'They just want to confuse you':
Negotiating trust and distrust in adult basic education

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It is in the very nature of adult literacy and numeracy education that most students will have had negative experiences of education in the past. Reasons for failing to achieve the required qualifications in literacy or mathematics while at school can include disaffection as teenagers, unrecognised learning difficulties, or poor teaching in school, so it is perhaps unsurprising that many such students perceive themselves to have been badly served by educational systems in the past.

By contrast, the discourses of adult educators have traditionally been humanist and transformative, with an emphasis on entitlement, dialogue and trust. The stated aims have been to redress earlier disadvantage, to include the excluded and to empower the disempowered (Freire 1972; Benn 1997; Hamilton and Hillier 2006). However, these are discourses of educators, not of students themselves.

This chapter examines adult numeracy students' trust, both within the local classroom environment and in wider educational structures, through analysis of the students' own spoken discourse as they engage with pedagogic texts; texts which include curriculum-driven learning materials and examination papers, and thus reflect the structuring discourses of policy and the traditions of academic mathematics.

The findings are taken from a study which aimed to learn more about the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of adult numeracy students in two classrooms in England, and how these are expressed and shared in their classroom discussions (Oughton 2012). Expressions of trust and distrust were among several themes which emerged inductively from analysis of audio-recordings of classroom interaction.

An analytical framework is proposed for examining the expression of trust through discourse, and extracts from classroom discussion are presented to illustrate how

participating students expressed trust or distrust through their engagement with each other and with pedagogic texts. The teacher's mediation of these texts is also analysed, to examine the relationship between local trust within the classroom, and apparent mistrust in wider structures.

Background

Trust as a mutual commitment to shared practices and endeavours

Definitions of trust in scholarly accounts vary widely, as may be seen from the variety of perspectives presented in this volume (for example, Kuśmierczyk; Elsey et al; Jackson). 'Trust' can variously refer to: a cognitive belief (for example, that a third party is telling the truth, or will fulfil a promise or contractual obligation); a behaviour (acting on those beliefs); or an affective state of mental calmness and well-being. Other conceptualisations conflate trust with 'faith', referring to risks for which the trustor believes that the outcome will be positive. Another frequently conflated concept is 'confidence' – a belief in the ability (rather than the willingness) of another to serve the trustor's interests. Fuller debates on conceptions and misconceptions of trust can be found in Luhmann (1979); Kramer (1999); Hardin (2004); Stoneman (2008); and Bamberger (2010).

However, Watson (2009:476) warns against overly narrow conceptualisations of trust, suggesting that such definitions overlook the constitutive role of trust as a 'tacit and necessary precondition' in the production of social order, as proposed by Garfinkel (1963:193):

> To say that one person 'trusts' another means that the person seeks to act in such a fashion as to produce through his action or to respect as conditions of play actual events that accord with normative orders of events depicted in the basic rules of play.

Garfinkel's claims regarding trust as a necessary condition for mutually understood social action are illustrated through his 'breaching experiments', which demonstrated that interactions which undermined supposedly reciprocal assumptions resulted in the subjects experiencing bewilderment, anger, and attempts to normalise or rationalise the aberrant behaviour as a joke, as incompetence, or as deliberate attempts to disrupt. Thus, according to Watson (2009: 483), trust can be seen as:

> a normal condition that informs parties' entry into any given interaction. It constitutes part of anyone's basic understandings of the local order of that interaction and involves the presumption that the other parties will orientate themselves to the interaction in similar, interchangeable ways.

Rawls (2008:712) emphasises the tacit nature of trust within Garfinkel's conceptualisation, and points out that trust only becomes problematic when called into question.

> Every action assumes (trusts) that the ordinary properties of objects (defined by constitutive practices) are as they are expected to be. One assumes that tables are solid and that bottles are labeled properly — until something goes wrong. Then every assumption is open to inspection.

Trust is regarded as a key component of social capital, the networks of shared norms and interests between individuals and communities which facilitate cooperation (Putnam 2000). High levels of trust are generally conceptualised as beneficial, and it is argued that without trust, social and financial exchange would be impracticably time-consuming (for example, Fukuyama 1996).

Trust in the context of this study, then, may be taken to be a reciprocal commitment to, and expectation of, mutually-understood practices and intentions, which forms a necessary basis for purposeful and ordered endeavour in the classroom.

Discourses of 'trust' in adult numeracy and literacy education

The role of trust in underpinning activity in adult literacy and numeracy classrooms, and the work of teachers in building and maintaining mutual trust between students and teacher, has been a key theme emerging from ethnographic classroom studies (for example, Benseman *et al* 2005; Balatti *et al* 2006; Baxter *et al* 2006). Ivanič *et al* (2006:38) describe how:

> Teachers paid a great deal of attention to establishing, sustaining and supporting relationships of warmth and trust in the classroom, and learners appeared to be relaxed and happy and enjoying class ... The building of such relationships depended to a large extent on respect and trust between learners and teachers, the teacher's commitment and professionalism, and the teacher's authenticity of response as a person.

Increased levels of trust are also regarded as one of the social capital outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy education (Tett and Maclachlan 2007; Tett *et al* 2006), and trust is seen to contribute to students' personal development in such classrooms. Tett and Crowther (2009: 692) reflect trust as a pre-condition for shared practices and endeavours, suggesting that adults' perceptions of themselves as competent learners depend on the provision of:

> an environment in which students can thrive through a pedagogical approach that places participants' own goals at the centre of the learning activities and creates a supportive atmosphere where they were treated with respect within relationships of trust.

However, studies of trust in wider educational structures – especially those between policy and teachers – suggest a more problematic relationship. For the last decade, adult numeracy and literacy education in England has been driven by strongly structuring and regulating policy discourses (DfES 2001; BIS 2011). Teaching is prescribed by a core curriculum and funding is dependent on students' successful achievement of nationally-recognised qualifications, with teachers reporting that the majority of classroom activity revolves around preparation for these examinations (Cara *et al* 2008; Rhys Warner and Vorhaus 2008). Teachers report decreased autonomy since the introduction of the new policies in 2001, and a greater emphasis on accountability and targets (Gregson *et al* 2005; Coffield *et al* 2007; Tusting 2009). It has been argued that the increase in regulation reflects a distrust of teachers by policy, for example, by Carpentieri (2008:28):

> under this way of thinking, teachers and other public sector workers could not only not be trusted to do what was best for their 'users', they could not necessarily be trusted to even know what was best.

Conversely, it is also claimed that over-regulation can unintentionally lead to a reduction in teachers' own trust in policy (Ecclestone 1999; Cara *et al* 2008).

In this chapter, I have taken students' engagement with pedagogic texts as reflecting their trust in wider educational structures. The influence of mathematical and pedagogic texts on students' beliefs and attitudes is explored, for example, by Dowling (1998), and is also noted by Ivanič and Tseng (2005:13), who describe how:

> Beliefs can enter the classroom indirectly by being inscribed in the syllabuses, curriculum documents and learning/teaching resources that are used there. In this way, policymakers, commercial publishers and practitioners devising teaching materials shape classroom pedagogy and learning outcomes.

Distrust in educational structures by adult learners is not always regarded as problematic, but as characteristic of healthy scepticism. For example, the Brazilian educational reformer Paulo Freire (1972) deplored what he regarded as the 'banking' style of education, in which approved knowledge is 'deposited' in the learner. He suggests that an unquestioning acceptance of this knowledge is a result of 'domestication'. In a more specific study of how measurement is taught in adult numeracy classrooms, Baxter *et al* (2006:48) interpret distrust (of 'not-to-scale' diagrams) as a *positive* outcome of the student's growing competence in classroom numeracy:

> The skilful student will work out that the diagrams are not to scale, and will not trust them.

Few other studies of adult students' trust (or distrust) in educational structures are to be found. As Balatti *et al* (2006:39) point out, 'more needs to be known and documented about how trust and respect develops between students and teachers'.

Trust and distrust in classroom discourse: a framework for analysis

How might students (and teachers) express trust or distrust as they talk together in the classroom? It is helpful here to consider language as a system of choices for making meaning (Halliday 1985; Christie 2002), providing a framework for investigating the functions which speakers achieve through selecting from the linguistic repertoire available to them. Halliday identifies three metafunctions of language in use; the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The interpersonal metafunction is the 'participatory function of language' and is thus key to analysing trust in discourse. It allows the expression of attitudes and evaluations, and also of relationships between the speaker and the hearer or a third party (Halliday 1994:27).

If, then, trust is to be taken as the confident and reciprocal expectation that others will behave according to mutually understood rules of social behaviour and interaction, trust (or distrust) might be expressed through:

- The speakers' expressed understanding or tacit acceptance of the other's intentions, and the 'rules' by which the other is playing, for example: the meanings and purposes of classroom activities; the rules and expectations of behaviour in the classroom; or the rules and expectations of mathematics as a discipline.

- The speakers' attempts to normalise situations which appear unfamiliar or bewildering.

- The extent to which the speakers' express affiliation with, or alienation from, others within the classroom, or other actors within wider structures.

- The degree of confidence and expectation expressed through use of auxiliary verbs and other modalising expressions.

This analysis assumes that the speakers' expressions both reflect and constitute trust or distrust, and that the positioning of others as trustworthy or untrustworthy is negotiated between speakers. Thus the students not only express their own beliefs and perceptions, but also form, maintain and reinforce the beliefs and perceptions of their hearers.

Methodology

Adult numeracy students' naturally-occurring classroom discussions were audio-recorded as they worked together in small groups to solve mathematical problems with little input from the teacher. The audio-recordings provide a rich source of data for analysis, affording

privileged insights into the students' own experiences of learning, and revealing their spoken responses to written texts.

According to Rawls (2008), displays of trust only work if they are recognisable by others, and thus are open to ethnographic research. The approaches used in the study draw on linguistic ethnography, in which naturally-occurring interaction is recorded and analysed in order to learn about the social settings and structures where that talk takes place, and the ways these structures shape, and are shaped by, discourse (Rampton *et al* 2004).

The Teacher, the Students and their Classroom

The participating classes were chosen because of the teacher's existing commitment to collaborative learning tasks, which generated student discussion as data without requiring any intervention in normal classroom activity. The weekly classes took place in two adult community education centres in England, which offer free literacy and numeracy provision to any adults lacking prior qualifications in those subjects. The classes each comprised between eight and twelve students, aged between 20 and 55 years, most of whom were studying towards nationally-recognised qualifications in numeracy at Levels 1 and 2 (equivalent to the target levels for 14-16 year-olds in English secondary schools).

The aim was to record discussions which were as naturalistic as possible. No intervention was requested or made to the learning activities already planned by the teacher, and no activities were included, omitted or adapted for research purposes. Working in small groups, the students undertook a variety of mathematical learning activities, including worksheets, card activities and practice examination papers, during which they were encouraged to discuss mathematical ideas and solutions with each other. The students supported each other during these activities, calling on the teacher's help only as a last resort.

While I would resist the notion of a 'typical' classroom, wide experience as a teacher-educator in this sector leads me to suggest that the participating classes were not *un*typical except perhaps in their effective use of groupwork. Broader ethnographic accounts of similar classrooms may be found in Appleby and Barton (2008), Rhys Warner and Vorhaus (2008) and Cara *et al* (2008).

Data collection, coding and approaches to analysis

Participants were audio-recorded (with their informed consent) during their usual classroom activities. Mobile phones were used as audio-recording devices, and were left unobtrusively on the tables around which the students gathered for collaborative groupwork.   Since the students often placed their own mobile phones on table-tops during classes, they were a familiar classroom object and participants tended to ignore them.   Labov (1972) furthermore suggests that speakers' discourse becomes more natural when they are intensely engaged in the subject under discussion, as the students were in their mathematical problem-solving.   Students seemed quickly to forget that they were being recorded, and their talk appeared to become naturalistic within a few minutes of the start of each recording. The audio-recordings were then transcribed for analysis, using field-notes to enrich the transcription where relevant.

Eleven hours of recorded discussion were collected and transcribed, providing a rich source of data with potential for analysis from a variety of perspectives. An initial analysis was made using interpretive comments written in a column alongside the transcription (Wolcott 1994). This was used to draw up a set of codes to identify and categorise emerging themes. During an iterative process of listening again to recordings, and re-reading and revising transcripts, these codes were then added alongside the transcripts in a third column. Analysis was inductive, with the aim of finding out about students' experiences of adult numeracy classes, and particularly how they constructed those experiences in their discussions with each other. Expressions of trust and distrust appeared among several themes which emerged inductively from the data.

Findings from analysis of student discussion

As described above, expressions of trust and distrust were analysed within a framework which investigated: speakers' expressed understanding of the other's intentions, and the 'rules' by which the other is playing; speakers' attempts to normalise situations in which these rules appear to be breached or called into question; speakers' expressions of affiliation with, or alienation from others; and the degree of confidence and expectation expressed by the speakers.

Four emerging themes are discussed below and illustrated using extracts from the recordings, namely: trust within the classroom environment; students' apparent distrust of writers of pedagogic texts; the mediating role of the trusted teacher; and an isolated

instance when the usual hegemony between text producer and text consumer was breached.

Trust within classroom relations

In line with other ethnographic studies of adult literacy and numeracy classrooms, interaction *within* the classroom appeared to be characterised by mutual support and a commitment to shared endeavour. Students readily undertook and participated in the activities planned for them by the teacher even when the purpose was not immediately clear.

The teacher played a central role in establishing this environment of trust through the nature of her own discourse with the students. I have selected one extract to illustrate ways in which mutual trust between students and teacher was accomplished through discourse, but many others could have been chosen from the data.

Extract 1 demonstrates a number of small and immediate (but probably largely unconscious) discourse practices through which the teacher, Mary, expresses her trust in the students.   A group of students, including Hannah and Diane[1], have been working through a practice examination paper together. They have so far been largely unsupervised by the teacher, and she has returned to their table to review their progress.

Extract 1:

1.	Teacher:	How are you doing?
2.		What sort of number are you up to?
3.	Hannah:	Number 15
4.	Teacher:	15, right
5.		I was just wondering how far?
6.		Whether you want to stick at it all until you're finished
7.		And then mark it?
8.		Or whether you want to mark what you've done and then have a –
9.		I mean, you're not halfway through yet
10.		So if you give it a bit longer
11.		It's entirely up to you
12.		Whether you just want to keep going?
13.		(…) save a little bit of time to mark it
14.		Have you been agreeing as you've gone along, or have you got different?
15.	Diane:	Yeah
16.		We did eventually
17.	Teacher:	Right, oh right
18.	Hannah:	There's just one answer where we all got different
19.	Teacher:	Would it help it I just double-checked?

This extract exemplifies the way in which the maintenance and demonstration of trust was a continuous process for the teacher, Mary, and was embedded in her classroom behaviour and interactions. By demonstrating her trust in the students' ability and willingness to judge their own progress, Mary elicits the students' trust in her.   On this occasion, when joining the group working at the table together, she begins by using modalising expressions such as 'sort of' (line 2) and 'just wondering' (line 5) to reassure the students at an early stage that her intention is not to 'check up' on them, but tentatively to offer support if needed. Although her questions are often not complete, she uses a rising intonation to invite a response from the students. Her repairs in lines 6, 9 and 13 suggest that she is anxious not to sound too didactic. In line 11 she explicitly states that it is 'entirely up to' the students, but indeed the whole utterance from line 4 to line 14 functions to leave agency with the students. Even the use of the phrase 'double-checked' (line 19) demonstrates her belief that her students have already checked their work, and her confidence in their judgement about whether it needs to be checked again.

By contrast the students' trust in the teacher was generally tacit; evidenced by mutual acceptance of their shared purposes and their willingness not to question or challenge the teacher's intentions, either directly to her or among themselves. Although (as demonstrated later in this chapter) the students frequently questioned the purposes of pedagogic texts and the intentions of their writers, the students never constructed the teacher's intentions as anything but benevolent in their discussions with each other throughout the recordings.[2]

A telling demonstration of the depth of their trust in the shared expectations of accepted practice of the classroom is their readiness, on occasion, to stretch, and 'play with' the boundaries of this reciprocally-understood social order. In the following example, the group of students can clearly see that the teacher, Mary, is using a computer to print out worksheets from an adult numeracy website for them.   Nonetheless they take the opportunity to tease her.

Extract 2:
1.   Tracy: [loudly] Mary's just always on t'Internet, isn't she?
2.   Leah: [loudly] She's on that chatroom again
3.   Tracy: I know
4.   Leah: YouTube, or whatever it is…
5.   Debbie: YouTube!
6.   Tracy: Yeah, that's it, YouTube.
7.   Is it called YouTube or I-Tube? I keep calling it the wrong one
8.   Students: [laughter]
9.   Tracy: Right [turns back to her work]

There is no sense that this is intended as a challenge to Mary's authority. For example, although Tracy and Leah have clearly spoken in a tone loud enough to be audible to Mary, there is no pause in which the students watch for her response. Instead Tracy makes a self-deprecating comment at her own expense before turning back to her work. Indeed such episodes seemed to be intended by the students, and accepted by Mary, as good-natured and even affectionate teasing. Dynel (2010) suggests that affiliative teasing can be distinguished in discourse analysis from disaffiliative mocking through the responses (spoken or otherwise) of the object of teasing, and Mary's response to the students' occasional teasing was to smile or laugh with apparently genuine enjoyment.

Trust, then, between students and teacher, can be seen both as a process, and as a tacit, underpinning condition. The teacher works to build and maintain trust, both by expressing her confidence that her students will conform to normative expectations, and by conforming to the expectations her students have of her; even when they deliberately and playfully stretch the boundaries of these expectations. The greater part of the trust within the classroom, however, is implicit and taken for granted; it is evidenced precisely because the participants' commitment, intentions and competence are mutually understood, and are thus *not* called into question (Rawls 2008).

Distrust of pedagogic texts

By contrast to the unquestioned assumptions of trust *within* the classroom, the students frequently questioned the intentions and purposes of the *writers* of pedagogic texts. The episodes of talk below illustrate how two students, Richard and Elaine, attempted to make sense of the writer's intentions as they responded to a worksheet on the areas of two-dimensional shapes.

In Extract 3a, Richard and Elaine engage with a 'discovery' style task (Fig. 1), which requires students to work out how many square millimetres there are in one square centimetre. It is intended to address the common misconception that, because there are ten linear millimetres in one linear centimetre, there must be ten square millimetres in one square centimetre (there are actually 100).

Fig. 1 Excerpt from *Skillsheet* worksheet on area (Henry 2003)

Extract 3a:

1.	Richard:	We've got to do the area
2.	Elaine:	Oh, right, the area of the square
3.		So it's one by one
4.		But they've tried to confuse it by saying that ten millimetres is one centimetre.
5.	Richard:	Right, so it's one by one
6.	Elaine:	So it's one by one, which is, erm
7.	Richard:	Will it be ten by ten?
8.	Elaine:	In millimetres yeah
9.		So the area in millimetres would be
10.	Richard:	One hundred
11.	Elaine:	Ten tens are one hundred millimetres [writing] One hundred… millimetres…
12.		So [reading] 'do you still agree with your answer to question 4?
13.	Richard:	Well, yeah, because it says how many millimetres in one square centimetre – ten
14.	Elaine:	Right
15.	Richard:	So yeah
16.	Elaine:	Wonder why it's asked us that though
17.	Richard:	I think it's just to make sure
18.	Elaine:	That's just to make sure you've got the right answer
19.	Richard:	Make sure you're paying attention
20.	Elaine:	Mmm

In Extract 3b, Elaine and Richard continue working on the same topic. A later question requires them to calculate the area of a rectangle from which the dimensions have been omitted, and it has taken them some time to realise that they are expected to measure with a ruler. As they complete the problem, Richard attempts to reassure Elaine (and perhaps himself) that they will be given all the information they need when they take the examination.

Extract 3b:

21.	Richard:	So it's six hundred and thirty
22.	Elaine	Yeah
23.	Richard	That weren't too bad.
24.	Elaine:	So really, with the first one they're giving us
25.		So in the exam it'd be like that, wouldn't it?
26.	Richard:	Er, yeah
27.	Elaine:	Without the
28.	Richard:	Well they'd give you –
29.		No, they'd <u>have</u> to give you <u>something</u>, well
30.	Elaine:	I don't think they would
31.	Richard:	Well they'd either give you the information or give you a ruler to work it out
32.	Elaine:	Mmm
33.	Richard:	Cos you <u>can't</u> just estimate
34.		That's not clever.
35.	Elaine:	Right, split these into two then, so we... three times three

In both extracts Richard and Elaine are not only trying to make sense of the mathematical problems; they are also trying to make sense of the writer's purposes in asking these questions. They appear to be experiencing bewilderment at the structure and form of pedagogic mathematical texts, and are struggling to find out the 'rules' of the game they have found themselves playing.

Both Richard and Elaine use the form 'they' to refer to writers of pedagogic texts. Although the sole author's name (L. Henry) is printed visibly on the worksheet (Fig. 1), Richard and Elaine refer to her as 'they' (line 4) or 'it' (line 16).   Later, in line 24, Elaine again refers to Henry as 'they', but immediately afterwards, in lines 25-31, 'they' refers to the writers of the examination paper. The antecedent is not explicit in either case, and so contributes to a conflation in which the writers of both types of text may be seen as parts of the same distanced structure, anonymised and other.

Richard and Elaine discuss the purpose of the 'discovery' task at some length to arrive at a negotiated narrative for the worksheet writer's motives.   Elaine initially ascribes malevolent motives (line 4) 'they've tried to confuse it by saying...', suggesting that this is merely an *attempt* to confuse, which she and Richard have successfully evaded.   Later in their discussion, perceived motives range from a paternalistic attempt to ensure that students have the right answer (line 18) to again suggesting that students need to be alert to possible entrapment (line 19). Presumably Henry was aiming to illuminate through discovery rather than confuse, yet the task seems to reinforce Elaine's perceptions that the aim of mathematics is to 'catch out' the unwary and to perplex students by making questions unnecessarily difficult. Taking Garfinkel's (1963) view of trust, we may see Richard and

Elaine as attempting to normalise, or rationalise, a perceived breach of their expectations of social order.

In the later extract, it is the examiners', rather than the writer's, intentions which are again negotiated. Richard expresses a trust that 'they' will provide the information necessary for candidates to answer the questions on the paper (lines 28 to 34); in other words, that the examiners will conform to rules which appear as common-sense to him.   Note that in lines 29 and 33 he stresses the modalising auxiliaries 'have to' and 'can't', suggesting that he is attempting to convince himself that he has every reason to expect what he perceives to be normative behaviour.

Despite expressing continuing doubt about the writer's and examiners' purposes, Richard and Elaine both seem to accept their own compliance with the requirements of pedagogic texts as non-negotiable. In lines 18, 19 and 20 Richard repeats three times that they need to 'make sure'. Later, neither student expresses an expectation that their query about the examination will be resolved, nor to trust that they will be fully advised in advance. Instead they proceed to the next problem on the worksheet (line 35) rather than seeking a definitive answer. In fact, candidates are given instructions in advance of the examination, which clearly state that a ruler will be needed (QCA 2004).

In contrast to the trust between students and teacher, which was tacit and taken-for-granted, in the above extracts the intentions of others are called into question and trust thus becomes problematic.   These are not isolated extracts, but illustrative ones. Throughout the recordings, writers of pedagogic texts were referred to as 'they' (usually without an antecedent noun) by both students and teacher. Metaphors of entrapment, evasion and gaming were prevalent as students attempted to make sense of the unfamiliar experiences, such as challenging questions or unfamiliar mathematical vocabulary, which they encountered when engaging with these texts.   For example, in their discussions with each other, students complained that 'they' were 'trying to catch us out' or 'throwing us off course'.

The mediating role of the teacher

The above episodes show how trust underpinned shared meanings and purposes between participants within the classroom, but that the students' engagement with pedagogic texts was often undermined by uncertainty as to the writers' intentions, and doubt as to whether

these were to be trusted.   The teacher's role accordingly becomes one of trusted mediating ally between the students and the educational structures within which they find themselves.

In Extract 4a, Natalie has encountered the unfamiliar word 'modal' on an averages factsheet (Fig. 2). Her fellow student, Joanne, expresses suspicion of this specialised mathematical vocabulary, but seems to see it as imposed on them by the writer of the worksheet, rather than by their teacher, Mary.
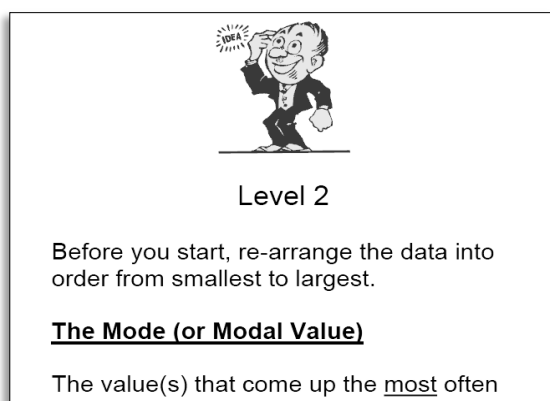

Level 2

Before you start, re-arrange the data into order from smallest to largest.

The Mode (or Modal Value)

The value(s) that come up the <u>most</u> often

Fig. 2 Excerpt from averages factsheet (Skillsworkshop 2007)

Extract 4a:
1.   Natalie: Modal?
2.   Is modal part of – mode
3.   Oh, the mode or modal, right
4.   Teacher: Yeah
5.   If they talk about finding the mode or the modal value
6.   It's the same thing
7.   Natalie: The same thing
8.   Joanne: They just want to confuse you
9.   Teacher: [addressing whole class] Do you know why we have more than one kind of average?
10.   Why we've got the median and the mode?
11.   Natalie: [laughing] No
12.   Joanne: They like us enjoying things
13.   [laughter]

Note that Natalie starts to speak in abstract terms about the new terminology (lines 1-3) and that it is the teacher, Mary, who first refers to 'they' in line 5. It is even less clear than usual whom this pronoun refers to, and she seems to be speaking of writers of mathematical learning and assessment materials in general.   The teacher's use of the third-person plural thus positions them as 'other', while implicitly aligning herself with her students.   In lines 9 and 10, the teacher reverts to using the inclusive 'we', perhaps in an

attempt to re-engage the students by reassuring them of the relevance of this part of the curriculum, or perhaps simply to reinforce her affiliation with them.

The student Joanne attempts to make sense of this introduction of unfamiliar discourse. Unlike Richard and Elaine, she does not consider a range of possible motives, but attributes just one malevolent intention 'to confuse' students (line 8). Joanne's ironic suggestion that 'they' have created the three types of average for students to 'enjoy' in line 12 also serves an affiliative purpose; and is used humorously to present the students within the classroom as beleaguered by external forces.

To address the questions raised about averages, the teacher Mary then introduces an activity intended to help the students understand the difference between the three types of average: mean, mode and median (Extract 4b). She gives out a set of cards showing annual salaries, most of which are in the range £10 000 to £15 000, but also one outlying value, £100 000, which will distort the mean, and make the median a more representative average.

Extract 4b:

14.	Teacher:	If I give you each one of these
15.		They're meant to be, er, your wage
16.		We're all working, all working in a factory or something, okay?
17.		Take one of those
18.		[walking round class offering each student a card to pick at random]
19.		Take one of those
20.	Liz:	Thank you
21.	Natalie:	[seeing Liz's card] That's alright [laughing]
22.		Ooh, that's even better. You're supervisor.
23.		What've you got?
24.	Teacher:	How many of us are there? One, two, three, four, five
25.		[overlapping talk]
26.	Natalie:	Have you? Oh she's the director.
27.	Gayle:	Now that's just not fair [laughter]
28.	Natalie:	[receiving her own card] I'm the cleaner [laughter]
29.	Teacher:	Right, so we've all got different wages
30.		I'll write on the board what we've all got
31.		And we're going to calculate what the typical wage from our (…)
32.		So what have you got there? Natalie?
33.	Natalie:	Ten thousand
34.	Gayle:	Twelve
		[other students out of range of microphone read out salaries on their cards]

The information given to the students by Mary in lines 14-25 may serve to intrigue the students, but does not clearly explain the purpose of the exercise.   Although the students are given very little information about where the activity is going, they do not challenge or

interrogate the teacher's intention. In lines 21-28, they engage with the teacher's premise that they are 'working in a factory or something' (line 3)[3] , and in lines 33 and 34 they unquestioningly respond with the elicited response.

The completion of this activity allows the students' to 'discover' how the mean of a data set can be distorted by an outlying value, and why the median can sometimes be a better indicator of central tendency. Thus uncertainty caused by the introduction of new vocabulary is resolved not through the students' trust in the worksheet in which the vocabulary is encountered, but through their trust in the teacher as mediator of the text.

These extracts are also illustrative of the affiliative, and often self-deprecating, laughter which was prevalent throughout all the classroom recordings, and which demonstrates the contrast between assured and tacit trust between those present in the classroom, and the questioning and doubtful distrust of pedagogic texts and their associated vocabulary.

Hegemony disrupted: questioning 'their' identity

As we have seen in the examples above, writers of pedagogic texts were consistently referred to as 'they', without an antecedent noun. 'Their' identity was never explicitly discussed, but generally seemed to be inferred successfully from the context by all listeners. Also, as illustrated earlier, the students at times expressed distrust about the writers' *intentions*, but their *competence* and authority generally appeared to be accepted as absolute.

However, in a rare exception, authority was disrupted and 'their' identity questioned. Students Hannah, Debbie and Linda were working collaboratively on a practice examination paper, which presented multiple-choice word-problems with a range of answers labelled A, B, C or D. The teacher had previously discovered that the answer given on the official answer sheet (Fig. 3) for question eight was incorrect.

ADULT NUMERACY
Level 2 Test L

Mark Scheme

Question Number	Answer Key	KS Spec ref.	ANCC ref.		Question Number	Answer Key	KS Spec ref.	ANCC ref.
1	C	2.2.5	MSS1/L2.9		21	C	2.2.4	MSS1/L2.6
2	C	2.1.5	MSS1/L2.3		22	D	2.2.2	MSS1/L2.1
3	D	2.2.4	MSS1/L2.5		23	D	2.2.1	N2/L2.6
4	B	2.1.4	N2/L2.3		24	B	2.2.7	N1/L2.3
5	A	2.2.10	N1/L2.4		25	C	2.2.6	N1/L2.3
6	D	2.2.5	MSS1/L2.5		26	C	2.2.7	MSS1/L.10
7	B	2.2.8	HD1/L2.3		27	D	2.2.3	N1/L2.3
8	C	2.2.9	HD1/L2.4		28	B	2.2.8	N2/L2.7
9	C	2.1.6	N1/L2.2		29	A	2.2.9	HD1/L2.3

Fig. 3 Excerpt from practice paper answer sheet (Move-On 2008)[4]

Extract 5:
1.   Debbie: Take two off that, so what's that? Is it ninety-six?
2.   …
          Linda: (…) ninety-six, yeah, ninety-six
3.   Teacher: Which number question is it? Eight?
4.   Linda: Yeah, ninety-six, we got.
5.   Teacher: Which is?
6.   Linda: D
7.   Debbie: D
8.   Teacher: They've got C, but I think they're wrong
9.   Hannah: Who's got C?
10.   Teacher: The answer sheet

Here, then, it is the teacher who has encountered the unexpected and has had her trust called into question. Like the students, she attempts to make sense of the experience, but in this case, rather than attribute it to malevolence on the part of the examiners, she attributes it to incompetence.   In line 8 the teacher's hedge 'I think' hints at the fallibility of both herself and the writers of the practice paper, perhaps giving the students a passing glimpse of mathematics, and its learning materials, as constructed rather than absolute.

Hannah's question in line 9 is a unique query as to 'their' identity; on this occasion she seems not to infer this from the context, as the listeners did in all the previous extracts. Perhaps the teacher's reference to 'their' fallibility has disrupted Hannah's acceptance of the pronoun. Note how anonymity is reinforced once more by the teacher's response in line 10.

This is a rare but telling disruption to the unspoken order. The teacher proceeded to over-rule the answer given on the answer sheet, although she first re-checked her answer and consulted a colleague as part of her response to this disruption of the trust condition. Thus the teacher's distrust of the writers of this text differed from that of her students. The students seemed to distrust that the writers are *willing* to serve their interests; their teacher, on this occasion, distrusts that the writers are *able* to serve her students' interests.

Discussion

Adult basic education in England is currently dominated by the structuring and regulative discourses of policy, which have been critiqued for the deficit views constructed of adult students (Papen 2005; Oughton 2007). In a sector where students have already been marginalised by the education system, it is therefore worth considering the significance and implications of their apparent distrust of learning materials, examination papers and the discourses of academic mathematics .

As Rampton *et al* (2004) point out, the structure imposed on ethnographic study by the application of linguistic analysis enables the researcher to re-examine taken-for-granted discourse practices in familiar institutional settings.

> This commitment to de-familiarisation can be very well-suited to researchers whose first ethnographic priority is to achieve greater analytic distance on realities that they themselves have lived for a long time … [it] provide[s] ways of stepping back from the taken-for-granted in order to uncover the ideological processes that constitute commonsense and everyday practice (Rampton *et al* 2004:7).

While the data reported here was collected in just two classrooms, I suspect that similar discourse practices are widespread, at least within the context of English classrooms. Such discourse can construct perceived 'truths' about the natural and social world by which members of communities define themselves and others (Luke 1995).

In examining the contrast between the students' trust in the teacher, and their mistrust of pedagogic texts, it is telling that trust tends to become more conspicuous by its absence. Rawls (2008) emphasises the *tacit*, taken-for-granted, nature of trust as a necessary background condition in a constitutive order, and suggests that trust is damaged when it is called into question. The students' trust in the teacher was thus generally evidenced by the shared order and endeavour within the classroom, and by their willingness not to question or challenge her purposes and intentions.   This mutuality of respect and trust between teacher and student within the classroom reflects Freire's (1972) ideals, which have been

long been central to the discourses of adult literacy and numeracy education (Ivanič *et al* 2006; Hamilton and Hillier 2006).

By contrast, the students' engagement with pedagogic texts was often characterised by the absence of trust in the writers' motives and purposes, and their negotiated attempts to make sense of the writers' intentions. According to Rawls (2008:712), calling trust into question serves to undermine it:

> Trust is tacit and taken for granted. Studies show that taken-for granted issues are only topicalized when they become problematic. Topicalizing trust can mark it as a problem.

The students' attempts to rationalise these intentions tended to be in terms of entrapment or gaming; their response was to be on their guard against being 'caught out' or 'thrown off course'.

> When the trust condition is not in place, participants experience bewilderment, confusion, frustration or indignation, or they attempt to make sense of or normalize the events in different terms – as a joke, or hoax, a deliberate provocation, obtuseness or whatever (Watson 2009: 482)

We may ask whether distrust in wider educational structures is necessarily harmful, and whether such distrust hinders learning. A healthy scepticism and a willingness to challenge the prescribed curriculum may be regarded as a desirable aspect of critical pedagogies which seek to offer alternatives to 'banking' models of education (Freire 1972; Giroux 1988). It is useful here to examine the contrast between the students' different responses to the two 'discovery' tasks for which they did not know the ultimate purpose.

In Extract 3a above, the task to discover the number of square millimetres in a square centimetre was presented on a worksheet and unmediated by the teacher. The students questioned the writer's intentions, and even ascribed malevolence which they had successfully evaded, yet their distrust was suppressed and hidden from the teacher, and they attempted to comply even when apparent trust conditions were breached. Exploratory discussion of the mathematical problem itself was inhibited and unconfident, and Richard and Elaine's debate about the number of square millimetres in a square centimetre was ultimately inconclusive.

 By contrast, in Extracts 4a and 4b, the students' distrust of the new vocabulary ('mode' and 'modal') was discussed openly and critically through mediation by the trusted teacher. Compliance with the curriculum was humorously presented as a pragmatic choice rather than inevitable, reflecting a level of *conscientization* (Freire 1972). Their expressions of distrust were explicit and critically playful, as was their engagement in the subsequent discovery task to examine how the mean can be distorted by an outlying value. Although

this activity was very unlike their usual classroom tasks, and its purpose was not fully explained in advance by the teacher, the students did not express doubts about its purpose, but engaged fully and answered the teacher's questions willingly, in seemingly confident expectation of its resolution.

Another strand of my analysis focused on the use of the pronoun 'they'. In many instances this may be interpreted merely as a shorthand term for an unfamiliar and amorphous group of actors, or as informal way to express the passive voice. However, this pronoun may also be used to reflect a perceived marginalisation on the part of the speaker (Dunne *et al* 2008:244). Hoggart (1957:72) describes how 'us' and 'them' are used to express a distrust of authority. He recounts how representatives of such authority (including those in education) were perceived by working-class individuals in England as:

> a shadowy but numerous and powerful group affecting their lives at almost every point: the world is divided into 'Them' and 'Us'

In Hoggart's account, 'They' were not actually viewed as evil, but as baffling, powerful agents in people's encounters with social structures:

> Towards 'Them' the primary attitude is not so much fear as mistrust … of the complicated way – the apparently unnecessarily complicated way – in which 'They' order one's life when it touches them.

I have taken the view throughout this chapter that discourse is not only reflective but constitutive, and the use by both teacher and students of the pronoun 'they' thus serves to construct and reinforce perceptions of writers of pedagogic texts as 'other', while also reinforcing in-group bonding and providing an object for affiliative humour.

Garfinkel's conceptualisation of trust as a necessary pre-condition for social order emphasises the reciprocally constitutive nature of the trust condition (Garfinkel 1963; Watson 2009). Whereas trust in the teacher can be, and was, demonstrably reciprocated, interaction between pedagogic texts and the students can only be one-way and hierarchical. It is notable that there were no instances in the recordings of students making references to writers of pedagogic texts as 'them' – only to 'they'. 'They' are always actors, never acted upon.

Finally, in conclusion I present a personal view on the students' expressed distrust of writers of pedagogic texts, while at the same time examining my own subjectivity. My current academic role brings me into personal contact with writers of learning materials, examiners,

and those responsible for the development of the curriculum at a national level. The majority of these were once teachers themselves, and I find that they still express the same commitment to shared purposes and furthering the interests of adult students (and even the same warmth towards those students) as do the majority of currently practicing teachers. It would be hard to justify any accusation that these contributors were 'not trustworthy'. However, I can comfortably draw this conclusion from my own current position of relative power within the system. For students (and indeed for many teachers), the wider constraints of curriculum and assessment impose a distance and structure on the production and consumption of pedagogic texts which lends them mysteriousness in the perceptions of those who use them.

Transcription conventions

These have been kept to a minimum. Those used in the extracts reproduced in this chapter are[5]:

Convention	Meaning
[description of gesture]	Gesture, action or other non-verbal semiosis
(.)	Pause
?	End of apparently interrogative utterance (i.e. rising intonation)
.	End of utterance (falling intonation)
–	Interrupted or broken-off utterance
emphasised word	Stress placed on underlined word by speaker
(guessed utterance)	Indistinct utterance; content of brackets represents 'best guess'
(…)	Untranscribable utterance; unable to make guess (usually due to overlapping talk from other speakers)
…	Lines transcribed in full transcript but not reproduced in extract for clarity or concision (usually overlapping talk from other speakers)

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[1] The names of all students and their teacher are pseudonyms throughout.

[2] Indeed, the students never discussed the teacher without her knowledge in eleven hours of recordings. It may be that they were conscious at all times of the recording devices, but it is noteworthy that they never slipped up in this regard, though they sometimes did in others (for example, discussing their private lives or students in other classes).

[3] For an examination of the students' engagement with this activity, see also Oughton 2013

[4] The answer for question 8 was corrected by the publisher (to D) in the 2009 version of this answer sheet.

[5] Following, for example, Bucholtz (1999); Barwell (2003); Maybin (2007).