 'the bedrock of ethical procedure' (Cohen *et al*, 2007, p.52): research participants need to be informed about the research to which they are a contributor so that they can make an informed decision as to whether or not they wish to take part. They should also be clear that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The common method with which consent is gained is through the issue of a consent form which is signed by participants to indicate their willingness to be involved in the research. The information sheet which accompanies the form will assure participants of their right to anonymity and confidentiality, as did the form issued to my research participants. However, informed consent is not a simple concept, and cannot offer a solution to all ethical problems. It is difficult to keep subjects fully informed when the researchers themselves may not know all the details in the early stages of research (Hammersley and Trainanu, 2012). This is certainly true of ethnographic studies which take twists and turns as my research study has. It is also significant that I, as a tutor, was asking my trainees to consent to being involved in my research study: the decision of whether or not to do so may have been influenced by my professional relationship with the trainees:

We cannot assume that, when people are faced with the issue of consenting or not consenting to being researched, they exist in a social vacuum as sovereign individuals. Rather, they live through playing various roles that involve them in relationships with other people, including many that involve influence and power. They make their decision, at least partly, in light of those relationships. (Hammersley and Trainou, 2012, p.9)

With this in mind I was careful to put no pressure on trainees to participate in the research. It was unrelated to any assessment procedures and I made it clear that



there was no obligation to become involved. I gave as much information as was available to me at the point of issuing the consent form. However:

What is clear, though, is that informed consent cannot be treated as a sacred principle that must always be fully respected. What it means, and what is possible and desirable, will vary according to circumstance. Complex and uncertain judgments are always at least potentially involved. (Hammersley and Trainou, 2012, p.10).

The reference to circumstance in the quote above is important and when choosing details to include about trainees in my research study I had to think beyond the fact that I had respected all assurances given on the consent form. For example, protecting anonymity extends beyond the return of a consent form and the use of pseudonyms. Although I was careful to protect the identity of trainees through the use of pseudonyms and although no colleges were named in the study, identity might be traced through the identification of the teaching subject where only one trainee in the cohort had this particular specialism. For this reason, the table of research participants in Appendix 1 gives trainee subjects by broad discipline area, rather than specific subject. This protects the identification of trainees but still allows for a degree of comparison between subject areas and evidences the breadth in data-gathering across disciplines.

Hammersley and Trainanou (2012) argue that the ethical dilemmas faced in conducting educational research are more often potential rather than actual dilemmas and should not necessarily create angst for the researcher. They caution against over-dramatisation of potential dilemmas and advise careful discrimination between those which have serious significance and those which do not. In terms of my study the anonymisation of direct quotes was effected by the use of pseudonyms. There were, however, some quotes which adopted a specific metaphor to describe an experience or subject specific detail. Although these quotes yielded rich data I was mindful that, in one particular case, the use of an idiosyncratic metaphor, which might have been shared with others, had the potential to identify a particular trainee. I had to find a way to convey the message behind the quotes without compromising anonymity.

One option was to fictionalise the data (Campbell, 2000). It is argued that fictionalising the data in educational research allows the disguise of people and places where the data is of a personal nature and therefore requires maximum confidentiality. When fictionalising, the research study assumes the characteristics of a novel and is effectively similar to those works of fiction which state that they are 'based on a true story'; in the case of a research study this would translate as 'based on real data'. It is suggested that the search for new ways to represent data is a result of 'the growing interest in engendering a 'sense of empathy' for the lives of people' (Eisner, 1997, cited in Campbell, 2000, p.86). Eisner does, however, point out the dangers of a 'lack of referential precision and the need for context as a major requirement of alternative forms which are breaking relatively new ground' (p.86). It is for this latter reason that I chose not to fictionalise the data: had I adopted fictionalisation for this short data extract I would not have been writing a novel but a vignette within a wider study which may have lacked the 'referential precision' to which Eisner refers and the format would have sat outside the other data presented. I chose instead to present the quotes in the form of field notes in order to retain consistency with the other data presentation findings and also to allow me to draw from other trainee data on a similar theme.

### Data transformation

For researchers who gather qualitative data a key question is what to do with it (Wolcott, 1994). Wolcott suggests that data transformation takes place through a process of description, analysis and interpretation (or varying combinations of these three elements). He points out that 'analysis' is often used as an all-encompassing term to describe the process of transforming qualitative data, however he applies this term in a specific sense and offers the following definition for the three elements:

- Description addresses the question 'What is going on here?' Data consist of observations made by the researcher and /or reported to the researcher by others
- Analysis addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic descriptions of interrelationships among them – in short, how things work. In terms of stated objectives analysis also may be employed evaluatively to address questions of why a system is not working or how it might be made to work better

- Interpretation addresses processual questions of meanings and contexts: 'What does it all mean?' 'What is to be made of it all?' (Wolcott, 1994, p.12)

The process of description, analysis and interpretation (D-A-I) is one which I found helpful when considering the methodology of my research study. Wolcott conceives of the three part process as a D-A-I formula which bears similarities to the N-P-K formulae of plant fertilisers, which have varying ratios dependent on the desired horticultural result. Description is a key element, but the D-A-I formula would vary according to the emphasis which a research study places on either analysis or interpretation:

Description is the fulcrum, the pivotal base on which all else hinges, but it is the researcher who decides how the description is to be played out – whether to bear down more heavily on the side of analysis or interpretation. (Wolcott, 1994, p.36)

### The integration of theory

In my study I have described key events through a mixture of trainee quotes, field notes and narrative accounts of critical events. The extent to which these are purely descriptive is debatable since, in the process of becoming data, they are already affected by an implicit analysis and/or interpretation and there is a subtle shift as data moves between the three stages of processing (Wolcott, 1994). With a view to facilitating these shifts I set the data against a backdrop of theory in order to provide a wider context for analysis and interpretation. This provided an integrated review of relevant literature, some of which had been discussed in Chapter 2, and which could now be applied to the data to facilitate a more holistic understanding of trainee experiences. It was also important to relate any serendipitous findings to existing theory in order to make sense of them, as discussed in part one (Merton and Barber, 1968; Fine and Deegan, 1996). Setting the data against wider theory demonstrated the interaction between theory and practice and allowed for reference to wider social and political debates for, 'while the personal is political, the political is not always personal' (Apple, 1996, cited in Campbell, 2000, p.86).

The theoretical backdrop in Chapters 4 to 6 also served to identify interconnections between data themes: an example of this was the emergence of 'consumerism and the commodification of education' as an interconnecting theme. I had not anticipated

how this theme would emerge or how it would help to contextualise the data and it provided another of the twists in my research road. As I identified interconnecting themes in the data I found myself engaging in a process of narrative analysis rather than a paradigmatic analysis, the latter being characterised by categories of coding and the former characterised by the researcher acting as the main instrument of the research helping to bring meaning to the data and producing explanations. The problem with adopting paradigmatic analysis is that it can result in a myopic approach which can obscure more important data (Colley, 2010). This myopia is akin to the 'filtering out' of serendipitous data as conceived by McBirnie (2008) and discussed in part one of this chapter. If rigid approaches to analysis are adopted then they can 'blinker' the researcher to the existence of rich data. Narrative analysis might more accurately be described as narrative synthesis, for while analysis suggests taking apart, synthesis suggests putting together and seeking out patterns or connections between sets of data (Colley, 2010). Just as a serendipitous approach can drive data generation so can it drive data synthesis but only if the researcher's mind remains open to possibilities; the possibilities presented by taking the twists and turns in the research road. A key aim of my research study was to 'make sense' of trainees' experiences and although individual data themes may be identified, these rarely stand alone and their interconnections are more easily identified in a process of synthesis which presents the fabric rather than just the individual threads of the data themes: it is in the interweave of the threads that a fuller picture emerges.

The process of data synthesis set against a theoretical backdrop allowed for an almost seamless shift into data interpretation as I sought to present a picture which would make sense of trainee and NQT experiences. It was important for me to consider that interpretation can be subject to excess (Wolcott, 1994). For example there may be a temptation to present data and allow it to speak for itself, resulting in a lack of discussion or, to offer too much personal comment and risk the accusation of undisciplined subjectivity. My intention throughout the discussion in my data chapters was to maintain the interaction of theory with data in order to present an applied interpretation which could be set against a wider social context.

Bearing in mind that 'what the researcher intends is not necessarily what the reader actually finds' (Wolcott, 1994, p.51), the researcher can only offer an interpretation.

Just as the data is filtered through my subjective I's, so has the raw data been filtered through the subjective I's of the trainees and NQTs who generated it. The reader of this study will also filter the data, my findings and my interpretations through their own subjective I's.

Essentially, there is no method which can offer a failsafe approach to understanding qualitative data but it is important to avoid those which prevent us from gaining the understanding to which we aspire:

There are no techniques, whether conventional or radically non-conventional, to which we can turn with certainty that they will resolve our problems in making sense of qualitative data. If deployed unthinkingly, research techniques may drive our enquiry off course rather than help us gain in understanding...With all data we have to be able to think through the most appropriate methods to make sense of it. (Colley, 2010, p.195)

### Criteria for judging the research

It is inevitable that readers of this research study will formulate opinions of its worth and filter it through their subjective I's (Peshkin, 1988). Various attempts have been made to arrive at a set of suitable criteria by which to judge interpretivist research, for example lists of criteria for judgement. However such lists are now considered less a set of definitive criteria, and more an open ended set of possibilities (Sparkes, 1992). In light of this I have suggested some 'possibilities' against which my research might be judged and these are laid out below:

1 Has it stayed true to the following ethnographic characteristics, as discussed in part one and repeated below?

- People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts rather than under conditions created by the researcher
- Data are gathered from a range of sources, including informal conversations
- Data collection is relatively unstructured: it does not follow a fixed research design and categories for interpreting are generated out of the process of data analysis
- The focus is generally small scale, perhaps a group of people

- Analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices and how these are implicated in local and perhaps also wider contexts.  
(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

2 Does the research meet Harris's (1983, cited in Sparkes, 1992, p.35) three levels of interpretation necessary for 'good' interpretive research:

The research must be grounded in the shared understandings about the culture developed between the researcher and the members' of the group being examined; it must include the researcher's insights about details of the culture that are not well articulated by members of the group; and it must include theoretical generalizations that go beyond the particular details of the culture to link the study to relevant portions of other research.

3 Have the data been set against a backdrop of relevant theory in order to demonstrate the interaction of theory and practice (Apple, 1996, cited in Campbell, 2000)?

4 Have I, adopting the role of 'researcher as instrument', identified key emergent themes from the data and synthesised the data in a way which has helped to produce explanations (Colley, 2010)?

5 Has Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity offered a suitable framework against which to explain the nature of the challenges facing trainees and NQTs in their bid to deliver a 'good education'?

'In a world of multiple realities, multiple truths can exist' (Sparkes, 1992, p.36): the picture I am painting of 21<sup>st</sup> Century education is but one artist's view. In the world of art, as in the world of research there can be multiple interpretations of subject material. What constitutes good art is a subjective and often contentious topic: in a similar vein there can be no definitive answer as to what makes good interpretive research. The criteria above were used to help me develop the thesis and to make judgement as to its efficacy. I believe it has met these criteria and I hope the reader agrees.

#### Providing the foreground detail in this picture of education

This chapter has focused on the technique adopted to create the picture of education represented in this study. The background and middle ground of the picture has

been provided in Chapter 2 and it is to the foreground detail that the thesis now turns: Chapters 4 to 6 depict the working experiences of trainee and newly qualified teachers, with each chapter examining a particular theme which has emerged from the data. However, as with all pictures, to be fully understood the foreground detail must be considered against the background and middle ground. For this reason, when considering the findings, reference will be made both to the discussion points raised in Chapter 2, and to other theme-specific theory. The interweaving of theory with findings allows for a contextualising of the experiences depicted in this foreground detail, so that they may be better interpreted by the reader.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Scripted Teacher**

#### **Introduction**

On a day in March a trainee teacher is making his way to his first job interview and is feeling very confident. He has prepared for questions he might be asked and has, as requested, prepared a 20 minute lesson which he is to deliver to a group of A Level students as part of the interview process. The lesson has been carefully researched and prepared. The formal interview goes well and the trainee enters the classroom to begin the lesson. He hands a lesson plan to the observer and begins teaching. The trainee is full of confidence and the students give the lesson a positive reception. Half an hour later the trainee is told that he has not got the job. Here he takes up the story and gives the reasons:

I was told that I didn't outline fixed objectives at the start of the session, I didn't use visual backups (Powerpoint) and I only gave a brief plenary...I was told that if I had corrected the above I would have got the job as I was first choice after the formal interviews. I made the mistake of missing out these basic elements in the teaching session; my natural opposition to these concepts (I see fixed objectives as indicative of a bygone behaviourist dominated age) perhaps does not project an image of organisation and reliability in interviews. My brief had been to teach the first 20 minutes of a planned hour long session, unfortunately I took this too literally and didn't give a complete and conclusive plenary as I was thinking I was only 20 minutes into the hour, a stupid mistake as I now realise. (Alan, 09-10)

After reading this account what strikes the reader is the language adopted to describe this experience: Alan describes as 'mistakes' his decisions not to outline objectives, not to use Powerpoint and to give only a brief plenary at the end of the lesson. His feedback indicated that if these 'mistakes' had been 'corrected' he would have been offered the job. As a result of University teaching sessions and placement experience, all trainees were aware of the expectation to follow a standardised lesson planning format; however, in discussion the trainee acknowledged that although he had clear aims for the lesson he did not feel that he needed to express these as fixed objectives (or outcomes). He had made a conscious decision not to use Powerpoint as he did not feel that it would be appropriate in this particular lesson and his final plenary was brief as this seemed appropriate for a brief 20 minute



teaching session. The feedback which he received at the end of the interview process indicated that these decisions had cost him the job. The trainee commented that the lesson content was well received by the students present but this seemed to have been ignored by the observers. In short, this trainee chose not to keep to the lesson plan script which requires learning objectives to be clearly communicated at the start of the lesson and revisited in a plenary and this choice not only cost him the job but led him to believe that his decision was a 'stupid mistake', despite the fact that he was able to give justifications for his decisions. This account illustrates the extent to which a standardised format of lesson delivery is expected in colleges, and the extent to which an autonomous approach to such delivery is dismissed. It also raises the important question of what is more important, the lesson content or its template? This is a key consideration in the quest for good education and reminds us of Biesta's (2009a) observation, noted in Chapter 2, that we are in danger of valuing what is measured rather than measuring what we value.

The lesson plan is just one example of the scripts which structure and prescribe teacher activity, and this chapter will chart the rise of this prescribed scripting and offer an analysis of its impact on teachers, students and the curriculum. The chapter will begin by examining the rise of neo-Fordism and technical rationality (Hodkinson, 1997) which has led to a set of hegemonic arrangements which 'secure their power through the production of a common sense which claims there is no alternative' (Avis, 2007a, p.12). The controlling nature of such arrangements will be analysed against the emergence of Digital Taylorism which restricts 'permission to think' to a small group of individuals within organisations (Brown *et al*, 2011) and has led, I will argue, to the rise of the 'scripted teacher' and the demise of the thinking teacher.

### Neo-fordism , hegemony and outcomes

Throughout this research study a recurring theme in the data is the business lexicon which dominates current educational discourse. The focus on end product, quality assurance and continuous improvement is reminiscent of language which is associated with production and the influence which Fordism and post-Fordism have had on this. Fordism is associated with the mass production of standardised objects by workers who are under close supervision in hierarchical organisations where quality control of finished products is undertaken at the end of production; post-

Fordism is characterised by specialised production in flatter organisational structures where workers are given responsibility for quality assurance of their own work product (Hodkinson, 1997). Individual responsibility is designed to deliver increased efficiency and to 'empower' workers. However this empowerment is 'on a terrain that is set by others and according to a logic that presupposes it is meeting human needs but which may in fact be antithetical to this' (Avis, 1996, p.107). Despite the fact that post-Fordism boasts of an investment in the professional development of workers and empowerment of the individual, an emphasis on quality and efficiency results in teaching being subjected to standardised approaches: a form of technical rationalism which is hegemonic in nature:

Education and training are seen as systemic production processes, using the metaphor of the assembly line, with its inputs, processes and outputs. Quality and efficiency are dominant concepts. Above all, technical rationality is about the achievement of ever greater control over social and human, as well as physical and inanimate, contexts and processes. (Hodkinson, 1997, p.74)

Essentially, teachers are supposed to feel empowered by the offer of professional development and increased self-responsibility. However, the quality agenda is imposed from above, and an emphasis on continuous improvement and efficiency puts considerable pressure on the teacher to deliver the desired result. Teachers are therefore subjected to neo-Fordism, a combination of post-Fordism and technical rationality (Hodkinson, 1997). The close control over educational process is evident in the prescriptive nature of documents which define the curriculum. An example is the awarding body specification: previously referred to as a *syllabus* (defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the subjects covered in a course of study or teaching') the change of nomenclature to *specification* (defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'the action of identifying something precisely or of stating a precise requirement') illustrates the exacting control over subject content which teachers must respond to. The specification is translated into schemes of work by college departments and then each teacher is expected to write lesson plans which specify what is to happen in a given lesson time period. The four part lesson, following a pattern of *starter, introduction, development, plenary* was inspired by the National Strategies introduced into schools in 1997 as a fixed term intervention programme to raise standards in schools (Department for Education, 2011). Although focused on schools, many standardised elements of the strategies found their way into colleges,

including the four part lesson plan. Interestingly, an official government communication now claims that it is a common misconception that Ofsted expects lesson plans to be produced for all lessons and claims:

The Government wants to bust this myth by making it clear that neither the Department for Education nor Ofsted require written lesson plans for every lesson. Instead, inspectors may want to see where the lesson they observe fits in the sequence of teaching. The Government supports the idea that teachers should plan their lessons but this does not mean imposing a centralised planning template on schools (Department for Education, 2011b, unpagged)

Despite this claim, all placement colleges presented PGCE trainees with standard college lesson plan templates which they were expected to complete for each lesson. Those trainees observed by Ofsted and/or college observation teams during their placements were always expected to produce a lesson plan. The continuing emphasis on standardised planning in colleges may be an indicator of the fear and insecurity which can result when schools or colleges become accustomed to employing prescribed techniques and approaches to planning: they are difficult to abandon and some staff may become reliant on them. Prescriptive regimes can result in dependency and some teachers (and college management teams) may be fearful of abandoning the standardised lesson plan and play safe by continuing to use the template.

This is not to suggest that planning per se is bad; however, the use of standardised lesson plans is an example of what Furedi (2006) refers to as 'template education' (p.161). The trainee interview experience described at the start of this chapter illustrates the expectation of template education that the communication of objectives and a full plenary (even in a 20 minute lesson) were considered to be essential components. Of significance is the reaction of the trainee teacher to the outcome of the interview: he is made to feel that he has made a stupid mistake and believes he has given an impression of being disorganised and unreliable. There is clearly a suggestion that unless he conforms to 'template' expectations in the future he is unlikely to be successful in job interviews: he felt he would have to conform to standardised expectations and abandon his individual approach to teaching in favour of the template approach.

Essentially this trainee did not keep to the script. This is not an isolated incident.

Other examples cited by trainees are:

- Trainees are expected not only to communicate objectives to students but keep them displayed during the session. One trainee described an occasion on which he was being observed and had communicated the objectives verbally to students but was criticised as they were not written on the board.
- Another trainee who had displayed the objectives was criticised for not returning to them at the end of the session to confirm that they had been met.
- A lesson observation at which I was present found the trainee rushing through an important explanation towards the end of the lesson because she was concerned that she must leave time to ask students if they agreed that all the learning outcomes had been covered. This resulted in a parroted response from students as they were asked if each outcome has been achieved and they replied 'Yes'. When I questioned why she had done this she explained that a colleague had emphasised the importance of this approach. She was concerned that if she did not do this she would be downgraded. (Field notes, Feb 2011)

Whilst the value of structured lesson planning is acknowledged as an aid and guide to the teacher, the emphasis on objectives or learning outcomes seems to have assumed more importance than the content and process of the lesson itself. The curriculum debate focusing on product versus process models is a long running one and is characterised by the work of Ralph Tyler and Lawrence Stenhouse (Smith, 2000). The product model is focused strongly on behavioural objectives:

Since the real purpose of education is not to have the instructor perform certain activities but to bring about significant changes in the students' pattern of behaviour, it becomes important to recognize that any statements of objectives of the school should be a statement of changes to take place in the students. (Tyler, 1949, cited in Smith, 2000, unpagged)

With the process model, however, the objectives, or outcomes, are no longer the defining feature. Objectives are not set in advance but the lesson is approached more organically and learning develops as teachers and students work together. In the field of post-compulsory education where most study leads to an externally awarded qualification, which is usually time bound, the process model has limitations and Stenhouse himself acknowledged that 'it can never be directed towards an examination as an objective without loss of quality, since the standards of the

examination then override the standards immanent in the subject' (Stenhouse, 1975 cited in Smith, 2000, unpagged).

It is not within the remit of this chapter to engage in a detailed curriculum debate; however, rather than be viewed as an either/or debate it is important to acknowledge the significance of context and the fact that a 'one size fits all' model has limited scope to meet the needs of a diverse student population. What is relevant to this study is the extent to which the product model dominates and how it constricts teacher activity. To illustrate this domination it is useful to compare the wording of the lesson plan examples below, both taken from college lesson plan templates used by trainees and included in Appendix 4:

#### Example A

*Learning outcomes:*

*At the end of the lesson students **will** be able to...*

#### Example B

*Learning outcomes:*

*At the end of the lesson students **must** be able to...*

Example A suggests a 'crystal ball' prediction by the teacher, but Example B suggests an intensification of this which borders on a coercion that the teacher produce a particular result by the end of the lesson. Both examples present a dilemma for the teacher founded in the impossibility of predicting what learning will take place or when it will happen: this can only be judged after the event:

We can only use the word learning retrospectively, i.e., after some change has happened. Whether any current activity will actually result in learning – that is, whether it will actually result in more or less durable changes that we find valuable – is not something we can know when we are engaged in the activity (Biesta, 2009b, p.5)

The impossibility of prediction is illustrated in the following trainee quote:

Sometimes I find myself having to rearrange a whole lesson plan because things have needed to go a completely different way and at times I have needed to spend a whole lesson on a specific outcome and not had time to do the other one. Does this mean I have failed as a teacher? How should we as

teachers be expected to 'predict' what is going to happen during a lesson?  
(Karen, 10-11)

Unlike the production of material goods where an outcome can be specified and reliably predicted, education is far more complex, relying as it does on interactions between students and teachers. Interactions are spontaneous and unpredictable because they are between humans, not machines:

Classrooms are complex and busy places in which a plethora of variables operates and teaching and learning are inherently 'fuzzy' activities characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty between input and outputs.  
(Hussey and Smith, 2003, p.359)

The trainee quote below also supports the view that students bring a complex set of variables which make outcomes difficult to predict:

This is why learning outcomes cannot be used effectively: they do not take into account everything else that is involved with students...the social time, the difficulty of the topic. It simply assumes that students sit down and learn the material. Learning is subjective and depends on everything else which is going on. (Caroline, 10-11)

Despite the apparent impossibility of predicting learning outcomes, the demand on teachers to do so persists and has become a key element of the quality agenda which presupposes that everything can be measured and managed as if colleges were production lines. The demand is justified on the grounds that there is no other option: it is part of a legitimating rhetoric which is hegemonic in nature (Hodkinson, 1997). This is illustrated by Example B above which requires teachers to state what **must** be learned by the end of the lesson. As well as placing an impossible demand on the teacher it also places a demand on students, as illustrated by the following trainee quote:

Learning outcomes can be intimidating for some students – they are seen as something that they 'need' to be able to master by the end of the lesson.  
(Karen, 10-11)

To avoid the constricting and coercive effect of outcomes this trainee added that a move towards wider aims would allow for structure without excessive limitations:

I feel a better approach would be to have aims...by aim I mean a focus – something to aim to achieve by the end of the lesson, not something that **must** be achieved. (Karen, 10-11)

Another trainee felt that a particular problem with learning outcomes was that they had to be applied to each lesson. He felt that they should be used more flexibly:

It is less useful to make predictions for each and every lesson. Learning outcomes, in my opinion, should be more flexible and applied over a longer period of time. (George, 10-11)

Another trainee observed that closely timed lesson plans do not allow for the inquisitive nature of students who are genuinely interested in the lesson content and wish to explore some issues in more depth:

The video had to be cut short to leave time for the recap. This was caused by the learners asking inquisitive questions throughout the lesson. Although I found this positive as it showed their engagement it also meant that it used time up that was not factored into the initial plan. (Sam, 10-11)

When lesson plans include precise timings, trainees often feel obliged to keep rigidly to them. When situations occur, as described above, where students are inquisitive and wish to know more about a topic, the teacher is then left with the dilemma of either sticking to the plan or following the spontaneous diversion of the lesson. The importance which is attached to the lesson plan often results in trainees feeling obligated to follow it, much as an actor might follow a set script rather than improvising. In a class discussion it emerged that what prevents trainees from diverting from the script is not the fear of improvisation but the fear that they are breaking a golden rule of teaching to which they should adhere. It was felt that if specific learning outcomes had not been achieved by the end of a lesson then this might be perceived as a failure on the part of the teacher (Field notes Feb 2011).

Trainees reported mixed reactions from students to learning outcomes. While some believed that they put pressure on students, others felt that there was a general disinterest in them:

I believe my students are not interested in objectives as they always seem very bored when I present them. (Maria, 10-11)

This trainee felt that the standardised approach to lesson planning which required objectives to be communicated at the start and end of every lesson became part of a repetitive routine which received scant response from students. Such routine can result in parroted responses from students (as noted above) at the end of lessons

when they are asked to confirm that the learning outcomes have been met. As Maher observes of learning outcomes:

Treated with ambivalence, they become meaningless and even detrimental to the educational process. (Maher, 2004, p.49)

Aside from differing ideological standpoints on their use in the classroom (illustrated by the quote from Alan at the start of this chapter) it would appear that any potential advantage in using learning outcomes has been lost because they have been hijacked by the quality audit culture in colleges which uses them as a measurement tool:

... and too tight a focus on learning outcomes is at odds with notions of good learning, good teaching and empirical experience. (Hussey and Smith, 2003, p.359).

Hussey and Smith (2003) argue that the problem lies not with the notion of learning outcomes, which can be useful when applied flexibly, but with their rigid application as a tool of measurement which has no practical use in the classroom. The dilemma for teachers is that they are being encouraged to be innovative and engaging in their lessons, but within the confines of specified measurable outcomes:

The teacher is stuck in the middle between tight adherence to achieving pre-specified outcomes, on the one hand, and optimising the opportunities for the development and support of independent, autonomous and lifelong learners, on the other. The resulting fog of rhetoric and justification threatens to stifle originality and responsiveness within classrooms. (Hussey and Smith, 2003, p.358)

Avis (2007) echoes this concern when he identifies the irony of teachers being encouraged to stimulate creativity in students whilst their working practices are dominated by performative practices. Trainee data suggests that these performative practices frame college expectations and leave little scope for the teacher to demonstrate creative approaches to teaching. Alan's second interview experience would seem to bear this out:

I attempted to demonstrate my aspiration to develop independent thinkers using basic cognitive techniques in the classroom. I don't think that this fitted well with the general ethos of the institution as the learners (approx 10 of them) seemed surprised by my approach to teaching. I moved desks around



(as they had been arranged in a grid as I imagine a 1950's teaching manual may have suggested) but this didn't seem to go down well with my observers. (Alan, 09-10)

An emphasis on standardisation and outcomes stifles creativity rather than fostering it and can result in a reductionist approach which restricts learning (Maher, 2004). It seems ironic that at a time when creativity is being encouraged in the classroom the confines of standardisation are limiting its growth in terms of both teacher and student activity. This creates a paradox:

The concern with trust and creativity and the encouragement of apparently progressive models of educational practice rest uneasily with the conditions within which teachers labour as well as the pedagogic context in which they work. (Avis, 2007a, p.95)

The need for a more flexible approach which would foster creativity was particularly important for those trainees specialising in teaching of the arts. The following trainee quotes are from arts specialists and support the view that outcomes can limit exploration of topics:

Pre-determining a whole lesson can limit what happens during the lesson and if an event should occur which the teacher believes they could explore more deeply, the lesson plan may limit the extent to which it can be explored. (Karen, 10-11)

It is difficult to set out exactly what will be discovered and learned within a particular time frame as groups tend to move off in varied directions from the given stimulus, guided by their own imagination and work at their own pace. (George, 10-11)

The learning processes take place over a lengthy period of rehearsal and individual outcomes cannot be pinned down and addressed for every student in one specific session. (Stuart 09-10)

Furedi (2012) supports the view that a focus on outcomes stifles creativity but he also believes that a more serious consequence is that they encourage irresponsibility:

This utilitarian ethos encourages irresponsibility because what matters is whether the formal outcomes have been achieved, not what students have actually experienced or learned. It promotes a calculating and instrumental attitude where responsibility becomes equated with box-ticking. (Furedi, 2012, unpagged)

The reductionist effects of a utilitarian ethos which result in box ticking are also identified in the following trainee quote:

There seems to be culture of 'box ticking' in the current teaching arena one which I feel does not improve the standards of teaching but merely causes more work. (Robert, 09-10)

The standardised approach to teaching has clearly been influenced by the rise of a quality culture in colleges and the need to demonstrate continuous improvement. A technical view takes the approach of building a model of 'what works' and expecting college staff to follow a 'recipe for action' (James and Biesta, 2007, p.106). However there are many problems associated with this approach, including an assumption that teaching and learning are the same everywhere and that it is teachers and their teaching which need improvement (when there are in fact many other factors involved). The template approach does not allow for individual difference and no approach can ever guarantee success:

Whatever the intentions and whatever the planning, there will always be unintended outcomes and outcomes will differ from student to student. (James and Biesta, 2007, p.36).

James and Biesta argue for a focus on learning cultures in FE which allows for a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, one which considers both external and internal factors affecting colleges and departments and the complexity of the interrelationships which influence learning.

### Transparency and criteria compliance

It is not only at the planning stage that teachers are scripted but also at the assessment stage. In fact it could be argued that it is assessment which drives the planning and teaching process.

Following the principles of constructive alignment, learning outcomes are used as a starting point and teaching activities and assessment criteria are then aligned to them (Biggs, 1996). The approach is designed to ensure consistency through transparency of intentions from learning outcomes through to assessment tasks. However, this transparency, which is intended to empower students, can actually entrap them and encourage passive adherence to criteria (Hussey and Smith, 2003).

Transparency encourages instrumentalism and can result in criteria compliance rather than learning (Torrance, 2007). Effectively the student becomes focused on the assessment criteria and works towards them rather than achieving them through the natural process of learning. The end result is that learning outcomes and assessment criteria script the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students.

The focus on assessment criteria has arisen out of the notion that the UK needs to produce highly qualified individuals who can compete in the knowledge economy and global work arena: it has fallen to the education system to produce these individuals as 'the worker is seen as the key factor of production and economic success' (Avis, 2007a, p.22). As the demand to gain qualifications has increased, students have become increasingly focused on this end product with the result that they aim to gain the best grades possible. A previously selective education system has developed into a mass education system in an attempt to educate for the knowledge economy: this has resulted in an emphasis on content standards and learning outcomes accompanied by a regime of more frequent testing (Torrance, 2011). Attempts by the government to 'squeeze' more and more testing into the curriculum and the fact that not enough space was available for this has resulted in a situation where 'elements of what were squeezed in popped out again' (Torrance, 2011, p.11). Some aspects of this will be discussed in Chapter 5 where the findings suggest that emphasis on assessment leaves little time for other important aspects of learning (for example assignments assume more importance than practical activities on VET courses: essentially these elements are 'popping out' as a result of the assessment squeeze). Torrance's examination of international research evidence suggests that rising test scores are disguising the fact that standards are falling as a result of a much more restricted objectives based curriculum, a curriculum which ignores the importance of the teacher-student relationship and an emphasis on 'grade accumulation rather than learning' (Torrance, 2011, p.26).

An early observation by trainees when beginning their teaching placement was the emphasis placed on grade attainment by both colleges and students:

The focus on target grades was evident from the start as students were assigned target grades on their transfer from school to college. These grades

were based on GCSE results and trainees felt that from the start of their colleges studies, students were encouraged to focus on their targets and to meet or surpass them. Trainees felt that these targets defined students (for example they commented on students being referred to as 'grade A students') and that targets could either put undue pressure on students or limit their efforts by defining them as, for example a 'grade D student' thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Field notes, December 09)

One trainee commented:

I hope to take a teaching approach that does not dwell on predicted target grades and I hope to assess students realistically through various classroom and feedback sessions. (Aisha, 09-10)

Another trainee felt that the focus on target grades detracted from the education process and led to students asking what they needed to do in order to achieve these grades:

Students like to know what they need to do to achieve their personal targets. This can have its downside as students become too focused on achieving an end product or grade rather than to experience and value the process they are going through in order to achieve their grade. (Ann, 10-11)

The first sentence of the above quote is particularly significant as it is a contributory factor to criteria compliance: when students interpret targets as things which they *must* or *need* to achieve then they expect teachers to provide a formula for success. Teachers will share with students the grading or assessment criteria which specify what is required for success and students then focus on satisfying these criteria, often at the expense of wider study or learning. This was a trend identified as far back as the 1990s, illustrated by Ecclestone's observation:

It is already apparent in outcome based systems that an instrumental attitude of just doing what is needed for assessment reduces the desire to do anything challenging or cognitively difficult. (Ecclestone, 1999, p.47)

The trainee quotes in this study indicate that this trend has intensified to the extent that some students are expecting teachers to 'tell them what to do' and that some teachers are guiding students towards the 'safe bet' in assessment to maximise the chances of success (see Chapter 6 for detailed discussion). The notion that there is a safe bet or recipe for success can lead to a lack of originality or sameness in student work:

Because the college I taught in had such good grades and Ofsted reports, every year they expected the teachers and students to do better and achieve better grades and if this meant the students having similar work then so be it! (Fran, 09-10)

The emphasis on continuous improvement and the attainment of higher grade percentages in this case seems to have forsaken originality and risk-taking in favour of tried and tested methods of success. The research data in this study suggests that the *need to achieve* has assumed increasing importance for both students and teachers whose futures now depend largely on the qualifications gained. It is of significance that it is not only student futures which are dependent on results but also the future prospects of teachers whose professional competence is judged increasingly by the results of their students (see detailed discussion in Chapter 6). The research data suggests that with so much at stake approaches to assessment are adopted which eliminate the risk of failure. Torrance *et al's* (2005) research findings seem to support this view:

...no approach to or method of assessment is immune from distortion when too many consequences ride on the results. (Torrance *et al*, 2005, p.81)

Just as student activity becomes scripted by assessment criteria, so does teacher feedback which often has to evidence the meeting of learning outcomes. One trainee was surprised to find that she was required to use specific wording and terminology contained in the set outcomes:

I had to grade work and give written feedback. I didn't mind doing this but we had to stick to guidelines and specifications using certain words that were written in the curriculum learning outcomes. This, I felt, was quite contrived. Like words were being put into my mouth when I may have wanted to say something different but couldn't! (Fran, 09-10)

This is perhaps one of the most constricting examples of teacher scripting as it deprives the teacher of the opportunity to give individual, meaningful and constructive feedback. This type of precise scripting is reminiscent of the scripts which are used in service industry call centres which require workers to respond to customers in uniform ways. When teachers comply with such approaches with reluctance it can result in them adopting 'masks of cooperativeness' (Sennett, 1998, p.112) which can result in them being 'oppressed by the very superficiality of the fictions of teamwork' (Graham, 1995, cited in Sennett, 1998, p.113). Most

importantly, perhaps, scripting deprives individuals of their capacity to think for themselves.

### Permission to think

As the data comments above illustrate, trainees are often surprised (and reluctant) to engage in the prescriptive practices which they encounter on teaching placement but feel that they have no option but to do so. The danger is that the more accustomed they become to complying with prescriptive demands, the less accustomed they become to thinking for themselves:

If learning does become increasingly confined to prescriptive specifications designed by exclusive groups and then implemented by cynical, defensive teachers then space for students and their teachers to think for themselves, to question, to challenge and to define their own outcomes could become the preserve of a shrinking elite. (Ecclestone, 1999, p.47)

The notion that only a minority of individuals have the freedom to think while others simply follow standardised practices is reminiscent of F.W. Taylor's application of scientific management principles to effect mass production in factories. Taylor's approach was based on the notion that there is 'one best way' to maximise production. He did not believe in placing trust in workers and believed that managers should have a monopoly on thinking: they were to devise working practices which were formulaic in nature and led to the mechanisation of man. Despite Taylor's views being eventually discredited as dehumanising, some of his key approaches seem to be having a resurgence and are being applied to knowledge workers rather than factory workers (Brown *et al*, 2011). This resurgence is evident in education, as identified by Hodkinson's allusion to technical rationality:

Technical rationality can be seen in the production line metaphor for education – where education is a linear process, with inputs and outputs. We control that system primarily through controlling the inputs and outputs. (Hodkinson, 1997, p.74)

Essentially the controls which teachers are experiencing in the form of template lesson plans and strict adherence to learning outcomes and assessment criteria are a form of Taylorism for the modern technological age, or knowledge economy. Brown *et al* (2011) refer to this as Digital Taylorism. They comment that Digital

Taylorism is characterised by micromanagement and scripting with 'permission to think' restricted to a minority of individuals. This comment echoes that of Ecclestone, above, who predicted in 1999 that the opportunity for teachers to think for themselves would become the preserve of the few.

Some characteristics of Digital Taylorism, as conceptualised by Brown *et al* (2011) are worth exploring in more detail as they offer a useful analysis for the changing field of education and those working within it. They define one characteristic of Digital Taylorism as the separation of conception from execution which encourages segmentation of talent: effectively the workforce is divided into thinkers and doers. Three categories of workers identified are developers, demonstrators and drones. Developers are given permission to think and to devise initiatives which are implemented by demonstrators leaving drones to carry out tasks requiring no thinking, merely scripts. Brown *et al* include teachers in the demonstrator category:

Much of the knowledge used by consultants, managers, teachers, nurses, technicians and so forth is standardised or pre-packaged. Indeed, although demonstrator roles may include well-qualified people, much of the focus is on effective communication with colleagues and customers. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, unpaginated, section 5: Digital Taylorism)

The standardised, pre-packaged knowledge alluded to in the quote above might include (for teachers): awarding body specifications, lesson plan templates and assessment criteria passed down from external and internal 'developer' sources. In order to effect standardisation Digital Taylorism breaks jobs down into components and modules and puts a growing importance on behavioural objectives (Brown *et al* 2011). These terms are familiar to teachers as modules and objectives have shaped the existing model of curriculum planning and assessment. As demonstrators rather than developers, teachers have no choice but to comply with such reductionist models of practice and often feel frustrated by their lack of power to resist or rework them.

Trainee quotes have evidenced the frustration which trainees feel when outcomes and assessment take precedence over the wider function of education:

An educator's aim should be to create individuals and prepare them to succeed in life but unfortunately this perspective gets lost in the target driven culture that is judged on results and the value added. (Sam, 10-11)

Within a prescriptive regime which places emphasis on the qualification function of education the socialisation and individuation functions (as identified by Biesta, 2009b) seem to be relegated. The research data suggests that this creates a tension for teachers who perceive their role as encompassing all three functions. The struggle to achieve the multiple functions of education has led Hargreaves (2003) to describe teaching as a 'paradoxical profession':

Teachers, more than anyone are expected to build learning communities, create the knowledge society and develop the capacities for innovation, flexibility and commitment to change that are essential to economic prosperity. At the same time teachers are also expected to mitigate and counteract many of the immense problems which knowledge societies create such as excessive consumerism, loss of community and widening gaps between rich and poor. Somehow teachers must try to achieve these seemingly contradictory goals simultaneously. This is their professional paradox. (Hargreaves, 2003, p.1)

Hargreaves conceptualises this paradox as a triangle of competing interests in which teachers are 'caught', becoming simultaneously:

*Catalysts* of the knowledge society and all the opportunity and prosperity it promises to bring;  
*Counterpoints* for the knowledge society and its threats to inclusiveness, security and public life;  
*Casualties* of the knowledge society in a world where escalating expectations for education are being met with standardized solutions provided at minimum cost. (Hargreaves, 2003, p.3)

Some of the research data in this study would seem to illustrate Hargreaves' model. For example, considerable inner tension was evident for one NQT whose comments indicate that significant reconciliation was needed in his first year of teaching as evidenced in the following quotes:

I believe that 'approved' educational practice is becoming increasingly inflexible and restrictive with many teachers propagating systems and strategies in which they do not have faith. It seems ironic that with the 'free educational market' come increasingly narrow guidelines under which that market can operate. In fact that 'free market' is nothing of the sort but a homogenisation of education which fits the government's final 'utopia'. Many people involved with the arts, including teachers, wish to criticise and act as counterpoints to the way the world around them is changing (and in educating our students, enable them to criticise in the same way). As arts educators we are being drawn inextricably into acting as collaborators in the creation of the



very society that we aim to critique. This creates huge tension between personal creed and values and the expectations placed on teachers. (Stuart, NQT, 10-11).

Directives which emanate from both external and internal sources can cause considerable frustration for teachers whose voice is seemingly silenced by their reductionist role of implementer. As members of the 'demonstrator' category of workers they are required to implement and execute rather than to think, and for many teachers this is very frustrating, particularly in subject areas which have critique, interpretation and creativity at their core. It can result in teachers adopting an air of resignation about their role as indicated in the following comment:

I might liken it more to the role of a jobbing theatre director who takes on a play he doesn't like in order to make ends meet, and must lead his company to the best production he can, in spite of his lack of belief in the project. (Stuart, NQT 10-11)

The fact that subject specifications are handed down by awarding bodies and must be strictly adhered to leaves little or no time to explore topics which are not listed on the specification. What is equally frustrating for some teachers is when topics appear on the specification which seem to have little relevance for either teachers or students:

I have had a couple of students who have questioned the value of what they are expected to do for the exams. During classes, when such questions arise, I have often found myself saying things like 'It's what the exam board wants'. This is testament to the fact that I cannot always rationalise what the syllabus sets out in terms of any inherent value. (Stuart, NQT 10-11).

Within the framework of Digital Taylorism, demonstrators or implementers have no choice but to put into practice the ideas of the developers:

I just have to get on with it. There is no way to change the specification for the qualification, so I focus simply on the best outcome for my students. (Stuart, NQT, 10-11)

Ironically it is through college enrichment programmes (provided as an add-on to the core curriculum in many colleges) that teachers and students have the opportunity to think and enjoy the freedom of curriculum design without the limitations of specifications and assessment criteria:

It is worth mentioning that the enrichment programme at [*name of*] college is, in my opinion, very good and allows teachers the freedom to develop courses that are challenging and in which they invest real value for the students. (Stuart, NQT, 10-11)

The trainee and NQT data throughout this study often alludes to the surprise and frustration which is encountered when faced with the prescriptive nature of teaching. In many cases the trainee quotes suggest that their expectations of teaching have not been met and that they have experienced disappointment at the restrictive conditions in which teachers must work. This disappointment is, perhaps, an example of the human cost of Digital Taylorism:

Today the question is how will a much better educated workforce respond to work which does not fulfil their expectations. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, unpagged, section 5: Digital Taylorism)

The NQT comments in this study suggest that, where expectations are not met, the degree to which teachers can be reconciled may be limited, with some choosing to work in alternative educational environments, as illustrated by the following NQT quotes:

I have been able to encourage students to question some of the underlying structures that govern our lives, though this has not extended to the educational structures. I suppose I have been careful not to undermine the authority of the college and the students' and parents' expectations in my first year. Whether or not I will continue to uphold these structures in subsequent years remains to be seen, though I am not sure I will be able to bear it. (Stuart, NQT, 10-11)

This was something that I was not happy with and therefore decided that community work was for me. I don't care what Ofsted reports the college gets as long as the students are happy, learning and happy to learn for themselves. (Fran, NQT, 10-11)

My experience shows, I feel, the pressures within the teaching profession at present. How this will improve waits to be seen – however for myself at this present time a decision has been made to utilise my teaching skills within HE and the corporate training world. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

In the examples above there is a clear indication that there are limits to how far teachers can be reconciled to the conditions under which they teach and that the human cost can be the loss of talent to the FE teaching profession as teachers seek

alternatives to working within colleges. However, for many teachers who remain in FE teaching, the effects of Digital Taylorism are keenly felt and if the *permission to think* is to remain the preserve of an elite, we may be witnessing not only the rise of the scripted teacher but the demise of the thinking teacher, for if individuals are denied permission to think they may lose the impetus to think, thus allowing hegemonic practices to flourish. As teachers are denied the permission to think and as students become accustomed to 'play it safe' by being told what to do, the need to think diminishes, as does creativity and inventiveness:

Social inventiveness depends on extending personal freedoms and giving people permission to think and to act upon them...but extending this invitation to think will be rejected by students and their families unless they are freed from the high-stakes competition for education and jobs that is robbing them of real choices and leads them to play it safe. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, unpagged, section 10: A New Opportunity)

Essentially students and teachers risk being locked into a cycle of education for economic, rather than social advantage and it is this cycle which will be hard to break as education remains part of the rhetoric of global competitiveness which dominates our, so called, knowledge society.

Teacher scripting is not a new phenomenon in the classroom. However, what the findings suggest is new, is the extent to which it has intensified, resulting in the constraining of educational activity; a reliance on scripting seems to have developed so that both teachers and students 'play safe' in order eliminate risk in end product assessment. Multiple assessment points, whether in the form of examinations or assignments, punctuate the academic year and place pressure on teacher time and it is to the topic of time, a largely under-researched area in education, that the next chapter turns.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Time pressures**

#### **Introduction**

I spent more time planning yesterday than I have done for years...I spent my lunch hour trying to navigate the computers and photocopier...For tomorrow's lesson I have spent all evening planning. (James, 09-10)

I have no time for myself. (Angela, 10-11)

These comments illustrate a theme which has recurred throughout the research period: time, or rather the lack of it. It is by no means a problem particular to the teaching profession and could be described as a global consequence of the technological age, an age in which we are expected to operate at an ever increasing speed (Neary and Rikowski, 2000). A number of writers have offered analyses of the phenomenon and this chapter will consider the research data against these analyses. The chapter will examine how target driven college cultures, with their emphasis on student results and achievement (in terms of grade acquisition), have combined with a re-sit culture to create an academic year punctuated by assessment points and driven by the *need* to achieve. These factors, in addition to curriculum change, a culture of learner centredness and the demand for increased workplace flexibility, have combined to exert intensified multiple demands on teachers' personal and professional time. The emphasis on completing tasks in the least time possible has resulted in the 'valorization of speed' (Adam, 1995, p.100) in Western culture which can be ascribed to the commodification of time. The result is that attempts are made to speed up all activities so that more can be squeezed into the same amount of time. As specifications and examination schedules are squeezed into tighter time frames and as teachers are required to respond to an increasing number of curriculum changes and new initiatives, this chapter will argue that education is being squeezed into temporal frameworks which exert harmful pressure on teachers and their students and which, ultimately, jeopardise the learning process.

The speed-up of activity can be traced back to the introduction of new technologies in production; just-in-time systems and accelerated turnover times have in turn increased the pace of consumption of both products and services. A consequence of this has been 'to accentuate volatility and ephemerality of fashions,

products...ideologies, values and established practices. The sense that “all is solid melts into air” has rarely been more pervasive’ (Harvey, 1989, p.287). The image of solidity melting resonates with Bauman’s (2007a) notion of liquid times whereby people are living increasingly fragmented lives made up of short term episodic experiences. It is as if speed has eroded the solid foundations of life and has led to a trend towards living in the moment, or instant. The speedy society represents ‘the triumph of effect over cause, of instantaneity over time as depth’ (Baudrillard, 1981, cited in Harvey, 1989, p.291). We are at risk of living life in an increasingly superficial manner without insight or deeper understanding of life experiences. Globalisation has combined with time acceleration to create ‘time space compression’ (Harvey, 1989, p.296). A consequence of this is that decision making is now expected to be quicker, effectively reducing thinking time and running the risk that the decisions made may not be the best ones:

Time-space compression always exacts its toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us. Under stress, for example, it becomes harder and harder to react accurately to events. (Harvey, 1989, p.306)

This accelerated pace of life has been described as a ‘runaway world’ (Giddens, 2002, p.2) which appears to be increasingly out of human control and which is affected by rapid progress in science and technology which makes the future seem even more unpredictable. This lack of predictability is accompanied by uncertainty about the future, an uncertainty which affects not only global world events but also the everyday lives of individuals. Living in an age of uncertainty leads individuals to be increasingly competitive and contributes to a culture of *survival of the fittest* (Bauman, 2007a). In this competitive race, speed is perceived to deliver expediency and efficiency, supposedly resulting in a more satisfied customer.

### The temporal impact of curriculum and assessment change

The formal educational landscape has traditionally been designed around specific time restraints, from the tightly timetabled day to the foreshortened ‘academic’ year. It is through the education system that the habits of clock time are learned (Adams, 1995): timetables, schedules and deadlines dominate the school day and structure the week. Assessments are also timed with examinations being of a set duration in which students must demonstrate not only their knowledge and understanding but

their time management skills in finishing all questions within the allotted time. Academic endeavour in the post-compulsory sector has traditionally focused on particular end points which are formally assessed, whether it be a completed assignment or an examination, often scheduled at the end of the summer term when pressures on both teachers and students tend to peak. The relationship between assessment and time is entrenched. They are therefore inseparable and one will always affect the other: any change which is made to assessment procedures will inevitably have calendar time implications, but it is the effects on human experience of time which will also be considered in this chapter. It is useful to begin by examining 21<sup>st</sup> Century changes to post-compulsory assessment procedures and how these have combined with a target driven educational agenda to produce what I term 'toxic time demands' on teachers.

The advent of Curriculum 2000 heralded a shift in post-16 assessment activity with the introduction of AS/A2 exams and vocational A Levels (Hodgson and Spours, 2003). This effectively punctuated the academic year with additional assessment points, a key example being the re-organisation of A level examinations. Pre-2000, A level candidates sat one set of exams at the end of a 2-year study period. Post-2000 this changed to a 4-point assessment design with a total of 6 assessed modules (3 modules examined in January and/or June of each study year). One of the arguments in favour of this change was that it relieved the candidates of pressure from lengthy exams at the end of the 2 years' study and replaced them with shorter, more regular exams with exit qualifications at AS level as well as the full A2 qualification. Although theoretically more flexible in nature, this change was set against the target driven culture which was being fostered by the government of the day (Hodgson and Spours, 2003) and resulted in candidates sitting multiple exams (and re-sit exams) in a bid to improve their grade profile.

Although a partial policy U-turn in 2010 saw most A level subject assessment reduce from 6 to 4 modules over the 2 year period, the focus on target grades has not abated and the re-sit culture survives, often encouraged by colleges which are under pressure to gain the highest grades, not only for the students but also, significantly, for the college. Poon Scott (2011) refers to a *second chance mentality* and strategy of *playing to the system* which exists amongst students, a factor which has further exacerbated the pressure on teachers to prepare students for an ever

increasing number of exam sittings resulting in increased demands on teacher time. Concerns regarding a second chance mentality are not confined to exam based assessment, however. Students following programmes of study which are assessed by coursework are permitted to submit revisions to course work and 'provided the work is (eventually) completed, the award will be achieved' (Torrance, 2007, p.284).

The quote above resonates with the experience of trainees in this study: trainee teachers of vocational subjects, which are assessed by a series of assignments, commented on the heavy marking workload generated by multiple revisions of assignments. One newly qualified teacher found that marking was generated in a continuous loop as students made multiple attempts at assignment submissions:

The structure of the vocational curriculum and assessment based work added extra pressure to an already overloaded working staff... From work handed in perhaps a third were passed whilst the remainder were returned for additional work to be completed to get to the designated 'pass' stage. Continued support was provided for learners with some having three/four attempts to achieve a suitable pass standard. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

This teacher commented that the multiple submissions not only made a significant impact on teacher time in terms of support for resubmissions, but also added considerably to marking time. Of particular concern was the fact that many resubmissions were the result of limited effort on the part of students; this created a tension between those students who submitted only once and those who made multiple submissions, the former category expressing the view that those who did not make the effort to reach the standard on initial submission seemed to be rewarded with more teacher support (see findings in Chapter 6).

The pressure to gain the best possible student results has resulted in the need for teachers to dedicate time to additional support and marking. This has led to the emergence of an interdependence culture whereby the survival and reputation of teachers and colleges are predicated on student results and teachers are being held increasingly responsible for the results of their students to the extent that teacher effort seems to be supplanting student effort as the main driver of success. Aside from the ethical implications of this (discussed in Chapter 6), the data in this study indicates that colleges expect staff to schedule revision sessions during lunch time, or at the end of the college day to increase the chance of student success. Ironically

many students are unprepared for their exams as a result of non-attendance at timetabled sessions, yet the data suggests that it is teachers who are required to provide a solution to this problem (see later findings). The policy revisions to curriculum and assessment combined with target driven cultures and league tables has resulted in an extension of working time: effectively, the boundaries between work time and personal time are being eroded.

Many trainees commented on an imbalance between work time and personal time and the need for them to work well into evenings in order to meet curriculum and college demands. One trainee commented that her health had been affected by the stress caused by this imbalance and felt that her performance in the classroom had been negatively affected as she struggled to meet the demands of planning, teaching and marking. Of particular concern was the fact that she felt her time management skills were at fault when she was, in fact, juggling a timetable comprised of both A level and vocational classes, each with multiple assessment points which created an almost continuous marking schedule with additional time demands. The trainee felt that these demands were considered to be the college norm and therefore felt a sense of failure when she struggled to meet expectations. (Field notes, 2011)

The demands placed on teachers are often justified by workplace reference to flexibility, a term which sits comfortably in the business lexicon which has invaded the vocabulary of education.

#### Time, pace and flexibility

The external imposition of time demands in the workplace is often disguised by the linguistic euphemism embedded in the organisation's cultural catchphrases. Phrases such as 'employee empowerment' and 'work-family balance' appear to make the employee feel valued but they also encourage an allegiance to work which is at the expense of personal time:

The more attached we are to the world of work, the more its deadlines, its cycles, its pauses and interruptions shape our lives and the more family time is forced to accommodate to the pressures of work. (Hochschild, 1997, p.45)

This is certainly apparent in the opening quotes of this chapter where trainees indicate that work encroaches into lunch times and evenings, even to the extent that there is no personal time for the self.



Complaints about the erosion of personal time are often met with the exhortation to be flexible in the workplace. Sennett (1998, p.46) makes an interesting point about the origins of the word 'flexibility'. He comments that the word arose out of the fact that, although a tree's branches will bend with the wind, they will return to their original position when the wind abates, indicating an inner strength and capacity to recover:

Ideally flexible human behaviour ought to have the same tensile strength: adaptable to changing circumstances yet not broken by them. Society today is searching for ways to destroy the evils of routine through creating more flexible institutions. The practices of flexibility, however, focus mostly on the forces bending people.

Flexibility is a seemingly cunning term: it suggests choice or freedom from constraint; however, as Sennett suggests, flexibility can exert a bending 'force' on the individual, a force from which it might be difficult to bounce back, unlike a tree's branches. Under the pretext of flexibility it seems to be increasingly assumed that employees can be called upon at any time to work additional hours (for example, in the case of teachers this includes lunch time revision sessions and one to one support sessions in addition to formal timetable commitments).

Adam (1995) also expresses concerns about flexibilization and describes how it can affect life outside work:

Flexibilization of working time brings with it far reaching changes to people's lives... [it] erodes communal activities in both the public and the private realm. (p.103)

It seems that flexibility, far from releasing individuals from the constraints of work, is actually binding them more strongly to such constraints with the result that flexibility becomes a form of control:

Time in institutions and for individuals has been unchained from the iron cage of the past but subjected to new, top-down controls and surveillance. The time of flexibility is the time of a new power. Flexibility begets disorder, but not freedom from restraint. (Sennett, 1998, p.59).

These words resonate with the experience of teachers in two respects. First there is the apparent paradox that teachers' 'free' time is actually far from free but is increasingly constrained by the need to offer additional support for students in the

form of tutorials or extra teaching sessions. Secondly there is Sennett's reference to control and surveillance which reminds us that teachers find themselves increasingly under surveillance through lesson observation schedules: the reference to surveillance is reminiscent of Foucault's (1977) notion of panopticism which sees observation as a disciplinary mechanism to ensure that there is always a control of an individual's time and space within organisations. The constraints of the observation process put extra pressure on trainees as they are conscious of having to demonstrate their teaching skills in a snapshot of performance which may not provide a holistic picture:

These constraints put an enormous amount of pressure on the trainee and make for an unrealistic almost theatrical classroom situation in which the teacher performs for the observer. (Stuart, 09-10)

The observation schedule for trainee teachers is subject to time constraints (at the time of the study trainees were observed on 8 occasions during the year, each observation lasting one hour). As the quote above illustrates, these observations create a situation where trainees have to present their *best act* for the observer as, although the observations are an opportunity to give formative feedback on development, they are also graded. Thus trainees feel the pressure to demonstrate their developing expertise within the time frame of one hour. Trainees report that many observers within colleges expect lessons to follow a prescribed format which can be very constraining as we have seen in the data findings presented in Chapter 4.

The periods of time which fall outside formal teaching hours have traditionally been used for planning, marking, research or what might be termed thinking time. However, by prescribing how teachers should be using their time outside formal timetabled hours, organisations are invading this thinking space and, without the temporal spaces which provide valuable thinking time, teachers can find themselves enslaved by organisational expectations and student demands – effectively a time trap. Disrupted patterns of work and personal time result in what Sennett (1998, p.98) refers to as the 'disorganisation of time' which he believes is a product of our continually changing times. It can have a disorienting effect on human relations in the work place as individuals struggle to reconcile the personal with the professional.

Ylijoki and Mäntylä (2003) acknowledge that there are some temporal experiences which we are unable to avoid, for example night and day, birth and death, which are 'naturally' imposed frameworks which order our human experience. However, within these frameworks sub-constraints are imposed on our time, perhaps most noticeably in the field of work which used to be expressed in the now rather defunct term '9-5'. Traditionally this has been identified as the hours during which work activity is generally undertaken. However, we now live in a 24-hour culture which has been fostered by technological advances and which, potentially, renders human beings as having 24-hour availability. This is perhaps most apparent in the retail business sector where many supermarkets are open 24 hours a day. This has resulted in the framework of night and day being adjusted for many into a series of time 'shifts'. While this has always existed in certain professions, for example the emergency services, its introduction into non-essential areas such as retail has resulted in a trend towards an assumption that 24-hour availability is necessary for all. The distinction between night and day is blurring, and the option to 'not be available' is diminishing as the norm shifts towards the euphemistically termed 'flexibility'. The choice, however, is not always a personal one but, in the case of work, externally imposed by others – ie the organisation within which individuals work. Ylijoki and Mantyla (2003, p.56) describe how the 'pace and rhythm of work is affected' by the temporal structures imposed by organisations. The use of the terms pace and rhythm is an interesting one as, with music, if pace and rhythm are lost the result can be disjointed and fragmented. In music, as in the workplace, the resulting discordance will have a negative impact on performers.

In colleges this interruption of pace and rhythm is illustrated by teachers grappling with a growing administrative workload. Avis *et al* (2001, p.76) found that such a workload resulted in lecturers consistently working over hours and they 'gained a sense of an overburdened profession'. As well as placing pressure on teachers, an increased administrative workload also detracts from the core task of educating, as illustrated by this newly qualified teacher's comment:

I faced a heavy workload in the first term which was not subject related. For example when sending out progress reviews each subject teacher had to conduct a one-to-one with each student. These reports were then sent to the tutor to interpret and write one summative report that was sent to parents...it detracted from the thought and effort I could put into teaching...it was an

unnecessary administrative task that in my opinion was less informative for parents and students than the original set of teacher one-to-ones were. (Tom, NQT, 10-11)

The increased demands on teacher time have an inevitable impact on the pace at which tasks are to be completed in order that more might be achieved in a given period of time. The increasing use of technology in education requires a daily input of registration information, student tracking information, records of assessment and responsiveness to email demands. Eriksen (2001, p.vii) refers to 'the current drift towards a society where everything stands still at enormous speed'. The concept of 'drift' is an interesting one as it suggests a trend which has been unwittingly condoned and, perhaps, facilitated by an acceleration in electronic communication; this generates a mass of information and minor tasks which can divert teachers from the main purpose of their labours (which is education). Teachers are often diverted from this core focus by the minutiae of 'information lint' (Eriksen, 2001, p.viii) which fills every available minute and distracts them from the main task at hand. It acts as a type of displacement which subordinates more important tasks and wills teachers towards devoting more time to instant tasks which masquerade as important work (such as inputting target grades, progress grades and attendance information) but are, in fact, often distractions from the more pressing and meaningful labour of education, as illustrated by the NQT's quote above.

#### Fast/slow time and fast/slow thinking

As employees are expected to squeeze an increasing number of tasks into a limited amount of time, the need to work fast demands the ability to think fast. Although quick thinking might have positive connotations, fast thinking can be problematic in that not all problems can be solved in this way. It is difficult, if not impossible, to put a time limit on creative thinking and problem solving often demands reflective time on the part of both teacher and student. The importance attached to detailed lesson planning which divides a lesson into precisely specified time intervals, is an example of how teachers are encouraged to fit a certain amount of learning into a particular time period. This is problematic in that some concepts require extended time for thinking and the actual learning may not be evident until weeks, months or years hence (Biesta, 2009b). However, despite this, teachers are expected to measure learning in relation to set objectives at the end of each teaching session.

Although some thinking may be 'fast', there are clearly other types of critical thinking which require a slower, more measured approach. Eriksen (2001) distinguishes between fast and slow time and links this to fast and slow thinking. He develops this idea from Bourdieu (1998) who argues that there is a clear connection between thought and time: time is needed if valuable thinking is to take place but time pressures negatively affect the thinking process. Bourdieu's comments are set within a critique based on the medium of television through which debates take place at fast speed. He argues that regular participants in televised debates ('media mavens', p.30) are able to think fast because they are communicating 'received ideas' (p.29) rather than original thought. They are effectively communicating familiar notions which an audience can easily understand.

There are some parallels between Bourdieu's comments and a popular classroom teaching strategy which has been recommended to student teachers on placement:

In a class discussion some trainees commented that they had been advised to 'deliver learning in bite size chunks', the aim of which is to maintain student engagement and facilitate recall of facts. Many trainees felt that this strategy was akin to 'spoonfeeding' of facts to be regurgitated in exams. They felt that thinking was diminished and discussion sidelined in favour of a technique which supposedly helps recall and allows more to be 'learned' in a shorter space of time. They felt that there was little time for students to develop critical thinking skills and that if this is to be encouraged in students then more time is needed. (Field notes, December 2009)

Their comments seem to echo Bourdieu's (1998, p.29) thoughts:

Making an argument takes time since you have to set out a series of propositions connected by 'therefore', 'consequently', 'that said', 'given the fact that'. Such a deployment of thinking thought, of thought in the process of being thought is intrinsically dependent on time.

The trainee comments regarding 'spoonfeeding' are reminiscent of Furedi's (2006, p.116) view that learning is being reduced to 'easily digestible spoonfuls of information' and ignores the fact that 'complete ideas are not learned but studied'. It would seem that trainees concur with his view:

Some trainees commented that they adopted teaching strategies which they were not entirely comfortable with but felt that they were having to compromise their preferred approaches because of college expectations and assessment deadlines. In discussions on this subject, trainees often used the

word 'compromise' to describe their teaching approach while others described a 'balancing act' whereby they attempted to reconcile personal educational ideology with college cultures within the limited time frame available. (Field notes, December 2009)

Some key creative ideas and learning emerge from slow thinking which needs slow time to accommodate it (Eriksen, 2001). However if time is increasingly accounted for within the college day then creative thinking space is often relegated to serendipitous moments when scheduled time is unexpectedly interrupted: for example a cancelled meeting which creates an unexpected hour to visit a library or simply to read an article or book which one has been waiting to have time for. As Eriksen (2001, p.156) explains 'Creativity is directly produced by the gaps. Slowness needs protection and delays are blessings in disguise'.

The research data suggests that, as lesson plans divide learning into shorter blocks of time for individual learning activities, teachers feel compelled to adhere to these and are fearful of deviating from the plan. It seems that the lesson plan can move from being a classroom aid to a means of control. This is reminiscent of Foucault's (1977, p.149) reference to the timetable as a 'control of activity', a means by which time is not wasted. He argues that disciplined use of time extracts the maximum possible efficiency from each available moment and that this disciplinary time has shaped pedagogical practice. He offers, as an illustrative example, the suggested timetable for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'ecoles mutuelles' which was broken down into activity by the minute:

8.45 entrance of the monitor, 8.52 the monitor's summons, 8.56 entrance of the children and prayer, 9.00 the children go to their benches etc. (p.150)

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century lesson plan echoes this tight control with its focus on content broken down into timed activities and learning outcomes (see findings in Chapter 4). The emphasis on predicted learning outcomes and adherence to strict planning clearly undermines teacher confidence in their own judgement and causes anxiety about how much deviation can be made from the lesson plan timings. It is also inappropriate for some subjects. Referring to performing arts lessons a trainee commented:

Students need to have their own environment and space to use time effectively for themselves so setting objectives would not be a positive way of approaching this subject. (Ann, 10-11)

A danger of dividing lesson plans into shorter timed activities is that it becomes vulnerable to Ericksen's (2001, p.123) paradox: 'When time is chopped into sufficiently small units it ceases to exist'. Effectively, when time is treated in this way it ceases to exist as duration.

Trainee comments suggest that this is certainly a risk of the modern approach to lesson planning where a lesson plan consisting of a series of precisely timed activities can result in one timed activity being quickly overtaken by the next; activities are expected to be directly linked to specified outcomes which seem to assume more importance than the process of learning involved in the lesson (as discussed in Chapter 4). Many trainees agreed that learning cannot possibly be predicted in advance and may take a long time to develop fully:

Only when the individual has experienced and been able to put theory into practice, may true learning take place. One may learn or absorb facts within a classroom environment – however until there is a need to utilise stores of knowledge, learning may not take place. (Elizabeth, 10-11)

The argument that learning takes time and may take place at a slow pace is not conducive to the expectations of the modern classroom. Slow time seems to have adopted negative connotations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century whilst speed has assumed a positive position. Hochschild (1997) refers to the 'virtue of hurry' which has been perpetuated by advertising for such products as fast food and labour saving devices. This comment resonates with Bourdieu's (1998, p.29) argument about 'received ideas' through the medium of television which he describes as 'cultural fast food'. Speed adopts an allure to which consumers are drawn and the virtue of speed becomes internalised and has the potential to affect every aspect of our lives, including education.

The culture of now, combined with the contagion of fast time, results in the demise of thinking time, essential in the field of education. It may also explain the demand from some students for instant results which are divorced from effort (see Chapter 6). Although many teachers would like to make time for the activities which would facilitate thinking time they are tied into the fast mode which is imposed by exam

schedules and awarding body specifications. The 'just in time' (Colley *et al*, 2012) nature of many qualifications means that they which must be achieved in shorter periods of time:

Trainees commented that the modular structure of AS/A2 qualifications found them preparing new September entry students for exams which were to be taken in January: the specification had to be covered 'just in time' for the examination to be taken. This put time pressure on both students and teachers as there was only one term to cover the module topics. The focus then moved to preparation for June exams, and, following the issue of results in March, a further effort towards re-sit exams followed. Trainees commented that there was little respite from the continual preparation for exams. (Field notes, March 2010)

This continual cycle of assessment is not restricted to A levels, however, but also to vocational subjects which are assessed by written assignments and which also have to be completed by strict deadlines:

The amount of assignments to hand in by learners further added to the pressure for both teachers and learners alike with students having to do a 'last minute rush' to complete on time which I feel resulted in a lower standard of work being handed in. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

The concept of 'just in time' which originated on the production lines of factory floors is an interesting one. In the manufacturing context, stock supplies were ordered 'just in time' to be used to manufacture products, the idea being to avoid unnecessary stockpiling and keep costs to a minimum. Applied as an analogy to education some interesting parallels are revealed: trainee teachers reported that they found themselves teaching to the exam (or assignment) because of tight time constraints with the result that lesson content was restricted to the knowledge necessary to pass the exam or meet specified criteria in assignments (Field notes, March 2010). Effectively, in this scenario a 'minimal stock level' of knowledge is being imparted from teacher to student which can prove very limiting and, as the quote above illustrates, there is an inevitable impact on the quality of work produced.

The just-in-time nature of qualifications results in instant gratification and living in the moment, and this has affected the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another (Eriksen, 2001). It is as if there is nothing to be learned from past generations as we worship in the temple of now.



The emphasis on the present has resulted in a social amnesia (Jacoby, 1999; Furedi, 2009) characterised by a disregard and devaluing of the past, its policies and its inhabitants. In educational terms this results in what Furedi (2009, p.25) refers to as 'throwaway pedagogy' with one educational policy superseding another with little regard for their effectiveness. Another problem may be 'policy amnesia' in education which fails to distinguish between successes and mistakes (Hodgson and Spours, 2003, p.2). In order to make effective change policy makers must have some notion of what has, and has not, worked in the past:

Policy-makers – ministers and their civil servants in particular are notorious for wanting their own ideas and initiatives and are often not around long enough to have any sense of 'policy memory' so they are unable to benefit from 'policy learning'. They often suffer from what might be termed 'policy amnesia'. Practitioners on the other hand who are usually around a lot longer than politicians, do have a sense of policy memory because of their ongoing efforts to mediate national reforms to make them work at grassroots level. (Hodgson and Spours, 2003, p.1)

The latter sentence is an important one: practitioners are rarely consulted on policy change yet they have a historical perspective which is of significant importance when evaluating what is likely to work, based on what has or has not worked in the past. An example of this is the recent government proposal to make changes to A Level assessment and return to examinations at the end of the two-year study period (Ofqual, 2012). This proposal follows the pre-Curriculum 2000 model and while it may relieve pressure created by the re-sit culture, it fails to acknowledge that this model was not without its drawbacks (for example student futures being dependent on performance in one set of extended exams) and some universities have commented that the AS exam results are helpful when making offers of student places. This proposal appears to be an example of policy amnesia which has failed to consider other possible options which may offer a balance between the past and present models of A level assessment.

### The vocational time squeeze

Trainee comments suggest that the emphasis on assignments and the attainment of grades in courses which purport to be vocational and 'applied' may have squeezed out the practical aspects of study which have traditionally been associated with such

courses. Practical experiments, careers guidance and workplace visits are three such aspects which were a focus for comment.

The demise of practical experiments was of particular concern to one Science trainee teacher, who called for:

Teaching for learning rather than teaching for assignments. (Sara, 10-11)

Sara was concerned that most Science lessons in her placement college were theoretical and lacked the essential practical element of an applied course. She was surprised at the lack of laboratory equipment to carry out practical experiments and, where the equipment was in existence, it seemed to be poorly maintained and rarely, if ever, used. In discussions with members of the department there was an acknowledgement of the value of experiments but a reluctance to carry them out was attributed to time constraints in completing assignments. Essentially it was felt to be too time consuming, even though there would be learning benefits to the students. Sara took steps to test an item of equipment and was able to bring it into working order for a student practical to be carried out. She reported that the experiment, which allowed the students to apply knowledge and see it in action rather than simply discuss it in assignments, was successful and well received. She also commented on a significant rise in student motivation and understanding of a key concept after this single experiment. However, whilst acknowledging the positive contribution to student learning, staff discouraged the trainee from carrying out experiments on a regular basis because of time pressures in completing assignments to target grade levels. (Field notes, March 2011)

It is significant that departmental colleagues acknowledged the value of practical experiments yet felt discouraged from carrying them out as assessment was by written assignment and to strict deadlines. Such experiments amounted to a desirable rather than an essential component of the learning process as the emphasis was on meeting set criteria within the Pass, Merit or Distinction grading bands and attaining the highest grades possible for students. The trainee felt that the lack of practical experiments resulted in a depth of conceptual understanding being sacrificed: essentially the 'process' element of learning was being removed as it was time consuming.

Many trainee teachers of subjects with a practical or vocational element, whether in the arts or sciences, felt particularly affected by time constraints, as they felt that the learning process should not be divorced from the product of learning. They felt that this divorce was also evident in the area of careers guidance and information. In some cases, trainees felt that vocational courses, which purport to prepare students

for employment, contain very little course content relating to careers and that this aspect is considered to be the remit of careers advisers. One trainee teacher commented that while some vocational students were planning to remain in college and progress from level 2 to level 3 study, others who would not gain the higher grades to make this possible were becoming demotivated and were not receiving advice on future options. They found themselves referred to an external careers adviser who visited the college on particular days of the week and who could offer a limited time specific appointment for discussion. It was apparent to her that all students, whether planning to stay in college or leaving to start work, would benefit from a classroom-based teaching session on possible future careers so she set about arranging a careers talk. However, this proved to be problematic:

To arrange the careers talk I first spoke to the class teacher to arrange a suitable time for the talk; however it emerged that there were not any appropriate opportunities due to time constraints. (Maria, 10-11)

Again, the time demands of assignments were detracting from what this trainee believed to be an essential part of a vocational course: awareness of career choices within the students' sphere of study. She felt that receiving careers advice as a group would encourage those students who lacked the confidence or impetus to arrange their own individual appointments. The decision by the trainee to try and embed careers advice into the course was made for two reasons:

Firstly, it helped to ensure that all students were receiving careers guidance and secondly the classroom situation may have created a discussion forum of ideas. (Maria, 10-11)

The trainee comments regarding discussion resonate with the research findings of Kuijpers (2012) who highlights the importance of career conversations between teachers and students. Although focusing on vocational educational policy in the Netherlands, her findings are pertinent to vocational education in the UK and resonate with trainee teacher comments quoted here: students have little knowledge of the careers available to them or have difficulty in identifying careers which match their own personal strengths. Kuijpers advocates a cycle of student reflection, work exploration, career action and networking, supported by the teacher, which would help students to identify their strengths and prevent inappropriate career choices from being made. The comments and observations of trainee teachers in this study

suggest that the work exploration element of Kuijper's cycle, would be of benefit to students in UK colleges:

I delivered a lesson to the level one class on professions. I was surprised at the responses I received when I introduced the matching activity on some of the different occupations that exist. Some students said they had never heard of some of these professions before and asked for more information on them. (Angela, 10-11)

It was clear to this trainee that these students both needed and wanted more information on possible careers but that little course time was assigned to it. What particularly surprised the trainee was not the fact that students were unsure about the *nature* of certain job roles but the fact that they were unaware of the *existence* of these roles. She felt that careers exploration should be at the heart of vocational courses so that students were able to place their studies in the context of future possible work roles. Although she provided the students with as much information as possible and encouraged them to research possible careers, she was mindful that the students needed more discussion time to explore their own personal career interests and the training routes which would be necessary to realise their ambitions. Kuijpers's (2012) proposal for career conversations and work exploration would clearly have been of benefit to these particular students.

The need to raise awareness of different careers and employment opportunities was also recognised by a trainee who chose to meet this need through a workplace visit. It became apparent to him during a class discussion that the majority of students had no experience or knowledge of the careers which they could pursue on completion of the course so he arranged a visit to two workplaces. The visit was a success because not only were the students made aware of the career possibilities which were open to them but they were also able to see theory in action:

The students were excited not only in visiting the establishments but also applying everything that had been taught into real life scenarios...I had shown the students possibilities that they could achieve if they completed the course, ones they would never had imagined had I not arranged the trip...Students asked plenty of questions to the Human Resource Manager about how they could get employment on completion of their course. (John, 10-11)

It is clear that this trip motivated the students, raised career awareness and put their studies into context. However it is clear that such visits, which take time to organise

and effect, are rare; it was the trainee's idea to arrange the trip and was not an established part of students' study activities. When he questioned college staff about why such trips were not organised, he was told that the administrative requirements were too time consuming:

...the extra administration, arranging the mini bus, finding a driver, writing letters to parents to authorise the students to go on the trip; a day out of teaching, including having to find cover for other lessons not able to teach...  
(John, 10-11)

It would seem from this explanation that increasing workplace demands on staff do not leave time for the planning of trips or to release them from their teaching duties so that the trips can be supervised.

Trainee experiences seem to suggest that careers education and workplace visits have been squeezed out of the vocational curriculum by a series of time restraints and theoretical assignments which punctuate study and leave little or no time for the 'hands on' experience and guidance which many students need and expect from such a course. Adam (1995) reminds us that clock time is a finite resource – only so much can be accomplished in a set amount of available time. Although trainees attempted to find curriculum space to accommodate student needs they clearly experienced difficulty in matching 'time available' (clock time) to 'time needed' or what Davies (1994, cited in Colley *et al*, 2012), refers to as process time and this often resulted in them having to 'find' time to accommodate student needs.

### The temporal impact of learner centredness

The distinction between clock and process time is one which is often overlooked in the timetabling of education. For example a lesson may have a *clock time* of one hour but at its conclusion there may be a need to answer student queries, offer additional support or allay anxieties: the *process time* of the lesson is therefore longer and will extend beyond the clock time of one hour. The tight confines of term dates and exam schedules impact on staff timetables and are already a tight fit for clock time but an increasing emphasis on student support results in a much longer process time. The pressure on colleges to meet league table and grade targets mean that teachers are expected to do everything they can to meet targets. Extra support sessions and revision sessions impact on teacher time 'putting the care-

receiver's interests first' (Davies, 1994, cited in Colley *et al* 2012, p.3) to the extent that workload is significantly increased. After a discussion with a mentor one trainee commented:

We spoke at length about the support networks that are in place. I felt quite overwhelmed by the amount of administrative work that these networks generate. It made me consider how time consuming the role (of teacher) can be, aside from the actual planning and teaching elements. (Craig, 09-10)

It is clear from comments made by trainees during the PGCE course that although the importance of student support is acknowledged, teachers are put in a position of 'making time' for this rather than time being formally allocated for it:

A key element of my own practice is making time for students and providing as much close support as possible. (Tom, NQT, 10-11)

The *making* of time usually extends into personal spaces such as lunch times to provide additional tutorial support. One trainee felt the need to introduce individual tutorials to compensate for the lack of one-to-one time during timetabled lessons:

Classrooms filled with 20-30 students do mean that there is less teacher-student time unless tutorials are booked. (Angela, 10-11)

It is clear from these quotes that teachers are dedicating administrative and support time to students which leaves fewer hours for planning and marking, key elements of practice which then encroach on personal time: many students commented that they spent most evenings and weekends planning or marking. Meeting the needs of all learners in a restricted amount of time was a source of anxiety for one trainee who felt that she had to make choices about who to support (and who would accept support) and commented :

Ensuring that time is given to learners who need it is a priority and extra to those who are willing to accept the extra help...the time that this takes away from other learners will be a delicate balancing act – one I find hard to achieve. (Caroline, 10-11)

It is clear from this last comment that the willingness of the teacher to provide extra support is not always matched by a student willingness to accept it. This can be very frustrating for trainees and can conflict with their motivation for entering the teaching profession:

In a class discussion focusing on the factors which motivate trainees to enter education a frequent comment was that trainees had entered the profession because they wished to 'make a difference' to people's lives. They believed that this motivation reflected their belief that education should be an individually transforming experience. Trainees were, therefore, surprised to find that not all students were keen to accept extra support even though it was intended to be in their best interests. They commented that some students seemed reluctant to study or make the effort necessary to take full advantage of this support. (Field notes, April, 2010)

In an attempt to explain this apparent reluctance to study, it is useful to consider the origins of the term 'learner centred'. Learner centredness is a term born out of the language of learning which has overtaken education and which Biesta (2009b) argues is problematic:

The language of learning makes it difficult to acknowledge the relational character of education and also makes it difficult to raise questions about the particular role and responsibility of the educator in such relationships (p.3)

He continues:

We shouldn't refer to our students as 'learners' but should either refer to them with terms that specify the particular relationship they are in – which is what the word 'pupil' does – or with terms that specify the activities they are engaged in – which is what words like 'student' or 'worker' do (p.5)

Biesta's argument is not merely a semantic one – it clearly highlights the danger of substituting the term 'learner' for 'student' – the latter denoting a more active role involving study. It is clear that there are limits to what a teacher can achieve through their own efforts alone and the time/effort equation between student and teacher is pivotal. One trainee planned and led support sessions to which 'half or less' attended. Another commented:

The students and I had allocated a time that we all agreed that we could make for one-to-one tuition. However, only one student out of the three turned up. (Angela, 10-11)

It is clear that a sense of powerlessness was experienced by this trainee as she continued to feel the pressure to provide extra teaching sessions to prepare these students for the forthcoming exam, but then felt thwarted by students who seemed reluctant to avail themselves of the support. Trainees demonstrate resilience when facing such challenges but clearly experience frustration at giving up their own time

when students are unwilling to give theirs. The problem seems to extend to meeting assignment deadlines; the following trainee comments reflect the frustration experienced when students do not submit work on time:

In the lesson only two out of twelve learners handed in the assignments...extensions had to be given...why set a date for handing assignments if it does not have to be kept? (John, 10-11)

He later commented:

The assignments are being handed in but the submission of many is not sufficient and they are being returned to learners for subsequent work. This is adding extra pressure on my time. Feedback is being made via email but this is a time consuming exercise. Anything to get the learners through – talk about learner centred! (John, 10-11)

These comments reflect the feeling of frustration experienced by many trainees who give their personal time but feel that this time and effort is not reciprocated by students and that the true spirit of learner centredness is being lost and exploited by some students to the cost (particularly in terms of time) of teachers. Some of the comments above suggest that learner centredness may be bordering on learner *indulgence* with the balance of time and effort weighted on the side of the teacher. The persistent encroachment of work time into personal time can cause a temporal imbalance which is a source of considerable stress and anxiety for teachers.

### Temporal imbalance

Reference has already been made to Ylijoki and Mantyla's (2003) study but it is useful to return to some of their findings which are particularly relevant to the discussion points in this chapter. Their study focuses on the education sector and their findings resonate strongly with many trainee comments quoted within the chapter. They identify four types of time which are experienced by individuals (scheduled, contracted, timeless and personal) and the dilemmas which arise in trying to balance them. They refer to the effects of 'everyday realities in which temporal perspectives are seriously asynchronous' (p.75).

Three elements of their framework (scheduled, contracted and personal time) are of particular significance to the experiences of trainee teachers and it is useful to apply



the framework to these experiences in order to illustrate the effects of this asynchronicity or imbalance.

Scheduled time, which includes timetables and formal commitments, is described as having 'accelerating pace' (Ylijoki and Mantyla, 2003, p.60) with tasks having to be completed in shorter spaces of time. Scheduled time is identified as having two elements - linear and cyclical time - the former having a distinct beginning and end, but the latter having a continuous effect: once a procedure is completed, it must be repeated again and again. The features of cyclical time resonate with trainee experiences previously discussed, whereby when one exam is over the next must be prepared for, and when one set of assignments is marked another set will be submitted. The exam re-sit culture means that the cycle is intensified, and after each set of results is received, an examination *post mortem* has to be carried out by teaching staff. One trainee explained that the college demanded explanations for each student who had not attained their target grade:

I sat and watched the department try to work out where some students had gone wrong...answers need to be given. (Caroline, 10-11)

This continuous cycle of analysis and attendant accountability results in constant pressure on teachers to explain unfavourable student results and to offer strategies for future success. Interestingly, student input does not feature in this analysis with the result that teachers (particularly trainees) feel that they are in some way to 'blame' for any failure on the part of the student. One trainee commented that staff at her college placement felt that their job security was compromised by poor student results and that this resulted in considerable anxiety and stress (Field notes, March 2010).

Job security and tenure which is predicated on results is of particular concern for those staff who are not employed on permanent contracts. Ylijoki and Mantyla (2003) include contracted Time as part of their temporal framework and it applies to newly qualified teachers as they find that scarcity of permanent positions leaves them with the option of only supply work or fixed term teaching contracts. One former trainee, Aaron, who completed the PGCE course in 2010 remained on fixed term contracts for two years. Although he was not out of work during this period he found the constant change and movement between organisations to be destabilising and

insecure. He found it very difficult to maintain relationships with workplace colleagues and commented that many were dismissive of him because of his status:

Professional relationships are very difficult on day-to-day supply and most staff can be very dismissive and treat you as if you're invisible.

Although having followed the PGCE in PCET, Aaron found that he needed to be flexible enough to teach in a range of contexts (including schools) which would not necessarily be his first choice:

Job security is a major problem in most fields these days: I feel I have to be as flexible and adaptable as possible in order to keep working in such restrictive times.

A particular concern was the fact that his status meant he was not afforded the same CPD opportunities as permanently contracted staff, and he felt that this had a negative impact on morale:

Supply staff don't receive the CPD that regular teachers receive...I feel the status of supply staff needs to be raised to aid morale and a team work ethic. During a maternity cover I received no CPD for my subject due to the extra cost of employing cover teachers.

Aaron's fragmented experience brings to mind Sennett's comment that it is difficult to have long-term purpose in a short-term society: 'The conditions of the new economy feed on experience which drifts in time, from place to place, from job to job' putting at risk 'those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self' (Sennett, 1998, p. 26-7).

Fixed term contracts are often paid on an hourly rate and one NQT commented on the disparity between hours paid and hours worked:

The turn-around time for marking was tight but manageable (if as a part time teacher you worked on your supposed 'days off'). Being an hourly paid contractual worker, the amount of extra time needed to cope with my marking resulted in the actual hourly pay received being halved when you calculated the time spent on marking away from the workplace. I feel this reached an unacceptable level and greatly encroached on family time both during the week and at the weekend. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

This latter comment resonates with the final temporal category identified by Ylijoki and Mantyla (2003), personal time, and it is significant that many trainee reflections

focus on the impact of their experience on their personal lives. During the PGCE year, trainees are subject to the dual demands of university study and college placement which results in an intensified experience of temporal pressures. It is notable that many trainees are coping with the struggle of meeting the external demands of Ofsted grading (particularly to achieve 'outstanding' grades) while also coping with the personal standard which they set themselves:

During the course of the year I have learnt that this is an unrealistic and impossible expectation to place upon myself. No teacher is excellent from the start and it is unrealistic to assume otherwise. I am now fully aware that development comes through time and practice and reflecting on this to identify areas to improve further. This has probably been the biggest lesson of the year: to not put ridiculous expectations on myself and unnecessary pressure when it is healthy and proper to develop gradually. (Keira, 09-10)

This comment resonates with the earlier discussion about some learning being impossible within tight time frames. This trainee has identified the need to develop over time and to develop gradually, beyond the limits of the PGCE year.

Also apparent in trainee reflections and discussions was the need to balance work and home commitments and recognise that a commitment to teaching should not preclude commitment to personal life. This was an important learning point for one trainee who commented:

I must learn to accept that although we all have a passion to teach we are all also someone's lover, partner, wife, husband and other life experiences will affect our day to day commitments to the course. (John, 10-11)

During a University session held at the end of the PGCE course, most students commented on the speed with which the year seemed to have passed and the difficulty experienced in reconciling the demands of home and work. It was clear that many students experienced an intrusion of scheduled work time into personal time and recognised that it is a challenge to achieve a balance between the two. One NQT decided after one year that teaching in the FE sector, even on a part time basis, was not conducive to raising a young family because of the time pressures experienced. She decided to take a break from the sector and commented:

The added demands of attending extra meetings (in addition to ones agreed during interview stage) which fall outside my working hours and being asked

to produce a term's work, scheme of work and all learning literature a week before delivery shows, I feel, the pressures within the teaching profession at present. (Elizabeth, NQT 11-12)

As a tutor on the PGCE course I am acutely aware that teacher training courses in themselves exert considerable time pressures on trainees (see Postscript to this thesis). As discussed earlier, practical assessment is through a series of lesson observations which are essentially 'snapshots' of practice which do not necessarily constitute a holistic view. When commenting on the observation schedule constraints one trainee emphasised the significance of developmental time:

It does not take into account delivery and work with groups and individuals **over time**. (Stuart, 09-10, trainee emphasis in bold)

The external imposition of 'standards' by Ofsted and professional bodies restrict institutions in how they assess trainees (in much the same way as awarding bodies dictate this for students) and trainee teachers' awareness of temporal restraints is therefore augmented. It is a time trap from which there seems no escape: teacher educators experience external constraints which are then passed to trainees; trainees experience external constraints which are passed to their students; and so the cycle continues. It is clear that trainee teachers experience anxiety as they are faced with temporal dilemmas in the workplace which inevitably trespass on their personal space and create temporal imbalance.

The difficulty for teachers is that workplace demands emanate from multiple external sources: the demands of Ofsted inspection frameworks, professional standards bodies and awarding bodies are channelled into college QA mechanisms which leave teachers with little room for manoeuvre. Quality assurance adopts a technical emphasis on results which locks teachers into cyclical assessment demands which inevitably intrude on personal time.

### Curriculum and time – a conclusion

The contrast between the product and process models of curriculum (discussed in Chapter 4) can be compared to the clock and process interpretations of time as described by Colley *et al* (2012). It is clear that the process model of curriculum is more fluid and improvisational but requires more time whilst the product model, with

its emphasis on the end product (such as an exam or assignment) is more time specific and constraining. Many trainees in both the arts and sciences have identified process as being the key ingredient of learning in their subject as they feel that creativity is stifled by an objectives-based approach (see findings in Chapter 4). As discussed earlier in this chapter, education has always been framed by timetables and punctuated by bells: it is not the framework itself which is problematic, but rather the modifications to assessment procedures and target driven agendas which have come to dominate our educational system and which are particularly evident in the post-compulsory sector where each course has an externally assessed end product. By squeezing an increasing number of assessment points into a limited time frame the pace of learning has been accelerated as well as standardised. Despite the fact that not all knowledge and learning can be fast, or fit standardised formats, there is an apparent 'falling marginal value of slowly acquired knowledge' (Eriksen, 2001, p.118) in academia and among students who view education in much the same way as other elements in their life – it must be fast paced and immediate, leading to the next course or job, but clearly instrumental in nature. The demand for instant gratification and quick options are evident in all spheres of education; there are even fast track options for teacher training. Time becomes a series of 'nows' and 'instants' and becomes fragmented: it transforms into what Bauman (2007b) refers to as 'pointillist time'. He argues that in our modern consumer society the meaning of time has changed and that cyclical and linear time have been replaced by pointillist time made up of randomly scattered points or episodes of time but with no continuities:

Pointillist time is broken up, or even pulverized into a multitude of 'eternal instants' – events, incidents, accidents, adventures...separate morsels, each morsel reduced to a point ever more closely approximating its geometric ideal of non-dimensionality. (Bauman, 2007b, p.32)

Comparing pointillist time to the pointillist school of painting, Bauman (2007b) stresses that unlike the artists whose painted points make up meaningful images, 'in pointillist time it is the task of each "practitioner of life" to arrange the points in meaningful configurations. Unlike the works of pointillist painters, this is done as a rule with the benefit of hindsight' (p.35). The research data suggests that the danger for education is that pointillist time could lead to pointillist learning; learning of a

hurried and episodic nature which is decontextualised and which could result in superficial understanding.

Our 'now-ist culture' has effectively created a 'hurried life' and an effect of this is that 'wishing time to stop is a symptom of silliness, sloth or ineptitude' (Bauman, 2007b, p.36). The message inherent in this culture is that 'slow' has no relevance or value: fast time has become a vortex which puts toxic time demands on teachers and from which there is no easy escape. Technology has clearly had a part to play in this, and the ultimate irony is that in embracing the time saving nature of the technology which we took to be our servant, it has become our master and has reduced the amount of 'free' time which is available to us. Hochschild (1997) argues for a 'time movement' in which collective action is taken to resist the time bind which afflicts us as individuals. She observes that 'many are prisoners and architects of the time bind' (p.249). The problem is self-perpetuating: without time for reflection we do not have time to question it. It is important to acknowledge the possibility of benefitting from both the fast and the slow: 'immeasurable values are lost if we end up only seeing one of them' (Eriksen, 2001, p.160) but achieving this balance will require recognition from politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders. The research data in this chapter would suggest that the task for educationalists is to challenge this triumvirate to recognise the particular importance of slow time in education.

Although teacher scripting and time pressures have been examined in separate chapters, they cannot be completely divorced from one another, as one inevitably impacts on the other. In Chapter 6 there is some recurrence of these data themes as the chapter examines the ways in which student expectations and the student-teacher relationship have been affected by, amongst other factors, scripting and time. The reader may notice some repetition of these themes but, where this occurs, it serves to illustrate how the three data themes explored in these chapters, consolidate each other and how they combine to intensify their effects on the working lives of teachers.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The corrosive effects of commodified education: expectations and entitlement**

#### **Introduction**

There are various forms of student assessment that are used to establish student voice or, as a college manager put it, 'customer feedback'...Referring to students as customers and comparing the college's quality policy to Marks and Spencer's it struck me how businesslike a college must be if it is to thrive. It can be disheartening when aspiring to be a teacher - I did not anticipate this level of business talk, competition and all the bodies to contend with. (Tom, 09-10)

This comment from a trainee teacher illustrates the extent to which the business lexicon has impacted on education, and also the surprise with which it is met by trainees. Many are motivated to enter the teaching profession because of a belief in the transformative power of education for both individuals and society at large and, as the quote above illustrates, they are often disappointed to be met with the reality of commodified education.

Education as a business is not a new concept and it is useful to chart the emergence of this business culture, which, in relation to further education, can be traced back to the early 1990s when colleges were incorporated. Incorporation released colleges from local authority control but subjected them to a funding mechanism based on student numbers, with student recruitment driving the financial position of individual colleges. The funding mechanism required colleges to meet retention and achievement targets in order to secure funding and this resulted in colleges adopting quality assurance mechanisms to help them achieve such targets (Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Robson, 1998). Aside from funding issues, a significant effect of incorporation was the shift in organisational culture from one of collaboration to competition, with colleges pitched against each other in a bid for economic survival (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). The culture of competition which emerged from incorporation followed in the wake of the Thatcher era, which promoted marketisation across society and which witnessed a rise in the language of consumerism, promoting the notion that we are all consumers and producers. At the heart of this dual role is the expectation that we are all responsible for the quality of the goods and services which we consume and produce: the quality culture expects

us to give feedback to others on their performance and receive feedback from others on our own performance, thus contributing to a culture of continuous improvement, or, perhaps more accurately, self-control (Avis, 1996). Quality assurance and accountability are the main instruments of new managerialism and, ironically, have flourished under different political parties:

The excesses and antidemocratic tendencies of the accountability regime are as much the product of the New Labour government's interventions during the past ten years as they are of the Thatcherism dominant in the 1980s and early 1990s. In this respect the idea of accountability may be relatively immune to political ideology, or may even have shaped what is politically "possible." (Biesta, 2004b, p, 234).

Biesta's observation underlines the ability of the accountability agenda to transcend politics and leave it impervious to regulation. A significant effect of the accountability culture has been a reconfiguration in the relationship between the state and its citizens, moving education from a public service ethos to one of customer orientation (Biesta, 2004b). This reconfiguration has shifted the notion of teacher professionalism so that it has become 'professionalism associated with predetermined product and brand image rather than pedagogy' (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p.450). Given that the effects on education of incorporation and new managerialism have been well documented, it is significant that new teacher trainees remain surprised and discomfited when confronted by the phenomenon of education reduced to a manufactured commodity to be traded in the market place. This discomfiture has implications beyond the ideological: it is not just the decline of what Biesta (2009b) refers to as 'good education' which is at risk from such a concept: the ethos of consumerism has tightened its grip on education with the result that teachers and students are encouraged to think of their *se/ves* as a commodity, and to focus on the end product of achievement as a sole barometer of success.

Success for students is often defined in terms of graded qualifications, and teachers are expected to deliver these results for their students. The data presented in this chapter suggests that teacher competence is increasingly judged by these results to such an extent now that their own careers are dependent on them. Trainee comments also suggest that a climate of student entitlement has been fostered by the expectation that teachers are responsible for delivering the desired results and this has led to a shift in the nature of the teacher-student relationship which puts at



risk the notion of 'good education'. The implications of this are far-reaching and this chapter will examine these implications in relation to the research data and relevant literature. I will begin by extending the discussion raised in previous chapters regarding the rise in consumerist values which are creating a culture of commodified education in colleges.

### The language of consumerism

The commodification of education may be attributed to the exponential rise in society as a whole of consumerist values with their emphasis on the continual consumption of products and services. It is clear from the business lexicon which now dominates education that learning is a product to be bought and sold in the marketplace, just as any other consumer good or service. As the opening quote of this chapter illustrates, students are now typically referred to as *customers* and student voice as *customer feedback*.

After reading an article about the current state of further education funding another trainee commented:

Even the language used - increasing turnover – demonstrates the extent to which colleges now view themselves as businesses rather than educational institutions. Governors appear to be more concerned with margin and the bottom line than they do with learning (which presumably is merely the product they are selling). (Stuart, 09-10)

Education as a 'product' is being viewed in much the same way as a material retail item where money will be exchanged in return for a good or service. However it is not just the language of the retail sector which has been adopted: colleges now adopt *quality assurance* mechanisms, a term reminiscent of the factory floor and the manufacture of products which undergo a quality inspection during manufacture as well as on completion. In the case of education it is the grades which are attained by students which undergo an inspection during and at the end of the year. A trainee commented that one college in particular had been described to him by a colleague as 'a grade factory' (Tom, 09-10).

These comparisons to the factory floor resonate with the findings in Chapter 5 which discussed the 'just in time' approach to teaching and assessment: this term also originated on the factory floor with its allusions to cost savings achieved by holding

minimum stock levels and producing only what is needed 'just in time' for delivery. This approach manages people as if they were machines and is rooted in technical rationalism where quality and efficiency are of prime importance (Hodkinson, 1997). The concept of Kaizen or continuous improvement drives the quality agenda and, masquerading under the term *empowerment*, each individual is held responsible for the quality of their own output, seemingly putting them in a position of responsibility. However:

to the extent that we are empowered it is to control our own labour process and to accept uncritically mission statements and notions of quality derived elsewhere. (Avis, 1996, p.108)

When, as Avis states, notions of quality are derived elsewhere there is a risk that these notions will not be congruent with those of teachers in the classroom. Organisational notions of quality based on targets and student results often conflict with those of teachers who relate quality to 'traditional humanist notions of educating the whole person' (Ainley and Bailey, 1997, p.101) and the disagreement about what is actually meant by 'quality' has rendered it 'the most meaningless and abused word of the past decade' (Biesta, 2004b, p.248).

Trainee comments presented in this chapter indicate that they do not always share the college's interpretation of quality, nor do they subscribe to the notion that quality education is solely about the end product (which for students is a graded qualification); what does concern them is harnessing the transformative powers of learning. However, for most colleges the quality assurance mechanism focuses on the number of high grades achieved across the institution and if this is seen to be lacking it is teachers who are held accountable. Stuart's comment above seems to consolidate the college perception of quality based on cost margins rather than educational process. Effectively, in this scenario the teacher is the producer, the qualification is the product and the student is the customer. Process is essentially lost, yet it is clear that trainees perceive education as a process and are surprised when confronted with a college emphasis on education as a product.

Some might argue that colleges are simply ensuring that they provide students with what they want – high grades to enter University or employment. However the reduction of education to a product has other far reaching effects on curriculum

content and delivery and it is useful, at this point, to examine the specific elements of consumerism which have facilitated these effects.

### Consumerism and transience

Consumerism has thrived under the reign of a neo-liberalist agenda where individuals have been encouraged to pursue self-interest, with greed treated as a virtue (Brown *et al*, 2011). The culture of acquisition has encouraged the purchase of material goods which are perceived to be indicators of success. However, as the urge to acquire intensifies, the consumer society is reluctant to retain or value goods but uses trends or fashions as an excuse to divest and replace goods with newer models. Even after coveted goods are attained they give but fleeting satisfaction as the desire to replace and update locks consumers into a cycle of consumption (Hartley, 2012). This 'fleeting' satisfaction echoes Bauman's (2007b) argument that a key element of our consumerist culture is a hurried life and 'the motive to hurry is partly the urge to acquire and collect' (p.36). Although his reference is to traditional consumer goods it could equally be applied to education where students are required to acquire qualifications in order to compete for jobs or University places. As discussed in Chapter 4, the demand for increasingly higher qualifications has resulted in a re-sit culture whereby students retake exams in a bid to gain better grades (Torrance, 2007). Effectively they 'acquire' module grades in the hope that the next will be better than the last. A re-sit culture effectively locks students into a cycle of *exam consumption* where the results gained are perceived to be more important than the knowledge gained. Trainees who taught at A level commented that many students seemed reliant on re-sits to boost their grades as well as developing a reliance on staff to tell them how to pass. Trainees added that some students wanted a quick and easy formula to follow in order to attain their desired grades. As one trainee commented:

I found that I had to quickly learn how to deal with the questions that learners had. Mainly "If I failed, how do I pass next time?" (Caroline, 10-11)

As discussed in Chapter 5, time plays an important role in this phenomenon with the result that the 'virtue of hurry' combines with the desire to attain graded qualifications and perpetrates the growing phenomenon of just-in-time education.

A consumerist approach to education does not only affect the acquisition of qualifications but also their content and method of delivery. Numerous curriculum changes and new pedagogical initiatives have affected further education, initiatives which are often short lived and rapidly replaced by a further set of changes. This phenomenon was identified by Ainley and Bailey (1997) post-incorporation and there has been no apparent abatement in the intervening years. While it would seem naive to suggest that education should not respond to a changing world, it seems that the culture of consumerism has created a compulsion to introduce new policy initiatives or interventions at a rapidly increasing rate in order to satisfy the notion of continuous improvement. One trainee felt that this intensified the commodification of education and reduced the role of teacher to that of service provider:

The 'quality' culture instilled by Ofsted only serves to deepen this sense of commercialism with targets and figures turned into pounds and pence and the roles of teachers and lecturers reduced to 'service providers'. (Stuart, 09-10)

The relentless pursuit of improvement is predicated on the assumption that there is always a better way of doing things. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, it is apparent that many 'initiatives', whilst presented as new ideas, are in fact a recycling of old ideas; for example Hartley (2012) draws parallels between the current personalised learning agenda and the notion of pupil centred learning which was promoted as far back as the sixties. Without this historical evaluation the drive for constant change often leads, not to genuine innovation but to the aforementioned recycling of old ideas. This apparent recycling is akin to Eriksen's notion of vertical stacking of trends: 'there is no change, but mere circulation' (2001, p.112). The 'stacking' of policy initiatives is also problematic as each has little time to bed in before it is replaced by the next. This problem was identified by lecturers who were interviewed by Ainley and Bailey (1997) as far back as the 1990s: they also commented on the fact that these changes brought little improvement and, in some cases actually led to falling standards.

Revisions to qualifications, particularly those in the vocational sector have been subject to frequent change, with little chance for them to establish before being replaced with an alternative (Hodgson and Spours, 2003). Examples include the General National Vocational Qualification being replaced with the Vocational Certificate in Education in 2000 for the latter only to be withdrawn in 2004; and the

14-19 diplomas being introduced in 2006, only to be abandoned in 2011. Problems resulting from such changes result in increased workload for teachers, anxiety for students who are part way through qualifications and considerable confusion for employers who struggle to understand the parity of qualifications. Reforms to qualifications which are made as a result of centralised curriculum prescription and market forces have been described as 'so misconceived that their impact upon the quality of student learning is minimal, even adverse' (Bloomer, 1996). Research data from the trainees in this study would seem to support this notion (see also Chapter 5, The vocational time squeeze ): one NQT felt that the vocational curriculum she was required to follow, despite having undergone previous revisions, lacked application to the workplace and was very restricted:

The surprise came in the form of a somewhat 'dry' curriculum which lacked something – much of the course can allow students to follow 'rote learning' strategies obtaining information from a ready-made handbook. To combat this we gave research tasks for the learners to relate the theory they had learned to an organisation of their choice and gave the opportunity to listen to guest speakers. What would be most beneficial is a relook at the curriculum – a fresh approach where students can learn at college while experiencing work experience alongside their studies – putting learning into practice. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

The rapid turnover of initiatives and qualifications is just one effect of a culture of continuous improvement. Trainee teachers in this study have also alluded to the fact that students in their classes are increasingly seeking speedy routes to success. A PGCE class discussion revealed the following:

A creative arts trainee commented that some students were reluctant to carry out preparatory, experimental work prior to producing pieces of work for assessment. This experimental stage, considered by the trainee to be invaluable in developing individualism and originality in student work was resisted by some students as they considered it to be time consuming and wanted to progress directly to the final assessment work. This tendency to focus on summative rather than formative assessment was not confined to creative subjects: trainees in the field of vocational education reported that some students were focused on grading criteria to the extent that they would only complete written activities if they were directly attributable to final assessment criteria. Effectively, effort would only be expended on end product achievement. (Field notes, February 2010)

The student preoccupation with assessment criteria could be attributed to the increased transparency of intended learning outcomes, which, although effective in facilitating learner achievement, also encourages instrumentalism with the risk that the challenge of learning is reduced (Torrance, 2007). As the following quote illustrates, the focus on end product achievement resulted in some students preferring to be told what to do (see also later discussion – ‘Play Safe’) so that they could effect a speedier outcome without recourse to time consuming experimentation, a fact which disappointed the following trainee:

I loved teaching but always felt that it was too restricted. The majority of the sketch books took on the same form, students preferred to be told what to do rather than to experiment and learn for themselves and when teaching art this felt quite frustrating at times. Surely they should be encouraged to be a free spirit and express what they are feeling through their art. (Fran, 09-10)

The apparent desire for quick and easy outcomes is, perhaps, a feature of our consumerist culture of convenience which attempts to streamline activities so that more can be squeezed into existing time frames. Education seems to be ‘fitted in’ around other competing activities often allowing little time to be allocated for study which involves routine and application - elements which are not always conducive to 21<sup>st</sup> Century lifestyles (Eriksen, 2001). As a result of this, regularity and procedure have become unbearable to many resulting in the ‘elevation of novelty and the degradation of routine’ (Bauman, 2007b, p.130). The research evidence suggests that this ‘elevation of novelty’ manifests itself in education through college expectations that teachers should ‘engage’ learners with ever more stimulating lessons, as discussed in the next section.

### Education as entertainment

In a class discussion trainees commented that they were encouraged by their placement colleges to find resources and activities which would ‘stimulate’, and ‘engage’ students throughout lessons. For example, they were encouraged to use starter or plenary activities in the form of activities which had a ‘fun’ or interactive element. Trainees felt that they were expected to seek out original resources which had not been used before and which would hold students’ attention. This expectation seemed particularly prevalent with level 1 and level 2 learners or ‘difficult to reach’ learners although the expectation was also evident with some AS level students who seemed to lack motivation for their studies. Trainee teachers who attempted to ‘engage’

their students with original activities reported an increasing expectation from students that lessons should include games or quizzes, and some trainees identified the risk that engagement could easily become entertainment, to the detriment of the learning experience. One trainee reported that students seemed to regard lessons as a social event with subject content being considered secondary to how it was delivered. Although it was acknowledged that a 'fun element' may engage students it was a cause for concern for trainees that some students came to expect such fun activities to become a regular feature of lessons, often at the expense of exam revision and preparation. (Field notes, Jan 2011)

The expectation that learning should be fun could be attributed to the fact that 'students are consumer and entertainment oriented, multitasking and expecting immediate gratification with minimum contribution' (Barefoot , 2007, cited in Barlow and Fleischer, 2011, p.235). With an increasing emphasis on learner engagement and student voice in colleges, it is easy for trainees to feel under pressure from students to give them what they want in terms of activities. However, as indicated in the field notes above, teachers were concerned and wary about student pressure to entertain rather than educate. The rise in student voice, constructed as 'customer feedback', can lead to an imbalance in the teacher-student relationship and raises questions related to authority. Furedi (2009) argues that the notion of authority has assumed negative connotations as it is regarded by some as a challenge to freedom. However, he believes that the imposition of teacher authority is a key requirement of education. He comments:

The act of learning and the very pursuit of knowledge requires the acceptance of the authority of the subject and of the teacher who represents it in the classroom. (p.70)

The decline of teacher authority parallels a similar decline in parental authority to the extent that some parents relinquish their authority to children, protecting them from teacher criticism and delivering praise for the simplest of actions. As children demand more, parents and teachers are expected to meet these expectations: essentially the desires of the child are prioritised (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). The field notes above illustrate the tension which trainee teachers often experience when they are being encouraged by colleges to engage learners and respond positively to student voice, only to find that student expectations can divert them from the core purpose of teaching and learning. When education is commodified and reduced to a

consumer good or service and when students are referred to as the customers of the college there is a clear danger that authority may shift from teacher to student in a bid to 'satisfy' customer expectations. Bauman (2005) identifies this phenomenon as:

a gradual yet relentless replacement of the orthodox teacher-student relationship with the supplier-client or shopping mall-shopper pattern. (p.317)

Education is about a relationship between student and teacher (Biesta, 2009b) but Bauman's comment reminds us that it is the nature of the relationship which is so significant. As noted above, the language of 'delivery' which dominates education strengthens the perception that teachers are supplying education in the form of a product, in much the same way that a good can be supplied and purchased in a shop. An effect of this is to compound the assumption that teachers should supply what students (or customers) *want* rather than what they might *need*. Trainees commented on the pressure from college departments to be innovative and creative in lessons requiring them to design or seek out resources and activities which had not been previously used in the classroom. In the same way as consumer goods are expected to have a short shelf life and be constantly replaced by newer models, this approach seems to have affected education in that trainees are often made to feel that they must be constantly creating new resources. This can put additional pressure on trainees and can, again, divert from the main purpose of education. One trainee commented:

I have heard various opinions on reusing and borrowing activities; some teachers believe that activities should always be created. However I disagree with this view as I believe that teachers should be able to learn from each other through sharing resources. My colleagues have often asked me to provide them with activities which I have used as they would like to make use of them. I also believe that teachers are far too busy with all of their responsibilities to also worry about creating lots of different resources. As long as students are learning and developing their knowledge then it does not matter whether they are provided with brand new activities or recycled activities. (Maria, 10-11)

This quote was part of a reflection written by the trainee in May and she was reflecting on what she had learned since beginning her placement in October when she was encouraged to make her lessons unique and create her own resources. She added:



I believe that the students' development is more important than uniqueness and the use of brand new resources. I also believe that time saved by reusing resources can be used to tailor the delivery of the lesson to suit individual learning needs. This approach is far more important than spending lots of time creating a handout which no one has used before. (Maria, 10-11)

This particular trainee has recognised the toxic time demand which can result from the expectation that resources must be constantly renewed. She has identified the fact that this expectation could result in diverting her from the core purpose of education and has made the decision to regain control of a situation which has the potential to place unnecessary pressure on her with no apparent advantage to students.

Commodification is far-reaching and affects not only the nature of the education which is provided in colleges, but also the students and teachers who work and study within those colleges.

#### Self as a commodity

As students pursue success in the form of University places or employment and as teachers pursue success in the job market, both encounter the danger of the self turning into a commodity. Both teachers and their students increasingly find themselves in a position whereby they must promote themselves to educational institutions and workplaces as desirable commodities. As Bauman (2007b, p.6) states:

They are simultaneously promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote...(and let me add that any academic who has ever applied for a teaching job or research funds will easily recognise her or his own predicament in their experience).

The drive to self promote is a consequence of the pressure to compete against other individuals in a bid to gain success. However, if everyone is adopting the same tactics, no one actually gets ahead and an 'opportunity trap' is created, with employers retaining powerful control in the labour market (Brown *et al*, 2011). The drive to self-promote is particularly prevalent in the job market and some trainees have commented on the need to project a particular image at job interviews. Some have explained that this image is constructed around the expectations of the interviewing college and the ethos it promotes through its marketing material rather

than on the trainee's own sense of teacher self. The need to conform to organisational mission and ethos is a characteristic of the managerialist culture which dominates in many colleges (Shain and Gleeson, 1999 ) and under a managerialist regime many assumptions are taken for granted with the result that 'a politics of difference is silenced' (Avis, 2002, p.80). Trainees are conscious that they need to conform to organisational expectations in order to be considered a suitable employee (see Chapter 4): the pressure to be 'someone else' and to silence any hint of dissent can be strongly felt in an interview situation but, equally, some trainees struggle with assumptions which are made by interviewers. Comments from one trainee suggest that the commodification of the teacher self has resulted in a form of stereotyping during the recruitment and selection process. Here he comments on a question asked at interview:

I was asked why I wanted to work at an establishment with lower entry requirements than my placement college: I explained my belief in education as a tool for social mobility and referenced my work at [*name of college*] and [*name of charity*] as examples of this in action. This has made me wonder if I am defined in others' minds by the institutions I have taught in. As I have taught in an organisation with high entry requirements does this give the impression that I am taking an elitist approach to teaching? I got the impression that I was perhaps considered too aloof for this institution and therefore not able to engage lower level learners. The irony is that this could not be further from the truth. (Alan, 09-10)

This particular trainee had supplemented his placement college experience by undertaking teaching at another college and by gaining experience of teaching with a community charity and yet this experience was overlooked and overshadowed by an emphasis on entry requirements at his placement college. It would seem that the focus was on the trainee's placement college, its targets and its products rather than the trainee, who as interviewee, was trying to present himself honestly but who found himself being assessed as a *product* of his placement experience. Essentially, in the eyes of the interviewer, Alan's individual identity had been supplanted with the organisational identity of his placement college. Alan's concept of professional self is an illustration of what Shain and Gleeson (1999) refer to as a public sector concept of teacher professionalism which has at its heart a commitment to community, a concept which is not conducive to the managerialist culture which has come to dominate the further education sector. Within this culture Alan would

probably fall into the category of 'marginal performers' – individuals who have not embraced a marketised approach and still have a social service ethos (Ainley and Bailey, 1997). Under a managerialist approach, although professionals are encouraged to be *empowered* to take responsibility for their actions, all activity is policed by management under the guise of appraisals and target setting: effectively individuals are expected to develop their own subjectivities in tandem with the organisation (Avis, 1996). Under such a regime individuality is suppressed and fear for job security results in some teachers adopting attitudes of compliance to organisational expectations (Shain and Gleeson, 1999). The expectation of compliance seems to be evident even at the interview stage.

Another trainee commented that target driven agendas seemed particularly pronounced in sixth form colleges where there was an emphasis on the attainment of high A level grades. During interview questions were focused on grade attainment with the interviewer asking, for example, how the candidate would add value to the student experience and ensure that students gained the highest grades that they were capable of. The interview experience led him to comment:

I felt at odds in the interview with the performance oriented, business-like approach of the representatives of [*name of*] Sixth Form College. Sixth form colleges seem to be very pressurised and results driven. (Tom, 09-10).

The feeling of being 'at odds' with the ethos of a college presents a dilemma for trainees and the expectation to conform to organisational norms can easily lead to trainees presenting a 'front' at interview as they attempt to impress potential employers. Impression management has become a key factor of self promotion as interviewees attempt to persuade interviewers of their potential (Brown *et al*, 2011). The pressure to conform to expectations is an indicator of the effect of consumerism:

The consumerist culture is marked by a constant pressure to be someone else. Consumer markets...breed dissatisfaction with the products used by consumers to satisfy their needs and they also cultivate disaffection with the acquired identity and the set of needs by which such an identity is defined. (Bauman, 2007b, p.100).

In the case of Alan, his interview experience made him more determined to stay true to his conception of what makes a good teacher:

I have also strengthened my idea of what I believe in as a teacher and have a determination not to compromise on this. I would rather give a true reflection of myself as a teacher in an interview than pretend to be someone else and end up with a job in an environment where I wouldn't be happy. (Alan, 09-10)

The sad truth of holding true to one's own conception of professional self however, is that it is not always conducive to employability. As Avis (1996) observes of managerialist cultures:

We are all to develop our subjectivities in a particular direction and failure to do so indicates our unsuitability and unwillingness to engage in the personal development warranted in post-Fordist organisations. (p.113)

The results-driven ethos of colleges is unlikely to abate in the competitive climate of consumerism: as entry requirements to the job market are raised and as increasingly high qualifications are needed to gain University places, both students and teachers are victims of credential inflation, which is itself a result of social congestion (Brown *et al*, 2011). Essentially there are too few jobs for too many candidates. Thus, at interview teachers are expected to market themselves to colleges as commodities; once employed they are then expected to transform their own students from consumers of education to workplace commodities. The transformation works as follows: as well as colleges using student results to bolster their league table results and improve their competitive standing they are also being responsive to a consumer society which puts pressure on students to gain the best possible results in order to gain the job, or the university place, of their choice. Thus the student as consumer becomes the student as commodity as they market themselves (and their results) to prospective universities or employers. This results in the 'transformation of consumers into commodities' (Bauman, 2007b, p.12) and it falls to the teacher to effect this transformation by helping students to achieve the highest grades possible. However, the degree to which teachers should be held responsible for the grades achieved by their students is debateable and it is to this topic that the discussion now turns.

## Ownership of results

As education and the process of learning have been displaced by the emphasis on end product, or qualifications, assessment has become the prime focus for both teachers and learners. The emphasis on league tables and competition means that schools and colleges also place assessment at the forefront of their endeavours. The results of assessment, or qualifications, are no longer owned solely by the students who have achieved them but are now referred to in terms of shared ownership:

In a class discussion trainees commented on the close scrutiny of grades which takes place in colleges on results day. They reported that departments (and individual members within them) were under pressure to achieve high pass rates and, where this was not evidenced, to provide explanations and strategies for improvement. Trainees reported that teachers would often refer to 'my' or 'our' results rather than to 'student' results. Teachers would compare their results to those of others, creating a competitive culture, one in which teachers were increasingly held accountable for their results. This raised the question of how far teachers are responsible for the results which their students gain: trainees expressed concern that where results were poor because of student absence or lack of effort the solutions to these problems were also held to be the teacher's responsibility and resulted in them being asked to hold extra teaching sessions for those students who 'needed extra help' to gain better grades (see also Chapter 5). (Field notes, March 2010)

When students fail to achieve good results and the teacher is deemed to have failed to gain the desired results, this can result in a major cause of anxiety and soul searching, resulting in trainees feeling they are to blame when results are not as desired, as illustrated by the following quote:

Where had I, as the teacher, gone wrong?...Was it you or was it me or was it a combination of both? (Caroline, 10-11)

The competitive nature of departmental achievement and the pressure to improve is illustrated by this trainee comment:

The pass rate was [number] % which is what the subject department usually attains, however, surprisingly, it was high compared to other, usually well performing humanities departments. This has created a slight feeling of achievement within my department especially as it has recently been criticised for under achievement. (Aisha 09-10)

It is clear that competition exists not only between colleges but also between the departments within them and subsequently to individual teachers within departments. It can result in teachers focusing on their own students' results and adopting a competitive rather than collegiate approach to teaching. This trend to focus on competition and self-interest can be attributed to free market economic policy which is based on two assumptions: firstly that competition is natural to humans and secondly that individuals are selfish, and it is marketplace institutions which create the conditions which allow these assumptions to flourish (Ball, 1998).

Effectively the market form is creating the competitive climate which threatens team endeavour within the department and finds colleagues comparing the cohort grades of each teacher to analyse percentage achievement and success rates. A trainee referred to the analysis of results as:

The numbers game that followed in ensuring that learners get the grade they want. (Caroline, 10-11)

The words 'ensuring that learners get the grade they want' implies that it is within the power of teachers to effect this, yet clearly some responsibility for exam results must lie with the students. Language plays an important part in shaping perceptions of responsibility: when teachers, departments and colleges refer to student results as 'my' or 'our' results it implies teacher responsibility for the grades attained but fails to acknowledge any responsibility on the part of the student.

The research data presented in this study suggests that responsibility for students' results seems to be increasingly attributed to the teacher role with student responsibility being less well defined. This trend seems to have led to a situation where teachers are now judged by the results of their students, not only in the workplace but also at the recruitment stage. This is evident in the design of some college job application forms for teaching appointments where a section is included which requires applicants to list their students' results with a full breakdown of grades (see Appendix 5 for examples).

The narrative below highlights the concern and disillusionment experienced by trainees in the 10-11 cohort during a teaching session on college recruitment and selection:

The focus of the discussion was prompted by a trainee who was applying for a first post at a local FE college. She was confused by a section on the application form and she brought it into the University for advice on its completion. The section required applicants to list their students' results, for both examination and coursework based programmes of study. Applicants were required to list not only overall success rates but results by grade. Trainee teachers applying for jobs expressed confusion and concern about this. They felt at a distinct disadvantage as trainee teachers because they had no student results which they could claim as their own, placement classes being shared with an experienced member of staff. Trainees felt that as NQTs they would be at a disadvantage when applying to colleges which required this information as it was felt that colleges would be likely to favour candidates who could evidence a track record of success with students. As the discussion developed trainees raised other concerns: this requirement clearly placed an emphasis on student achievement and inferred that the results would be interpreted as an indicator of whether or not the candidate was a good teacher. It was felt that this measure ignored all other factors which may have impacted on student results – particularly student effort. Essentially it was felt by trainees that they would be judged by their students' achievements rather than their own. This raised an important question relating to the responsibilities of teachers and students – just how far is a teacher responsible for the results which their students attain? (Field notes, March 2012)

Essentially the applicant is not being judged solely on their own qualifications but also on those of their students. Applicants are being asked to provide evidence of end product achievement in the form of student results by grade breakdown. The subliminal message is: the more 'A' grades and Distinctions which your students get, the better teacher you are and the more likely you are to get the job. This, of course, is decontextualised information and takes no account of situational factors which may affect student results. It is a crude measure which is reminiscent of sales departments in business organisations which offer contracts and commission payments to the employees with the best sales figures. This relatively recent addition to college recruitment strategy devalues the personal and professional qualities which traditionally defined 'a good teacher' and is yet another example of product taking precedence over process: essentially all that matters is getting the results.

Although not all colleges ask for this information, those that do place an additional pressure on trainee teachers as they see it as an obstacle to gaining a first teaching post. However, perhaps more importantly, it consolidates an early impression that it

is teachers who are primarily responsible for the results that their students gain. The role of student effort and responsibility is minimised in this context and consolidates the assumption that the students' results are in fact the teacher's results: effectively the distinction between teacher and student is lost. One explanation for this trend could be the language of learning which dominates education (Biesta, 2009b) and which was discussed in Chapter 2. When students are referred to as 'learners' (which is commonplace and evident in the trainee data quotes in this research study) it is problematic because it does not adequately reflect the relationship between teacher and student or the activity required of the learner:

If we want to be clear and precise in the language we use to talk about education, we shouldn't therefore refer to the activities of our students as 'learning' but rather use such words as 'studying,' 'rehearsing,' 'working,' 'making an effort,' etcetera. (Biesta, 2009b, p.5)

Essentially, the relationship between teacher and 'learner' has become less well defined: it is clear what is expected of teachers but what of learners? The word 'student' infers the action of studying but if the word 'learner' infers learning then the required action is less clear. It seems that as the teacher role has become increasingly prescribed with an emphasis on accountability, the learner role has become less well defined and this has resulted in a shift of responsibility: where previously teacher and student shared responsibility for student outcomes it seems that this responsibility is shifting increasingly towards the teacher.

The shift of responsibility from students (or learners) to teachers and the fact that when education is *purchased* the customer *expects* a particular outcome (for example, a qualification) is illustrated in the following trainee comment:

It makes me wonder how long it will be before Ofsted will start awarding star ratings where 'buyers' will be able to logon to the website and rate the 'seller' of their course rather like Amazon marketplace. Naturally there will be no responsibility placed on buyers for the nature of the education they received, nor any effort required on their part. They paid for it after all, so cough up the goods. (Stuart, 09-10)

Stuart's quote suggests that students perceive education as something to be bought rather than something to be worked for – a product (or qualification) rather than a process: the quote also suggests that the act of buying absolves the customer of any



effort or responsibility for the outcome. In this scenario the relationship between buyer and seller is purely transactional rather than interactional and herein lies one of the problems of applying the principles of consumerism to education: if, as discussed above, we accept Biesta's (2009b) premise that education is about a relationship between teachers and students with each having their own roles and responsibilities then there should be a distinction or 'gap' between teacher and student and, according to Biesta, (2004a), the gap between teacher and student is where education takes place. He argues that:

education exists only in and through the communicative interaction between the teacher and the learner...education has a relational character, it does not exist in any other sense than as a relation and 'in relation'...the relation is only possible because of the existence of an unrepresentable transformative gap. (Biesta, 2004a, p.21)

If education is relational and facilitated by a 'transformative gap' then it follows that if the gap is closed then the process of education is lost. I would argue that the emphasis on end product (or qualification) and the increased responsibility placed on the teacher to deliver this end product has resulted in a closing of the relational gap between teacher and student. This has had two effects: the first is that the education process has been squeezed out and secondly the distinction between the roles of teacher and student has been obscured to the extent that teachers seem to be judged by their students' grades as if they were their own.

The 'squeezing out' of education is apparent in the emphasis on criteria compliance which dominates the post compulsory sector and which has resulted in a focus on end product qualifications or assessment as learning (Torrance, 2007). Torrance also acknowledges that an emphasis on assessment has placed additional work on tutors:

The responsibility for putting in the 'hard work' of assessment in pursuit of achievement might now be said to fall as much on the shoulders of tutors as on the learners, and a great deal of 'hidden work' is undertaken according to tutor disposition (Torrance, 2007, p.286)

However some of the data from trainees in this study suggests that the 'hard work' is falling not as *much* on the shoulders of tutors but *more* on the shoulders of tutors. In

addition to this, the 'hidden work' which is alluded to by Torrance seems to be no longer 'hidden', but an overt expectation from both students and colleges.

In some cases, however, it seems that students are reluctant to take advantage of the extra help offered by teachers as it would involve extra work for them as students. It is important to note that the following accounts illustrate trainee perceptions of some student attitudes. It is not being suggested that *all* students are resistant to work or effort. However, the quotes do illustrate a recurring theme which also emerged in class discussion – that of student reluctance to study. One trainee referred to the frustrating scenario of trying to help learners who were clearly reluctant to help themselves:

With some learners it is a pattern that they do not learn the work...but the level at which a learner can be persuaded and somehow 'forced' to learn the work is a balancing act... it is clear to see that some learners are not willing to improve. (Caroline, 10-11)

This trainee and staff in her department held extra support sessions for students in the approach to exams but few attended despite voicing a desire to improve their exam grades. Her reaction was:

What more can be done when the learner does not want to learn? (Caroline, 10-11)

These comments echo those of Angela which were discussed in chapter 5. It is useful to repeat them here:

The students and I had allocated a time that we all agreed that we could make for one-to-one tuition. However, only one student out of the three turned up. (Angela, 10-11)

The concept of work or effort on the part of the student seems to have been replaced with a broad interpretation of support which, in some cases, results in students expecting to be told what to do or what to write. The reluctance of some students to take responsibility for their work combined with the pressure to attain college targets can put teachers in situations which challenge their professional judgement :

On several occasions I referred what I believed was substandard work and was asked to 'relook at the work' to see if there was any way it could be

‘squeezed through’ – I was unhappy with being asked to put my name to such work and felt I was being asked to lower my working standards – which I will not compromise on. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

Elizabeth’s experience is an example of ‘the conflict between a professional and managerial paradigm’ (Avis, 2007a, p.99). By ‘squeezing through’ the work, college success targets would be met and the learner would ‘achieve’ but the quote suggests that this is at the cost of professional integrity and a lowering of academic standards. Elizabeth’s refusal to compromise is an example of the conscientious objection identified by Colley *et al* (2007) and discussed in Chapter 2. In a culture of accountability which is predicated on student results:

Teachers and educational institutions have been manoeuvred into a position in which they have to go along with the customer and meet the customer’s needs. As a result it has become increasingly difficult for them to act according to their professional judgment if it runs counter to the apparent needs of the learner. (Biesta, 2004b, p.249)

Elizabeth also noted the fact that students who failed to hand in work on time seemed well aware of the fact that college recruitment and retention targets were driving the move towards *second chances* for assignment submission with the result that they would confront teaching staff with arguments:

Lack of firm structure and consistency regarding discipline for those handing in assignments late or those with poor attendance allowed a minority to be treated differently – with many being given a seemingly never ending number of chances – when threatened with disciplinary hearings or running the risk of being ‘kicked off’ the course; the said few continued to work against the system, some even stating “you need me on the course or it will affect your figures!” (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

This type of confrontation puts additional pressure on teachers’ integrity, a pressure which was felt not only by Elizabeth as a NQT but also by established staff at the college:

Many existing staff admitted that this too troubled them and they felt ‘worn down’ by the added pressures placed upon them. (Elizabeth, NQT, 11-12)

It is worth giving consideration to factors which may have contributed to this shift of responsibility from student to teacher, apart for those already discussed: the phenomenon might be traced back to habits which are learned at school and carried

into college. It could be argued that the trend towards therapeutic or emotional education in primary and secondary schools has resulted in an infantilisation of students, resulting in a paradox of education: 'the more we expect of education, the less we expect of children' (Furedi, 2009, p.16). Furedi (2009, p.19) argues that education for its own sake has been superseded by education for policy agendas resulting in a devaluing of commitment to learning:

A classroom which is subjected to the dictates of a policy agenda is very different from one devoted to inculcating a love and habit of learning.

The expectation, from some students, that teachers should do everything they can to guarantee the desired results, seems to have caused the emergence of a culture of entitlement among some students, a phenomenon which could be attributed to the commodification of education. It is to this culture of entitlement that the discussion now turns.

### Entitlement

The rise of entitlement is, perhaps, an inevitable consequence of a consumer culture which focuses on the self: in an age of competition where the self becomes a commodity and the high stakes assessment culture rewards those with the best grades, students are encouraged to do all they can to win (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). The culture of the individual or self has perhaps blossomed under the focus which has been placed on student self-esteem. Young-Eisendrath (2008) describes a self-esteem trap whereby educational initiatives to develop feelings of self-worth in young people have resulted in them having unrealistic expectations of success and even celebrity. This inevitably results in disappointment when such expectations are not met. Young-Eisendrath (2008) acknowledges that an emphasis on self-esteem has created a shared cultural attitude which has effectively lured many young people into the trap of feeling that they are special and able to achieve whatever they desire. The message inherent in some policy initiatives, for example Aim Higher, in operation between 2004 and 2011, has been that students can achieve whatever they wish to if they raise their aspirations and confidence levels. However, in a competitive marketplace academic aspirations can be thwarted by reality. Student aspiration (and sometimes expectation) to get into the best college or get the best

job often ends in disappointment: while we can all be encouraged to do our best, we cannot all be the best (Brown *et al*, 2011).

The message which is implicit in therapeutic education initiatives is to value who we are rather than what we do – this can lead to misleading expectations and a dangerous legacy for future years of education (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). It can result in reduced collective action, selfishness and even narcissism which can result in a bloated self (Craig, 2007). While the raising of self-esteem would seem to be a positive move towards increasing student confidence, it is problematic when feeling good about yourself becomes more important than performance (Twenge, 2006). The emphasis on self has been perpetuated by the personalisation agenda which has driven educational initiatives in recent years. It has led to what Hartley (2012) refers to as a ‘narcissistic quest’ (p.5) by individuals who are increasingly focused on the self rather than the social: we live in an age where even social interaction is increasingly facilitated by personal technological devices which are being harnessed in the classroom under the umbrella term of e-pedagogy.

Hartley’s reference to narcissism echoes Twenge and Campbell’s (2009) reference to a narcissism epidemic which, among other effects, has resulted in students exhibiting behaviours which suggest a rise in expectations of entitlement. They argue that the blurring of the distinction between narcissism and self-esteem has had corrosive effects on young people. Twenge first refers to narcissism in her earlier work which focused on ‘Generation Me’ (2006) and the growing sense of ‘entitlement’ noted among young students, which resulted in their ‘demanding’ better grades, irrespective of the effort they had put in. They attribute this entitled attitude to emphasis on self-esteem which has emerged through pedagogical initiatives focused on emotional education.

The focus on self puts in jeopardy those learning activities which focus on the shared social benefits of group learning. As individuals focus only on their own priorities and needs, other students (and teachers) have to suffer the consequences. Selfish behaviours might be attributed to a rise in narcissism which encourages the belief that it is the individual that matters most with little thought given to the effects of individual actions on others (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). The lack of focus on the

social can have a particularly detrimental effect on the teaching of those subjects which require group activities and interdependence. Subjects such as PE and Performing Arts are affected by the absence, lack of effort and/or lack of responsibility demonstrated by some students:

During a class discussion trainees whose subjects required groups of students to work together described their frustration at planning group practice and rehearsal to which not all students attended. They reported situations where they would wait for students, often contacting them by phone to discover their whereabouts. The group activities (particularly performing arts rehearsals) were often dependent on the attendance of individual students and their non-attendance caused considerable inconvenience and frustration for both the trainees and other students. When they did attend these students would often have neglected to complete preparatory work which had been set. Trainees reported that the lack of responsibility and effort from these students combined with absence to group activities/presentations caused considerable tension between groups of students, with those who had completed the work becoming annoyed and resentful at the lack of effort demonstrated by others which often compromised the progress of practical group activities. Some trainees reported that some students expected gratitude from the teacher for simply turning up. (Field notes, March 2010)

This apparently casual student attitude to attendance is of growing concern to teachers, including those who teach at HE level where a culture of negotiated engagement defines the modern relationship of students to higher education (Barlow and Fleischer, 2011). A lack of self-reliance and difficulty in taking responsibility for their own learning is a feature of some student behaviour and points to a decline in the reciprocal teacher-student relationship:

The often tacit contract between teachers and students needs to be more explicit. We do not mean at a box-ticking level but at a qualitative level of reciprocal respect and mutual effort. (Barlow and Fleischer, 2011, p.233)

The lack of student concern about the impact of their negative behaviour on others is not restricted to absence. A problem was caused for a trainee when assignment deadlines were re-negotiated for some students who had failed to complete work. A schism was created between two cohorts of students: those who met deadlines on first submission and those who were seen to be given multiple submission opportunities:

Those students who worked within the set guidelines felt increasingly penalised for working well and 'towing the line'; many becoming resentful and feeling what was the incentive to work hard whilst the continual 'slackers' were given better treatment. This was something I felt particularly strongly about. (Elizabeth, NQT 11-12)

The college expectation that some students be given extra help and multiple opportunities to achieve created a professional dilemma for Elizabeth, in that it raised questions of professional judgement and fairness. As Torrance comments:

It can be argued that none of this support, even exam coaching, is necessarily inappropriate or unfair in and of itself. Such practices are at the heart of professional judgments about the performance/competence interface which tutors and assessors must make. They are also very understandable in the current context of results-driven accountability and the financial viability of programmes and institutions. But the provision of such detailed support raises issues of equity if it is not pursued uniformly. (Torrance, 2007, p.289)

Poor work ethic and low levels of concern for how student behaviour impacts on others was a focus for Greenburger *et al* (2008), who researched the growing culture of self-entitlement among college students who expect lecturers to go to exceptional lengths to meet their needs and wants. Their research focused on the circumstances that foster the expectation of high grades for minimal effort and the resulting dissatisfaction when these needs are not met. Interestingly they allude to student voice (discussed earlier), and comment that, although it gives voice to students it may also give them a sense of power which is not always positive.

Added to the demands of the college and its students, younger students' parents have expectations too and these can contribute to the development of entitled attitudes. Barefoot (2007) cited in Barlow and Fleischer (2011, p.235) adopts the term 'helicopter parenting' to refer to those parents who hover over their children in a bid to foster their well-being but, in the process, undermine their childrens' capacity to make their own decisions and become self-reliant. Family pressures to achieve and to focus on grades can result in achievement anxiety in students which in turn can lead to an exhibition of self-entitlement as a coping strategy when grades are in decline (Greenburger *et al*, 2008). It is clear from one NQT that parents 'expect' good grades. The shift from 'want' through 'need' to 'expect' intensifies the pressure on students and, subsequently teachers, which leads to target grades becoming the dominant focus of teacher activity:

Most students are focussed on achieving high grades and progressing to good higher education courses (as indeed are their parents). This means that there is a natural pull towards ensuring high achievement in exams, though this often involves a degree of 'teaching to the test'. (Stuart, NQT 10-11)

The justification for teaching to the test and focusing on grades is made on the basis of 'need' which is a recurring theme in the data: students 'need' the grades to secure their future plans; teachers 'need' the grades to secure future employment; the college 'needs' the grades to secure its reputation in the marketplace. But 'need' soon becomes 'expectation' which extends beyond students and the college to parents and government agencies, with the emphasis on the teacher to meet these expectations. It is apparent that in a first teaching post the emphasis on grading shapes the interpretation of the teacher role:

I think I must be a pragmatist in some respects. The fact of the matter is the kids need good results. Regardless of college targets and national benchmarks, a teacher's job is to help students succeed academically, particularly in a sixth form college. (Tom, NQT 10-11)

The emphasis on 'need' is echoed in the following comment from Caroline and clearly illustrates the perception that it is the teacher's responsibility to achieve these grades:

When exams come back from an external source the questions begin to be asked from outside and answers need to be given. Targets have to be met and the college will state what the pass rate at the end of the year needs to be. It is up to the teacher to ensure that the learners get these marks. (Caroline, 10-11)

While few would argue that it is a teacher's job to help and guide students to achieve their desired results, the shift in responsibility for this achievement seems to lie increasingly with the teacher and is accompanied by an emphasis on what must be achieved by the teacher. This shift in emphasis is also evident in lesson planning documentation which requires teachers to express learning outcomes in terms of what students '**will** be able to...' or '**must** be able to ... do by the end of a lesson (see Chapter 4). In a bid to meet these expectations some teachers find that they are encouraged to 'play safe' and encourage students along secure paths to success, even if this is at the cost of a decline in individual thought and creativity.



## Play safe – tell them what to do

Trainee teachers have frequently reported instances of students asking them what they should write in their coursework assignments. Where trainees have offered exemplar guidance, they have later found their own guiding words featured in student work (Field notes, February 2010). This experience illustrates the fine line which exists between *guiding* and *doing*, and the distinction between the two can easily be blurred by college cultures which emphasise ‘student support’ in their mission statements (see discussion in chapter 5 on learner centredness). Supporting students with learning can easily become supporting students with *doing* and trainees have described this as a ‘trap’ they have fallen into. A possible explanation for this lies in the culture of compliance which has developed in the teaching profession and which is well documented as undermining teacher autonomy and reducing the teacher to a role as technician (Leaton Gray, 2007). This general compliance, when combined with criteria compliance (Torrance, 2007), has the potential to create a moral as well as an ideological dilemma for the teacher as they find themselves under increasing pressure to achieve the desired results for their students. The danger is that teachers will not only offer guidance or coaching but will explicitly point students in a particular direction with their work in order to eliminate the risk of failure. They ‘play safe’ by suggesting ideas to students which they feel will gain the best grades. One trainee teacher working in the Arts was surprised by students wanting (and expecting) to be told what to do rather than embracing the role of creative originality in producing their ‘own’ work at A level:

Some students have mentioned that they cannot work without the old teacher as he gave them ideas and told them exactly what to do. This shocked me. This is something I do not believe to be good practice. Surely you should be there to teach them methods and techniques but also be there to offer guidance whilst encouraging independent thinking...spoon feeding to get the grades may well not actually involve any learning. (Fran, 09-10)

The concern with teacher control over student work was echoed by another trainee who worked on an end of year assignment project with BTEC vocational students:

I thought that it would be a very much student centred project with them directing their own work but it is actually very different from that as there are many teachers involved who seem to have complete control over many of the students’ work...I work with them to generate their own ideas only to talk to

them a little while later to find that they have been 'told' to do something else. (Charlotte, 09-10)

These comments suggest that staff have been accustomed to directing students towards the 'safe bet' in assessment terms, to the extent that some trainees have expressed the concern that staff are all but producing the work for the students rather than guiding them. This caused considerable conflict for the trainees who felt that it was both counterintuitive to their own ideals but also to the learning experience of the students.

In creative subjects in particular, where elements of individuality would be expected to thrive, one trainee was disappointed to find that this was discouraged:

We were encouraged to push students down certain paths just so that the college would achieve the grades it wanted. I felt the whole teaching process was for the college and not the students. This was something I was not happy with. (Fran, 09-10)

From this quote it can be seen that prescription not only results from awarding body specifications (see Chapter 4) but also from the college itself. This trend can be self-perpetuating in that if students' work is directed down certain paths by tutors there is an increasing risk that students will become reliant on tutor direction in the future. This could be problematic for those students progressing to Higher Education where it has been observed that many students have difficulty in taking responsibility for their own learning (Barlow and Fleischer, 2011).

One trainee commented that the college focus on achievement of targets can conflict with the views of some staff who put the importance of understanding before that of achievement:

The college ethos is that the students must do well...the college management is focused on attaining results and for the college as a whole to perform well, responding to a behaviourist approach. In spite of this from the sessions I observed, the exams were only mentioned once or twice. [*The teacher*] stated that it was more important for the learners to understand the subject before exam focus comes into play. (Aisha 09-10)

There is a clear conflict illustrated in the quotes from the trainees. It seems that they, and some of their colleagues, strive to encourage individuality and free thinking in their students only to find their approach thwarted by others. Trainee comments

suggest that they share Ball's (1998) view that the language of pragmatism has displaced values talk and has marginalised educational issues. In a class discussion the majority of trainees expressed a belief in the function of education beyond that of mere qualification, (Field notes, May 2011) and the quotes below have echoes of the other functions of good education (Socialisation and Individuation), identified by Biesta (2009b) and discussed in Chapter 2:

I want to instil in the students the ability to have some responsibility for their own education...I want to teach them something about the country they live in and how they can affect it. (Caroline, 10-11)

I am there to facilitate the development of rounded informed individuals who can articulate their views clearly and with confidence and, who most importantly, enjoy their education. (Keira, 09-10)

This latter quote which emphasises the importance of enjoyment in education echoes Twenge and Campbell's (2009) comments on the need to inculcate in students both a love of learning and a sense of mastery borne out of hard work. As people become more self-centred they do what is necessary for success rather than for intrinsic purposes:

The price of success becomes self-denial, the suppression of feelings, interest and activities that do not conform to the perceived requirements of an occupational career. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, Section 9: The Trap)

In a bid to stem this 'suppression of interest', it is testament to the resilience of trainees that they are able to hold true to the notion of transformative education. The challenge for teachers is to maintain this resilience when working in colleges where ethos, competition and student expectation each combine to exert pressure on teachers to conform to the demands of commodified education.

## Conclusion

The research data suggests that the rise of commodified education in a consumerist age has resulted in target driven agendas dominating college cultures. The resulting pressures on teachers to achieve these targets are multi-directional: college management, departmental colleagues, students and their parents all have demands and expectations which are focused on the teacher. The time pressures which were discussed in chapter 5 are also a feature of commodified education as the effects of

transience are felt through the continual demand for new approaches to teaching and learning aimed at engaging learners. It is apparent from the data that the notion of continuous improvement and continual renewal results in teachers being expected to design original resources and activities in a bid to engage learners but that this can result in a divergence from the core purpose of education.

Commodification is not restricted to the nature of education itself but also to its key players, namely students and teachers. Teachers find they have to market themselves as providers of education with students acting as their consumers. The marketisation of self combined with the personalisation agenda which has dominated education in recent years, has fostered a culture of narcissism and entitlement among students with the result that they expect teachers to 'deliver' the necessary results. The reciprocal student-teacher relationship, defined by clearly demarcated roles, has declined with the result that teachers are being judged by their students' results with their professional survival dependent on them. The shift from students and teachers *wanting* good results to *needing* good results has further exacerbated the pressure to achieve at whatever cost to the teacher in terms of professional integrity. A culture of learner centredness and support has, ironically, shifted responsibility for learning away from the student and towards the teacher with a resulting dependency on the teacher to 'deliver' the desired outcome.

The data raises some ethical concerns with regard to the extent to which teachers are expected to 'deliver' what colleges and students demand. The data suggests that teachers can experience conflict between their personal educational ideology and the college ethos. Particular concerns for trainees and NQTs have included the fact that some teachers chose to prescribe rather than guide, directing students down certain paths in an attempt to secure target grades while others found themselves being asked to compromise their marking standards in a bid to secure success for some students. In such situations there is a risk of 'values drift' whereby teachers experience a shift from professional to market values (Ball, 1998, p.42). These actions also seem to be examples of what Bauman (2007b) describes as 'collateral casualties of consumerism'. He suggests that 'ethical blindness' (p.118) can result in perpetrators ascribing their actions to unavoidable consequences of consumerism, thus absolving them of ethical responsibility for their actions. With the relentless

multi-directional pressures on teachers to meet college targets and survive in the competitive age of consumerism there is a risk that ethical blindness may spread or that some teachers may decide to leave the profession. At least two of the trainees whose data is presented in this chapter have made the decision to work outside FE college environments, one within community education and the other within corporate training: these decisions were made as a direct result of their college experiences.

Underpinning many of the findings in this chapter is a rise in materialism and self-centredness which may be attributed to a narcissism epidemic of which many are unaware (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). It is as if the emphasis on self has entered the field of education by stealth, under a mantle of positive thinking and motivational mantra. However, as more importance has been placed on self-esteem, with success defined increasingly in terms of commodity acquisition, some students have become increasingly focused on end results rather than the process of subject mastery in education.

As the preceding chapters have illustrated, the themes emerging from the research data are interlinked: scripting, increasing time demands and the commodification of learning have affected the student-teacher relationship and placed an increasing burden of responsibility on teachers to meet the demands of consumer oriented college cultures. However, as well as describing and interpreting the data themes which have emerged in this study, it is also important to offer an explanation for them and it is to such an explanation that the thesis now turns.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The erosion of good education: the impact of liquid modernity**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter 1, this thesis was described as presenting a picture of education, and the preceding three chapters have provided the foreground detail of this picture of 21<sup>st</sup> Century education with three key themes emerging from the data: teacher scripting, time pressures and the rise of commodified education. However, in order for both the reader, and writer, to better understand the origins of the phenomena portrayed in this picture, it was necessary to seek a unifying theoretical framework against which to consider them. In seeking such a framework to better understand the picture, I needed to identify the art type, or movement, of which my picture was a part; one which would help me understand its content and meaning.

#### **The genre painting perspective**

Every picture tells a story: the picture which has been presented in this study would fall into the movement of genre painting, depicting as it does, scenes of everyday life. However, genre painting often depicts not only characters but also scenes which illustrate the human condition and it is factors pertaining to the human condition which will form the basis for discussion in this chapter.

It is evident from the data that trainees are teaching in an era of constant change which creates uncertainty about future job security in an increasingly competitive, consumerist world. The themes of change, uncertainty and consumer competition feature strongly in Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity and this notion provides an illuminatory and explanatory framework against which to consider the data findings in this study. Bauman argues that liquid modernity has had multiple effects on the human condition: we have shifted from a world of solidity which was predictable, stable and secure to one which is liquid in nature. The metaphor of liquidity illustrates the speed and lightness which characterise many aspects of our lived experiences: the solid and secure 'jobs for life' culture which characterised a more solid phase has been replaced by short term contracts, insecurity and uncertainty which place a premium on competition and the race for individual survival.

Bauman identifies five elements which characterise liquid modernity: emancipation, individuality, time/space, work and community. Bauman's discussion is wide: some aspects of his discussion go beyond the boundaries of this research study while some of the five elements which he has identified share similarities and overlap in their discussion foci. In light of these points, and because three of the elements are of particular relevance to the data themes which have emerged in this study, this chapter's discussion will focus on the elements of individuality, time/space and work.

This chapter will begin by considering the rise of individuality and how this has had a key role in the shift towards a culture of consumerism. The discussion will then consider how this shift has affected the shape of time and work in our modern world, with particular reference to the data findings in this research study. The chapter will conclude by considering how these elements of liquid modernity have led to the erosion of good education.

### Individuality

The findings in the preceding chapters suggest that the loss of professional autonomy experienced by teachers over the years has resulted in a fettered working life, one which is scripted and time bound leaving little freedom for creative action or individuality. The responsibility for achieving college targets and facilitating the attainment of high student grades seems to have shifted more towards the individual teacher; a shift which has been exacerbated by a rise in competitive, rather than co-operative college cultures. It is useful to begin by considering how 'liquid times', as conceived by Bauman, have fostered such experiences and how they have shaped a society which is characterised by a shift in focus from society's needs to a focus on individual needs. This shift is illustrated, historically and politically, by former UK Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's claim that 'There is no such thing as society' (Bauman, 2000, p.30), with the accompanying exhortation to take individual responsibility for one's own future prosperity. Others have referred to 'a society of individuals' (Elias, 1987, cited in Bauman, 2000, p.30) to convey the notion of a move from collective identity to one of individual identity. What follows from this is an emphasis on individual responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions. On first consideration this might suggest an accompanying freedom and choice from the shackles of restrictive hegemonic structures. However, the freedom which was

expected in the form of personal flexibility and empowerment has, in reality, created a new type of shackle: individual responsibility for socially produced problems. There is no choice about this:

Risks and contradictions go on being socially produced; it is just the duty and the necessity to cope with them which are being individualised... a gap is growing between individuality as fate and individuality as the practical and realistic capacity for self assertion. (Bauman, 2000, p.34)

When responsibility is individualised there is no longer a common cause which unites groups and enables collective action. Troubles may be similar but they are expected to be faced alone, without collective action. Bauman describes such problems as 'non-additive': they are not amenable to 'summing up' into a 'common cause' (p.35). Individuals with similar problems may advise each other on how to cope with such problems, but collective action to address them has been replaced by an expectation that individual action will solve them. The notion of citizens forming a society for the common good has been affected by individualisation to the extent that a schism has been created between the individual and the citizen, with the former tending to be 'sceptical or wary about common cause, common good, good society or just society...the other side of individualisation seems to be the corrosion and slow disintegration of citizenship' (Bauman, 2000, p.36).

Where individualisation may have held the promise of empowerment, this empowerment is in fact a form of controlling one's own labour process, often according to the standards imposed by others (Avis, 1996). Individuals are fettered by a sense of personal responsibility and the sense that any blame must be attributed to them; they are expected to engage in a cycle of continuous effort and improvement to address any shortfall in performance. This 'quasi' empowerment illustrates the binary division of individual *de jure* and the individual *de facto* as conceived by Bauman.

#### Individual *de jure* and individual *de facto*

The individual *de jure* is born of the self-critique which accompanies so-called empowerment: the individual blames him/herself for any shortcomings in performance and believes that they must try harder to bring about improvement. In contrast to this, individual *de facto* is the condition to which individuals aspire and is



what empowerment seemed to promise: the possibility to gain control over fate and to make the choices which individuals desire.

The data in the preceding chapters suggests that trainee teachers are victims of the binary between individual *de jure* and individual *de facto*: the teacher as individual *de jure* follows a prescriptive curriculum and assessment regime and is held responsible for the exam results of students. Where students fail to gain the required results it is teachers who are expected, by managers, to address any shortfall in student performance and to improve results through providing extra revision sessions or assignment support. When student results fail to hit set targets the blame rests with individual teachers and continuous efforts to effect improvement are expected. Teachers are effectively carrying out tasks which have been scripted for them. As Bauman (2000) comments:

To put it in a nutshell, 'individualisation consists of transforming human identity from a given into a task and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences of their performance. (p.31)

This position is very different to the teacher as individual *de facto* who aspires to the autonomy to make decisions about curriculum and assessment issues and to take the professional action which they think appropriate according to circumstances. The dilemma faced by Alan in his interview (see Chapter 4) is a case in point: he was aware that he would be expected to display learning objectives and follow a 'templated' lesson format but he chose instead to demonstrate his own autonomous approach to lesson design. Unfortunately he was unsuccessful at this interview and ascribed this lack of success to his non-conformity: he was unable to attain the status of individual *de facto*. Alan's experience illustrates the unlikelihood that the gap between the teacher individual *de jure* and the teacher individual *de facto* can be bridged by individual efforts alone:

Bridging that gap is the matter of Politics – with a capital P, where private problems are translated into the language of public issues and public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles. (Bauman, 2000, p.39)

Bauman argues that the move from collective to individual responsibility is a result of the colonisation of the public space by the private: effectively, any potential for collective action has been extinguished and rendered the public sphere as almost

obsolete. In terms of education, individual teachers are not involved in strategic decision making (Ainley and Bailey, 1997) yet in terms of accountability it is clear from the data presented in the preceding chapters that they remain tied to their own individual responsibility for end results. This is further exacerbated by the competitive culture which has emerged in colleges whereby colleagues find themselves in competition with each other to achieve the best possible student results. When results fall short of expectations, it was evident in the findings that trainees felt a strong sense of responsibility to offer explanations, illustrated by these quotes from Chapter 6:

Where had I, as the teacher, gone wrong?...Was it you or was it me or was it a combination of both? (Caroline, 10-11)

This can also extend to individual subject departments whose performance is under constant scrutiny:

The pass rate was [number] % which is what the subject department usually attains, however, surprisingly, it was high compared to other, usually well performing humanities departments. This has created a slight feeling of achievement within my department especially as it has recently been criticised for under achievement. (Aisha 09-10)

The fact that teachers are 'in the same boat' offers little solace but seems to merely reinforce practice which becomes accepted as standard:

From their daily guided tours of the 'public' space individuals return reinforced in their '*de jure*' individuality and reassured that the solitary fashion in which they go about their life-business is what all other 'individuals like them do' while – again like them - suffering their own measures of stumbling and (hopefully transient) defeats in the process. (Bauman, 2000, p.40)

Individuals have effectively been left without a vehicle for discussion of shared concerns; it could be said they have been stripped of their citizenship. However, Bauman argues that the individual *de jure* cannot become *de facto* without citizenship:

There are no autonomous individuals without an autonomous society which is a deliberated and shared accomplishment of its members. (Bauman, 2000, p.40).

Bauman argues for a revisiting of critical theory which has historically focused on protecting the individual from the threats of the public side. He argues that the current consideration is the opposite: to protect the attack on the public by the private, as this is what prevents the emancipation of the individual from autonomy *de jure* to autonomy *de facto*. He argues that where public power might have lost its oppressive power it has also lost its enabling capacity: 'Any true liberation calls today for more, not less of the public sphere and public power' (p.51). Most worrying, perhaps, is Bauman's observation that the belief in a 'good society' has been lost, for without belief in a good society there can be little motivation to work towards its attainment. In terms of education a challenge remains in envisioning individual problems as public ones, so used have teachers become to regarding them as private concerns. There is a need for 'recollectivizing the privatized utopias of "life politics" so that they can acquire once more the shape of the visions of the "good society" and "just society"' (p.51)

It is useful at this point to consider these comments against Biesta's (2009a) notion of good education, which he conceives of as having three elements: qualification, socialisation and individuation. Biesta's notion of individuation echoes that of Bauman's individual *de facto*: the function of individuation encourages independent thinking and the challenge not to accept unconditionally that which is presented as a given. While seemingly contradictory to the function of socialisation which Biesta sees as enabling individuals to become part of social and moral orders, these two functions acknowledge that education can encourage citizenship whilst also keeping alive the critical eye of individuation. For Biesta, the function of qualification also extends beyond skills or academic qualifications:

Providing students with knowledge and skills is also important for other aspects of their functioning. Here we can think, for example, of political literacy –the knowledge and skills needed for citizenship – or cultural literacy more generally –the knowledge and skills considered to be necessary for functioning in society more generally (Biesta, 2009a, p.40)

Biesta's model of the three functions of good education can be represented as a Venn diagram:



It is in the intersections of the three functions that the concerns of the public and private spheres are seen as not mutually exclusive but capable of working together so that 'good education' has the capacity to realise the 'good society' alluded to by Bauman (2000). The belief in the power of education to effect a good society is to recognise its transformative effects as envisioned by Giroux (2001) and McLaren (1995) and discussed in Chapter 2. The vision is rooted in critical pedagogy and echoes Bauman's (2000) call for a revisiting of critical theory: 'as always the job of critical thought is to bring into the light the many obstacles piled on the road to emancipation' (p.51). Many trainee teachers in this study alluded to their belief in the transformative power of education and it is useful to remind ourselves here of some of the comments made by trainees which illustrate this belief:

As arts educators we are being drawn inextricably into acting as collaborators in the creation of the very society that we aim to critique. This creates huge tension between personal creed and values and the expectations placed on teachers. (Stuart, NQT 10-11)

Surely they [*students*] should be encouraged to be a free spirit and express what they are feeling through their art. (Fran, 09-10)

I attempted to demonstrate my aspiration to develop independent thinkers using basic cognitive techniques in the classroom. I don't think that this fitted well with the general ethos of the institution. (Alan, 09-10)

I want to teach them something about the country they live in and how they can affect it. (Caroline, 10-11)

I am there to facilitate the development of rounded informed individuals who can articulate their views clearly and with confidence and, who most importantly, enjoy their education. (Keira, 09-10)

It is in the active pursuit of the 'good society' that 'good education' has a role to play: 'the search for an alternative life in common must start from the examination of life-politics alternatives' (Bauman, 2000, p.52). However, one of the obstacles to achieving a good education is the emphasis which is placed on end product qualifications. These are accumulated in much the same way as consumer goods and if the desired result is not achieved in these qualifications then the student will seek to replace the undesired result with a new and improved one, by process of a retake exam or a re-submitted assignment. This, coupled with the drive towards continuous improvement, means that individuals are restless in their quest for satisfaction, as satisfaction is often short-lived:

The code in which our 'life policy' is scripted is derived from the pragmatics of shopping... we 'shop' for the skills needed to earn our living and for the means to convince would-be employers that we have them; for the kind of image it would be nice to wear and make others believe that we are what we wear...there is no end to the shopping list. (Bauman, 2000, p.74)

It is evident from the data that 'shopping' for skills rather than 'working to attain' skills has resulted in some students expecting to be told what to do in their quest to gain their desired results (discussed in Chapter 6). This has been exacerbated by the drive towards 'deliverology' (Barber, 2007) which was discussed in Chapter 2. The 'delivery' of learning suggests that education can be presented to the student in much the same way as a consumer good is delivered to a customer. In such an exchange there is no effort required on the part of the customer; it is the provider who has sole responsibility for the quality of the goods delivered. The customer service model which dominates education, particularly in the post-compulsory sector with its emphasis on externally awarded qualifications, has fostered a culture of entitlement which has led to some students expecting that teachers deliver their desired result irrespective of student effort: this might explain the data in Chapter 5 which shows evidence that, despite efforts made by trainee teachers to provide extra support sessions for students, many failed to attend, resulting in considerable

anxiety and frustration for trainees who felt that their efforts were not reciprocated by students' efforts.

In order to arrive at an explanation for this trend it is helpful to consider Bauman's (2000, p.76) notion that 'society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers', a difference which he describes as 'seminal'. He describes life according to the 'producer's role' as being regulated by norms and conformity: there is an upper limit to what one might desire to achieve and it is centred around social approval. In contrast, life according to the 'consumer role' has no such norms or limitations to desire and is characterised by wanting things quickly: 'to take the waiting out of wanting' (p.76). The student as consumer has been encouraged not only by a customer service culture in colleges but also by the emphasis on building self-esteem through therapeutic education (discussed in Chapter 6) which encourages students to believe that they can achieve whatever they aspire to. However, the promise of consumer choice does not always match the reality of life choices: in an increasingly competitive culture an increasing number of students are chasing a decreasing number of jobs and many of these lead to disappointment as the number of 'developer' jobs is overtaken by the number of 'demonstrator' roles (as explained in Chapter 4, 'developers' are given permission to think and to devise initiatives which are merely implemented by 'demonstrators', without the need to think), resulting in 'Digital Taylorism,' (Brown *et al*, 2011). The level of competition for developer jobs is fierce and this puts a premium on the achievement of high grades and the promotion of the self as a commodity in order to stay ahead of the game. Unfortunately:

Not all choices on display are realistic; and the proportion of realistic choices is not the function of the number of items to choose from, but of the volume of resources at the disposal of the chooser. (Bauman, 2000, p.87)

The competition for jobs means that both students and teachers are in a position of making and remaking identities in order to satisfy the demands of the market and engage in impression management. In the case of Alan, in Chapter 4, he resisted the temptation to present as the teacher the interviewers wanted him to be and instead opted to hold true to his personal sense of teacher identity. For others, however, the necessity to become the teacher you are allowed to be rather than the teacher you

wish to be is a source of considerable tension as illustrated in Stuart's quote from Chapter 4:

I suppose I have been careful not to undermine the authority of the college and the students' and parents' expectations in my first year. Whether or not I will continue to uphold these structures in subsequent years remains to be seen, though I am not sure I will be able to bear it. (Stuart, NQT, 10-11)

The need to reinvent oneself to accommodate the ever-changing education and jobs market creates a competitive climate which puts a micro focus on end product qualification at the expense of the more unifying and transformative aspects of education. In particular it divides teaching colleagues who find themselves in competition with each other in a bid to meet externally and internally set targets. As Bauman notes:

The task of self-identification has sharply disruptive side-effects. It becomes the focus of conflicts and triggers mutually incompatible drives. Since the task shared by all has to be performed by each under sharply different conditions it divides human situations and prompts cut-throat competition rather than unifying a human condition inclined to generate co-operation and solidarity. (Bauman, 2000, p.90)

In short, individualisation is an obstacle to the provision of good education: it divides rather than unites and reduces education to a consumer end product to be gained as swiftly as possible. In the consumer world of liquid modernity, time assumes new dimensions and it is time to which this discussion now turns.

### Time/space

Liquids, unlike solids, cannot easily hold their shape, Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. (Bauman, 2000, p.2)

In Chapter 5 the data evidenced an increasing pressure on teacher time, the expectation being that more teacher activity be squeezed into limited amounts of time. It is useful to begin by considering the role of space in relation to time and Bauman takes a historical view of the time/space concept in his examination of the emergence of our liquid times. He observes that before the days of mechanical advances and technology, when human effort was restricted to the physical, answers to questions such as 'how long will it take to get there?' could be answered quite straightforwardly by considering physical limitations such as how far a human

being could walk in a given amount of time. Effort, when exerted by humans and animals, had physical limitations which made it easier to set time limitations. However, the invention of vehicles meant that distances could be travelled in reduced amounts of time, therefore placing the parameters of time in the hands of human invention:

Time has become a factor independent of inert and immutable dimensions of land masses or seas. Time was different from space because, unlike space, it could be changed and manipulated; it has become a factor of disruption: the dynamic partner in the time-space wedlock. (Bauman, 2000, p.111)

Mechanisation created speed which allowed geographical space to be covered in shorter periods of time; in historical terms of exploration, territory could be claimed by those who reached it first: 'space was value, time was the tool' (Bauman, 2000, p.113). However, the reliance on mechanics did have some limitations and, in terms of labour, machinery locked it to its work sites (for example the factory floor). Bauman contrasts this 'heavy' hardware phase to the 'light' software phase which has been ushered in by advances in technology:

If applied to the time-space relation this means that since all part of space can be reached in the same time span (that is in 'no time'), no part of space is privileged, none has 'special value'...The insubstantial, instantaneous time of the software world is also an inconsequential time. 'Instantaneity' means immediate, on-the-spot fulfilment – but also immediate exhaustion and fading of interest. (Bauman, 2000, p.118)

Bauman's notion of instantaneity has echoes of the discussion in Chapter 5: we are reminded of Harvey's (1989) 'time-space compression' and Eriksen's (2001) reference to the paradox of time whereby when time is reduced to increasingly small fragments, it ceases to exist. The allusion, in Bauman's quote above to 'on-the-spot fulfilment' and 'fading of interest' is also reminiscent of the trainees' data which describes some students' expectation of 'entertaining' lessons with quick results and the expectation on teachers to produce continually revised or new resources in a bid to engage students. It seems that instantaneity cuts short attention spans and is not conducive to the slow thinking which facilitates the good education envisioned by Biesta (2009a).



Clearly education cannot be divorced from the social arena which it inhabits and advanced mobile and internet technologies mean that a continuous stream of distractions, or communication 'instants' bombard students on a daily basis; as Eriksen (2001) comments, education is fitted in around these. Bauman (2000) alludes to this as 'instant living' (p.123) and identifies it as a feature of our liquid times. He comments that it 'makes every moment seem infinitely capacious; and infinite capacity means that there are no limits to what could be squeezed out of any moment - however brief and fleeting' (p.125). His reference to 'squeezing' is apparent in the Chapter 5 data which evidences a 'squeezing in' of activities (for example, assessment support) but at the expense of a 'squeezing out' of other activities (for example, vocational training elements). One of the vocational elements which is being squeezed out according to the trainee data is careers information, something which students had requested with regard to their future plans. However, this was not provided within teaching sessions because of an emphasis on assessment activities; essentially the 'future' was squeezed out by the 'now'. As Bauman (2000, p.125) observes:

The short term has replaced the long term and made of instantaneity its ultimate ideal. While promoting time to the rank of an infinitely capacious container, fluid modernity dissolves – denigrates and devalues – its duration.

This reference to the devaluing of duration echoes Eriksen's reference to the 'falling marginal value of slowly acquired knowledge' (2001, p.118). Slowly acquired knowledge puts an emphasis on what will be learned over the long term but 'the long term, though still referred to by habit, is a hollow shell carrying no meaning' (Bauman, 2001, p.125). Living in the instant shuns both past and future: a society with no historical perspective has no idea where it is going and this affects the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another (Eriksen, 2001). It is a society which wants to forget the past but which also has little faith in the future (Debord, 1990, cited in Bauman, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 5, living in the instant means that past lessons are forgotten resulting in policy amnesia (Hodgson and Spours, 2003) and throwaway pedagogy (Furedi, 2009). Trainee comments from Chapter 5 evidence the stress which results from trying to achieve a PGCE within an academic year punctuated by an external expectation of swift high grade achievement, continuous improvement and the attainment of multiple performance

standards, standards which wield considerable power over trainee activity. Bauman argues that the changing relationship between space and time not only affects human activity but is also inextricably linked to power:

Power can move with the speed of the electronic signal and so the time required for the movement of its essential ingredients has been reduced to instantaneity. For all practical purposes power has become truly exterritorial, no longer bound, not even slowed down, by the resistance of space.  
(Bauman, 2000, p.11)

He comments that those operating the levers of power are often out of reach and inaccessible: in terms of teacher education this could translate to the politicians who craft policy, agencies such as Ofsted which impose 'standards' or college managers who set achievement targets for teachers and students. In Chapter 5 this power and control was described with reference to Foucault's notion of panopticism, but Bauman supports the notion that we have moved from a panopticon-style to a synopticon-style society (Mathieson, 1997, in Bauman, 2000), which results in the many watching the few, rather than vice versa. It is obedience to standards which characterises the teachers' lot: professional standards and Ofsted standards shape the nature of the education which teachers are able to offer to their students. However, the standards (hailed as supporting professionalism and quality of provision, principles which seem worthy) are in fact a form of external control. The control shifts from panopticon-style to synopticon-style because it is often exercised by peers (in the form of lesson observations by colleagues) or students (in the form of student voice feedback or 'customer' feedback, as alluded to in the quote from Tom at the start of Chapter 6). Control can also be exercised by self-imposed pressure to achieve: Keira's comment, in Chapter 5 and repeated here, illustrates this self-imposed pressure and the realisation that only time will effect true teacher development:

I am now fully aware that development comes through time and practice and reflecting on this to identify areas to improve further. This has probably been the biggest lesson of the year: to not put ridiculous expectations on myself and unnecessary pressure when it is healthy and proper to develop gradually.  
(Keira, 09-10)

Trainees are aware that their best efforts are required at lesson observations in order to attain the set professional standards and the observation becomes a type of performance, as noted by Stuart in Chapter 5:

These constraints put an enormous amount of pressure on the trainee and make for an unrealistic almost theatrical classroom situation in which the teacher performs for the observer. (Stuart, 09-10)

These observations are time-bound and it is the attainment of prescribed standards which often drive the lesson, precluding any spontaneity or improvisation in performance. The observer is equally constrained in their evaluation of the lesson as they must evaluate against the same set of standards. The standards are effectively a synopticon-style control mechanism.

The 'learnification' of education (Biesta, 2009) and the emphasis placed on the attainment of learning outcomes after each lesson neglects to acknowledge the importance of putting knowledge into practice over time in order to effect true learning, as illustrated by Elizabeth's comment, repeated below:

Only when the individual has experienced and been able to put theory into practice, may true learning take place. One may learn or absorb facts within a classroom environment – however until there is a need to utilise stores of knowledge, learning may not take place. (Elizabeth, 10-11)

The premium which is placed on fast learning has created a schism between slow and fast, and a failure to acknowledge that 'slow' has its place. Bauman's notion of liquid times suggests that 21<sup>st</sup> Century liquid modernity is unstoppable; it cannot stand still, and is in perpetual 'liquid' motion. Instantaneity leaves no time for reflection on the past or planning for the future. The data and discussion in Chapter 5 suggests that the demise of slow time and slow thinking has eroded not only the foundations of good education but also the bridge which linked fast and slow. Consideration for the past and future has now been replaced by consideration for the moment. As Bauman comments:

But the memory of the past and trust in the future have been thus far the two pillars on which the cultural and moral bridges between transience and durability, human mortality and immortality of human accomplishments, as well as taking responsibility and living by the moment all rested. (Bauman, 2000, p.129)

This comment reminds us that to remove the solid frame of past and present is to remove the cultural and moral framework which gives meaning to our lives and which spans ethical and temporal binaries. Part of this solid frame has traditionally been provided by work, and it is to this that the discussion now turns.

### Work

The data in this study provides a picture of work from two perspectives: one perspective examines the working experiences of trainee and newly qualified teachers, and the other examines the attitude to work of college students, as perceived by these teachers. In very simple terms one might say that the teacher's work is to educate, while the student's work consists of study. Importantly, the 'work' of education is based on a reciprocal working relationship between teacher and student: both must 'work' if education is to be effected. However, the data presented in the preceding chapters suggests that a shift has occurred in the relationship between teacher and student which has resulted in an increase, not only in teacher responsibility for student results, but also an accompanying increase in the amount of teacher work necessary to effect these results. The work expectations of students are less well defined, though, and the findings in Chapter 6 suggest that a shift in the relationship between teacher and student has fostered a trend towards entitled attitudes in students and an increasing expectation that education be presented in ways that are 'fun' for them. The 'work' of education seems to be shifting towards engaging (or entertaining) activities and in order to better understand this trend it is useful to consider Bauman's analysis of work in the context of liquid modernity.

Bauman argues that the character of work has been changed by the shift from a solid to a liquid societal framework: solid work was a collective effort and was considered to be the 'natural condition' of human beings and a prime human activity. It was seen as giving shape to the future and putting humans in charge of their destiny, so that effort expended at work was expected to bring rewards in the long term. However, the nature of work in liquid times means that the long term has been replaced by the short term and as a result of this:

Work can no longer offer the secure axis around which to wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and life projects. Neither can it be easily conceived of as

the ethical foundation of society or as the ethical axis of individual life.  
(Bauman, 2000, p.139)

The effect of this change in work's character is that work is not now seen as a long term collective endeavour with long term reward, but instead is expected to bring short term gratification. Bauman argues that:

Work has drifted from the universe of order-building and future control to the realm of a game; acts of work become more like the strategy of a player who sets himself modestly short term objectives reaching no further than one or two moves ahead. What counts is the immediate effects of every move; the effect must be fit to be consumed on the spot. (Bauman, 2000, pp.138-9)

The effects of this are that work is:

measured and evaluated by its capacity to be entertaining and amusing, satisfying not so much the ethical, Promethean vocation of the producer and creator as the aesthetical needs and desires of the consumer, the seeker of sensations and collector of experiences. (Bauman, 2000, p.140)

Three points from the above quotes which are particularly pertinent to the data findings in this study are that in liquid times:

- work is a short term activity
- the effects of work are consumed with immediate effect
- work is judged by its entertainment value
- work is not produced but consumed

The phenomena bulleted above are apparent in the data in Chapter 6, which identifies a trend whereby qualifications are acquired, as expediently as possible, as illustrated by these quotes from Chapter 6:

I found that I had to quickly learn how to deal with the questions that learners had. Mainly "If I failed how do I pass next time?". (Caroline, 10-11)

The majority of the sketch books took on the same form, students preferred to be told what to do rather than to experiment and learn for themselves. (Fran, 09-10)

The first quote above suggests the expectation that the teacher can provide a 'magic formula' for success, and the second quote illustrates the immediate results which students expect: to experiment is time-consuming, to be told what to do is to effect a speedier result. It follows that to experiment is to be the producer and creator of

work, as alluded to in Bauman's quote above; but to be told what to do is to be a consumer of others' ideas. This expectation of being told what to do risks the removal of student 'thinking' from the educative process and this calls into question the nature of the 'learning' which is taking place: rather than learning being produced through the work of thinking and doing, it can be consumed through the process of teacher delivery. The language of learning and delivery consolidates the role of 'learner as consumer' as it has obscured the active role of student work in the education process. It is useful here to repeat some citations from previous chapters:

The often tacit contract between teachers and students needs to be more explicit. We do not mean at a box-ticking level but at a qualitative level of reciprocal respect and mutual effort. (Barlow and Fleischer, 2011, p.233)

Barlow and Fleischer's comments remind us that the reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship, or contract, has been diminished and needs to be better defined. This lack of reciprocity has been fostered by the consumer model of education and also by the language of learning:

We shouldn't refer to our students as 'learners' but should either refer to them with terms that specify the particular relationship they are in – which is what the word 'pupil' does – or with terms that specify the activities they are engaged in – which is what words like 'student' or 'worker' do. (Biesta, 2009, p.5)

This is not merely a semantic argument but, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, the language which we use to describe education shapes our perception of it. Students in colleges are increasingly referred to as 'learners' yet this noun fails to indicate the activity or work expected of the role. The 'work' of education is further obfuscated by the reduction of education to a product which is 'delivered' by the teacher and consumed by the student (as customer). The customer service culture which has emerged from this consumerist model has changed the shape of education and placed the desires of the student (or learners) at centre stage. As Tom commented in Chapter 6:

There are various forms of student assessment that are used to establish student voice or, as a college manager put it, 'customer feedback'...Referring to students as customers and comparing the college's quality policy to Marks and Spencer's, it struck me how businesslike a college must be if it is to thrive. It can be disheartening when aspiring to be a teacher - I did not

anticipate this level of business talk, competition and all the bodies to contend with. (Tom, 09-10)

The rise in the customer service model of education means that teachers are increasingly judged by the results of their students and this has exacerbated the trend to 'show students what to do' as teachers' career prospects are often dependent on these results. As discussed earlier, trainee teachers were expected to provide additional support and revision sessions for students but attendance to these sessions was often poor: learners, like consumers, were exercising their choice - which was not to attend. This led to consternation for trainees who were expected to effect grade improvement. As Caroline commented in Chapter 6:

What more can be done when the learner does not want to learn?

Some of the data suggests that the student-teacher relationship may be shifting: teacher effort is not always reciprocated by student effort. Just as a customer in a shop has a choice of whether to buy or not, the learner exercises a choice of whether or not to attend the session and complete the work necessary to effect grade improvement. As Stuart observed in Chapter 6:

It makes me wonder how long it will be before Ofsted will start awarding star ratings where 'buyers' will be able to logon to the website and rate the 'seller' of their course rather like Amazon marketplace. Naturally, there will be no responsibility placed on buyers for the nature of the education they received, nor any effort required on their part. They paid for it after all, so cough up the goods. (Stuart, 09-10)

The move from a 'producer' to a 'consumer' model of work helps us to understand Stuart's comment: the responsibility on the part of the consumer is diminished; however, the responsibility on the part of the provider is augmented: it is the teacher who is expected to find a solution to the problem of underachievement.

The reluctance of learners to attend the extra support sessions offered by teachers might be explained by the apparent student preference for immediate results and instant gratification: revision sessions will not provide immediate results, these will only be evident in the future, after the necessary work has been completed; in short this entails delayed gratification, a concept which historically kept the producer at work so that he/she could, ultimately, become the consumer. Delayed gratification was considered a sign of moral virtue and examples include sowing before

harvesting, saving before spending, working before consumption (Bauman, 2000). However, in our liquid times, such delayed gratification is seen as hardship and has been replaced by an expectation of instant gratification, one which focuses on the result rather than any effort necessary to attain it. This analysis goes some way to explaining the emergence of 'assessment as learning': students are increasingly focused on the end product rather than the process in attaining it.

The emphasis on end product creates uncertainty for the teacher: if the student results are not as expected how will this impact on the teacher's position and job security? Bauman (2000) identifies uncertainty, insecurity and fear as being key effects of living and working in liquid times. Many teaching jobs are now offered on a fixed term or temporary basis and the insecurity which results from this is apparent in the comments from Aaron in Chapter 5, who has had a series of temporary jobs since qualifying in 2010:

Job security is a major problem in most fields these days: I feel I have to be as flexible and adaptable as possible in order to keep working in such restrictive times.

Bauman (2000) observes that job security 'has become the yarn of grandfathers' nostalgia' (p.161). He identifies flexibility as the watchword of liquid modernity and this is echoed in Aaron's quote. As discussed in Chapter 5, the word flexibility has positive overtones but it is used as a means of control and, as Sennett observes 'The time of flexibility is the time of a new power' (Sennett, 1998, p.59). Bauman argues that the decline of long term security is what has ushered in instant gratification:

It is far from certain that the prizes which look attractive today will still be desirable when they at long last come. (Bauman, 2000, p.162)

Today's world of short-lived fashions and lifestyles are a result of economic and social conditions which have 'trained' people to perceive our world as made from disposable objects (Bauman, 2000, p.162). This may well be extended to education with its 'throwaway pedagogy' (Furedi, 2009) and the exhortation to create new resources to engage students. As Maria observed in Chapter 6, when she was encouraged to create new resources for lessons, new is not necessarily better:



As long as students are learning and developing their knowledge then it does not matter whether they are provided with brand new activities or recycled activities. (Maria, 10-11)

Despite this reality, the preoccupation with 'new' prevails and is exacerbated by a culture of continuous improvement which exists in many colleges: new initiatives in education abound and the drive is fuelled by the belief that new is better than old. In our liquid times the divesting of the old is not restricted to physical objects but extends to human relationships and commitments:

Bonds and partnerships tend to be viewed and treated as things meant to be consumed, not produced; they are subject to the same criteria of evaluation as all other objects of consumption. (Bauman, 2000, p.163)

Working relationships in education are dependent on co-operation and reciprocity. The shift in the student-teacher relationship, discussed above, seems to have been fostered by the effects of consumerization. Bauman (2000) argues that consumption is a lonely activity and it is co-operation which is needed to make individual efforts into productive ones. In terms of education this could apply not only to the student-teacher relationship, where co-operation would effect greater productive effort, but also to teacher relationships with colleagues which seem to have shifted from the co-operative to the competitive, as discussed in Chapter 6. When individual teachers and departments within a college are in competition with each other to attain the best student grades, it can lead to a culture of 'survival of the fittest' which can divide rather than unite:

If the human bond, like all other consumer objects is not something to be worked out through protracted effort and occasional sacrifice , but something which one expects to bring satisfaction right away , instantaneously at the moment of purchase – and something that one rejects if it does not satisfy , something to be kept and used only as long as it continues to gratify then there is not much point in trying hard and harder still let alone in suffering discomfort and unease in order to save the partnership. (Bauman, 2000, p.164)

Peer relationships between students are also affected: in Chapter 6 trainees made reference to the fact that student absence was a problem in subjects relying on group participation and effort: some students were reported as demonstrating little or no collective responsibility for group tasks to the point that the success of performing

arts presentations could be jeopardised by non attendance. Trainees expressed surprise at the attitudes of these students who did not recognise that their behaviour had repercussions for other members of the group. An explanation for this could lie with Bauman's (2000, p.165) notion that consumerisation has caused 'a disintegration of human bonds'. He argues that productive work effort requires the co-operation of individuals: from physical work whose load is lightened by co-operative manpower to more complicated tasks requiring diverse specialist skills, which may not be possible for only one individual, co-operation is essential for a successful end product.

Bauman's notion of the disintegration of human bonds together with growing consumerization has led to the demise of co-operation:

In the case of consumption, though, co-operation is not only unnecessary , but downright superfluous. Whatever is consumed is consumed individually, even in a crowded hall. (Bauman, 2000, p.165)

The focus on individual consumption puts the focus firmly on the self. The trainee data in Chapter 6 offers a number of examples of this: the self has become a commodity; both teachers and students are vying for a scarce number of jobs. The fact that individual teachers are responsible for the results of their students puts them in competition with their colleagues to see who can achieve set targets: collective and co-operative effort becomes secondary to individual effort in this instance. Likewise with students, when individual target grades are assigned it is to these end results that effort will be expended. Co-operation, in Bauman's (2000) terms is 'superfluous'. A growing sense of student entitlement emerges from the data which is born out of the focus on 'me' rather than 'us': the data demonstrates that for some students there is the expectation that deadlines are flexible; that multiple assignment submissions can be made; that absence from group sessions is acceptable; that specially arranged revision sessions can be missed. These actions have an impact on teachers and students yet a sense of collaborative responsibility is absent for these students. The quote from Elizabeth in Chapter 6 suggests that those students who do meet deadlines and accept responsibility for their actions feel resentful towards those who do not and this causes a schism between groups of students which could further exacerbate effort towards collaborative teamwork and action.

In short, the 'work' of education is a collaborative effort: it cannot be effected in isolation. Education is dependent on relationships, the most basic being that between teacher and student. But relationships between colleagues and fellow students are also essential if Biesta's (2009a) model of good education is to be realised. Relationships thrive on reciprocity and without this the relationship breaks down. However, there can be no reciprocity without co-operation and if, as Bauman (2000) suggests, co-operation is superfluous in an age of liquidity, then this goes some way to explaining the disintegration of relationships based on 'reciprocal respect and mutual effort' as alluded to by Barlow and Fleischer in the citation above.

### The palimpsest of modern education

Fluids travel easily...they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still. From the meeting with solids they emerge unscathed, while the solids they have met, if they stay solid, are changed – get moist or drenched. (Bauman, 2000, p.2)

Education is considered the foundation upon which members of our society build their lives. A foundation must be solid if it is to support the lives which are built upon it. However, as Bauman's quote suggests, liquids affect solids: solids change to some degree when they come into contact with liquids: they may be reshaped or a layer of residue may be left behind. Over time successive fluid washes may erode solids or change their shape to the extent that they may bear only slight traces of their original shape. The data suggests that the effects of liquid modernity have reshaped education, eroding some aspects but still maintaining recognisable features. In summary, it could be said that the modern conception of education is a palimpsest: it is altered but still bears visible traces of its earlier form. Education has undergone successive reshaping, subject as it has been to new initiatives and policy changes which have washed over it to create its modern conception. The three elements of liquid modernity discussed above – individuality, time/space and work have combined to form the 'wash' which has left its mark on education, simultaneously eroding it whilst also leaving layers of residue upon it, creating the palimpsest.

Individuality has replaced 'us' with 'I', co-operation with competition and reciprocity with self-direction. The language of learnification (Biesta, 2009b) has washed over

education with initiatives such as learner-centredness, focusing on individual needs and expectations rather than the importance of reciprocal relationships. A culture of competition, fostered by consumerist values, has placed a premium on the self, and an invasion of the public realm by the private has eroded any sense of collective responsibility: the teacher stands in competition with colleagues for the attainment of targets and job security; students stand in competition with each other to attain grades for jobs or university places; colleges stand in competition with each other to achieve the coveted Ofsted grade of 'Outstanding'. Such levels of competition are highly divisive:

Individual exposure to the vagaries of commodity-and-labour markets inspires and promotes division, not unity; it puts a premium on competitive attitudes, while degrading collaboration and team work to the rank of temporary stratagems that need to be suspended or terminated the moment their benefits have been used up. (Bauman, 2007, p.3)

Competition creates a race for survival and a race demands speed: fast time has replaced slow time and this has washed away the value of slow thinking in education. The valorisation of speed (Eriksen, 2001) has rendered slow thinking untenable: to think slowly is to fall behind in the race for achievement; it delays the prize. Effort is expended, less in the process of education, and more in the attainment of its product. However, in attaining the product of education the race is not over, as individuals must then compete for the next stage of the competition, whether this be a job or university place. The pursuit of targets and goals can be relentless and can sometimes result in disappointment when the job attained does not fulfil an individual's expectations, an increasing risk in an age of Digital Taylorism (Brown *et al*, 2011). This underlines the fact that the speed at which goals are pursued leaves little time to consider their ultimate purpose:

Having reshaped the course of life into an unending series of self-focused pursuits, each episode lived through as an overture to the next, it offers no occasion for reflection about the direction and sense of it all. (Bauman, 2007, p.109)

A preoccupation with speed and time has eroded the process of education and reduced it to a series of timed learning episodes to be recorded on lesson plans as learning outcomes. Even though it is impossible to predict at what point knowledge

gained becomes true learning, the practice of using learning outcomes survives because of the preoccupation with speed and short term goals. As Biesta observes:

We can only use the word learning retrospectively, i.e., after some change has happened. Whether any current activity will actually result in learning – that is, whether it will actually result in more or less durable changes that we find valuable – is not something we can know when we are engaged in the activity... sometimes it can take a very long time before we can conclude that we have learned something from a particular experience or event, which is an important argument against an exclusive focus on short-time result in education. (Biesta, 2009b, p.5)

The language of learning has washed over education propelled by the fluid force of individuality:

One problem with the word 'learning' is that it is basically an *individualistic* concept. It refers to what people do as individuals. This stands in stark contrast to the concept of education which generally denotes a *relationship*. (Biesta, 2009, p.3)

Biesta's comment is a direct illustration of how education has been affected by Bauman's notion of individuality in liquid times: it puts a focus on the self and what the individual does, rather than what the individual does in conjunction with others. Effectively, learning is about 'I' but education is about 'we'. In substituting learning for education, the significance of relationship, whether this be with fellow students or teachers, has been washed away. Education has fallen victim to liquid modernity's focus on consumerism with its rapidly replaced initiatives, competition and customer service culture. However, consumption is an individual pastime (Bauman, 2000) and, in terms of education, the focus on individual satisfaction and learner centredness can give rise to expectations of customer, or learner, entitlement. There is little work involved in consumption; the consumer is a receiver rather than a giver and to cast the student as a customer is to cast them as a receiver of learning. However, education involves work: the work of study and, most importantly, thinking. The reciprocal relationship and interaction of teacher and student foster the education process but reciprocity is not essential to 'learning' because, as Biesta points out, it is an individualistic concept. Effectively, learning can be 'consumed'; it is a self-directed act and it makes the 'work' of learning difficult to define. The data suggests that in addition to the responsibility for teaching, the teacher is also held responsible for student learning, yet the latter is out of teacher control, being as it is, an

individualistic concept. The data suggests that teacher effort to improve student achievement is not always reciprocated, evidenced by non-attendance to support sessions, failure to meet deadlines and the growth of a second-chance mentality. Despite this lack of reciprocal effort from some students, teachers remain responsible for student achievement and are placed under considerable pressure from colleges to meet set targets and further pressure is exerted on teachers as their job prospects and job security are dependent on meeting these targets.

Bauman's notion of liquid modernity has provided an explanatory framework against which to consider the picture of education presented in this study. The three concepts of liquid modernity discussed in this chapter are exerting a triple stranglehold on teachers and education: the liquid washes of individuality, time/space and work have eroded education and left three layers which make up the palimpsest and which obscure good education. One layer has been created by the scripting of teaching and assessment regimes; the second by the time pressures which accompany these and the third by the emergence of a culture of commodification and student entitlement.

The concluding chapter will consider how the layers of the palimpsest might be stripped away to reveal the picture of good education which lies beneath it and how this picture might hold hope for the teachers who strive for a more transformative model of education.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

This research study has followed the experiences of trainee teachers in a bid to make sense of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a century which casts teachers in the role of supplier of 'world class skills' (Leitch, 2006) on the global stage. The 'business of learning' (Ainley and Bailey, 1997) is not a new concept: it has shaped post-compulsory college education since the introduction of incorporation and has placed a premium on competition and the attainment of achievement targets: fostered by neo-liberalist policy the language of education has shifted to the language of learning which has reduced learning to a product which is to be 'delivered' to students. What is new in the findings of this study is the extent to which the business of learning has intensified, eroding the foundations of good education and its inherent relationships, and leaving a palimpsest of education in its place. The previous chapter has offered an explanation for this intensification and its effects through the application of Bauman's concept of liquid modernity but this concluding chapter must now turn to the implications of this explanation: how might the layers of the palimpsest, created by the washes of liquid modernity, be removed to reveal the picture of good education which lies beneath it? A starting point is to consider the power of human agency.

#### **Harnessing the power of human agency**

The metaphor of liquid modernity focuses on the natural components of fluids and their ability to change, or erode, solids. Much as rock is eroded by rain, rivers or seas, liquid modernity is conceived as a force over which human lives have little control. However, intervention by human beings can go some way to controlling nature and the damaging effects of fluid erosion as demonstrated, for example, by the erection of flood barriers and defences. Although these are not failsafe measures to eliminate damage, they are testament to human efforts to limit the damage and it is in the possibilities inherent in human effort that the future of damage limitation to education lies. A starting point is to revisit critical theory with a view to reconnecting the individual *de jure* and the individual *de facto* so that they become a force for the common good:

If the old objective of critical theory – human emancipation – means anything today it means to reconnect the two edges of the abyss which has opened between the reality of the individual *de jure* and the prospects of the individual *de facto*. And individuals who relearned forgotten citizen skills and reappropriated lost citizen tools are the only builders up to the task of this particular bridge building. (Bauman, 2000, p.41)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bauman recognises that the original aim of critical theory – to protect the private sphere from public domination – has been reversed and it is now the public sphere which needs protection from the private:

As always, the job of critical thought is to bring into the light the many obstacles piled on the road to emancipation. Given the nature of today's tasks, the main obstacles which urgently need to be examined relate to the rising difficulties in translating private problems into public issues. (Bauman, 2000, p.51)

The power of human action lies in the recollectivizing of private concerns so that an 'examination of life-politics alternatives' (Bauman, 2000, p.52) can take place with the aim of restoring individual autonomy. It is clear from the trainee quotes that a vision of the transformative effects of education is a collective vision. However, there seems little opportunity to translate this into the competitive workplace with its emphasis on targets and end product achievement. The competition to achieve the highest student grades divides rather than unites colleagues and a culture of 'survival of the fittest' does little to encourage solidarity: indeed it perpetrates the very divisiveness which is an obstacle to unity and collective action.

When individuals are faced with such obstacles to their ideal or utopian vision of education the choice is either to accept, through compromise, or escape:

Increasingly escape now becomes the name of the most popular game in town. Semantically escape is the very opposite of utopia, but psychologically it is, under present circumstances, its sole available substitute. (Bauman, 2007, p.104)

The data evidences the fact that escape has become the chosen option for some trainees and NQTs who are unable or unwilling to accept compromise. These 'escapes' present an additional obstacle to the possibilities for collective action and any potential pockets of resistance are restricted to the actions of individuals behind closed classroom doors.



A first step toward effecting collective action is to arrive at a collective understanding of the liquid forces which are impacting on education today. This could be achieved by harnessing collective intelligence which recognises that common problems can find common solutions through the power of co-operative thought and action:

Collective intelligence [is] defined as a measure of our ability to face up to problems that confront us collectively and to develop collective solutions.  
(Lacey, 1998, cited in Avis, 2007, p.135)

Collective action may help to counter the imposition of externally set professional standards, Ofsted grading criteria and awarding body specifications which have presented the current conception of post-compulsory education as a *fait accompli*: the scripted nature of lesson planning and assessment schemes limit teacher autonomy and exhortations for learner-centredness and student engagement, while seemingly worthy and well intentioned, consolidate the casting of the student as a consumer and the teacher as a supplier of learning, undermining the reciprocity in the teacher-student relationship. This can cause considerable frustration for teachers, as evidenced in the data, and the levels of responsibility which are placed on the shoulders of teachers can lead them to feel that they must face such challenges alone. However, by viewing their personal predicaments through the lens of liquid modernity teachers should be better placed to understand that these predicaments are shared and that the prevailing 'common sense' can be challenged, with the possibility of allowing a picture of good education to emerge.

### Rediscovering good education

In a bid to rediscover good education, the three layers of the palimpsest, identified in Chapters 4 to 6, must be removed. The first layer of the palimpsest which must be removed is related to scripting. The scripting of lesson planning and assessment schemes has arisen out of a target driven system which puts a premium on outcomes: the emphasis is placed on what Biesta (2009b) terms the 'qualification' function of education. The focus on world class skills for a global economy (Leitch, 2006) has led to an assumption that high grade attainment will ultimately lead to coveted university places and/or well paid, creative jobs leading to prosperity. However, the reality is that in an increasingly competitive society the promise of such jobs is not always realised and the world of work is dominated by Digital Taylorism

where only a few are granted the permission to think creatively (Brown *et al*, 2011). Our current education system exhorts teachers to encourage creativity in students and to adopt creative and engaging methods of teaching in order to achieve this; however, the paradox is that they are expected to deliver such creativity within the confines of a highly prescribed and time-limited curriculum. If true creativity is to be realised, then it lies in the widening of educational purpose and the power of collaborative thinking. One of the major obstacles to achieving this is the competitive culture which has come to dominate our education system: If our current education fails to deliver on its promise of good jobs for well qualified candidates then it calls for a rethink in how we conceive good education:

The realities of digital Taylorism strengthen rather than weaken the case for an alternative approach to education by rejecting the narrow minded (human capital) view of education as an economic investment. By transforming the idea of education as an economic investment to an education system dedicated to enhancing the quality of life we move closer to John Dewey's idea of education as a freeing of individual capacity linked to social aims, not limited to economic advantage ...This approach to education encourages people to think beyond narrow self-interest and to celebrate their mutual dependence as part of what it means to live in human society. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, section 10: A New opportunity)

To move beyond self-interest and to reclaim mutual dependence is to resist the forces of liquid modernity which have placed an emphasis on individuality. Working collaboratively with others and acknowledging mutual dependence can foster true creativity and take the focus away from the goals and targets of self-interest which can lead to 'playing it safe'. The data in this study indicates that there is a growing trend towards both teachers and students 'playing it safe' and a highly prescribed and scripted assessment regime exacerbates this. The desire to study a subject and learn more about it can be stifled by prescription and an emphasis on skills for the economy. However, 'most creative ideas do not stem from a desire to make money; they arise out of a genuine interest in a subject' (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, section 10: A New Opportunity). A reduction in the competitive, high stakes culture which dominates in many colleges would go some way to freeing both teachers and students to focus on the desire to learn and think rather than simply the desire to achieve.

Extending this invitation to think will be rejected by students and their families unless they are freed from the high stakes competition for education and jobs that is robbing them of real choices and leads them to play it safe. (Brown *et al*, 2011, Kindle, section 10: A New opportunity)

The invitation to think should, perhaps, be fine tuned to an invitation to 'think slowly' in order to counteract the competitive effects of liquid modernity which have placed a premium on speed in order to stay ahead in the race to achieve. To be free to think slowly requires the removal of the second layer of the palimpsest which relates to time.

An emphasis on time, specifically the rise of fast time and fast thinking in education, has been exacerbated by the scripting of education: lesson plans are timed and learning outcomes must be specified for each lesson period. Learning outcomes speed up the teaching process as, once specified, they are expected to be met. This can lead to an emphasis on attaining the outcomes and 'fitting it all in' before each round of assessment. Increased assessment points intensify teacher activity and put a stronger focus on end product achievement. As more assessment activity is squeezed in, other activities are squeezed out leaving a diminished model of education which leaves little time to focus on functions other than that of qualification. The premium which is placed on speed has led to students seeking a 'fast track' to qualification which eliminates the need for creative thinking. This in turn has led to the emergence of 'playing it safe' (as discussed above) and a trend towards students wishing to be 'told what to do' in order to achieve the most expedient result in terms of qualification. Effectively, the first and second layers of the palimpsest combine to obscure the picture of good education in favour of one which is instrumental in nature. Removal of the first layer will better facilitate removal of the second as it will weaken the stranglehold of time which confines educational activity. Slow time enables slow thinking which will enable original thought in students rather than the 'received ideas' alluded to by Bourdieu (1998) and discussed in Chapter 5. A return to slow time would enable the neglected functions of socialisation and individuation (Biesta, 2009b) to reclaim their place alongside qualification in the model of good education which would, in turn encourage students to think beyond self-interest and to think critically with, and about, others.

Having time to think in collaboration with others not only promotes critical reflection but also has the potential to weaken the desire for instant gratification which accompanies self-interest and which fosters a culture of entitlement. The emergence of this culture of entitlement brings us to the third layer of the palimpsest: the rise of entitled attitudes and an accompanying demise of the student-teacher relationship which has traditionally fostered good education.

The third layer of the palimpsest has developed as a result of the two layers described above: scripting and time. An emphasis on end product achievement and the desire to effect it as expediently as possible has reduced education to a consumer good. In turn this has affected the character of the student-teacher relationship which is being steadily replaced by a supplier-consumer relationship, a trend consolidated by the language of learning 'delivery'. The teacher, in their role as supplier, is held increasingly accountable for student achievement, while the role and accountability of the student are less well defined. A decline in the reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship is a result of the narrow conception of education and the emphasis on qualification as an end product to be 'consumed' rather than worked for.

The third layer of the palimpsest is strengthened by the existence of the first two layers: however, the removal of the first two layers would have the potential to weaken the third layer and make it easier to remove. The re-emergence of the socialisation and individuation functions would follow the removal of the first two layers encouraging an educational vision which extends beyond student self-interest and which promotes collaboration with others. This collaboration enables the reinstatement and reinforcement of human bonds and the potential to rediscover the reciprocity, not only in relationships with fellow students, but also in the teacher-student relationship. To remove the focus on the self-interested individual is to remove the potential for entitled attitudes to develop. It follows, therefore, that the removal of all three layers of the palimpsest allows for a redefinition of roles, responsibilities and relationships, facilitated by a reinstatement of balance in the three functions of good education.

Finding a balance in the three functions of education – qualification, socialisation and individuation – prevents educational endeavour from remaining in one of the three

extremes (Biesta, 2009b). Echoing the comments of Bauman (2000) who writes about the good society, Biesta argues that the question of goodness is one which should be deliberated in all collective human endeavour; education does not stand alone, it is part of a bigger picture and it is through raising critical questions about what constitutes good education which can help shape the good society of the future:

Good education should at least enable and empower everyone to engage in such crucial deliberations about the shape, form and direction of our collective endeavours. (Biesta, 2009b, p.10)

Biesta's reference to the need to raise critical questions echoes Bauman's call for a revisiting of critical theory. To consider possibilities is to acknowledge that there is an alternative to the status quo:

Doing sociology and writing sociology is aimed at disclosing the possibility of living together differently, with less misery or no misery: the possibility daily withheld, overlooked or unbelieved. Not seeing, not seeking and thereby suppressing this possibility is itself part of human misery and a major factor in its perpetuation. (Bauman, 2000, p.215)

The raising of questions allows for the consideration of possibilities; when considering the future of good education the questions are as important as the answers for they allow the collective engagement of individuals with a common cause: good education which can lead to a good society. A first step on this road is to strip away the layers of the education palimpsest formed by the washes of liquid modernity and to expose the picture of good education which lies hidden beneath. Some first steps towards achieving this are suggested below.

### Delaying the palimpsest of modern education

- 1 Removing the language of 'liquid' education and rediscovering the language of 'good' education

This is, perhaps, the most important first step in delaying the palimpsest, as collective engagement of individuals requires collaborative discussion around shared issues and concerns, which means that an appropriate language, through which to debate these issues, must be found. This study has highlighted the importance of

language in shaping the way we think about education and the way in which the lexicon which we adopt can distort our conceptions. The importance of language is perhaps best summarised in this quote from Fielding (2003, p.293):

Language matters; it matters because in naming it celebrates and excludes, not just in the words it uses, but in the conceptual networks that give meaning to our wider activities and aspirations.

This study has illustrated how the language of delivery, the language of consumerism, the language of learning and skills talk have combined to strengthen the palimpsest of modern education. To begin the delayering process of the palimpsest an appropriate vocabulary must be adopted which allows for an alternative conception of education. The following paragraphs suggest ways in which such a vocabulary might be achieved: it is by no means an exhaustive list of suggestions but it serves as a starting point in developing a suitable vocabulary to advance the discussion around the rediscovery of good education.

In order to reinstate the educative relationship between teacher and learner and to recast the learner as an active participant (rather than a passive consumer) of education, it is necessary to adopt appropriate terms which denote both role and responsibility. The learner needs to be recast as student: one who studies. The teacher needs to have their responsibility for teaching defined as such, for they cannot be held responsible for learning:

Despite the many teaching and learning strategies that are being developed in schools, colleges and universities, and despite the fact that many of such institutions make individuals responsible for 'teaching and learning,' it is only teaching – and related aspects such as curriculum and assessment – that can be the object of a strategy and thus can be the responsibility of individuals whose task it is to take care of what, with a simple word, we might perhaps best refer to as 'education.' (Biesta, 2009b, p.5)

It is not only the term 'learner' which fails to accurately define the student role but when colleges refer to students as 'customers' it serves only to strengthen the notion that they consume rather than produce education, and if the reciprocity of the teacher-student relationship is to be rediscovered then this customer service language must be eradicated. Indeed, it can be argued that students are at college

to work and so might even be referred to as 'workers' which is how the progressive Dutch educator Kees Boeke referred to students in his school (Biesta, 2009b).

Another term which should be eradicated from the new lexicon of education is 'delivery': teachers do not deliver, in the manner of a parcel being delivered to a recipient, which is a one-way process. Rather, they teach, guide and respond to students who are expected to study, ask questions and share in the production of knowledge, which is a two-way process. The word 'delivery' should be eradicated from the vocabulary of education if the two-way educative process is to be fully realised.

The term education and training is often associated with the further education sector but to refer to 'education and training' as if they were separate entities serves only to consolidate the divide which persists between the academic and the vocational. The word 'training' is associated with the acquisition of skills and competence-based learning and its separation from the term 'education' serves only to underline the assumption that training does not require the same levels of knowledge and understanding as education. Training without education is an impoverished model which fails to acknowledge the wider dimensions of working life and the enrichment which can result from a consideration of how these skills may best be applied in society: for example, this study has evidenced a paucity of meaningful careers education to contextualise vocational courses and to guide students in identifying and pursuing their personal goals. For these reasons it is suggested that the word training should also be eradicated from discussions with the word 'education' being re-appropriated as an all-encompassing term to describe the activities of the further education sector. The skills talk which is associated with the term 'training' is laden with rhetoric, for example the reference to 'world class skills' alluded to in the title of the Leitch report (2006). The suggestion that we must accrue such skills to stay ahead in the global race serves only to intensify the competitive culture which dominates education and it is to this culture that the next set of suggestions refer.

## 2 Removing competition and reinstating 'real' improvement

For collective and collaborative action to be possible, a culture of trust and co-operation between teaching professionals is essential. Such trust and co-operation has been largely undermined by liquid modernity's wash of individuality. Teachers have been persuaded that they must assume individual responsibility for their students' results and the predominance of performance targets has pitted teacher against teacher, department against department and college against college in a vicious spiral of competition. Whilst teachers are effectively in competition with each other, there can be little opportunity for collaborative working; and while job security and employment prospects are dependent on student results, competition will be allowed to thrive. Synopticon-style controls such as peer lesson observations, Ofsted inspection and student voice feedback place teachers under regular surveillance which can invoke a culture of fear which in turn creates barriers to trust. The removal of such intense levels of competition and attendant fear is necessary if the power of human agency is to be realised. Such removal could be achieved through internal and external measures. Externally, the remit of Ofsted needs to shift from a focus of inspection to one of collaboration where members of Ofsted are not defined by an inspection role but, rather, a supportive role. This may go some way to relieving pressure on colleges, their staff and trainee teachers to achieve the coveted grade of 'outstanding' and, rather, achieve the characteristics of outstanding provision through positive working practices and relationships.

Internally, the relief placed on colleges by a shift in Ofsted role may also help to relieve the pressure placed on staff to be held individually accountable for student results. However, it is also necessary for college management teams to acknowledge that the drilling down of accountability regimes and performance targets places an emphasis on student grade acquisition which in turn leads teachers and students to adopt 'play safe' approaches to teaching and assessment which create a barrier to good education. The removal of performance targets would be a starting point in dismantling this particular barrier.

The improvement agenda has led to the adoption of terms such as 'best practice' which is, at best ill-defined and at worst, has led to the expectation that teaching



approaches and resources should be continually reviewed and renewed. The emphasis on student engagement which has led to an expectation by some that education be entertaining has devalued education and demands serious discussion amongst teaching professionals in colleges about the very nature and purpose of education and the action which is necessary to reinstate it. As Fielding (2003, p.294) observes:

The academic community has a major responsibility to engage not just in skirmishes about favoured or maligned approaches and topics but in looking hard at the fundamental models, not just of change, but of how we understand our human being and becoming.

The notion that a model of best practice can be achieved which is universal to all is an extension of the scripting which constrains teacher autonomy and it is to the removal of such scripting that the following suggestions refer.

### 3 The removal of scripting and the rediscovery of improvisation

A focus on the attainment of standards has led to a general standardisation of delivery and assessment in the classroom. Despite the claim from government that detailed lesson plans are not expected for every lesson (Department for Education, 2011b, unpagged), a reliance on the template lesson plan persists in colleges and is usually requested by Ofsted inspectors when they observe individual lessons. The cultures of accountability and fear, alluded to previously, further compound the problem in that teachers become fearful of deviating from the use of lesson plans as this might risk being awarded a lower grade in observations. Teacher freedom has been curtailed for so long that the art of improvisation has declined and the lesson plan has become a straitjacket rather than a support. In order to remove scripting and rediscover improvisation teachers must rediscover their lost confidence in diverting from the script, but the reinstatement of such confidence will only be achieved when fear is removed. The removal of scripting is closely linked to the recommendations above relating to language and improvement: by changing the language we use, we change the script; by removing the cultures of competition and fear, we encourage improvisation.

There will always be limits to how far a teacher can improvise whilst meeting the constraints of external assessment. However, it is education which should drive assessment and our current education system sees the opposite happening: the focus on assessment criteria is shaping teacher and student activity to the point that it delimits the wider functions of education rather than delimiting only the qualification function. Whether pursuing vocational or academic courses students should be able to contextualise their studies in a broader educative framework, one which aspires to the wider vision of learning alluded to by Pring (2010).

In order to remove scripting and the culture of performativity, action is needed at both national and local levels: at national level, changes to government policy and inspection frameworks can remove the culture of fear which discourages deviation from the script, but in order to effect such changes, the teaching profession at a local level must unite and lobby for such a change. However, in order for them to unite, the effects of individuality must be resisted, and resistance at an individual level demands a self-awareness not only of the teacher they want to be, but also of the teacher they do not want to be:

It is then that he or she can begin to take an active role in their own self-definition as a 'teaching subject', to think in terms of what they do not want to be, and do not want to *become*, or, in another words, begin to *care for themselves*. Such care also rests upon and is realised through practices, practices of critique, vigilance, reflexivity, and of writing. (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p.86)

It is through critique and vigilance, as referred to by Ball and Olmedo, that teachers can resist the 'common sense' that performative practices are logical and acceptable to all. However, this may not be a comfortable process for it demands that teachers confront their own role in the reproduction of such practices and reconsider what it means to be a teacher and to be educated (Ball and Olmedo, 2013).

In the postscript which follows this chapter a personal example is given of how the process of critique and reflexivity has raised self-awareness of these issues and how they need to be confronted by all educators in order to resist their reproduction.

## **Postscript**

As I reflect on this research study, I am reminded of the following comment by Stuart, discussed in Chapter 4:

As arts educators we are being drawn inextricably into acting as collaborators in the creation of the very society that we aim to critique. This creates huge tension between personal creed and values and the expectations placed on teachers.

This observation applies not only to arts educators but also to any educator who is committed to a vision of education which extends beyond the qualification function. As a teacher educator, Stuart's comment resonated strongly with me: during the research period, I frequently felt complicit in perpetuating a teacher education system in which I had diminishing faith. The pressures of scripting and time which affect teachers and trainees also affect teacher educators, and it is easy to find oneself swept along by the fluid forces discussed in Chapter 7. During the course of the research, the demands of meeting the Ofsted standards for Initial Teacher Training, the LLUK Professional Standards for teachers and internal University quality systems also 'scripted' me as a teacher educator and I felt myself caught between the competing imperatives alluded to by Hargreaves (2003) and discussed in Chapter 4.

The PGCE course on which I was a tutor was composed of academic Masters level elements together with practical elements which were focused on classroom practice. The former elements allowed for an exploration of theoretical educational frameworks and their application to a wide range of subject curricula. The latter elements allowed for consideration of how the theoretical elements may best be translated into classroom practice. University sessions provided critical space and time (albeit limited) to explore the possibilities of providing good education for students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The data presented in the preceding chapters evidence the vision of education shared by many trainees: one which is transformative in nature. This was often expressed by trainees in the phrase: 'We want to make a difference...' Although this may read as something of a cliché, I prefer to think of the phrase as translating the values of transformative education into the vernacular. The sentiment of 'making a difference' was a genuine motivation for trainees, as it is for many teachers. As a teacher educator, I had the same vision: to share with the

teachers of tomorrow the possibilities of education beyond the narrow and instrumental function of qualification. However, my autonomy to achieve this was severely restricted by the scripting of my role by external demands and I soon found myself caught in a professional dilemma, one where I was caught between the competing interests of keeping a balanced model of education alive while acknowledging the reality of the instrumental demands which are made on trainee teachers.

Scripting demanded that when observing lessons, I needed to acknowledge and respect the lesson plan formats provided by placement colleges with their requisite specification of learning outcomes and closely timed lesson formats. I needed to advise trainees on the completion of these documents and on the standardised expectation of lesson formats. At the end of each observation I had to grade the lesson, aware as I was that this was a mere snapshot of the trainee's practice. As Stuart commented in Chapter 5:

These constraints put an enormous amount of pressure on the trainee and make for an unrealistic almost theatrical classroom situation in which the teacher performs for the observer.

I was conscious that trainees needed to be prepared for these realities, but at the same time, I aimed to keep alive the transformative vision of education which they had brought to the start of their PGCE year and this was achieved through class discussion and debate as well as encouraging trainees to reflect critically on their classroom experiences.

In addition to the tension I felt in perpetuating the constraints of scripting I was also conscious that I was perpetuating the constraints of time: the PGCE year is an intensive one, and the programme deadlines which constrained me had to be passed on to trainees. Many struggled to juggle the demands of essay deadlines, lesson planning, student assessment and observation schedules. Whilst acknowledging the pressure which this placed on trainees, I had no choice but to build the schedules around the external and internal demands placed on me as a teacher educator. In Stuart's quote above he refers to being 'drawn inextricably into acting as collaborators' with systems in which we might have little faith: the process of being 'drawn in' results in what might be termed an involuntary complicity. This

involuntary complicity reinforces the conditions of liquid modernity which allow the hierarchical and hegemonic forces in education to thrive. The time pressures experienced by teachers leave little opportunity to critically question this involuntary complicity and this strengthens its capacity to perpetuate the hegemonic forces which fetter teacher freedom whilst also limiting the human agency to contest it.

The hierarchical system of accountability and responsibility in education means that each level of the hierarchy reproduces and reinforces systems through degrees of compliance (discussed in Chapter 2). However, while compliance is a conscious act, involuntary complicity is not, and awareness of it only surfaces through a process of critique and vigilance, as alluded to in the last chapter. This can create discomfort and inner struggle:

These are struggles that surface when the teacher begins to question the necessity of, and think about the revocability of, his or her own situation. (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p.86)

I am only too aware that I, as a teacher educator, was inextricably and involuntarily complicit in the reproduction of the very systems which I sought to question and critique, and this involuntary complicity led to considerable tension between my personal values and my professional role. It was clear from my conversations with trainees and colleagues that I was not alone in experiencing this tension; yet individuality, the key element of liquid modernity discussed in Chapter 7, was translating it from a collective to an individual concern. However, Ball and Olmedo's reference to 'revocability' in the quote above is an encouraging one, and leads me to believe that involuntary complicity can be reversed by harnessing the collective intelligence which was alluded to in the last chapter and which has the potential to find shared solutions to shared problems. Not only can teachers encourage collective intelligence in their own students, but teacher educators can encourage it in their trainees and amongst themselves through critical dialogue. University teacher training courses afford a critical space in which trainees, from the start of their careers, can debate professional issues. However, the revocation of the statutory obligation to obtain particular teaching qualifications in the FE sector (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) has resulted in the collapse of many University courses and the risk of a subsequent collapse in critical debating space. This makes it even more crucial that alternative spaces are discovered for

debate to continue and for individuals to find others who share their concerns and who wish to engage in such debate: 'These others might not be available in the staffroom but they may be within everyday social relations, union meetings or on social media sites' (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p.94).

As I conclude this postscript, I am reminded of Alan who, at interview, chose to stay true to his convictions of what constituted good education and resisted the expectation to engage in template education (Chapter 4). His convictions cost him the job, but I would hope that through the harnessing of human agency and collective intelligence, a time may come when such resistance to prescriptive constraints will be celebrated rather than condemned.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Table of research subjects

Appendix 2 – Examples of data from trainee reflective logs

Appendix 3 – The use of field notes

Appendix 4 – Lesson plan template extracts

Appendix 5 - Job application form extracts



## **Appendix 1**

### **Table of research subjects**

Key to sources of data: R – reflective log; C – class discussion; T – tutorial; O – lesson observation

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>PGCE Cohort year</b>	<b>Subject cluster group</b>	<b>Data from PGCE year</b>	<b>Data from NQT year</b>
Aaron	09-10	Sciences	C, T	R
Aisha	09-10	Humanities	R, O	
Alan	09-10	Creative Arts	R, C	
Angela	10-11	Social studies	R, C	
Ann	10-11	Performing Arts	R	
Caroline	10-11	Humanities	R, T	
Charlotte	09-10	Creative Arts	R, C	
Craig	09-10	Creative Arts	R, C	
Elizabeth	10-11	Business related	R, C	R
Fran	09-10	Creative Arts	R, T	R
George	10-11	Performing Arts	R	
John	10-11	Business related	R, T, C	
Karen	10-11	Performing Arts	R	
Keira	09-10	Humanities	R, C	
Maria	10-11	Social Studies	R, C	
Robert	09-10	Creative Arts	R	
Sam	10-11	Sciences	R	
Sara	10-11	Sciences	R, O	
Stuart	09-10	Performing Arts	R, C	R
Tom	09-10	Humanities	R, C, T, O	R

## **Appendix 2**

### Examples of data from trainee reflective logs

#### Example 1 - Elizabeth

##### Reflection – NQT year

My first full year of teaching came with the normal 'added extras' of any teaching posts – time consuming planning and preparation along with the need for effective classroom management techniques. The surprise however came in the form of a somewhat 'dry' vocational curriculum which despite various attempts to adapt still seemed to lack something – much of the course can allow the students to follow 'rote learning' strategies obtaining information from a ready-made handbook. As tutors, to combat this, we gave research tasks for the learners to relate theory they had learned to a company/organisation of their choice and gave the opportunity to listen to guest speakers etc. What would be more beneficial is a revamp of the curriculum – a fresh approach where students can learn at college whilst experiencing work experience with a company alongside their studies – putting learning into practice.

The structure of the vocational curriculum and assessment based work added extra pressure to an already overloaded working staff – for example if teaching three groups of vocational students (20 learners in each approx) – 60 assignments may be needed to be marked in any one session (despite attempts to stagger hand in dates). From work handed in perhaps a third were passed whilst the remainder were returned for additional works to be completed to get to the designated 'pass' stage. Continued 'scaffolding' (support) was provided for learners with some having three/four attempts to achieve a suitable pass standard.

From a new teacher's perspective the 'turn around' times for marking were tight but manageable (if for a part-time teacher like myself you worked on your supposed 'days off') but being an hourly paid contractual worker the amount of extra time needed to cope with my marking resulted in the actual hourly pay received being halved – when you calculated the time spent during time away from the workplace. I feel this reached an unacceptable level and greatly encroached on family time both during the week and also at the weekend.

The amount of assignments to hand in by learners further added to the pressure for both teachers and learners alike – with students having to do a 'last minute rush' to complete on time which I feel resulted in a lower standard of work being handed in - this obviously not fitting with the organisation's desire for 'higher results'. On several occasions I referred what I believed was substandard work and was asked to 'relook at the work' to see if there was any way it could be 'squeezed through'. I felt that I was being asked to lower my working standards – which I will not compromise on.

Lack of firm structure and consistency regarding discipline for those handing in assignments late or those with poor attendance allowed some students to be treated differently with many being given a seemingly never ending number of chances. Those students who worked within the set guidelines felt increasingly penalised for working well and 'towing the line', many becoming resentful and questioning what the incentive was to work hard whilst the continual 'slackers' were given better treatment. This was something I felt particularly strongly about: many existing staff

admitted that this too troubled them and they felt 'worn down' by the added pressures placed upon them.

This being said, there are many aspects of the first year which made me realise why I chose to go into the teaching profession. The less able students who were struggling when I arrived seemed to respond to a new style and approach of teaching – several successfully completing the year and bringing their work levels to a much higher standard. The more able students were pushed to achieve more and soon were able to enjoy conducting extra research which further enhanced their writing and spurred them on to aim for higher education – this was greatly satisfying.

From a personal stance I feel frustrated with many aspects of FE. How this will improve waits to be seen – however for myself at this present time, a decision has been made to continue with my teaching opportunities/experience within HE and utilise my PGCE and teaching skills within the corporate training world.

## Example 2 - Stuart

### **Education and social engineering**

**15<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

After reading Thompson's (2009) article about the new White Paper in this week's TES, I began to think about the role of education as a tool for social engineering. This goes right to the heart of my concerns with the philosophy of education, and how education functions in our culture. The reference in the article to the ambition to create a new 'technician class' demonstrates not only the government's recognition of the continuance of a class system in this country, but also its desire to perpetuate and control that system.

There are undoubtedly benefits that will come from the goals set out in the White Paper: the improvement of skills and opportunity for higher levels of education are key to improving individuals' quality of life and the health of our society in general. However, I believe the government's motives are more instrumentalist than they first appear. In setting these and other targets, the government are attempting to shape or reconstruct society to their 'ideal' model (primarily driven by economics) – in other words, to control people. This goes against my liberal ethics. The implementation of these targets is not necessarily in the best interest of the individuals concerned, but in the best interest of the government's model, which the individual must 'buy into' in order to survive.

The purpose of education becomes distorted from individual achievement, improvement and competence with a view to self-reliance and self-determination, to social conformity and class categorisation with the intention of instilling compliance and enforcing the dominant hegemony.

Reflecting on government action over the past few years has made me realise how at odds my own views are with current policy. This kind of tension could potentially create problems for me when I go into the workplace, as I will be expected to uphold government policy and initiatives on a daily basis. I believe that 'approved' educational practice is becoming increasingly inflexible and restrictive, with many teachers propagating systems and strategies in which they do not have faith. It seems ironic that with the 'free educational market' come increasingly narrow guidelines under which that market can operate. In fact that 'free market' is nothing of the sort, but a homogenisation of education which fits the government's final 'utopia'.

I will speak with teachers and lecturers who hold similar views at my placement college to discover how others cope with this dissonance between their own credos and the rules and regulations they must follow.

### **Reference**

Thompson, A (2009) *Skills white paper sets out new era for training*, TES [online] available <<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6027587>> [accessed: 15 November 2009]

### **Appendix 3**

#### **The use of field notes**

The serendipitous nature of the research study meant that I needed to be prepared to make notes of any exchanges with students which might prove significant to the study. Field notes were kept in order to record such exchanges and I have described below how these were developed in relation to an extract from Chapter 6:

In the spring term trainees began to apply for jobs and a University session was dedicated to the application and interview process. During this session I had encouraged trainees to seek advice from me if they had any queries whilst preparing their own job applications. I later received an email from a trainee in which she stated that she was confused by a section on a college application form and was unsure how to complete it. I asked the trainee to show it to me just before the start of the next University teaching session, which she did. The section causing confusion asked applicants to list their students' results and to include details about the teaching subject, group size and value added information as well as the grades achieved.

This was the first time that I had encountered a request for such information on a teaching application form and my initial reaction was one of bewilderment. My first priority was to decide how to advise the trainee and I consulted colleagues, but they too expressed surprise at this request. I also had to consider the 'ownership' of the results: the trainee teacher was sharing classes with the regular class teacher and had no student results which she could claim to be 'her own'. Following further consultation with placement and University colleagues the trainee was advised on the best course of action. As a tutor I now needed to consider how widespread this request might be and advise other trainees who might find themselves in a similar situation, but as a researcher I was alert to the significance of this finding as it I felt it had implications in terms of teacher accountability, issues of ownership, job prospects and competition, all of which were emerging themes in other research data. I made notes about my concerns and then, during a teaching session, after advising trainees about the action to take if they encountered this request, a discussion ensued in which trainees raised their own concerns, which I noted down. Their initial concern related to job prospects but as the discussion developed they expressed concern about how fair it was to judge teacher performance by student results alone.

After the teaching session I typed up the notes made about my own concerns and found that these were mirrored by the concerns raised by trainees. I asked trainees to inform me if they encountered this request on other college application forms and other examples were found (see Appendix 5). Although the practice was not common to all colleges, the fact that it was being made at all was a significant finding

and my subsequent notes were typed into the summary provided in Chapter 6 and repeated below:

The focus of the discussion was prompted by a trainee who was applying for a first post at a local FE college. She was confused by a section on the application form and she brought it into the University for advice on its completion. The section required applicants to list their students' results, for both examination and coursework based programmes of study. Applicants were required to list not only overall success rates but results by grade. Trainee teachers applying for jobs expressed confusion and concern about this. They felt at a distinct disadvantage as trainee teachers because they had no student results which they could claim as their own, placement classes being shared with an experienced member of staff. Trainees felt that as NQTs they would be at a disadvantage when applying to colleges which required this information as it was felt that colleges would be likely to favour candidates who could evidence a track record of success with students. As the discussion developed trainees raised other concerns: this requirement clearly placed an emphasis on student achievement and inferred that the results would be interpreted as an indicator of whether or not the candidate was a good teacher. It was felt that this measure ignored all other factors which may have impacted on student results – particularly student effort. Essentially it was felt by trainees that they would be judged by their students' achievements rather than their own. This raised an important question relating to the responsibilities of teachers and students – just how far is a teacher responsible for the results which their students attain? (Field notes, March 2011)

Appendix 4 – Two examples of lesson plan templates

Appendix 5 – Two extracts from job application forms

# **SESSION PLAN**

Course / Programme		Lecturer: _____ Student teacher: _____		
Scheme of Work Reference (Session/week number) and subject Week				
No Students	Date	Venue	Time	Level
(Key information about the class)				
Aim(s) for the lesson				
Objectives (ie students will / will be able to)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>				
Differentiation of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy / including challenge for the more able.				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>				



### Session Plan

Course:	Date:	Time:	(Tutor)			
Group:	Every Person Matters					Sheet 1 of 4
Venue:	Be healthy	Stay Safe	<u>Enjoy &amp; achieve</u>	<u>Make a positive contribution</u>	<u>Achieve economic wellbeing</u>	Room:
Assumed prior knowledge:						
<p>Objectives: At the end of the session students must be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> <li>6.</li> </ol>						
Essential Skills Opportunities:						

## STUDENT EXAMINATIONS RESULTS

YEAR	LEVEL/ SYLLABUS	GROUP SIZE	GRADES ACHIEVED							Comments on general ability of the group/value added information
			A <small>Distinction</small>	B <small>Merit</small>	C <small>Pass</small>	D	E	F	U <small>Fail</small>	

## REFEREES

*Please provide details of 2 people we may approach for references, one of whom should be your most recent employer. If you are in, or have just completed full time education, one reference should be from your school/college/university. We cannot accept references from family members and may take additional references in respect of previous employers from those provided without notification to you.*

1. Title:            Name:

2. Title:            Name:

Occupation:

Occupation:

Address:

Address:

Postcode:

Postcode:

Telephone No:

Telephone No:

Email Address:

Email Address:

*Please indicate that you are happy for us to approach your referees prior to interview, should you be shortlisted.*

Yes:

No:

Yes:

No:

**FOR TEACHING POSTS ONLY**

Year	Level / Syllabus	Group Size						Comments on general ability of the group / value added information
			A / Distinction	B / Merit	C / Pass	D	E	

**FOR NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS – Please attach a copy of the report from your teaching placement.**

**I certify that the information contained in this form is a correct record and understand that falsification of any details would lead to my application /appointment being revoked. I give my permission to any information contained herein, together with supplementary documentation provided by me as part of my application, being processed in accordance with the data protection regulations currently in force.**

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....