Making Sense of Critical Literacy: Interpreting and Enacting
Educational Policy in One Scottish Local Authority

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree
Doctorate in Education

School of Education
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
April 2012

ABSTRACT

Scottish education is currently undergoing a period of significant change, with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence in early years establishments, primary and secondary schools. This study focused on how educators in one Scottish local authority interpreted and enacted 'the important skills of critical literacy' (*Building the Curriculum 3*, Scottish Government, 2008). Critical literacy theory foregrounds issues of social justice, challenge, critique and action for transformation of inequalities in language and social practices; however this thesis posits that dominant government constructions of 'information and critical literacy' and 'higher order thinking skills' effectively remove social justice concerns from critical literacy.

This study aimed to add a Scottish perspective to the international literature on critical literacy pedagogies, by investigating the knowledge and beliefs of engaged, informed practitioners who experienced a particular model of critical literacy professional development, which was run in partnership between their local authority and the University of Edinburgh. Interviews were conducted with five teachers and one librarian who participated in the first year of the professional development model, as well as one of the university lecturers who designed and delivered the training and the local authority manager who instigated and facilitated it. I used a critical framework which foregrounds issues of access and power to analyse participants' understandings of the terms literacy and critical literacy and what it means to be literate and critically literate; the resources they identified as useful in developing these understandings; their beliefs about what was distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach; and their descriptions of critical literacy practices in their classrooms and contexts. Considerable complexity was evident in participants' declarative understandings of what it means to be literate and critically literate. Participants defined critical literacy as a natural acuity which should be fostered from the early years of education, rather than a 'higher order skill'. They also identified being critically literate as a capacity to protect children from 'being manipulated' by texts, particularly social media, which subverts the notion of certain texts as potentially harmful and instead posits that lack of awareness of how they might challenge, critique and act to transform such inequalities is the real issue. An overview of critical literacy practices identified by participants is discussed within a framework of how they

performed their understandings (Perkins, 1998) of critical literacy theory; I discuss in some detail five critical literacy practices enacted by participants, still within the critical analytical framework which gives prominence to intersections of access and power.

The study concludes with a reflexive discussion of the research design and process and proposes several implications for policy and practice in light of the findings. I argue that mainstreaming critical literacy in the nursery, primary and secondary sectors requires that we address the importance of critical pedagogical approaches in the early years; embed critical capacity within dominant constructions of what it means to be literate; and reconstruct prohibition, protectionism or censorship of texts as the development of critical analytical skills. I suggest that Scottish policy makers and enactors look to the adult education curriculum in Scotland, in which critical literacy is embedded, as a model of good practice; and that the critical literacy practices which the participants in this research study have developed are shared more widely with other practitioners attempting to make sense of critical literacy. I conclude with a final reflection on access and power as they relate to this research study and to the wider issue of 'the important skills of critical literacy'.

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Chapter

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This research study investigated educators' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy in one Scottish local authority. My interest in researching critical literacy originated when I read one of the Scottish Government documents outlining education reform, the draft literacy and English cover paper to *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 3* (2008), which states: 'In particular the draft Experiences and Outcomes address the important skills of critical literacy'. Puzzled that there was no further explanation or description of critical literacy in the document, I wondered what other teachers made of the 'important skills of critical literacy'. I spoke to several colleagues who were all similarly uncertain, although several asked whether it was, in essence, thinking skills. As further government information emerged, it was clear that critical literacy was being constructed as critical thinking or 'higher order skills' and as an adjunct to information literacy, effectively removing social justice aims and affirming the beliefs of the teachers I originally spoke to that critical literacy is another way to describe critical thinking skills in a hierarchy or taxonomy of cognitive abilities. In contrast, in reviewing the literature I discovered that although critical literacy is a contested term, there is considerable consensus in dominant constructions about what the term means.

I define critical literacy as an approach to recognise, challenge and critique issues of inequality in language and social practices, leading to action for transformation; this conceptualisation of critical literacy has clear social justice aims. Critical thinking, associated with 'higher order skills' within a cognitive model of improving one's capacity to think critically (Siegel, 1988; Cuypers and Haji, 2006; deBono, 2009; Ryan, 1990) might be an aspect of

critical literacy but without the explicit purpose of challenging and changing inequalities it lacks the political emphasis which is imbued in critical literacy practices (hooks, 1994, 2010; Freire, 1989). Information published on the Scottish Government's **Education Scotland** - formerly **Learning and Teaching Scotland** - website guides educators towards definitions which are not aligned with dominant constructions in the academic literature; for instance the section entitled 'Information and Critical Literacy' gives prominence to information literacy and in fact defines critical literacy as information literacy, which is not linked with social justice aims. If Scottish educators are using **Education Scotland**'s website as their main source of information about critical literacy, they might well understand it to be thinking skills and finding and evaluating information from the internet, not 'the important skills' (Scottish Government, 2008) of challenge and critique and action for transformation. The participants in this research study, who experienced a model of professional development which foregrounded the social justice aims of critical literacy, articulated their knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy in alignment with the dominant constructions in the academic literature. I argue that critical literacy *is* important precisely because of its social justice aims, and that education for social justice should be embedded in Scottish educational practices from the earliest years of education.

Educational research and social justice

I have explained that this research study was prompted by what might be termed a *gap* or a *silence* in the policy paper, which led me to an initial investigation of what critical literacy means, then to a wider exploration of how other educators interpret and enact policy. I have also claimed that in constructing critical literacy as information literacy and 'higher order

thinking skills' on its website, **Education Scotland** is effectively removing social justice aims from critical literacy. My understanding of what social justice means has evolved through considerable reading of the literature - not from a single source - and is best summed up by Griffiths' (1998) definition:

> Social justice is concerned both with individual empowerment and also with structural injustices; that is, with questions of power and resources available to individuals and to particular communities or sectors of those communities *(ibid.*: 13).

I thus perceive *power* and *access* to be fundamental aspects of engaging with issues of critical literacy and social justice; both concepts have been used as an analytical framework throughout this research study and permeate each of the chapters. Janks' (2000, 2010) theories of literacy and power have been influential in shaping my understanding of how power and access intersect with language and social practices, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three.

Another significant *gap* or *silence* - concepts which are central to definitions of critical literacy - led to this research study. In reviewing the literature on critical literacy theory and pedagogy I discovered a dearth of accounts of critical literacy in Scottish schools; hence, this study will contribute a Scottish educational perspective to the international literature on critical literacy. It is noteworthy that although I found no evidence in the literature of critical literacy practices in Scottish nursery, primary and secondary schools, critical literacy theory and pedagogical approaches are clearly explained in the Scottish adult education curriculum (Scottish Government, 2005), as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

My background

I began my career in Ontario, Canada, as a secondary English teacher. The majority of my students were 'streamed' into basic and general level classes rather than academic ones and seemed largely disinterested in English literature and in attending secondary school generally. I hoped that my enthusiasm for literature, combined with a lively approach and a determination to help them succeed, would 'win them around' to English. As the end of my first teaching year approached I knew that I had failed to engage most of them, and many students did not pass the course. At that time, I had not heard of critical literacy and did not use a critical pedagogical approach, by which I mean I did not foster an active, challenging learning environment in which social justice issues in texts were foregrounded. I will discuss critical pedagogical theory in greater depth in Chapter Two.

After moving to Scotland the first job I was offered was teaching learning support - as it was then called - in a state primary school, which basically involved supporting children's functional literacy skills; to be blunt, the expectation seemed to be that I would listen to children read and success seemed to be measured by my ability to hear each group who 'required' learning support read aloud daily. The school was in an area which faced considerable social and economic challenges, so I believed that pastoral care as well as helping the children learn to read and *enjoy* reading were my main aims.

My next job was as senior teacher of a literacy support service, which involved teaching children in upper primary in the support base two days per week, and outreach teaching in primary and secondary schools throughout the authority, both advising and supporting teachers and directly

teaching children with 'literacy difficulties'. Teaching children in the support base, I had more autonomy and thus greater opportunity to be more creative in trying to make developing basic literacy skills more interesting for students. I still had not heard of critical literacy, but I see now that in planning to engage children through participatory, democratic pedagogies and in critical discussions about texts, I was moving towards a different way of teaching. Although I was not consciously aware of it at the time, additional support in Scottish schools tends to follow a deficit model (Macleod, 2010); that is, it focuses on what children *cannot do* and attempts to remediate their learning difficulties. Discussing the use of terms such as disorder, remedial, disability and impairment, Powell (1999) argues:

> The medical discourse implies that such children need to be fixed, and that special programs can be created that will help to remove their deficiencies. What often occurs is that these children are passed from one supposed expert to another in an attempt to discover the hidden cause of their failure - a practice that can result in low self-esteem and a general disenchantment with literacy and schooling (1999: 32).

I suppose I was thought of by some colleagues - and perhaps even thought of myself - as a teacher with certain expertise, a 'supposed expert' to use Powell's (1999) words, which might enable me to help the children I worked with 'become literate'. Although I have claimed that rich discussions about texts were part of my approach, I did not open up discussions about what counts as success in literacy in Scottish schools with the students I worked with who were *not* achieving success in literacy. Thus, I missed opportunities to challenge and critique such definitions and models with the intelligent, critical children I taught, whose self-esteem was damaged by the fact that

they were failing to become literate according to dominant constructions of what that means.

Whilst in that post, I began to problematise gender and literacy, mainly because year after year either all or almost all of the children who attended the base and who were referred for outreach support were boys. Were boys more likely to have learning or literacy difficulties, I wondered, or were they more likely to be referred, for whatever reason? The issues of *access* and *power* thus became features of my thinking about gender and literacy - if boys were more likely to be referred for support but girls were just as likely to be experiencing difficulties, then boys clearly had greater access to support, but why? If boys were being referred for specialist provision when girls were just as needy why did they dominate - or have power in - the referral process?

Since embarking on the Doctorate in Education programme, I have held two posts: as a local authority education officer and as a lecturer in education in higher education. Engaging in research after a long period of being away from formal studies has invigorated and changed me. I have explained my regret that I did not engage in critical literacy practices earlier in my career, that I missed opportunities to challenge and critique injustices in language and social practices - the very discussion of social justice itself with children. I have explained that concerns about gendered literacy practices led me to the academic literature which I hoped would help me make sense of some of the conceptual difficulties I was having; because engaging with the literature changed how I think and act, the main theories which have shaped me - the lenses through which I see the world - will be discussed in some depth. Social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and critical pedagogical theory are the three main theoretical lenses I use, and in Chapter Two I will

discuss how they have influenced my research, my teaching, and more generally the language and social practices I participate in. I conclude that chapter by demonstrating how those theories shape my thoughts and actions, critiquing the Scottish Government's *Literacy Action Plan* (2010) and explaining how it led me to initiate critical discussions and action for transformation with colleagues.

I will then widen the focus in Chapter Three by exploring dominant constructions of literacy and critical literacy in the literature; discuss accounts of critical literacy practices with children and young people; consider how critical media literacy aligns with critical literacy; and discuss sites of resistance to critical literacy. The consensus in the literature reviewed for this research study is that concerns about inequalities are essential aspects of critical literacy; thus I argue that critical literacy is a tool for social justice and should not be subsumed into wider constructions of 'information and critical literacy', as can be seen on the **Education Scotland** website.

Critical literacy - the Scottish context

Critical literacy practices in Canada, Australia, the United States of America, South Africa and England are documented in journals and books referenced in the literature review; however as discussed previously I have found no examples of accounts of critical literacy practices or educational research in Scottish schools. One of the main aims of this research study therefore was to collect data about Scottish educators' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy, to add a Scottish perspective to the growing body of literature on teachers' perceptions and accounts of critical literacy practices. This research took place while the literacy and English curriculum was undergoing - and

continues to experience - a period of significant change in Scotland, so it was a timely investigation of how teachers perceive these changes. In Chapter Four I discuss in detail how constructions of critical literacy by **Education Scotland** are not aligned with social justice concerns, by exploring how information literacy is dominant and is in fact being erroneously equated with critical literacy; I propose that the emergence of critical literacy in Scottish educational policy might be attributed to the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** directives rather than out of concerns about social justice; I closely examine how the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes within Curriculum for Excellence address the important skills of critical literacy; and I contrast the adult literacy curriculum in Scotland, in which critical literacy is embedded, with Curriculum for Excellence. I then review the literature on models of professional development, to consider how the training undertaken by participants in my research study is similar to and different from these models and conclude the chapter with a discussion of how professional practice can be aligned with critical pedagogies in the context of educational reform in Scotland.

Critical literacy - the local context

The main aim of this research was to explore how educators understand and enact critical literacy within one Scottish local authority. I selected the local authority as the focus of my study not because I had any prior association with it, but rather because teachers and librarians there were involved in professional development which focused on critical literacy; they elected to undertake the training, demonstrating an interest in learning about critical literacy and how to put it into practice. Given that my aim was to investigate educators' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy, choosing a

purposive sample (Thomas, 2009) of people who were interested in, and engaged with, critical literacy theory and practices gave me access to such a group of practitioners.

Critical literacy professional development model

Participants in this research study took part in training delivered in partnership between the local authority in which they work and the University of Edinburgh. The training began in August 2007, and consisted of three input days in the first year. The following year, participants received individualised support and input from the university lecturers, who worked with them to steadily build their skills and confidence to enable them to lead training and support implementation of critical literacy in their schools. I therefore had access to a group of educators who had been sensitised and alerted to critical literacy as a pedagogy for social justice. Participants' accounts of how they delivered critical literacy training to colleagues and worked to develop practice will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

The main aims of the professional development were:

- to review and expand understanding of critical literacy
- to develop a critical literacy project in the participant's school, which colleagues might wish to contribute to or use in their own practice
- to consider one model of action research for planning, implementing, recording and evaluating this project
- to have opportunities for discussion with colleagues in the primary and secondary sector
- to give a theory-based insight into critical literacy practices
- to deliver a model of professional development which was sustainable (in contrast to a one-off training session) and in which the trainees became the trainers.

Participants were initially introduced to Freire's belief in the importance of developing learners' critical capacity so they can 'read the world as well as the word' (Freire and Macedo, 1987); and to Egawa and Harste's (2001) claim that decoding texts makes children good consumers but critical literacy makes them good citizens. Principles of critical literacy introduced on the initial training day emphasised:

- that texts are not fixed or unbiased
- the importance of analysing critically authorial intent, beliefs and values
- the need to explore alternative readings and interpretations
- the necessity of analysing how texts might manipulate readers
- the importance of teaching reader response theories, to encourage the reader to think of how s/he is positioned within and by certain texts
- voices that are heard/voices that are silent
- the importance of gendered constructions and perspectives
- the importance of the role of the educator in enabling understanding of critical literacy, and its purpose.

The purposes of teaching critical literacy skills were described as:

- helping children and young people to understand and interpret the huge amount of information they get from news media, including elements of bias and manipulation
- supporting children to understand the complexities of certain texts which they encounter, some of which might appear straightforward.

Critical literacy was situated within the wider Scottish educational context, namely within Curriculum for Excellence; Assessment for Learning; and cross-sector development opportunities.

Participants were encouraged to return to their schools and design their own critical literacy projects which were then presented to the whole training group at a later session. They were also informed that they could contact the University of Edinburgh lecturers for further training on the language of

literary criticism and critical literacy and a number of participants did so, particularly from the primary sector. Participants were told that they could use critical literacy approaches with children who could not yet read; across the curriculum; to analyse the media; and in health and wellbeing projects - one of the key areas in Curriculum for Excellence - with a focus on language. Each input day aimed to model approaches which could be used in any stage or sector using a range of print and non-print texts. Collaboration and support were encouraged among participants outwith the official input days. One of the university lecturers who co-designed and led the critical literacy training described the model as 'a tree with branches'. She explained that the idea was to empower educators to define for themselves what they needed, after they had some experience of putting critical literacy theory into practice in their own classrooms/contexts. Further support and development were offered through email and telephone contact, as well as additional in-school training. In an embodiment of the Freireian (1970, 1989) concept of *mutuality* educators learned from the university lecturers as well as each other; the lecturers explained that they learned from the educators; and educators and lecturers learned from the children and young people at the same time as guiding their understanding of critical literacy. Educators' evaluations of the training were consistently very good, although some indicated that they found interpreting and enacting critical literacy difficult and challenging.

Details of the training are discussed in this chapter to provide the context for this study, as this model of professional development provided me with access to the purposive sample of educators who elected to take the training, and with whom I could explore how they interpreted and enacted 'the important skills of critical literacy' (Scottish Government, 2008). I use the word 'educators' throughout this paper to reflect the fact that teachers and

librarians took part in the critical literacy training, and form the sample group of this study. When I use 'teachers' not 'educators' I do so either to represent the fact that the participants or the literature specifically refers to teachers.

Research questions

I have explained that my research interest developed through problematisation of the statement that the Experiences and Outcomes in the literacy and English curriculum 'address the important skills of critical literacy', but I believed that there was a clear lack of information and guidance about what critical literacy *means*, and how it might be *enacted* in Scottish schools. This central concern led me to construct the overarching research question:

- *What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority?*

The four research sub-questions are:

- *What do participants understand by the terms 'literacy' and 'critical literacy' and what do they see as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach?*
- *What do participants think it means to be critically literate, as opposed to being literate?*
- *What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts?*
- *What sources and resources do the teachers have access to in order to develop their knowledge and understanding of critical literacy practices?*

I did not attempt an evaluation of the model of professional development in the Scottish local authority which is the focus of my research for two main

reasons: firstly, I was interested to investigate participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy and how they came to that knowledge from a range of possible sources, not merely the training; and secondly, I was concerned that as a novice researcher, undertaking an evaluation of a project which I had not participated in at the time would lead to a superficial understanding of the training.

In Chapter Five I will discuss in some detail why I designed the research as I did, paying close attention to how reflexivity, hegemony and power - important aspects of critical research (McLaren and Kincheloe, 2007) - have shaped this research study. I explain why semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main methodological approach, and I also discuss the reasons for and limitations of using digital communication - a wiki and a blog - to gather data. The rationale for adopting Charmaz's constructivist/constructionist grounded theory (2006, 2008) to gather and analyse the data is given, and the process of using that analytical framework is discussed in detail.

Chapter Six explores the findings of this research study, and is divided into two sections, the first of which considers how participants' *interpret* policy and the second which describes how they *enact* policy. I explain that the structure is aligned with how I began to conceptualise how participants made sense of critical literacy, by making the distinction between gaining an understanding of critical literacy theory *before* putting it into practice in their classrooms/contexts; however I claim that as I made sense of the data I began to realise that we make sense of new theories, initiatives and concepts *as* we put them into practice. I identify Perkins' theory of *understanding performances* (1998) as a useful framework to analyse and describe how

participants made sense of critical literacy as they enacted it with children and young people.

The chapter begins by exploring how these informed, engaged, skilled practitioners explained their understandings of the terms literacy and critically and what being literate means in each regard. The second section provides an overview of critical literacy practices described by participants, using the framework of Perkins' (1998) *understanding performances* to explore how participants develop and demonstrate their understanding of critical literacy. I then focus the discussion on five accounts of practice in some detail to gain a greater understanding of how power and access intersect in participants' classrooms and contexts:

• using picture books to teach critical questioning skills
• using adverts in critical media literacy
• using comic books and films about superheroes to develop critical capacity and to discuss gender stereotypes
• looking critically at book covers
• a whole school critical literacy approach to fairy tales.

The section concludes by looking at difficulties with enacting policy, or sites of teacher and student resistance in the data.

In the final chapter, I use a reflexive approach in discussing how this critical research study has involved challenge, critique and action for transformation. Specifically I consider how my assumptions have been challenged throughout this process; the various critiques I have engaged with; and how action for transformation has taken many forms in my own experience and in the participants' discussions. I propose several

implications for policy and practice in light of the findings of this research and suggest possibilities for further research and development. I conclude with a final reflection on access and power as they relate to this research study and to the wider issue of 'the important skills of critical literacy'. As will become clear to the reader, I view critical literacy not just as a pedagogical or economic issue but as a fundamentally political one; in 'coming to critical literacy' (Shor, 1999) I have become a critical educator as, I believe, have the participants in this research study.

CHAPTER TWO: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM, FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL THEORY

In the preceding chapter I argued that critical literacy is an important aspect of education for social justice, and that to define critical literacy as a 'higher order' thinking skill or as information literacy - such as happens on the **Education Scotland** website - removes its social justice aims. This research study explored educators' knowledge and beliefs and found that they identify social justice concerns in alignment with dominant constructions in the literature. In this chapter I discuss how the literature reviewed has shaped my understanding of critical literacy as a tool for social justice; specifically I explore how social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and critical pedagogical theories have been instrumental in guiding this understanding. Exploring conceptualisations of language and social structures and how these intersect to position us as powerful or powerless in specific situations led me to rethink not just how I understand literacy, but how dominant definitions of literacy practices and what it means to be literate in society shape what we teach and how we teach it in schools.

Previously I explained that I was motivated to undertake research out of concerns about access and power in education. In any given year, most of my students were boys; in fact, many years I taught *exclusively* boys. One of the most prevalent concerns I had at that time was one of gender and literacy: why were so many more boys than girls identified as having literacy difficulties? Were girls actually just as likely to have these difficulties, but were not being identified as requiring support? At that time, I did not have the conceptual tools to recognise that dominant definitions of literacy and what it means to be literate in our society (or the way literacy is constructed)

were central in the decision-making process about who is seen to require and, consequently, who receives support with literacy skills acquisition. The focus of additional support for learning provision in Scotland is on supporting individuals to acquire cognitive skills - such as the ability to decode words in reading - in order that they achieve a normatively agreed standard of literacy. The dominance of terms such as 'literacy interventions' implies that there is something wrong with the child which requires to be fixed. There is no space in such a model for thinking that perhaps what needs to be challenged is the dominant definition or model of literacy, if it is that construct which is causing so many children to be seen as unsuccessful, or failing. This hegemonic construction of literacy might well be constructing boys as underachieving; certainly it is constructing literacy as an independent, autonomous set of skills to be mastered rather than as a set of social skills and language practices.

At the same time as I was reading the literature on gendered literacy practices (Reay, 1991, 2003; Davies, 2003; Francis, 2006; Epstein *et al.*, 1998) educational policy reforms were taking place in Scotland. I have explained that I was struck by the statement, in the draft literacy and English cover paper to *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 3* (2008), that the policy addressed 'the important skills of critical literacy'. The literature I was reading at that time was principally about gender and literacy and inequality and, as I feel strongly that gender binaries are social constructions which we must challenge and critique in order for literacy to be a more equitable experience for girls *and* boys, this chapter begins with a discussion of gendered literacy constructions and practices from social constructionist and feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspectives. Gender binaries separate girls and boys into oppositional categories of female and male, feminine and

masculine; binary positioning is socially constructed and maintained (Davies, 1989, 2003) and, when one gender category or binary is dominant in a specific site it has more power than the other. How children conform to or resist the gender binaries is the subject of much of the feminist educational research which foregrounds issues of power; I believe that access is an equally important factor in considering gendered language and social practices, which will now be discussed in relation to the social constructionist and feminist poststructuralist literature reviewed.

Social constructionism

As I noted earlier, as I sought to understand why the majority of students referred to the literacy support service were boys, I began to read about boys' underachievement in literacy. The literature challenges the prevalent view in the field of additional support for learning in Scotland - which is essentially a deficit model of what an individual cannot do, which skills s/he lacks according to the dominant understanding of what it means to be literate - and instead foregrounds how literacy is a social construction, as are the binary conceptualisations of boys' and girls' attainments in literacy. I became conscious of the socially constructed nature of literacy and in so doing shifted from the dominant paradigm of a cognitive constructivist view of literacy acquisition and development, which does not foreground the socio-cultural nature of literacy (Stanovich, 1994). Seeking alternatives to deficit models of literacy, I discovered a number of frameworks for understanding literacy development which I consider to be more inclusive and which, if adopted in Scotland, might shift the dominant thinking from cognitive paradigms to socially constructed ones. Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999), which includes analysis of texts as one of the elements necessary for literacy, shifts thinking away from a deficit model towards a

more democratic understanding of participatory literacy or participatory pedagogy. Specifically, the concept of becoming a text user who knows about and acts on socio-cultural functions that texts perform in schooled and wider literacy practices, and becoming a critical analyser of texts who recognises that texts are never neutral, makes children active meaning-makers in their own language and social practices.

In addition, I discovered Janks' Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy (2000) and the Halliday Plus Model (Egawa and Harste, 2001), both of which include critical skills as important aspects of literacy learning and teaching and which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. At this point, my conceptualisation of literacy as a social construction expanded considerably, as I began to consider the importance of teaching children the critical questions they could use to interrogate texts and to challenge hierarchies of power and privilege therein. Although I no longer teach children with 'literacy difficulties' in a special provision, I imagined having discussions about the socially constructed meanings of literacy and challenging and critiquing the hegemonic constructions with a view to transforming children's perceptions of themselves as 'failures', 'underachievers' or 'thick' - all descriptions I heard far too often in the children's conversations about themselves.

I will now explain the distinction as I understand it between the terms social constructionism and social constructivism. Whereas social constructivism is concerned with the individual's meaning-making of knowledge in social contexts (Vygotsky, 1978), social constructionism theorises how phenomena develop relative to social contexts. Social constructivism is often described as a psychological conception whereas social constructionism is described as a

sociological conception (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999).

Hruby (2001) argues that the constructivist metaphor is not a functional metaphor in that it lacks a constructor; a construction does not just appear by itself, he argues, so constructionism is needed as a theoretical framework within which to consider how social constructions are wilfully constructed by agents. He defines social constructionism as being about 'the way knowledge is constructed by, for, and between members of a discursively mediated community' (2001: 51). Although acknowledging that moving away from such binary conceptions might be advantageous, Hruby explains that social constructivism is often perceived as a way to consider what is happening *in the head*, whereas social constructionism theorises what is happening *outside of the head*, in social discourse and interaction *(ibid.)*

Berger and Luckmann's seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) outlines their theory of how social reality or constructions shape identity formation and at the same time are shaped by social practices:

> Identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it (1966: 173).

Hruby (2001) and Burr (1995) describe the 'second wave' of social constructionism, which started in the 1970s, as a shift towards postmodernist extreme relativism, which held that multiple possibilities or realities could be

constructed. Burr (*ibid.*) claims that the original liberatory urge of social constructionism as she saw it began to blur into a distorted vision of multiplicity, denying that any recognisable vision of social reality existed or could exist, and thus making the action or transformation element intangible.

Individuals shape social constructs and are in turn shaped by them. Identity formation, social constructionism holds, is bound in the dominant social constructions in a given social setting in a specific time. The power of the dominant and accepted definitions of literacy and what it means to be literate constructs individual identities. Thus, social constructionist theory shows us that individuals are deemed to be literate or illiterate according to the dominant definition(s) of literacy in a society. I have explained that this research study was prompted by my interest in investigating what my colleagues made of bold statements in policy documents about the importance of critical literacy. What did other practitioners think literacy and critical literacy meant and how did they conceptualise 'being literate' and 'being critically literate'? What did they consider to be unique or distinctive about a critical literacy approach? Later, when I decided to choose a purposive sample of participants who had experienced a particular model of professional development, I was interested also to investigate what critical literacy practices look like in their settings and contexts. These became my sub-research questions within the overarching question: *What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority?*

Hegemony, which I understand to mean the dominance a social group or set of beliefs has over an other or others which leads to unequal relations of

power, is a key concept in understanding social justice issues in education. Problematising access to the specialist literacy base in which I taught, I was troubled by the possibility of hegemonic systems and structures which privileged one gender group over another. In the sections which follow, hegemony will be explored in relation to the social constructionist literature on gendered literacy practices.

Boys' underachievement in literacy as resistance

I have explained that boys consistently dominated the literacy support provision in which I taught, year after year. The boys were referred to the service because their schools identified them as having significant or severe and persistent difficulties acquiring functional literacy skills. From a feminist standpoint, so-called underachievement in literacy can be seen as boys' resistance; that is, boys construct their identities in opposition to the 'other', less powerful position, femininity, and as such reject any associated activities, such as literacy which some boys see as 'girly' (Warrington and Younger, 2006). Challenging dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity which lead some boys to reject schooled literacy practices is seen as an essential part of breaking the pattern of boys' underachievement (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Jackson, 1998; Reay, 2003), as is broadening dominant definitions of literacy and practices to make them more inclusive, in part by drawing on children's cultural capital (Hall and Coles, 2001; Marsh, 2005).

The literature also reveals how educators' actions construct and maintain gender hegemonies or hierarchies in schools, which can affect how children participate in literacy practices. Skelton's research in one English primary school revealed dominant constructions of masculinity normalised by senior management: the Head Teacher announced that she had poured water over a

disruptive boy, to show him who was 'pack leader' (2001: 80). If taking up hegemonic constructions of masculinity is causing some boys to underachieve, I recognise that schools must resist validating such structures and educators need to examine and challenge the gender constructions they project to children. As will be become clear in Chapter Six, participants in this research study do engage in critical reflection of the language and social practices in their classrooms and contexts. Maynard's study of literacy practices in primary classrooms revealed that teachers gave better marks to 'good narrative writing...stuffed full of adjectives and adverbs' (2002: 66), which was almost exclusively girls' writing; however they acknowledged that they considered this style of writing to be 'boring' and preferred to read boys' stories. Warrington and Younger's research on teachers' gendered expectations similarly found that teachers preferred the 'sparkle and challenge' of male learners (2000: 505). Expectations and assumptions about performance in literacy along gender binaries have implications not just for the social construction of identities, but also for attainment, if stereotypes are embedded in teachers' assessment practices.

Power and privilege - girls as 'other'

Discussions and debates about boys' underachievement in literacy are relational; that is, such conceptions rely on gender binaries which construct boys' literacy development in opposition to girls' achievement (Skelton and Francis, 2003). The 'what about the boys?' debate has served to focus government spending in some countries on resources to address boys' underachievement (Davies and Saltmarsh, 2007; Archer *et al.*, 2007) to the detriment of girls who are performing as badly as, or worse than, boys (*ibid.*) Social class, not gender, is the clearest predictor of underachievement (Reay, 1991, 2003, 2006; Francis, 2006), so feminist educational research aims to raise

the profile of working class girls (Archer *et al.*, 2007; Reay, 1991), thus foregrounding inequalities of access to resources in and beyond schooled education. The fact that post-school options 'remain undeniably better for boys than for girls' (Davies and Saltmarsh, 2007: 1) is often overlooked in popular media reports about the gender and attainment debate. The implications for practitioners to look beyond gender binaries are highlighted by Condie *et al.* (2006):

> Recent literature challenges a view of gender as pathologically determined and, instead, presents a more complex account of how boys and girls interact with schooling, developing and modifying their sense of themselves in response to particular circumstances, both in school and beyond school, shaped by a whole range of social factors - social class, culture, sexuality, ethnicity. Thus, schools have to acknowledge a diversity of masculinities and femininities and validate a range of pupil identities (2006: 7).

The feminist social constructionist literature discussed above both challenges gender binaries and illustrates how those binaries are constructed and maintained in schools; in fact I would argue from my experience that gender binary constructions are prevalent in Scottish schools. Difficulties and resistances in acknowledging diversity, as recommended by Condie *et al.* (*ibid.*) are evident in an article in a Scottish newspaper article from February 2012 which describes how one primary school in Edinburgh is addressing 'bullying and gender issues' through a range of what I would identify as critical literacy activities. For example, children work in groups to design 'gender-neutral' toys, sports teams are mixed gender and age, and such activities are underpinned by discussions about the importance of 'equal access to toys, pastimes, sports and jobs, regardless of their gender' (*ibid.*). Inspectors from Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) commended the practices and the local authority has recommended that

other schools adopt similar approaches; however a member of the National Parent Forum is quoted as saying that such an initiative is 'distracting' when the school should be focusing on implementing the new curriculum and the general secretary of a large Scottish teaching union derided the school's efforts, saying: 'Of all the things that are wrong and of all the problems these kids face, you would have thought the differences between boys and girls would be the least of it' (Marshall, 2012). I would argue that the school seems to be clearly addressing and embedding 'the important skills of critical literacy', despite considerable resistance evidenced in the article that challenging gender stereotyping is seen as a distracting, trivial matter.

Dominant social constructions of literacy

The previous sections described literacy practices in schools along gender binaries, to highlight not just current debates about gender and literacy but also to emphasise that thinking about boys and girls as binary opposites is prevalent in schooled literacy practices. I have previously claimed that my introduction to the social constructionist literature led me not just to challenge my own thinking about gender and literacy, but the very concept of literacy and what it means to be literate in society. Yet my conversations with teaching colleagues and observations of their teaching practices has led me to conclude that thinking about boys and girls as two distinct groups, with disparate interests and abilities, is still dominant. From a critical literacy perspective, I have often tried to engage colleagues in discussions which challenge this dominant view, but have had little or no success, as there seems to be a conviction that boys 'just are' one way and girls another. This conflict of beliefs, what we hold to be the truth of our convictions, and my frustration at not being able to engage in critical discussions about gender and literacy practices with colleagues due to their reluctance if not resistance

to challenge their assumptions, has been at the fore of my thinking as I have designed and carried out this research. In the process of speaking to participants in this research project, I have listened with a 'critical ear', wondering if gender binary conceptualisations are a feature of their discussions.

The question of how to critique hierarchies of power with the purpose of transforming them led me to the feminist poststructuralist literature on gender and literacy, which is the focus of the next section.

Feminist poststructuralist theory and gendered literacy practices

I have explained that social constructionist theory guided my understanding of gender binary constructions and how issues of access and power are important in educational research for social justice. In engaging with the social constructionist research I shifted away from my previously-held beliefs that my students' difficulties with acquiring functional literacy were constitutional; within that perspective, an individual is responsible for his or her success in becoming literate. I believe that if we change our understanding of 'being literate' to include more than the ability to grasp the alphabetic code, we would cease to deny so many people the right to identify themselves as literate.

Acutely aware that my teaching had not enabled many of my former students to call themselves literate according to the dominant paradigm, I feel hugely frustrated that my lack of theoretical knowledge meant that I did not provide opportunities for us to discuss and challenge the concepts of 'literacy' and 'being literate'. If we had engaged in such critical discussions, I believe that many students would at least have had the awareness that it was

less their personal failure to become good readers, spellers and writers - the trinity of the most privileged literacy skills in our schools - than it is a wider social issue which positions them as powerless, illiterate or - a descriptor which I frequently heard from teaching colleagues when discussing children with literacy difficulties - 'not bright'.

Seeking theoretical framing of how individuals are positioned by the dominant discourses and, crucially, how we can resist and subvert such power structures to transform our conditions, I turned to the feminist poststructuralist literature. The key difference between constructionist and poststructuralist paradigms is explained by Davies (2003):

> Subjectivity is generally not made problematic in constructionist accounts ... Poststructuralism, in contrast, seeks to understand the processes through which the person is subjected to, and constituted by, structure and discourse (2003: 13).

Foucault's definition of discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1972: 49) suggests that discourse is more than social construction of meaning through language, it is 'intimately connected to social structure and social practices' (Burr, 2003: 64). In considering issues of gender and attainment, poststructuralism is an epistemological approach which can be used to analyse how children position themselves and are positioned by discursive practices in schools. Davies (2003) states:

> The individual subject is understood at one and the same time to be constituted through social structures and through language, and becomes a speaking subject, one who can continue to speak/write into existence those same structures through those same discourses. But, as a speaking subject, they can also invent, invert and break old

structures and patterns and discourses and thus speak/write into existence other ways of being (2003: xx).

Davies' work on challenging gender inequalities involved teaching the language and concepts of poststructuralism to give children the conceptual tools to recognise and challenge instances of inequality in discourses, which she describes as 'the transparent medium through which we see real worlds' (2003: 154). In this way, she argues, children see themselves not as passive actors but as producers of culture. Reading Davies' *Shards of Glass: Children reading and writing beyond gendered identities* (2003) was a significant experience in the development of my critical consciousness, as I realised the importance of not just gaining personal understanding and knowledge about inequalities in education, but also that children need to be taught the metalanguage to understand, recognise and challenge those inequalities. *Shards of Glass* is not a critical literacy manual for educators, full of practical suggestions for critical literacy lessons or approaches, nor does it explicitly identify how poststructuralist theory was taught to children. It does, though, explain that key concepts such as discourse, positioning and resistance (to the dominant, discriminatory position) were taught to children, to make them challenge the 'taken-for-granted concepts of the individual as architect of their own subjectivity' (2003: 4). Children were taught that they could resist the dominant discourse if it positioned them in a powerless way, and reconstruct the text to make it more equitable or fair. The children in the research study, in the upper primary stages, amazed me with their usage of poststructuralist concepts, and revealed a sophisticated understanding of gendered power hierarchies in the texts they read and the discussions they held with peers of both genders (*ibid.*). Francis (1999), who replicated the study with children in England, suggests that Davies' (1993, first edition) work helped children challenge some existing stereotypes, although 'the

post-structuralist theory itself seemed less important than did teaching children about the relational gender dualism, how it impacts on our lives, in subtle ways and how unhelpful it is to present genders as oppositional' (1999: 389).

A distinction needs to be drawn between poststructuralism and poststructuralism from a feminist perspective: Francis (*ibid.*) argues that apolitical poststructuralism deconstructs gender categories and hierarchies, but it is only when coupled with feminism's urge to reconstruct research and pedagogical practices that poststructuralism can be used to transgress.

The concept of transgression or transformation alongside deconstruction of texts is, to me, the essence of critical literacy. Critique is only part of what it means to be critically literate, the act of transformation or attempted social change is included within my understanding of critical literacy. Davies (2003) was developing critical consciousness in the young learners' minds, she was guiding them towards an understanding of how language is powerful and how it constructs relationships of power; crucially she was also encouraging the students to use their conceptual tools to challenge instances where they felt they were being positioned as powerless in written and spoken discourse. The skilled work that participants in this research study undertook with children to engage them in critiquing inequalities of power and access will be analysed and critiqued in Chapter Six.

Janks synthesises theories of power in *Literacy and Power* (2010), stating:

> If we take seriously Foucault's view of power as having a "capillary form of existence" that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes,

their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980: 39), then this necessitates a focus on the effects of the texts, knowledges, and practices that we bring into our literacy classrooms (2010: 51).

Feminist poststructuralist research which uses a Foucauldian analytic approach to theorise gender construction and maintenance and hierarchies of power in education gave me an understanding of key discourses in the debate about gendered literacy attainment and made me increasingly conscious of issues of social justice in literacy education. Epstein *et al.*, (1998) identify the 'poor boys' and 'boys will be boys' discourses, and Francis (2006) and Davies and Saltmarsh (2007) discuss neo-liberal discourses and boys' underachievement. How boys are positioned as powerful or powerless in these discourses has implications for gendered identity construction and classroom practices. If, as Davies (2003) suggests, children need to be taught the conceptual tools for critiquing language and social practices which position them as powerful or powerless, then perhaps critical discussions about the dominant discourses surrounding gender and attainment should be part of critical literacy practices in schools. I would also argue that critical conversations need to be held not just in classrooms but also in staffrooms, to provide opportunities for truly reflexive discussions about our own and wider dominant literacy practices.

Critical literacy is a theme in much of the poststructuralist literature I read on the subject of gendered literacy practices and attainments. The literature on critical pedagogical theory - with a focus on critical literacy - and power in social justice education is the focus of the next section.

Critical pedagogy

Thus far in this chapter I have discussed how social constructionist and feminist poststructuralist theories guided my understanding of how hegemonic social and language practices can be subverted and transformed, in an effort to make schooled learning more equitable. The next significant challenge I faced in terms of my own understanding about literacy and social justice concerns was: how do we as educators set about guiding children in recognising, challenging and critiquing, and acting to transform inequalities in education? *Shards of Glass* (Davies, 2003) showed me that it is possible to do so, but did not provide an explicit guide of how such work can be enacted with children and young people. I was interested to explore the theoretical underpinnings of teaching approaches which inform more just, democratic educational experiences. I also wondered, if 'the important skills of critical literacy' are to be taught in our schools, how do educators go about this in their own settings? These concerns led to the two research questions:

- *What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their understanding of critical literacy practices?*; and
- *What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts?*

Critical pedagogical theory shows us how to put critical literacy into practice; it is a framework through which critical learning and teaching can be envisaged and enacted. I see critical pedagogical theory as the foundation of critical literacy: I do not conceptualise critical literacy as a practice to be reserved for literacy and English lessons, but rather as an approach which should be imbued in all aspects of education for social justice. The discussion of critical pedagogical theory here is intended to widen out the term critical *literacy* to highlight that critical literacy permeates all aspects of the official and the hidden curricula. Critical pedagogical approaches are not

commonplace in Scottish primary and secondary schools but, as Curriculum for Excellence literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes 'address the important skills of critical literacy', my research investigates what this means and how it is being enacted in one Scottish local authority. The discussion which follows begins with a definition of critical pedagogy; identifies the key distinction between critical theory and critical pedagogical theory; then looks closely at the influential pedagogical models of Paulo Freire (1970) and Ira Shor (1992).

Critical pedagogy defined

Kanpol (1999) defines critical pedagogy as enacting critical theory in classroom contexts. Critical pedagogies aim to recognise, challenge, critique and transform inequalities of gender, class and race and acknowledge that education can never be neutral, as the cultural and political ideologies of those who structure and enact educational practices shape and construct those practices. Critical pedagogy is concerned with social justice, as Kanpol explains: 'Critical pedagogy incorporates a moral vision of human justice and decency as its common vision' (1999: 27).

Critical theory underpins critical pedagogical theory, although there is a key difference between the two theories. Critical theorists or Neo-Marxists are primary concerned with how social class or socioeconomic status is produced and maintained through education. If the purpose of education is to produce workers for the marketplace to maintain capitalism and through that the power, control and financial dominance of the upper class, then schooling is the means through which these workers are created. Individuals might wish to rise above their class or status, but hegemonies of power and privilege resist such change and the status quo is maintained.

The fixed, negative nature of critical theory is subverted by critical pedagogical theory, which holds that schools can be sites of social change and transformation through critical pedagogical practices (Giroux, 1989; Shor, 1992; Kanpol, 1999; Willinsky, 2008). Hope in the possibility of social change and transformation is a feature of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogical theory foregrounds the ways in which hegemonies of power - along intersections of race, class and gender – are constructed and reinforced by structures and practices within schools. The power these hegemonies have to shape children's identities through the socialisation process has been called 'the hidden curriculum'; that is, children learn about gender, class and race through social and language practices enacted in schools. The hidden curriculum is a hegemony of power which is simultaneously shaped by dominant social constructions whilst shaping those who experience the hidden curriculum. Davies' (2003) work, in which she describes teaching children how to recognise and resist being positioned as powerless in written and spoken discourse, is an example of critical pedagogy. Recognising how dominant practices and ideologies shape us; challenging and resisting those practices when they are unjust or inequitable; and changing or transforming those practices are at the heart of critical pedagogy.

The key distinctions between critical theory and critical literacy theory are crystallised by Willinsky (2008), who explains that as critical literacy practices differ within and between sites, there is naturally a range of difference in how such practices incorporate pure critical theory. Whilst critiquing dominant international critical literacy policies and practices, he simultaneously offers a discourse of optimism, positing that critique as the key tenet of critical theory can be powerfully coupled with the hope and optimism of a transformative critical pedagogy.

Teachers as agents of change

Giroux (1989) argues that teachers need to be primarily concerned with the issue of empowerment, engaged in a collective effort 'as transformative intellectuals' (1989: 215) to make schools democratic sites of learning for all children. Critical pedagogy requires that teachers ground their pedagogical practices in the theory of challenge and critique, with the ultimate aim of social change and transformation for the betterment of not just the children they teach but the wider society. This requires that educators understand how hegemonies of power are constructed and maintained in and by educational structures and practices in order to enact critical pedagogies. Kanpol explains that critical pedagogy teachers:

> challenge stereotyping, find ways to subvert tracking through alternative teaching methodologies, build curriculum with open and critical spirits, become involved in the policy-oriented decisions of the state and local school district site, and form group solidarity over issues of value-laden importance (1999: 39).

Kanpol's description of critical educators is not typical of the majority of my colleagues, and I predict that there could be some confusion and resistance to adopting the critical approach suggested here. In the introduction to *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (Freire and Macedo, 1987), Giroux outlines the Gramscian perspective that 'literacy as a radical construct had to be rooted in a spirit of critique and project of possibility that enabled people to participate in the understanding and transformation of their society' (1987: 2). Participants in this research study demonstrated engagement with participatory, democratic pedagogies; although labelled as *radical*, understanding and transforming our society seems to me to be an important part of being a responsible citizen. Critical literacy pedagogy as a

transformative social practice is perhaps most commonly associated with Paulo Freire (1970), and his critical pedagogical theory.

Freire's critical pedagogical theory

In Chapter One I explained that during the professional development training, participants were initially introduced to Freire's belief in the importance of developing learners' critical capacity so they can 'read the world as well as the word' (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Freire believed that one's language and social experiences simultaneously construct and are constructed by these practices. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire describes the banking model of education, in which teachers who hold the knowledge and power deposit information into their students' minds. Freire advocated the development of critical awareness in students, claiming: 'The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world' (1970: 60). This problem-posing style of education, as Freire described it, is essentially a dialogic approach or critical dialogue between teachers as faciliators and students, learning from each other and collectively creating multiple layers of meaning in their understanding of print, spoken and lived texts:

> In problem-posing education, people develop their power to
> perceive critically the way they exist in the world *with which*
> and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world
> not as a static reality, but as reality in process, in transformation
> (Freire, 1970: 64, original emphasis).

Freire viewed problem-posing pedagogy as the fundamental way to develop critical consciousness, which he believed was essential for active engagement and participation in democratic society.

In a Freireian model of learning, although the teacher's conceptual knowledge is seen as important in guiding the critical literacy process, it is recognised that through the process teachers will learn from students and students will learn from each other. Power is shared as teachers and students collaboratively construct the curriculum. This co-construction of knowledge (Bell, 2011) is evident in the data gathered for this research study, and will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Freire conceptualised education as a practice of freedom and identified praxis, which he described as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (1970: 36), as the key feature of human beings and as an essential element of being free. He theorised that at the same time as we are shaped by culture and history, our cultural, historical and linguistic practices shape our worlds. Thus, a condition of freedom is engaging in praxis, reflection and action upon our linguistic, historical and cultural structures in order to transform our world.

According to Freire's pedagogical theory, dialogue is a fundamental aspect of education as a practice of freedom, the way in which students and teachers mediate their worlds through words. He states:

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (1970: 53).

Freire's theory recognises the power imbalances inherent in problem-posing pedagogies, namely that teachers are commonly seen to have the true knowledge to which students should aspire. Instead, he proposes that the

dialectical opposition of those knowledges is synthesised in a new practice of student-teacher and teacher-student interaction. Subverting authoritarian models in this way creates spaces for teachers to bring students' own cultural and linguistic practices into the classroom, using them as the foundation and the structure of literacy learning and teaching. Critical dialogue must include and respect students' own language practices, in order that they can use their words to describe and discuss the world as it is, the ways in which hegemonies and unequal power balances serve to oppress and limit opportunities, and also the world as it *might* be. Critical pedagogies are pedagogies of hope and possibility, not pedagogies of despair; they recognise that just as cultural, historical and linguistic practices construct and are constructed by those who shape them in a given time and place, where there are sites of injustice and inequality they can be reconstructed and reshaped. Freire's theory shows us the power of critical literacy for social justice, that critical pedagogies foreground issues of inequality and actively promote transformation of those injustices. I believe that critical literacy in Scotland must be constructed with Freire's theory at its core, which I have previously argued is not currently the case.

Bartlett's (2005) ethnographic study of critical pedagogy in adult literacy programmes in Brazil reveals that although teachers' declarative knowledge of the need to structure practices around students' own cultural and linguistic practices is evident, the actual implementation of such knowledge is problematic. Lack of understanding of students' own knowledges - including underestimating what they know - is a central concern, even for those teachers who live in or near the students' communities. One teacher describes steering students' dialogue away from airplanes and Volkswagens to canoes and fishing, an act which Bartlett argues does not recognise

students' knowledge - albeit perhaps not direct experience - of such topics. She also identifies the delicate balance between respecting students' cultural practices and acting in a patronising manner; for example, when she visited one literacy project the teacher and students were discussing the effects of the agricultural cycle on their lives and her host:

> suddenly insisted that the students push the desks to the corners of the room and do some impromptu folk dances that were traditionally performed at harvest time. The students' participation in this activity seemed, to me, more compliant than authentic, and I wondered what the students were thinking (2005: 358).

Bartlett also cautions against pedagogical practices which reduce 'dialogue to a bland version of socializing' (*ibid.*: 359). Allowing student knowledge to go unchallenged or uncritiqued when it is racist, for example, maintains damaging hegemonies. Uncritical acceptance of student knowledge when it is unjust is not respecting student knowledge, it is failing to act upon an opportunity for critical discussions which could lead to social change and transformation. One of the suggestions Bartlett gives for assisting teachers to implement critical pedagogies is 'to be given more time and opportunities to examine Freireian theory in more depth' (*ibid.*: 360), arguing that the complexity of the theory warrants more deliberation than merely being reduced to 'slogans'. Bartlett's argument resonates with my concerns about superficial constructions of critical literacy in Scotland, which foreground information literacy and higher order thinking skills, not critical literacy as a pedagogy for social justice. The participants in this research study engaged with Freireian theory during the professional development training, and have embedded critical literacy in their classrooms and contexts. Enabling greater access to Freireian theory across Scotland could result in critical

literacy for social justice becoming a widespread practice, which should not be confused with information literacy and higher order thinking skills.

For Freire, developing critical consciousness involves recognising how one's actions have an outward effect and also how one's own and others' actions affect identity formation. Critical knowledge is the goal of and the act of knowing as a practice of freedom. Glass (2001) states:

> Critical consciousness is mindful of the relationships among *consciousness, action,* and *world* and grasps the *why* of the world in the constructive nature of knowing (2001: 19).

Freire's theory holds that critical consciousness (or conscientization or conscientizaçao in Portuguese) is constructed by the identification of 'generative themes', which are the cultural, historical and political issues which are perceived by the student to be most important or 'iconic'. Emerging awareness of generative themes, which includes awareness of not just what the themes are but also recognition that they can change and be changed, leads to critical consciousness. Guiding students in identifying generative themes through problem-posing pedagogy is the main aim of critical teachers, according to Freire, who also argues that teachers must undertake thematic investigation of their students' communities, to name the world alongside their students, as a form of cultural action. Although they do not label them as such, participants in this research study use themes generated by the children they teach in their pedagogical approaches, putting Freire's theory into practice. Freire viewed conscientizaçao as the way for humans to shape and contribute to democratic society (1970, 2005).

Thus, Freire's critical pedagogy is a socially constructed form of education, and one with social justice at its heart. Becoming critically conscious with the aim of participating in - not merely observing - society is the key. Teachers who use a critical pedagogical approach to literacy are transformative agents (Giroux, 1989), whose work is underpinned by moral principles of social justice. Critical pedagogy challenges hegemonic conceptions of literacy and what it means to be literate, so issues of inequality along lines of race, class and gender become central concerns. Critical pedagogy teachers also use children's own stories and literacies to shape practices, as Kanpol (1999) explains:

> Critical literacy allows the teacher to connect curriculum texts to student experience—making curriculum knowledge both meaningful and relevant as well as introspective for both the teacher and student (1999: 55).

Critical pedagogical theory emphasises the need to engage children not only in their learning, but also in decisions about what is to be learned, or what counts as important knowledge in their classrooms. Sharing power disrupts hegemonies and creates climates for democratic learning environments, which is the focus of the next section.

Shor's critical-democratic pedagogy

Strongly influenced by Freire's critical pedagogical theory, Shor describes, in *Empowering Education: Critical teaching for social change* (1992), how he has developed his critical-democratic theory and practice. Shor links problem-posing to the theories of Dewey and Piaget and the active, inquiring education models they advocated. With a clear view of how traditional, passive forms of education serve to construct and maintain power and

privilege for students, Shor argues that teachers must also be conscious of how critical-democratic principles can subvert harmful hegemonies. Following Freire's theory of banking education, Shor suggests that teachers who ask children to memorise information instead of encouraging them to question school and society restrict 'their potential for critical thought and action' (1992: 12).

Shor (*ibid.*) identifies eleven key tenets of his empowering pedagogical framework:

- participatory
- affective
- problem-posing
- situated
- multicultural
- dialogic
- desocializing
- democratic
- researching
- interdisciplinary
- activist.

Interestingly, in his description of situated pedagogy, he cites Kirkwood and Kirkwood's book *Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland* (1989), suggesting that critical pedagogy in Scottish adult education has achieved international recognition by critical scholars. In fact, I subsequently found a second edition (2011) of Kirkwood and Kirkwood's book and was fascinated to read about a Freireian adult community education project in Edinburgh, called the Gorgie Dalry Adult Learning Project (ALP). Dr. Jim Crowther and Ian Martin of the University of Edinburgh write in the preface to the second edition:

> Through its pedagogy and curriculum ALP has made a significant contribution to enabling the often marginalised voices of Scottish

communities to be heard. For educators the world over who share similar aims and values, the experience of ALP is both insightful, instructive and inspirational (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011: xviii).

The democratic component of Shor's (1992) pedagogical theory is based upon the principle that, following Dewey (1917), children become passive citizens disinterested in civic life if they experience authoritarian approaches in schools; encouraging active participation in discussions about classroom rules and the curriculum, as well as about the wider purposes and implications of formal education, will hopefully lead to democratic participation in the wider society. Modelling democratic participation in schools, Shor (1992) argues, makes the workings of politics less abstract and thus increases the critical capacities of students to challenge and critique social structures, systems and institutions.

The dialogic principle (Alexander, 2004), or critical dialogue, is presented in opposition to what Shor (1992) calls 'teacher-talk'. He states that teachers who spend the majority of class time talking effectively silence students, as well as making them passive recipients. Shor is clear that a dialogic approach is not meant to be a free-for-all, but rather 'balances the authority and expertise of the teacher with the culture and language of the students' (1992: 104). He argues that direct instruction has been tried for more than a century and has resulted in weak literacy, so a cooperative, active approach to teaching literacy is needed. The participants in this research study are, according to Shor's conceptualisation, empowering educators: they use active, participatory pedagogies, creating a democratic classroom climate; they provide spaces for children to discuss issues which are relevant to them and connected to their interests; and they are motivated by central concerns to develop children's independent critical capacity.

Freire and Shor's critical pedagogical theories provide frameworks in which Scottish educators can plan to enact critical literacy. Shor advocates a co-operative, active approach to literacy, a suggestion which I believe would cause little resistance among most Scottish educators as active and co-operative learning are common approaches. Problem-posing pedagogies, power sharing and praxis will be more problematic, I predict, as they represent real change in current theoretical understandings and practices. Bartlett (2005) claims that educators need time to engage with Freireian theory in depth if they are to enact critical pedagogies. In this way, they would move towards Giroux's vision of 'transformative intellectuals' (1989: 90); in other words, they would think critically, reflect and act to change.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed how the social constructionist, feminist poststructuralist and critical pedagogical literature reviewed has shaped my understanding of critical literacy as a tool for social justice. Questions of access and power are critical issues in education for social justice and are foregrounded in the literature; applying these three theories enables and guides critique and challenge of inequalities of power in language and social practices as well as transformation of sites of injustice. Although my engagement with the body of literature reviewed in this chapter was prompted by questions of and concerns about issues of gender and access, inequalities of power along intersections of class, race and culture are critical considerations of education for social justice. The three key theories underpinning my research are instructive in recognising, challenging and acting to transform inequalities, and they have shaped not just this research study but also how I think and act in the world.

As I was preparing to write the conclusion to this chapter, I discovered a Scottish government policy document which I will briefly explicate and critique to demonstrate the impact of the three theoretical frameworks on my interaction with and interpretation of texts for this research. The *Literacy Action Plan: An action plan to improve literacy in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2010) states:

> We also need to accept that the early identification of additional support needs and the diagnosis of learning difficulties are of great importance in breaking down barriers to literacy and attainment. We will therefore:
> • Encourage all local authorities to introduce personalised assessments and diagnosis at P1 and at other appropriate stages.

The usage of the word 'diagnosis' in this policy document concerns me, as when I first read it I felt indignant that one of the recommendations within an action plan to improve literacy in Scotland would use medical terminology to describe early years educational practice. This social construction of literacy teaching and support along the medical model which dominates additional support provision in Scottish education (Macleod, 2010) maintains the hegemonic belief that there is something wrong with children who experience barriers to literacy attainment which can be *fixed* or *remedied* once the correct diagnosis is made. Using a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework to move beyond critique to also consider sites of possible transformation led me to use the above statement as a stimulus for discussion at a meeting with additional support for learning teachers in Edinburgh, which served as a means to discuss this construction of our role as 'diagnosticians' in schools and the resultant expectations that we would then 'fix' children. We discussed the fact that in Scottish schools teachers 'identify' children who experience literacy difficulties, including dyslexia,

but we do not diagnose them; in using the word 'diagnose' the Scottish Government is not only out of touch with current practices but is also using a deficit or medical model to describe literacy learning and teaching.

At the same meeting, critical pedagogical theory was used as a lens through which we imagined – and planned for – change in our development work with class teachers. Whilst recognising the importance of providing literacy support to all children including those with barriers to learning, as additional support for learning teachers we also planned to guide colleagues towards understanding that 'personalised assessment' and 'diagnosis' implies that we hold privileged knowledge about how to *recognise* and *remedy* difficulties with learning, when in fact much wider discussions about literacy and what it means to be literate need to take place, to open up thinking about barriers to learning from a socio-cultural perspective, rather than from a deficit model of literacy acquisition.

Thus I recognise that I use the conceptual tools gained from the theoretical frameworks of social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and critical pedagogical theory in the process of critique and transformation. The focus in this chapter on how these three key theories have shaped me as a researcher and as an educator is intended to make my own position clear; it is also a reflection of my belief that my theoretical perspectives shape and affect all thoughts and actions and thus influence how I have imagined, designed, carried out and analysed this research. These theoretical frameworks will also permeate the next chapter, which discusses the literature reviewed to address the research questions and which gave me a better understanding of the main themes which I predicted would emerge in discussion with the participants.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL LITERACY THEORY AND PRACTICES

The previous chapter explored how my concerns about access to specialist resources led me to review the literature which foregrounds issues of gender and power; social constructionist, feminist poststructuralist and critical pedagogical theories have shaped my critical consciousness and have changed the ways I participate in language and social practices. I have argued that critical literacy is important, precisely because it foregrounds issues of social justice in education, and I have also argued that in constructing critical literacy as information literacy and higher order thinking skills, **Education Scotland** has produced an inaccurate construction of critical literacy. The consensus in the literature reviewed for this research study, discussed in the previous as well as this chapter, is that concerns about inequalities are *essential* aspects of critical literacy. In this chapter, I explore dominant models and conceptualisations of literacy and critical literacy; what is identified as being distinctive about a critical literacy approach; accounts of critical literacy practices with children and young people; and the intersections of critical media literacy and critical thinking with critical literacy.

Dominant definitions of literacy in the past century

As discussed in the preceding chapter, dominant social constructions have the power to shape what people believe; such definitions thus become the dominant ideology in a specific sociocultural space. Post World War Two, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (**UNESCO**) became the 'main institutional haven for international literacy activity' (Levine, 1986: 26). **UNESCO**'s 2004 position paper '*The Plurality of Literacy and its Implications for Policies and Programmes*' contains a brief history

of the changing meanings of literacy, claiming that until the mid-1960s literacy was 'understood as a set of technical skills: reading, writing and calculating' (*ibid.*: 6). In the late 1960s and 1970s the term 'functional literacy' came into use, conceptually linking reading, writing and arithmetic skills with socioeconomic development; that is, it implied that those skills were required by individuals to gain employment (*ibid.*: 9). Understanding literacy as a set of social practices is emphasised: 'Today, the international community no longer sees literacy as a mere stand-alone skill, but instead as a social practice contributing to broader purposes of lifelong learning' (*ibid.*: 10). In Chapter Four I will discuss critical literacy in the adult education framework in Scotland.

UNESCO's definition of literacy is:

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

In Scotland, literacy is defined within Curriculum for Excellence as:

> the set of skills which allows an individual to engage fully in society and in learning, through the different forms of language, and the range of texts, which society values and finds useful (Scottish Government, 2009).

Both definitions highlight the importance of literacy skills as a prerequisite of active citizenship and for lifelong learning. Other models of literacy acquisition and development also reflect the change in understanding literacy as more than functional skills. For instance, the Australian Literacy

and Language Policy Group's definition includes speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking as well as reading and writing (cited in Cairney, 1995). Similarly, Gee argued that defining literacy as reading and writing ignores its sociocultural contexts, instead treating literacy as 'an asocial cognitive skill' (1990: 23). As will be seen in Chapter Six, participants in this research study articulated their understandings of being literate in line with traditional views of literacy, as well as current dominant constructions of literacy as a sociocultural practice.

Literacy as social construction

In the preceding chapter I discussed that educators' failure to recognise how the literacy choices they make, for their students and for themselves, shape and construct individuals and the wider society is of concern in much of the literature reviewed; in other words, if educators are not critical about their language and social practices, possible power imbalances go unrecognised and unchallenged. I have explained that this research study began with the identification of a *gap* in a policy paper, and in the preceding chapter I discussed how my critique of the Scottish Government's *Literacy Action Plan* (2010) led to wider critical discussions and action for transformation. Next, I will discuss three dominant social constructions of reading in the past century.

Theories of reading - The New Criticism, Reader Response Theories and Transactional Theory

The New Criticism was the dominant school of thought about textual interaction in the early to mid-twentieth century, which held that the text was an entity in itself, requiring close analysis to reveal the truth or meaning within. Neither the author's intention nor the reader's response was

foregrounded. Within this theoretical framework, the reader is a passive recipient of the text's ultimate meaning.

In the 1960s and 1970s, reader response criticism (Fish, 1990) emerged, foregrounding the importance of the reader's active engagement with the text in order to make meaning. The possibility of multiple meanings rather than one correct understanding of the text is a feature of reader response theories; without a reader a text holds no meaning.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1994) can similarly be seen as a reaction against the New Criticism; it holds that texts are nothing more than their physical markings until a reader makes meanings of those texts, with his or her unique perspective and background helping to shape or construct that meaning. This reciprocal relationship between reader and text defines Transactional Theory. Rosenblatt 'emphasized the contribution of literature to a democratic society, making explicit the broad social role of literature' (McDaniel, 2006: 30). The shift in dominance from the New Criticism to Reader Response Theory and Transactional Theory represents a change in understanding literacy practices as active, rather than passive. In Chapter One I explained that one of the key aims of the critical literacy professional development training was developing participants' understanding of the importance of teaching reader response theories, to encourage the reader to think of how s/he is positioned within and by certain texts. Such theories inform issues of *access*, as they challenge the notion of one authoritative reading of a text and instead posit that multiple interpretations are possible, and are grounded in the reader's unique social, cultural and historical position. Over time our notion of what a text is has

widened, particularly with the recognition of what is commonly termed multiliteracies.

Defining Critical Literacy

Multiliteracies

In 1996 the ten scholars who formed the New London Group produced the article *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing social futures* (1996), addressing the need to reform literacy pedagogies in response to rapidly changing technology as well as multiple cultural and linguistic influences and perspectives. Access and engagement were the two key tenets of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, in terms of creating spaces for texts and textual practices which were meaningful to children in schools and in fostering critical engagement with the texts and with a view to giving children the skills to imagine and design what their futures might hold. The four components of the pedagogy, as originally conceptualised by the New London Group, were:

- situated practice - immersion in experience and simulations of the structures and relationships which might be found in the wider world of work and public spaces
- overt instruction - systematic and conscious understanding and learning about metalanguages
- critical framing - interpreting and critiquing sociocultural contexts including what is being studied
- transformed practice - reflecting on and applying the transformed meaning to work in other sites.

The concept of reconstruction or redesign appeared for the first time in *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (1996), which Janks later referred to as 'a pedagogy of reconstruction' (2010), making it explicit that texts which can be

deconstructed can also be reconstructed, or transformed. Thus, pedagogies for multiliteracies are engaged and engaging, and not only active but *activist*; that is, teachers who use such approaches aspire to transform as well as critique, as will be demonstrated clearly in Chapter Six. Participants in this research study identified critical literacy practices which involved transformation as well as critique, and thus enacted active, activist pedagogies.

Four Resources Model

One view of what such an active/activist pedagogy might entail has been provided by Luke and Freebody (1999) whose Four Resources Model is a learning and teaching framework which identifies four key roles in literacy practices - code breaker, text participant, text user and critical analyser - and foregrounds the importance of technical ability, an awareness of the importance of enjoyment of language practices and the application of critical skills. Code breaking involves recognising and using sounds, letters, spelling and structural patterns. Text participants understand and compose meaningful texts, using their personal meaning systems. Text users know about and act on cultural and social functions that texts perform in and outwith schools, with an awareness of how to make meaning from different genres of texts. Critically analysing texts recognises that texts are never ideologically neutral, that certain views are silenced when others are dominant in texts, and that textual practices can be critiqued and reconstructed. The Four Resources Model, then, advances a conceptualisation of critical analytical skills in which social justice concerns are embedded, which I believe is fundamental in any model of critical literacy.

Halliday Plus Model

In 2001, shortly after Luke and Freebody's model appeared, Egawa and Harste developed another model of literacy involving critical capacity, the Halliday Plus Model of Language Learning (2001). Egawa and Harste's model is similar to Luke and Freebody's in its emphasis on the importance of teaching children to use language to learn, to learn about and through language and to learn to use language to critique. Learning language relates to using language and semiotic systems to make meanings. Learning about language means understanding how texts operate and how they are coded. Learning through language is essentially using texts to learn about the world. Learning to use language to critique involves questioning and challenging assumptions about what seems normal in as well as creating new texts and redesigning existing ones.

Egawa and Harste (*ibid.*) argue that learning to decode texts teaches children to be good consumers; however they need to learn to critique texts in order to become good citizens. This is an interesting distinction in respect of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and the four capacities identified therein - responsible citizen, effective contributor, confident individual and successful learner. The Halliday Plus Model shows that access to texts in the form of decoding them is insufficient, as children also require access to the language of critique; in this way, they gain greater power to recognise, resist and transform sites of inequality and injustice.

Janks' Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy

A key tenet in Janks' theory of teaching literacy is helping students understand the relationship between language and power, specifically how certain acts of communication have greater or less power in different sites. In

her Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy (2000), Janks theorises the interdependence of four key components of critical literacy: domination, access, diversity and design. Within Janks' model, *domination* refers to the ways in which hegemonic language practices are constructed, maintained and challenged. *Access* is the means by which people gain access to privileged or dominant spaces of power, whether social or language practices or institutions. *Diversity* foregrounds the importance of recognising and utilising students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and backgrounds. *Design* refers to the ways we construct or create texts, including reconstruction or redesign of texts for transformative purposes. Janks argues that foregrounding any one component over others limits the opportunities to recognise and understand how language works in powerful ways and restricts the ways in which we can challenge and subvert damaging enactments of the language/power relationship. I have previously explained that *power* and *access* are central to my conceptualisation of critical literacy practices for social justice, influenced by Janks' *(ibid.)* theorisations, as is the principle of *design* or reconstruction - which I refer to as action for transformation throughout this thesis. Although I do not address *diversity* frequently or explicitly, underlying my central argument is my belief in the importance of recognising and accepting multiple, differing responses to texts - and to including language and social practices which are relevant and connected to children's lived experiences. For these reasons, Janks' Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy (2000) has been very influential in shaping my thinking about critical literacy theories and practices.

Critical literacy as a tool for social justice

Just as a fixed definition of literacy is elusive, as outlined in the preceding section, so too is defining - and engaging with - critical literacy, according to

Shor (1999): 'Coming to critical literacy is a rather unpredictable and even contentious process filled with surprises, resistances, breakthroughs, and reversals'. Searle (1993) describes literacy, as opposed to the mechanical skills of reading and writing, as the development of consciousness-raising skills. He argues that children 'can never be too young to use their skills-in-acquisition of literacy to confront, criticize, or question, as well as to form their own rational attitudes to issues arising from their own world' (*ibid*: 171).

Comber and Simpson (2009) argue against the use of a generic definition of critical literacy, advocating instead the practice of negotiating critical literacies in situated spaces. They state:

> Critical literacy resists any simplistic or generic definitions because its agenda is to examine the relationships between language practices, power relations, and identities - and this analysis involves grappling with specific local conditions (2009: 271).

Although I would agree that one fixed definition would be difficult to negotiate and might not reflect local concerns and situated practices, I would argue that teachers coming to critical literacy for the first time need some conceptualisation of critical literacy in order to begin to understand what it means for their classroom practices and for the students they teach. Shared understandings are important, I feel, in giving teachers the confidence to implement new policies and practices. However, I recognise that Comber and Simpson's (2009) argument relates to concerns about access; educators need to be alert to the texts which children access in and beyond school, and alert to the types of texts which children need access to in order to engage in critique which could lead to transformation of their conditions, if those are unjust.

Freire (1970) and Shor (1992), as discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, link critical literacy with active, participatory pedagogies which they feel give students the critical tools they need not just to navigate their ways in the wider social world but also to transform it for the better. In this way, critical literacy is a tool for education for social justice. This section looks in more detail at the literature on critical literacy education for social justice, before turning in the next chapter to examine how reform to literacy and English policy in Scotland might be considered within the wider context of democratic education.

Giroux (1993) states that education is never a neutral process and that schools construct certain knowledge/power relations and specific forms of citizenship. He advocates a critical democracy, one which 'is not about creating passive citizens. It is about providing students with the knowledge, capacities, and opportunities to be noisy, irreverent, and vibrant' (1993: 374). He explains that democratic education must offer students the knowledge, skills and values 'they will need to critically negotiate and transform the world' (*ibid*.: 376). In this way, educators are enabling access to critical skills which support this process.

Morrell (2008) directly appeals to literacy educators and researchers to be activists in the move towards a critically literate society:

> The real struggle may involve marching or protest; losing our jobs and our livelihoods. The literacy revolution that I envision may demand of us everything. In return, though, we may have everything to gain in taking important steps toward remaking the world in a way that is more livable, more just, and more human (2008: 27).

Less overtly radical, in *Literacy and Power* Janks (2010) claims that being a political teacher involves guiding students in recognising the multiple realities they face in their language and social practices. This understanding of politically-motivated teaching suggests smaller educational steps towards social change through literacy practices; Janks explains that critical literacy teachers 'help students to rewrite themselves and their local situations by helping them to pose problems and to act, often in small ways, to make the world a fairer place' (2010: 19) The language of problem-posing education is clearly Freireian, but might perhaps seem more inviting and accessible to teachers than grand statements about literacy revolutions. There is considerable evidence that participants in this research study act, and guide the children they teach to act, in small ways towards greater equity and social justice.

Morgan (1997) describes the political environment surrounding critical literacy practices in Australian schools, specifically that:

> the historical and material systems of socioeconomic and political oppression tend to be bracketed off from direct sustained inquiry, hence the follow-through of direct action to redress such oppression is almost nowhere visible (1997: 24).

She suggests that critical literacy resources which claim to require little in the way of change in terms of teacher approach are 'perhaps why teachers and education systems are so ready to take up critical literacy, when the discourse claims as a selling point that it will not shift teachers from their present comfort zone' (*ibid.*). This statement resonates with my concerns about current constructions of critical literacy in Scotland which effectively remove social justice, which might be perceived as contentious and difficult to enact

in educational settings, from critical literacy practices. Morgan opines that the current generation of secondary English teachers in Australia have had little direct training in - and thus limited or no knowledge of - the works of Freire (1970, 1989, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2005), Shor (1992, 1999), Aronowitz (2008) and Giroux (1989, 1993); that their understanding of the purpose of critical literacy does not include transformation, nor would they be likely to identify themselves as transformative intellectuals. In the previous chapter, I discussed Bartlett's (2005) claim that educators need to have opportunities to engage with Freireian theory in depth, if they are to understand and enact critical pedagogies. These difficulties emerge in participants' accounts discussed in Chapter Six.

Morgan's (1997) explanation of the meaning of *praxis* is helpful in a discussion of politics and education. She claims that as all education intends to change an individual, there must at the same time be a belief in what an educated person *should* be and a vision of the ideal society which the individual will help shape and structure. Recognising how current social and political conditions shape them as subjects, and acting to change conditions of inequality and injustice, leads students to become 'mobilised as agents, active citizens committed to democratic action for the sociopolitical reconstruction of society' (1997: 16). She suggests that underplaying praxis in Australian educational policy is, perhaps, inevitable:

> It would be naive to expect that the state would endorse a pedagogy which proclaims its intention to undermine the economic status quo and the legitimacy of the present practice of government (*ibid.*: 24).

The endorsement by the Scottish Government of 'the important skills of critical literacy' in policy without foregrounding social justice issues has

caused me to reflect on why critical literacy has not been aligned with the dominant models of critical pedagogy in the literature; in the next chapter I discuss possible reasons for this in more detail.

Critical literacy as transformation

Powell (1999), in *Literacy as a Moral Imperative: Facing the challenges of a pluralistic society,* argues that literacy education is always a political act; indeed, one of her criteria for promoting critical literacy is that 'literacy instruction ought to be consciously political' (1999: 86). She argues:

> Realizing the democratic ideal, then, required that the voice of those in the margins be brought to the center. It also requires that we examine the hidden assumptions that are implicit in the texts that we use in our classrooms and in the received knowledge of our respective disciplines. Thus, literacy instruction that is consciously political would involve, first, inviting deliberation on critical social, economic, and political issues, and second, exposing students to the latent values that are embedded in written and oral texts (*ibid:* 87).

She explains that Freire's model of problem-posing pedagogy is a form of literacy instruction that is consciously political, situated in the students' own realities, engaging in critical praxis with the aim of transforming oppressive elements in their social worlds. Powell's conceptualisation of political education is one which aims for personal and social transformation and change.

McLaren and Lankshear (1993) also highlight the transformative power of critical literacy:

> *Critical literacy,* as we are using the term, becomes the interpretation of the social present for the purpose of transforming the cultural life of

certain groups ... That is, critical literacy asks: How is cultural reality encoded within familiar grids or frames of intelligibility so that literacy practices that unwittingly affirm racism, sexism, and heterosexism, for example, are rendered natural and commonsensical? (1993: 413).

Challenging taken-for-granted social practices, assumptions and hierarchies is a key component of understanding critical literacy. Critiquing texts and social structures along intersections of inequality and injustice is important, but the action of redesigning or reconstructing new ways of thinking and being is a key distinction between critical theories and critical literacy theories. Wray (2006) makes this point succinctly: 'critical literacy is about transforming taken-for-granted social and language practices or assumptions for the good of as many people as possible'. One of my research questions asks what participants identify as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach; although transformation was not explicitly identified by many, there was considerable evidence of action to transform inequalities, as will be discussed in Chapter Six. The next section will take a closer look at how critical literacy is negotiated in primary and secondary classrooms, including instances where children have acted to transform sites of injustice in their social worlds.

Critical literacy and classroom practices

Comber and Simpson (2009) claim that more research is needed into the local interpretations and enactments of critical literacy in classrooms. Accounts of practice in context are considered in this section of the literature review, including those of kindergarten, primary and secondary teachers. The information reviewed for this section developed my understanding of two of the key research questions:

- *What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their knowledge and understanding of critical literacy practices?*
- *What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts?*

Critical literacy practices with young children

In Chapter Two I explained that Davies' *Shards of Glass* (2003) was an important work in shaping my understanding of critical literacy. Her work (*ibid.*) challenged assumptions I previously held about children's capacity to engage with critical theoretical perspectives in the process of recognising, resisting and reconstructing gendered power imbalances in written and spoken discourse. The literature shows us that foregrounding social justice issues is always an important aspect of critical literacy practices, even though the dominant political constructions in Scotland appear to be neutralising such concerns.

Critical capacity reflects 'students' recognition that texts and contexts are social constructions that can be read and interpreted in multiple rather than singular ways' (Keddie, 2008: 2), ways which can subvert dominant and possibly damaging hegemonies of gender, race and class constructions. As I discussed in the previous chapter, classroom practices need to be examined by teachers, specifically 'where the relations of domination and power that derail the social justice possibilities of critical literacy can be made both recognisable and revisable' (*ibid.*: 1). A cautionary tale of critical literacy practice in conflict with teachers' classroom management styles is evidenced in Keddie's (*ibid.*) description of 'Mr A', whose lessons on critical literacy and social justice issues are undermined by his authoritarian and sexist interactions with his students.

Vasquez (2010), like Comber and Simpson (2009), believes that critical literacy practices should be locally negotiated. Her account of practice illustrates the restrictive power of a poster produced by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which contained images of men only and which led some children in her kindergarten class to decide that girls must not be allowed to join the Mounties. When one of the female students challenged this belief, then redesigned the poster and mailed it to the local constabulary, an RCMP officer made contact with the class to say that no one had previously brought the inequality to their attention and they would redesign the poster. This is a striking example of one child's recognition that she is being denied access to the very possibility of becoming a Mountie, because of her gender; that she challenged the way she was positioned by the poster, and acted to transform the inequality, reveals how powerful critical literacy practices can be, in terms of making the world more just and fair.

Vasquez (2009) describes another example of kindergarten students challenging what they felt was a social injustice and ultimately transforming it. On the day of the annual French café in their school, Vasquez's five year old students learned that they and the other kindergarten classes were not allowed to attend the event, although all of the other classes had been invited. Wondering aloud about methods of protest, the children recorded a plea to the school principal in their 'speaker's corner' and also created a petition, which was signed by all of the junior and senior kindergarten classes. Vasquez reports that when other staff members became aware of the protest, they voiced no objections to a change in the system and in subsequent years kindergarten students were invited to the annual event. Thus, as in the preceding example, students challenged social practices which they perceived to be unjust, because they were being denied access to

the dominant practices or constructions, and acted to change them. Participants in this research study described similar actions for transformation, in which the children they taught set out to change injustices which they had identified.

Participatory critical literacy, Vasquez therefore argues, should not be the end of the process; rather, following on from deconstructing texts children should be involved in transformative action. She claims that 'it is the action piece, doing something with what we discover through critical analysis of text, that helps us to participate differently in the world' (2010: 17). Similarly, Davies (2006) states that deconstruction/reconstruction is one approach to teaching children how to conceptualise gender and subjectification through literacy in the primary classroom.

Marsh (2008) describes critical literacy practices in one English classroom, stating that at the time of writing there were no other examples in the literature of critical literacy practices in England. The study focused on a Year 5 - aged nine and ten - class in Sheffield, whose teacher aimed to guide the children in understanding and critically analysing their own media consumption and practices in the wider sphere of looking at media reports on the dangers posed by children's new media practices. In analysing their peers' responses to a question about the number of hours they spent watching television or using computers or other new media, a group of children showed obvious disapproval that one individual spent on average seven hours a day using media; however, they spent a similarly significant amount of time doing so but seemed to distance their disapproval of their own practices from the larger sample.

Marsh (2008) claims that one of the major tenets and benefits of critical literacy is situating practice in children's own cultures, which is a key reason she feels that blogging and other forms of social media are important tools for critical literacy. She sums up the study in the following way:

> Overall, the children concluded that the media reports about the negative impact of new technologies on children's lifestyles were exaggerated and that the media brought both benefits and disadvantages, depending upon what was used and how it was used. Importantly, this aspect of the project enabled them to engage in reflection on a key aspect of their own lives and this offered a productive pedagogical practice in which the "connectedness" of the school curriculum to the outside world was paramount (2008: 180).

This example shows real, relevant critical literacy practices which engaged children in challenge and critique of their own media practices. It also highlights tensions between critical self-reflection and change, if that change involves practices in which children have considerable vested interests. Just as Marsh (*ibid*.) identified a dearth of accounts of critical literacy practices in England, I have found nothing in the literature which discusses critical literacy in Scottish schools, highlighting the importance of researching critical literacy in schools in this country to add to the international literature.

Critical literacy practices with young people

Janks' Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy (2000), as outlined in a previous section, consists of four key aspects of a critical literacy approach: domination, access, diversity, and design. Discussing the development of a Critical Language Awareness programme in her secondary school classroom in South Africa, Janks stresses the importance of a whole-school approach to critical ideology, that is, the school must 'support communicative openness and transformative exploration' (2009: 149). She posits that adopting a

poststructuralist perspective on reading might help teachers and students understand the plurality of meaning and the situated and partial readings of all discourse. Janks' suggestion echoes Davies' (2003) work in Australian schools, teaching children about poststructuralist concepts and vocabulary in order that they might recognise and resist oppressive discourses.

In *Literacy and Power* (2010), Janks describes several critical literacy projects from her own experiences as a secondary school teacher and as a teacher educator. She states that introducing students to binary opposites is a good way to begin to discuss how certain concepts are socially constructed, rather than biological or natural differences. Binary descriptors of race, gender and class can all be considered, she suggests. One example of practice she cites critiques how the British press constructed 'us and them' categories in its usage of language to describe British and American forces and the Iraqi people. Illustrating how 'unequal naming' creates a dominant, powerful group and leaves the other disempowered or powerless, the exercise is a powerful example of how language constructs meanings and identities, in other words our 'reality'. Participants in this research study discussed critical literacy practices which similarly foregrounded how language and images are used to position us in certain ways, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Stein (2009), discussing her work with South African secondary students, emphasises the importance of transforming texts. She encouraged her students to produce countertexts to subvert the dominant print canon. Here, the previously marginalised literacy practice of oral storytelling is used to reconstruct meaning-making in her class, reclaiming oral texts as powerful. This example illustrates how power can be disrupted by subverting genre

hegemonies in the curriculum; I believe that this epitomises Janks' (2000) conceptualisation of *diversity*, or respecting students' cultural and historical language practices. Interestingly, one of the participants in this study used the word 'countertexting' as a verb, to describe reconstructions of texts.

Morgan (1997) describes how one secondary school in Queensland, Australia, set a task for students to reconstruct a picture book, subverting stereotypes such as gender, age and race - a project which the students referred to as making 'politically correct picture books'. The Head of English in that school states:

> What they've done is suddenly see how they're not politically correct and … they have obviously started to realise that the things they believe might be out of sync with what other people might believe (*ibid.*: 87).

However, another teacher in the department problematises the concept of political correctness, claiming that what they are teaching is a school-sanctioned view of the term and he worries that 'we're also pushing a baggage of political values as well and that's the part that worries me the most' (*ibid.*). Morgan opines that the concerned teacher - and others who might share his concerns - are worried by the fact that 'in their very desire for social justice critical literacy teachers may be participating in the work of social control, of "governmentality"'(*ibid.*: 88). This act of critiquing critical pedagogy and practices seems to me to be the essence of critical literacy, in order that it does not become another mundane, unquestioned part of the literacy and English curriculum. The concern about critical literacy as a form of political correctness - used as a pejorative term - is one raised by participants in this research study and will be discussed in a later chapter.

Discussing his efforts to transform the media studies curriculum in his secondary English classes in Texas after the September 11th attacks, Arendt (2008) describes how he linked a novel study of Orwell's *1984* - specifically Winston's emerging critical voice in the face of oppressive and omnipresent media messages - with real-time news reports streamed into the classroom about the war in Iraq. Aiming to make the concept of media manipulation tangible to the students, Arendt deliberately led the study of O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a work of fiction about the Vietnam War based on the author's experiences there, to suggest that it was a true story. He describes the students' response as 'overwhelmingly one of resentment at being lied to and manipulated' (2008: 133) once they learned that they had been misled, and his subsequent attempts to explain that printed material and media reports can manipulate. Arendt's pedagogical approach involved deliberate misinformation, it would seem, to provoke a strong emotional response in the students in order to urge them to challenge the validity and reliability of *all* print texts. I find this an interesting account, given that participants in this research study discussed their concerns that children and young people overwhelmingly believe in the absolute truth of print texts which as educators they feel they are consistently challenging; however none reported using a deliberately provocative approach such as Arendt describes.

Although Arendt questions the extent to which the students he taught engaged in critique and challenge about the media reports, he describes a separate act of social activism which may or may not have stemmed from his critical literacy lessons. Arendt provided reading materials which challenged the accepted assumptions about Columbus's 'discovery' of North America, which presented an 'alternative view that included violent conversions to Catholicism, torture, rape, theft and other acts the allegedly civilized

perpetrated against the supposedly savage' (2008: 138). An outraged group of students decided to take action, creating information pamphlets about this alternative perspective on Columbus and distributing them at a nearby mall whilst answering questions from the general public. This seems to me to represent Comber and Simpson's (2009) argument, discussed previously, that enacting critical literacy means 'grappling with local conditions'; the celebration of Columbus day in the United States positions him as an explorer-hero, whereas Arendt in this example gave his students access to an alternative to the hegemonic construction, critique which led to action.

In the conclusion of his essay, Arendt provides an interesting insight into the socially constructed nature of knowledge, specifically the power that the media has to shape and construct what we think we know about events. He describes the media coverage of the tragic death of a student in a nearby school, which contrasted sharply with what students and others in the community knew had actually happened from firsthand experience and accounts. The ways in which some students began to believe the media reports because they perceived them to be 'facts' is a reminder of the power of the media to shape our 'truth' and the ways in which we can be manipulated by texts, and is aligned with concerns raised by participants in this study.

Morrell (2008) established a 'cybercommunity of practice' in the secondary school in which he taught, describing how he collected electronic communication from the community over an eighteen month period, including emails, instant message conversations and chat sessions. He:

[I]dentified several literacy practices associated with critical pedagogy in cyberspace including sending emails for political purposes, engaging in critical online research, and virtual lobbying of politicians and other power brokers (2008: 151).

Morrell believes that by participating in the online writing community students developed their citizenship skills by reading and critiquing peers' work; honed their writing skills by editing each others' work; and became 'cyberactivists'. He states that Gramsci 'understood the potentially positive role of media in bringing about revolutionary consciousness' (2008: 157) or, put another way, the *hegemony* of the media. Morrell argues that young people use the new media technologies to design 'counter-narratives' which challenge dominant media production (*ibid.*). Having access to media technologies in this case leads to the possibility to challenge and change the powerful media messages we encounter so frequently.

Discussing the critical literacy pedagogies he uses, Searle (1993) gives ample space to pupil voices in his essay *Words to a life-land: literacy, imagination, and Palestine*, in which he describes how thirteen-year-old working class students in Sheffield were encouraged to develop their literacy skills whilst considering the issue of the Israeli occupation of the territories of the West Bank. The poems cited in the essay reveal, in Searle's words:

> such human solidarity and breadth of understanding, clear evidence of a curriculum of extended literacy for young people that fuses the abilities to develop new skills with words, to sharpen human consciousness and stretch the imagination to enter the lives of others in a shared world (*ibid.*: 189).

Reading the poems, I was profoundly moved at the ways in which the young poets 'entered the lives of others' so eloquently; I believe such examples

prove that young people do respond to contentious, difficult themes and issues because they are concerned with social justice issues, which are foregrounded in critical literacy approaches. And, although having access to practices which reflect local concerns and conditions is important, I believe that Searle's account also shows that children often have a tremendous capacity to engage and empathise with inequalities which are not of their own social worlds.

This section has explored accounts of critical literacy practices with children and young people who are engaged in critiques of social and language practices and, in many cases, have acted to transform inequalities and injustices. The next section will consider the literature which explores sites of resistance; that is, where and when critical literacy approaches are not readily or actively accepted or practised.

Critical literacy and resistance

Divergent and intersecting points of resistance are considered in this section, specifically how the literature represents resistance to critical literacy theory and practices on the part of government, teachers, students and parents.

I have previously argued that **Education Scotland,** which is meant to support educators in implementing the curriculum, promotes a model of critical literacy without transgressive, transformative pedagogies or aims of social justice. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) make apparent that shared understandings of power and privilege are at the heart of critical literacy practices:

> Teachers and students engaged in the process of critical literacy recognize that dominant social arrangements are dominant not because they are the only possible arrangements but because those arrangements exist for the advantage of certain privileged groups (1993: 414).

Without this understanding, literacy practices are not critical. Thus, if teachers and students are not aware that interrogating power and privilege in language and social practices is a necessary aspect of critical literacy, then they are not engaging in critical literacy practices. If, though, teachers and students have knowledge of the ideological and political aspects of their literacy practices but do not accept these elements then they are *resisting* critical literacy.

Resistance to critical literacy appears as a theme in the literature across many aspects:

- resistance to an active or activist form of literacy in favour of a passive model of reading or wider literacy practices
- resistance to perceived indoctrination or political correctness when the latter is conceived as a form of indoctrination
- resistance to the view that education generally and literacy practices specifically are always political, are always rooted in ideological stances
- resistance to transforming sites of inequality and injustice due to an individual's racist, sexist or other discriminatory beliefs
- resistance to introducing contentious, difficult topics into the classroom student apathy as resistance.

I will now discuss how these themes appear in the literature.

Student resistance

Petrone and Borsheim (2008) argue that critical literacy researchers and teachers who understand and accept that literacy includes political and ideological dimensions challenge and critique dominant models of literacy which promote passivity rather than critical consciousness. They describe critical literacy practices with secondary school students in Michigan, in which they encounter resistance in the form of student apathy:

> To overcome this apathy, which is a result of being part of a constructed and invisible mainstream, they must be pushed to question that which seems normal, comfortable, even beneficial to them. In many cases, ignorance is bliss; they have no self-interest in doing this work because it doesn't serve their immediate concerns. They have not often been asked to recognize their own privilege, nor do they understand or readily accept the ways they are shaped and constructed. Students who *are* in marginalized positions due to socioeconomic status are unlikely to acknowledge or label themselves as such (2008: 183).

This description of student apathy is in sharp contrast to Morrell's (2008) descriptions of working with students in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage in California, in *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth*, whose engagement with issues of social inequality and injustice in the classroom spread to activism in the wider community. Student apathy - aligned with Petrone and Borsheim's view rather than Morrell's - was a major concern of one of the participants in this research study, which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Petrone and Borsheim (2008) acknowledge that opening up spaces for discussions about contentious issues is not easy; for example following discussions in which insensitive views were aired in class, they wondered

whether to continue with the project, but concluded that becoming critically conscious demands talking about important subjects which will at times cause difficulty and feelings of unease.

They also claim that student resistance can emerge not in the discussion stage of critical issues, but at the point of action:

> The nature of students' resistance to or subversion/dismissal of critique suggests that once critique moves from articulation to action, lines get drawn; it seems to be acceptable for many of the students to "be critical" in words but much less so in action, particularly when it involves something(e.g., video games, constructions of gender) in which their sense of identity is heavily invested (2008: 203).

This form of resistance suggests that identity is an important determinant of action, that understanding how our language and social practices might harm us or serve to maintain inequalities does not necessarily translate to action or transformation of such practices. Petrone and Borsheim's example is similar to Marsh's (2008) research, discussed in a previous section, which revealed how Year 5 children were critical of peers' media consumption but did not seem to recognise their own similarly excessive daily use of media.

Students might also resist the concept of literacy education as overtly political. Powell (1999) states:

> It is important to acknowledge that not all students will be receptive to a pedagogy that is consciously political. Some students may prefer to remain passive, while others may actively resist. Often student resistance is the result of the conditioning they may have received through prior schooling; they simply are not accustomed to being actively engaged in critical inquiry (1999: 92).

Shor (1992) argues that students should never be coerced into political discussions, that forced discussion contradicts critical-democratic education principles and is a form of authoritarianism. He offers no suggestions for teachers managing classroom discussions when students wish to opt out; not wanting to contribute to a discussion and not being forced to by the teacher is one issue, but if students wish not only not to *speak* but also not to *listen* to a critical discussion, then should a critical-democratic educator allow those students to opt out of the classroom space itself? Certainly, student resistance is difficult for educators to manage for a number of reasons.

Teacher resistance

Students themselves recognise teacher resistance to difficult topics in the classroom, sometimes when the students are keen to have those difficult discussions. Petrone and Borsheim (2008) cite one student with such views about teacher resistance:

> ... sometimes like race or something like that, they'll be like "oh, no" and try to redirect the topic even though they don't want it to seem like they are but you can tell that it's happening because it's too hard. If you start talking about something about race or like people being treated a different way. Do you know what I mean? I think they're afraid to offend people. That's why I like this classroom, because we can talk about it, and people, like don't get offended (2008: 197).

Divergent, disparate perspectives and beliefs can also cause resistance. Creating democratic spaces in which multiple perspectives can be heard is important, claims Powell (1999), and teachers must respect students' right to express their views, regardless of how different they might be from their own. In this way, 'problem-posing education resists indoctrination by providing a forum for the presentation of differing perspectives and by

subjecting all ideas to public scrutiny' (1999: 93). Participants in this research study discussed their colleagues' resistance to engaging with critical literacy theory and to enacting practices in some detail, which will be explored in Chapter Six.

Parental resistance

Although parental resistance is not a strong theme in the literature, Van de Kleut (2009), a Canadian teacher, offers an interesting insight into her experience with one parent who clearly felt that a critical literacy approach was not appropriate for his child. Following a class discussion about race and gender stereotypes in advertisements shown during the National Football League's Superbowl broadcast, Van de Kleut describes her grade five students as 'intrigued and horrified' by the discussion, who then asked if they could undertake further work in that area. She instructed them to watch an hour of primetime television that weekend and keep a list of inequalities they saw. The children returned, engaged and excited by what they had found, although one of the students handed Van de Kleut a letter from her father as well as her list. Her father wrote:

> This project really confuses me. Bigoted, stereotypic profiling based on race, has never been discussed, or even thought of in Lauriana's mind. It is difficult for me to understand why this negative, discriminatory message would be taught to 10 year old kids. Now, thanks to her liberal education, she thinks there are major differences between black and white people. Until now, they were all the same (2009: 12).

In Van de Kleut's response to the parent, one of the reasons she cites for the critical media literacy lesson is that of curricular mandate, which she refers to as 'hiding behind the curriculum'. She reasons that Lauriana's father believes

that children should be sheltered from controversial issues, their innocence protected. This parent's view of literacy practices contrasts with my understanding of critical literacy as a tool for social justice, as a means of helping children see power and privilege in social and language practices and how these inequalities are sustained by the multiple texts that they encounter; instead, this instance of parental resistance sees critical literacy as something from which children should be protected, to maintain their innocence. This account has been discussed here not because parental resistance is a theme in the data, but in view of the fact that issues of protection emerge as significant in Chapter Six.

In this section, resistance to critical literacy by students, teachers and parents has been discussed, to explore difficulties, differences and divergent perspectives on the importance of critical literacy approaches and practices. Exploring multiple perspectives, meanings and purposes is of central importance in critical media literacy, which will be discussed in the next section. Participants in this research study all discussed critical media literacy practices as those which they used to engage children and teach them the language and skills of critique and reconstruction.

Critical media literacy

UNESCO defines media literacy as:

> a part of a wider definition of 'literacy' in the 21st Century. It does not simply refer to technical skills, but rather has to do with understanding, critical reading, the ability to analyse and reason and social participation. As media becomes an increasing part of every-day life and as we make progress in bridging the digital divide, media literacy is becoming increasingly important. Media literacy is essential to giving people the choice to communicate, create and participate fully in today's world (2011).

Potter offers this definition: 'Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter' (2011: 19). He outlines a typology of media literacy:

• acquiring fundamentals, age 0-1
• language acquisition, age 2-3
• narrative acquisition, age 3-5
• developing skepticism, age 5-9
• intensive development, follows thereafter
• experiential exploring
• critical appreciation
• social responsibility.

Potter describes critical appreciation as an internal perspective about one's opinions about the best writers, producers, and news reporters, for example. Social responsibility entails the same skills as critical appreciation but in addition asks 'What types of messages are best for others and for society?' (2011: 24). In this typology, the social responsibility stage is better aligned with the dominant meanings of critical literacy discussed previously in this chapter, whereas critical appreciation refers to one's ability to state opinions or make value judgements and explain reasons for holding those views.

Kellner and Share (2005) provide helpful delineations of critical literacy and critical media literacy:

> Critical literacy gives individuals power over the culture and thus enables people to create their own meanings and identities to shape and transform the material and social conditions of their culture and society .... Critical media literacy offers an excellent framework to

teach critical solidarity and the skills that can challenge the social construction of information and communication, from hypertext to video games (2005: 381).

They argue that discussing and deconstructing inequalities and injustices in media representations could be an effective way to introduce problem-posing transformative education, that critical media literacy provides students with the necessary tools to recognise images and sites of injustice and work towards creating a better society (*ibid*.: 382). They conceptualise critical media literacy as a pedagogy for social justice, advocating the teaching of critical media literacy from a feminist standpoint which begins with a recognition of and challenge to the dominant perspective.

Buckingham (2011) explains the difference between the 'protectionist' approaches to media in the United Kingdom and the United States; specifically that in the UK the focus has been on the benefits of the 'classics' in art and literature in opposition to the media's lack of moral value, whereas in the US the argument is that if children are taught to be critical of media representations of issues such as drugs, violence and sex, then they will 'be free of them'. He explains that high-level endorsement of media literacy in the UK comes from Ofcom, whose position he posits is not protectionist; however he states that:

> the ways in which the argument for media literacy is framed within the public debate – and the functions it serves – certainly tend to present it as a matter of people learning to protect themselves from 'harmful' content (*ibid*.).

In reviewing this literature on media literacy, I was confused about the meaning of 'protection', as the protectionist approach is described as

protection from 'low culture' (media) in the United Kingdom and development of critical analytical skills in the United States. When I subsequently investigated the Ofcom website I found a document entitled *'Recent Decisions on the Protection of Children'* (2011) which listed complaints about various television broadcasts and rulings about broadcasters in breach of not providing 'adequate protection to children', which I interpret as broadcasting offensive material. In other words, protecting children in this sense means not broadcasting certain programs or music videos, for example, which might also be seen as censorship of certain material.

In his *Manifesto for Media Education*, posted on his blog, Buckingham (2011) argues:

> Media literacy education is no more about protecting children from harmful media than literacy education is about protecting them from harmful books. It is not a covert means of censorship, or a form of behaviour modification .... I have always felt that media education suffers from an excess of grandiose rhetoric. We have all heard far too many assertions about how media education can change the world, save democracy or empower the powerless (2011).

In the manifesto, Buckingham's argument is in contrast to that of Kellner and Share (2005), discussed previously, who clearly state that critical media literacy can be used as a tool for social justice, to challenge inequalities in order to improve conditions in society. It is clear that participants in my research study perceive critical media literacy as a powerful approach to guide children to critique texts. Action for transformation through the production of media texts will be discussed in the next section, as will participants' conceptualisations of critical literacy and protection.

Reconstruction - production of media texts

Morrell (2008) believes that producing new media texts as acts of reconstruction and transformation must be part of critical media education:

> Critical media curricula, then, need to focus more on how urban youth can produce and distribute via new media genres. Whether through the production of websites, digital video documentaries, hip-hop CDs, or digital photojournalism, literacy educators are challenged to open up spaces for critical production across the new media genres (2008: 159).

Morrell's view that mainstream texts should dominate media literacy curricula is echoed by Bell (2009), whose work with teacher trainees in one American university attempted to use and model critical media literacy pedagogy using popular films. Bell describes his frustration that whilst the teacher trainees could clearly see themes of personal and social transformation in the films he chose for the course, they stated that they would not consider using those films in secondary school classrooms as the coarse language and sexual themes might lead to them being disciplined or even fired. Bell is frustrated that the teachers, although cognisant of the possible transformative power of showing films in which inequalities and injustices are disrupted, feel unable to do so because of the restrictions of educational structures and systems. His criticisms of the teachers seem naive, recalling Morrell's radical view cited in an earlier section that 'the literacy revolution' might require educators to lose their jobs or their livelihoods. Is it fair to ask or expect that teachers will lose their jobs because they have chosen critical pedagogies? Will losing the most actively critical teachers from schools really benefit the shift from passive learning to a more activist, critical education, or will it ultimately serve to maintain the hegemony of an educational system which does not challenge or question its own role in

creating and perpetuating social injustice and inequality? In addition, there are legal reasons for deciding against showing such films in our classrooms.

In *Interpreting the Visual: A resource book for teachers*, de Silva and Gaudin (2007) acknowledge that advertising features strongly in critical media literacy education because issues such as bias and manipulation - or 'image ethics' as they call it - are important to recognise. They do, however, make a case for the positive nature of visual images in the media, such as an AIDS awareness campaign and the use of symbols to improve understanding in communities of speakers of different languages.

Predominantly, though, critical media literacy is seen as an important means of teaching students the power of images to construct meanings which can manipulate them and maintain damaging stereotypes and hegemonies, as a pedagogy of empowerment. Kellner (2000) states:

> Critical media pedagogy provides students and citizens with the tools to analyze critically how texts are constructed and in turn construct and position viewers and readers. It provides tools so that individuals can dissect the instruments of cultural domination, transform themselves from objects to subjects, from passive to active. Thus critical media literacy is empowering, enabling students to become critical producers of meanings and texts, able to resist manipulation and domination (2000: 198).

Kellner's description of critical media pedagogy is in alignment with dominant conceptualisations of critical literacy previously discussed in this chapter. Although Buckingham's (2011) voice is one of dissent, if Scottish educators adopt Kellner's (2000) view of critical media literacy *as* critical literacy, then it follows that media studies will become an important part of literacy and English practices in primary schools as well as secondaries. The

participants in this research study revealed that this is already the case in their practices, which will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

Critical thinking

In recent years the discourse of critical thinking has gained popularity in Scottish schools, based on models such as Edward de Bono's six thinking hats (2009) - which was originally conceived as a business management approach - and Tony Ryan's thinker's keys (1990). Principles of critical thinking have also gained place in Scottish education through the adoption of Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles. The application and transference of critical thinking skills in other contexts is considered a positive learning outcome in many cases.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, **Education Scotland**'s web resources for 'Information and Critical Literacy' actually maintain dominance of information literacy. A separate section on the website gives prominence to 'Higher Order Thinking Skills and Critical Literacy', essentially equating the two concepts, with links to 'Information Keys' which are based on Ryan's (1990) thinker's keys model.

Elsewhere in the literature, critical thinking is conceptualised as part of transgressive pedagogy. In *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical wisdom*, bell hooks states that such an approach emerges from her desire 'to understand how to make the classroom a place of fierce engagement and intense learning' (2010: 5). In the final book in a trilogy about transgressive teaching using a critical approach, hooks opens with a quotation from Freire (1989), from *Learning to Question: A pedagogy of liberation:*

Human existence, because it came into being through asking questions, is at the root of change in the world. There is a radical element to existence, which is the radical act of asking questions ... At root human existence involves surprise, questioning and risk. And because of all this, it involves actions and change (2010: 5).

Freire's quotation is a clear link with the conceptualisations of critical literacy which are foregrounded in this literature review, hence linking critical questioning and critical thinking as foundations of critical literacy. For Freire, existence itself is an active position, when *surprise, questioning* and *risk* are involved; hooks' conceptualisation of critical thinking holds that thinking itself is an action. If one of the key components of critical literacy is action and if, as hooks believes, critical thinking is an action, then critical thinking is an important element of critical literacy.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) describes her experiences as a graduate student, wanting to become a critical thinker but instead encountering white hegemonic discourses transmitted through what she describes as the banking model, using Freire's (1970) metaphor. The aim of education, she claims, was not to become an independent, critical thinker, but rather to become a clone of her predominantly white peers. Discovering Freire's work was liberatory, hooks states (1994), and gradually - if not exactly easily - it became possible to enter into critical discussions about pedagogy, although the difficulties of so doing are made clear:

The feminist classroom was the one space where students could raise critical questions about pedagogical process. These critiques

were not always encouraged or well received, but they were allowed. That small acceptance of critical interrogation was a crucial challenge inviting us as students to think seriously about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom (1994: 6).

Critical thinking as part of the practice of freedom, as hooks defines it, or as a liberatory practice, according to Freire, seems a radical practice in relation to the dominant paradigm in Scottish education today; higher order thinking skills focus on the individual and how s/he develops and improves her/his cognitive abilities according to a structured hierarchy, as with Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, or using six methods of thinking which were originally conceived by deBono (2009) as an aid to business management. The **Education Scotland** website claims that educators can foster children's critical questioning skills by using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, which is divided into 'low order' questions such as remembering and understanding through to 'higher order' questions such as evaluating and creating, to support independent thinking. Although I do not dispute that critical questioning skills are an important aspect of critical literacy, I argue that the lack of reference to social justice concerns in the government's construction of critical literacy is not aligned with the dominant models in the literature, and thus cannot be seen to reflect 'the important skills' of critiquing and transforming injustices. It would seem, then, that the current emphasis in Scottish education of critical literacy as higher order thinking skills following Bloom's taxonomy (1956) and Ryan's (1990) thinker's keys model does not draw on or promote critical pedagogy or theory but rather individualist, cognitive models.

Understanding how critical thinking skills are to be taught within the wider area of critical literacy must be framed within a debate about the purposes of

critical literacy and critical thinking education. One body of the literature holds that children must be taught to become critical thinkers in order to become autonomous, self-governing agents (Siegel, 1988; Cuypers and Haji, 2006); here, one makes rational decisions and is able to reflectively reason about the appropriateness of these choices. What appears to be missing in these theories of critical thinking are social justice concerns: autonomy, self-governance and rationality do not urge teachers to think about the possibilities and the limitations in helping children develop the ability to question critically inequalities and injustices in the language and social practices they experience. Instead, the focus is more on acquisition of skills for self-betterment or actualisation of skills for qualification. Participants in this research study demonstrated that they understand critical thinking as a part of critical literacy, and also expressed some frustration that the government's construction of critical literacy as higher order thinking skills would be adopted by practitioners without engaging with the principles of education for social justice.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter explores changing definitions of literacy in the last century, including models which include critical capacity within the wider understanding of literacy and what it means to be literate; and definitions of critical literacy, which foreground social justice issues. As one of the research questions asks about critical literacy practices in participants' classrooms and contexts, accounts of practice from various countries and contexts were discussed. Critical media literacy and critical thinking were also discussed, as they are strong themes in the data gathered for my research study. I have argued that social justice issues are central to understandings and enactments of critical literacy, but that dominant

constructions by **Education Scotland** do not foreground social justice
concerns. In the next chapter I analyse and critique Scottish educational
policy to determine to what extent it addresses 'the important skills of critical
literacy' for social justice.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL LITERACY POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

I have previously argued that dominant constructions of critical literacy in Scotland are not aligned with those in the literature discussed in Chapters Two and Three, which foregrounds social justice concerns. In this chapter, I will discuss how critical literacy is being constructed by **Education Scotland,** in documents posted on its website and in training which I attended; I argue that information literacy has dominance in such constructions and that the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes do not in fact predominantly 'address the important skills of critical literacy'. I then widen the discussion by reviewing the literature on models of professional development, to consider how the training undertaken by my sample group is similar to and different from the dominant models in the literature, before focusing the discussion on how professional practice can be aligned with critical pedagogies in the context of educational reform in Scotland.

Critical literacy - the Scottish educational context

Curriculum for Excellence - ages 3 to 18

I have explained that this research study was prompted by the statement in the Scottish Government document *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 3* (2008) that the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes 'address the important skills of critical literacy'; however critical literacy is not thereafter defined or explained in any clear way. The extent to which educators are guided in building and implementing the new literacy curriculum by educational policy is of concern in terms of this research project. If, as my reading of the lack of direction in official policy statements

suggests, educators have partial or insufficient information from the Scottish government to introduce critical literacy practices, how do they go about understanding and guiding students' understanding in this area? Which theories and resources do they use to shape their own professional development in the area of critical literacy? One aspect of my research focused on the specific research question *'What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their knowledge and understanding of critical literacy practices?'*.

For example, the term 'critical literacy' is used in *Building the Curriculum 3* (2008); however on the **Education Scotland** website there is, I feel, considerable confusion in the representation of what constitutes critical literacy. A video clip of a secondary 'critical literacy' lesson actually shows what I would consider to be an information literacy lesson. If teachers are searching for guidance as to how to teach the 'important skills' of critical literacy, are they to assume that the information literacy materials are intended for the same purpose? I recently undertook training led by **Learning and Teaching Scotland** (as **Education Scotland** was then called) in which course leaders used the terms 'critical literacy' and 'information literacy' interchangeably. When I asked whether they understood the same thing by the terms, one of the course leaders stated that the term information literacy tends to be used in secondary schools whereas primary schools use the term critical literacy. This claim was not borne out in my discussions with participants in this research study, who represented the primary and secondary sectors. Furthermore, the recent addition of the 'Information and Critical Literacy' section to the **Education Scotland** website contains one single definition in which information literacy has dominance:

In simple terms, people are information literate if they know when they need information, and are then able to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively use the information to address and resolve personal, job-related or broad social issues and problems (2011).

While it is legitimate to argue that certain aspects of information literacy may overlap with some areas of critical literacy, they are two discrete concepts and should not be used interchangeably. The last few words of the definition of 'information and critical literacy' do highlight *social issues and problems,* which is aligned with dominant understandings of critical literacy in the literature, but these are ascribed to those who are *information literate*. When I wrote to **Education Scotland** to express my concerns about confusing information on their website, this definition was one of the aspects I highlighted and is a subject which I will discuss further in Chapter Five.

In addition, the lack of recommended resources for further reading and research in critical literacy is of real concern and is a poor reflection of a 'partnership' between educators and the government. In sharp contrast, the **Ontario Ministry of Education** website contains numerous excellent sources of theoretical and practical critical literacy support materials for teachers.

Emergence of critical literacy in Scottish educational policy

The emergence of critical literacy in Curriculum for Excellence can be seen to have its origins in the **OECD** mandate as this example from the *Reading for Change: Performance and engagement across countries: results from PISA 2000* report (2002) suggests:

> For example, at a national level, strong performance on the retrieving information subscale and weak performance on the reflection and evaluation subscale would suggest that future citizens, although highly attuned to content, might have limited capacity to form critical

judgments about what they read. Policy-makers alerted to such a trend of performance in their country may consider encouraging increased educational emphasis on the skills of critical literacy (OECD, 2002: 87) .

Although the **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2001) /PISA** task force (2005) states that data from the tests 'can identify important factors and raise significant questions, but cannot definitively identify remedies' and they caution that PISA and PIRLS 'are not intended to point policy makers to simple solutions such as trying to improve reading literacy scores by looking at high-ranking countries and "doing what they do" (Valtin *et al.*, 2005), the **OECD** report seems to make a strongly directive statement to Scottish policy makers about the implementation of critical literacy practice. In fact, I would argue that the inclusion of 'the important skills of critical literacy' in the policy document could have been directly influenced by the **OECD** report. That economic - not political - factors have driven the new educational policy might explain why social justice aims are not foregrounded in dominant government constructions of critical literacy.

Literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes - a critique

This section will closely examine Scottish educational policy to consider which of the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes actually do foreground critical literacy. I will look closely at the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes, which are organised under the headings of *listening and talking, reading* and *writing*. Under each heading I will list the Experiences and Outcomes which I feel 'address the important skills of critical literacy' and explicate my understanding.

Listening and talking

Under the heading of listening and talking are the five subheadings for the stages of progression (early, first, second, third and fourth) and their associated Experiences and Outcomes. I have undertaken a critical analysis of the Experiences and Outcomes in each category to identify which 'address the important skills of critical literacy' and how I have analysed them to be so.

1. Enjoyment and choice

- Early - *I enjoy exploring and choosing stories and other texts to watch, read or listen to, and can share my likes and dislikes.* LIT 0-01b / LIT 0-11b
  I enjoy exploring events and characters in stories and other texts, sharing my thoughts in different ways. LIT 0-01c
- First and second - *I regularly select and listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting, and I can explain why I prefer certain sources. I regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to create texts of my choice.* LIT 1-01a / LIT 2-01a
- Third and fourth - *I regularly select and listen to or watch texts for enjoyment and interest, and I can express how well they meet my needs and expectations, and I can give reasons, with evidence, for my personal response. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to create texts of my choice, and am developing my own style.* LIT 3-01a / LIT 4-01a

This reflects the beginning of critical thinking and evaluation, sharing likes and dislikes and sharing thoughts in different ways. As it suggests in the phrase 'I can explain why I prefer certain sources', if children are given the vocabulary to express *why* they like and dislike texts, they are beginning to be critically literate. The reference to how well texts meet individual needs and expectations is interesting in that it hints at an individual's assumptions (expectations) as well as what s/he wants or demands from specific texts

(needs). 'The important skills of critical literacy' thus appear in all five stages of progression in this category.

2. Tools for listening and talking

> - Third - *When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role and use contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking.* LIT 3-02a
> - Fourth - *When I engage with others I can make a relevant contribution, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute and encourage them to take account of others' points of view or alternative solutions. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, exploring and expanding on contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking.* LIT 4-02a

Engagement, collaboration and respecting others' view points and solutions - even if they differ from our own - are key aspects of critical literacy expressed in these Experiences and Outcomes. Co-construction of knowledge is evident in the phrase 'use contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking', as is reflexivity. Critical literacy is addressed in only two stages of progression in this category.

3. Finding and using information

I did not identify any relevant Experiences and Outcomes for this subheading.

4. Understanding, analysing and evaluating

- Early - *To help me understand stories and other texts, I ask questions and link what I am learning with what I already know.* LIT 0-07a / LIT 0-16a / ENG 0-17a
- First - *I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to and asking different kinds of questions.* LIT 1-07a
- *To help me develop an informed view, I am learning to recognise the difference between fact and opinion.* LIT 1-08a
- Second - *I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to literal, inferential, evaluative and other types of questions, and by asking different kinds of questions of my own.* LIT 2-07a
- *To help me develop an informed view, I can distinguish fact from opinion, and I am learning to recognise when my sources try to influence me and how useful these are.* LIT 2-08a
- Third - *I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by commenting, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts.* LIT 3-07a
- *To help me develop an informed view, I am learning about the techniques used to influence opinion and how to assess the value of my sources, and I can recognise persuasion.* LIT 3-08a
- Fourth - *I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by giving detailed, evaluative comments, with evidence, about the content and form of short and extended texts.* LIT 4-07a
- *To help me develop an informed view, I can identify some of the techniques used to influence or persuade and can assess the value of my sources.* LIT 4-08a

Asking questions of texts and connecting learning to prior knowledge and experiences are important elements of critical literacy. Asking and answering higher order questions which help develop critical consciousness appear in the second level.

Developing an informed, critical view and recognising how texts position us are strong elements of critical literacy. Critical literacy is addressed in all five stages of progression in this category.

5. Creating texts

I did not identify any relevant Experiences and Outcomes for this subheading.

Reading

Under the heading of reading are the four subheadings for the stages (early, first, second, third and fourth) and their associated Experiences and Outcomes. I have identified the Experiences and Outcomes which I feel 'address the important skills of critical literacy' and will explain why I believe this to be so.

1. Enjoyment and choice

- Early - *I enjoy exploring and choosing stories and other texts to watch, read or listen to, and can share my likes and dislikes.* LIT 0-01b / LIT 0-11b
- First and Second- *I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting, and I can explain why I prefer certain texts and authors.* LIT 1-11a / LIT 2-11a
- Third - *I can identify sources to develop the range of my reading.* LIT 3-11a
- Fourth - *I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts for enjoyment and interest, and I can express how well they meet my needs and expectations and give reasons, with evidence, for my personal response. I can independently identify sources to develop the range of my reading.* LIT 4-11a

As in the listening and talking Experiences and Outcomes, this reflects the beginning of critical thinking and evaluation, sharing likes and dislikes about texts and sharing thoughts in different ways. As it suggests in the phrase 'I can explain why I prefer certain sources', if children are given the vocabulary to express why they like and dislike texts, they are beginning to be critically literate. The reference to how well texts meet individual needs and expectations is interesting in that it hints at readers' assumptions

(expectations) as well as what readers want or demand from specific texts (needs). Critical literacy is addressed in all five stages of progression in this category.

2. Tools for reading

I did not identify any relevant Experiences and Outcomes for this subheading.

3. Finding and using information

> • First - *I am learning to make notes under given headings and use them to understand information, explore ideas and problems and create new texts.* LIT 1-15a
>
> • Second - *I can make notes, organise them under suitable headings and use them to understand information, develop my thinking, explore problems and create new texts, using my own words as appropriate.* LIT 2-15a
>
> • Third - *I can make notes and organise them to develop my thinking, help retain and recall information, explore issues and create new texts, using my own words as appropriate.* LIT 3-15a / LIT 4-15a

These Experiences and Outcomes might be addressing critical literacy, if 'exploring problems' has social justice implications and if creating new texts is intended as an act of transformation. Critical literacy is addressed in only three stages of progression in this category.

4. Understanding, analysing and evaluating

- Early - *To help me understand stories and other texts, I ask questions and link what I am learning with what I already know.* LIT 0-07a / LIT 0-16a / ENG 0-17a

- First - *To show my understanding, I can respond to different kinds of questions and other close reading tasks and I am learning to create some questions of my own.* ENG 1-17a

- *To help me develop an informed view, I can recognise the difference between fact and opinion.* LIT 1-18a

- Second - *To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own.* ENG 2-17a

- *To help me develop an informed view, I can identify and explain the difference between fact and opinion, recognise when I am being influenced, and have assessed how useful and believable my sources are.* LIT 2-18a

- Third - *To show my understanding, I can comment, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, and respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other types of close reading tasks.* ENG 3-17a

- *To help me develop an informed view, I am exploring the techniques used to influence my opinion. I can recognise persuasion and assess the reliability of information and credibility and value of my sources.* LIT 3-18a

- Fourth - *To show my understanding, I can give detailed, evaluative comments, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, and respond to different kinds of questions and other types of close reading tasks.* ENG 4-17a

- *To help me develop an informed view, I can recognise persuasion and bias, identify some of the techniques used to influence my opinion, and assess the reliability of information and credibility and value of my sources.* LIT 4-18a

In the early level Experiences and Outcomes, beginning to ask critical questions and connecting learning with prior knowledge and experiences is critical literacy. As with the listening and talking Experiences and Outcomes, asking and answering higher order questions which help develop critical consciousness appear in the second level.

Developing an informed, critical view and recognising how texts position or influence us are strong elements of critical literacy. Distinguishing between fact and opinion and credibility of sources are critical acts but I feel that teaching these skills is most likely best described as information literacy. Critical literacy is addressed in all five stages of progression in this category.

Writing

Under the heading of writing are the four subheadings for the stages (early, first, second, third and fourth) and their associated Experiences and Outcomes. I have identified the Experiences and Outcomes which I feel 'address the important skills of critical literacy' and will explain why I believe this to be so.

1. Enjoyment and choice

> - First and Second - *I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience.* LIT 1-20a / LIT 2-20-a
> - Third and Fourth - *I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience.* LIT 3-20a / LIT 4-20a

These Experiences and Outcomes could be considered to be critical literacy, if the writer or author seeks to position readers (or audiences) for a particular purpose.

2. Tools for writing

I did not identify any relevant Experiences and Outcomes for this subheading.

3. Organising and using information

- First - *I am learning to use my notes and other types of writing to help me understand information and ideas, explore problems, generate and develop ideas or create new text.* LIT 1-25a

- Second - *I can use my notes and other types of writing to help me understand information and ideas, explore problems, make decisions, generate and develop ideas or create new text. I recognise the need to acknowledge my sources and can do this appropriately.* LIT 2-25a

- Third - *I can use notes and other types of writing to generate and develop ideas, retain and recall information, explore problems, make decisions, generate and develop ideas or create original text. I recognise when it is appropriate to quote from sources and when I should put points into my own words. I can acknowledge my sources appropriately.* LIT 3-25a

- Fourth - *I can use notes and other types of writing to generate and develop ideas, retain and recall information, explore problems, make decisions, or create original text. I can make appropriate and responsible use of sources and acknowledge these appropriately.* LIT 4-25a

As with the reading Experiences and Outcomes, these Experiences and Outcomes might be addressing critical literacy, if 'exploring problems' has social justice implications and if creating new texts is intended as an act of transformation. Critical literacy is addressed in four stages of progression in this category.

4. Creating texts

- First - *I can convey information, describe events or processes, share my opinions or persuade my reader in different ways.* LIT 1-28a / LIT 1-29a
- *I can describe and share my experiences and how they made me feel.* ENG 1-30a
- Second - *I am learning to use language and style in a way which engages and/or influences my reader.* ENG 2-27a
- *I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or combine ideas in different ways.* LIT 2-28a
- *I can persuade, argue, explore issues or express an opinion using relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.* LIT 2-29a
- *As I write for different purposes and readers, I can describe and share my experiences, expressing what they made me think about and how they made me feel.* ENG 2-30a
- Third and Fourth - *I can engage and/or influence readers through my use of language, style and tone as appropriate to genre.* ENG 3-27a / ENG 4-27a
- *I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or concepts, and combine ideas in different ways.* LIT 3-28a
- Third - *I can persuade, argue, evaluate, explore issues or express an opinion using a clear line of thought, relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.* LIT 3-29a
- *I can recreate a convincing impression of a personal experience for my reader, sharing my feelings and reactions to the changing circumstances with some attempt at reflection.* ENG 3-30a
- Fourth - *I can convey information and describe events, explain processes or concepts, providing substantiating evidence, and synthesise ideas or opinions in different ways.* LIT 4-28a
- *I can persuade, argue, evaluate, explore issues or express and justify opinions within a convincing line of thought, using relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.* LIT 4-29a
- Fourth - *I can create a convincing impression of my personal experience and reflect on my response to the changing circumstances to engage my reader.* ENG 4-30a

These Experiences and Outcomes could be considered to be critical literacy, if engagement of the reader and intended impact relate to how the writer or author seeks to position readers for a particular purpose.

Interestingly, persuading the reader only appears in the first level experience and outcome.

Persuasion, arguing, evaluating and exploring are all critical actions.

Reflection in these Experiences and Outcomes can be seen to be a part of critical literacy, if that act examines or critiques one's own viewpoint or standpoint particularly with social justice concerns. Critical literacy is addressed in four stages of progression in this category.

Summary

In summary, I have undertaken a critical analysis of the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes to identify which ones 'address the important skills of critical literacy'. The literacy and English cover paper states that critical literacy 'in particular' is a focus of the new curriculum, so a critical exploration of the policy is an important aspect of this research. In conclusion, I would argue that whilst several of the Experiences and Outcomes are clearly reflecting developing critical capacity, many of them *might* be - but the wording is not explicitly linked with critical pedagogical theory to confidently claim this. Social justice issues are similarly not explicit; instead I have indicated when such concerns *might* be implicit in certain Experiences and Outcomes.

'Information and critical literacy' - a critique

Following on from my critical analysis of the Experiences and Outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence, I would also like to consider critically **Education Scotland**'s positioning of critical literacy within the phrase 'information and critical literacy' on its website, and how the terms are defined. Firstly, the main web page for the topic is headed *'Information and Critical Literacy – Learn how to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively use information'*. The physical positioning of the terms is important, I feel, in creating dominance of information literacy, even though the curricular documents state that 'the important skills of critical literacy' – not information literacy – are being addressed therein.

Secondly, on the 'About information and critical literacy page' it states:

> In simple terms, people are information literate if they know when they need information, and are then able to identify, locate, evaluate, organise and effectively use the information to address and resolve personal, job-related or broad social issues and problems.

I think this is confusing. Although it claims to be informing the reader about *information and critical literacy*, it then describes what an *information literate* person is. It does hint at explorations of 'broad social issues and problems', which would seem to me to be getting to the heart of what critical literacy is, although none of the supporting materials is concerned with social justice issues. Downloads on the page (at the time of writing) also seem to give dominance to information literacy, as they are entitled:

- *Draft - A National Information Literacy Framework Scotland*
- *Information literacy and study skills content and structure rationale*
- *Information literacy and study skills research report.*

The resources on the website are aimed at learners in the second to senior levels, as well as teachers and parents, with a clear weighting towards

information literacy. Virtually all of the resources on the website for learners are designed to build information literacy skills, such as:

- how to conduct internet searches
- checking internet sources for reliability
- finding information by sorting and searching and constructing databases.

I have selected only three topics from a larger selection online, but these examples are indicative of the nature of the whole; that is, information literacy dominates the resources for learners. Just how the resources are intended to develop information literate learners who have an understanding of even 'broad social issues and problems' in the definition of information and critical literacy is not made clear. It would seem as though *critical* literacy has been constructed as *information* literacy on the website, which denies those with a vested interest in Scottish education – learners, teachers and parents – who rely on **Education Scotland** to guide and support their knowledge and understanding about 'the important skills of critical literacy' the opportunity to explore the social justice implications.

Adult Literacy Curriculum in Scotland - *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Framework*

Unlike Curriculum for Excellence, which covers education from the ages of 3 to 18, the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Framework* (Scottish Government, 2005), clearly explains what critical awareness of texts means in the description of one of the three principles on which the curriculum is based:

> Develop an understanding of literacy and numeracy with particular emphasis on critical awareness of how and why communications of all sorts are produced and how they are intended to have an effect on us. This involves considering who produced the communication

in whatever form (text, statistics, graffiti, etc), who the intended audience was, what message the producer was trying to get across both explicitly and implicitly and how the reader might be affected by it. De-coding communications in this way enables tutors and learners to see that all communications have a purpose and none are neutral (*ibid*.: 27).

The framework also makes it plain that critical literacy is not meant to be taught only to more able learners, but rather that situated and contextual discussions about each learner's literacy practices are important. Indeed, critical awareness is embedded within the framework; in other words, the framework does not simply state that critical awareness *should* be a central focus of literacy practices, it clearly and consistently sets out how and why this should be done in adult education. In the second part of the document, which focuses on practice, clear strategies are given for developing critical literacy skills. For example, critically reading packaging and signs in supermarkets is detailed; as is an integrated literacy course on looking critically at recipes and recipe books (*ibid*.: 52-53).

One of the five organising principles of the document states that the research and theoretical base of the curriculum should be clear so that 'practitioners who understand what they are doing can be more effective' (*ibid*.: 7). This, I feel, would be a welcome underlying principle of Curriculum for Excellence, especially with regard to the philosophy and values of critical literacy, so that practitioners in nursery, primary and secondary schools understand what they are to teach and why.

Models of professional development

The focus in this section is on the literature pertaining to teachers' professional development, which I read to gain a better understanding of

how the training undertaken by my sample group is similar to and different from the dominant models in the literature. The model of training undertaken by participants in my research, which was discussed in Chapter One, differs quite considerably from the usual two hour or the rarer full day Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses typically offered in Scotland, which I have experience of as a participant and as an instructor, so I was interested to explore the models and modes of professional development in the literature.

As I explained in Chapter One, I did not attempt an evaluation of the model of professional development in the Scottish local authority which is the focus of my research for two main reasons: firstly, I was interested to investigate participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy and how they came to that knowledge from a range of possible sources, not merely the training; and secondly, I was concerned that as a novice researcher, undertaking an evaluation of a project which I had not participated in at the time would lead to a superficial understanding of the training. As Piggot-Irvine (2006) states:

> No matter how ethical and thorough an independent researcher is, or how much they know about evaluation, there is always a potential that an outsider does not have substantive enough knowledge about that programme content to explore significant issues deeply (2006: 494).

Thus, my concern in this research has been to explore *what* participants know about critical literacy and how they came to those understandings, not their recollections of the actual training and how it has affected their practices. At the same time, it is clear that their participation in the training is the main common element between participants, so attempting to understand and

describe the training is important for me as a researcher and author of this research. I also anticipated that participants would discuss the training during the interviews, so reading the literature on models of teacher professional development provided me with a broad understanding of dominant frameworks. I should also make plain that I explored the literature pertaining to *teacher* professional development, not that of librarians even though one of the participants in this research study was a librarian, as I decided that the model of training was designed for those who *teach* children and young people; however I am aware that I have not investigated or made a distinction between professional development for teachers and professional development for librarians.

Conceptualisations of teacher professional development

In an international review of the literature on teacher professional development for **UNESCO**'s Institute of Educational Planning, Villegas-Reimers states:

> Professional development includes formal experiences (such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc.) and informal experiences (such as reading professional publications, watching television documentaries related to an academic discipline, etc.) (2003: 11).

My research has explored participants' professional development in its broadest sense as outlined above; specifically, how has the model of training *and* participants' professional reading and research shaped their knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy?

Effective professional development

Joyce and Showers' (1980) matrix of inputs and outputs of teacher training lists five training methods and measures four levels of impact against the inputs. The training methods are:

- presentation/description of new skill
- modelling the new skills
- practice in simulated settings
- feedback on performance in simulated or real settings
- coaching/assistance on the job.

They contend that all five training methods are necessary for teachers to apply their new knowledge and skills in classroom contexts.

Piggot-Irvine's (2006) discussion of criteria for effective professional development highlights the importance of deep, collaborative, active and sustained elements of training. She synthesises Hill *et al.* (2002), Darling-Hammond (2000) and King and Newman's (2001) research on teacher learning, which point to these features as important, specifically that teachers:

- can concentrate on instruction and student outcomes in the specific contexts in which they teach;
- have sustained opportunities to study, to experiment with and to receive helpful feedback on specific innovations and;
- have opportunities to collaborate with professional peers, both within and outside their schools, along with access to the expertise of teachers (Piggot-Irvine, 2006: 482).

Building on the notion of collaboration between teachers and academics, she claims that this co-construction of knowledge is a reciprocal model of support (2006: 483). Such a model of professional development becomes *deep*

through personal and collective reflection and knowledge creation which can then be transformed into action (*ibid.*). This is an interesting conceptualisation, given that the model of professional development in the Scottish local authority featured in my study involved educators and academics collectively working to put critical literacy theory and policy into practice. The notion of knowledge creation which can be transformed into action resonates with previously discussed conceptualisations of critical literacy as critique and challenge with the aim of social change.

Opfer and Pedder (2011) argue that much of the literature on teacher learning wrongly equates *forms* of learning with teacher learning; for example, collaborative, activity-based, contextually situated learning is taken to *be* teacher learning when in fact, they argue, this is epistemological fallacy. Instead, they use a lens that sees teacher learning as serial and additive. Problematising the dominant concept that effectiveness of teacher learning translates into measured improvements in pupil learning, they argue that this is a gross oversimplification of how teachers learn and the myriad effects of teacher learning are highly complex. Using collegiality and collaboration as an example, they claim:

> To explain the role of collaboration in teacher learning, the intensity of collaboration becomes an important determinant—too much collaboration and learning are stifling, too little collaboration and teacher isolation inhibit growth, just enough collaboration and teachers receive the stimulation and support from colleagues necessary for change (Opfer and Pedder, 2011: 387).

Opfer and Pedder's research made me realise that I should not be applying binary conceptualisations of 'effective' and 'ineffective' models of professional development in my thinking about the model of training that

participants in this research experienced. I had been viewing the themes of collaboration, situating learning in practice, and activity-based training as leading to likely change in practice; however Opfer and Pedder's work encouraged me to think more broadly about these aspects of training. Importantly, it caused me to listen attentively to the sometimes nuanced statements the participants were making about these commonly-cited features of effective professional development.

Action research

The action research cycle of investigation, reflection and action is not intended to be a chronological cycle but rather is a framework within which practitioners can closely examine their own practices and contexts with the aim of acting to change those practices and contexts for the better. O'Hanlon (1996) states that action research is a 'form of inquiry which involves self-evaluation, critical awareness and contributes to the existing knowledge of the educational community' (1996: 181) and explains that it can be a positive model for improvement as it involves inquiry within practitioners' own contexts with the aim of improving learning and teaching through planned action (*ibid.*). As I explained in Chapter One, one of the aims of the critical literacy training was to encourage educators to engage in action research in their own contexts. One of the university lecturers who led the training explained that in future she would use the term 'practitioner inquiry' with educators, not action research, as she felt it had been daunting and intimidating for many. In Chapter Six, I will discuss participants' accounts of their investigation, reflection and action with regard to critical literacy.

Critical pedagogy and practice in Scotland

In Chapter Three I claimed that educators - such as those who participated in my research study - who enact critical pedagogies are not only active but activist, in that they aspire to transform as well as change. Janks' (2010) view that politically-motivated teaching entails helping students to pose problems and act to transform sites of injustice and inequality was also discussed, and shapes the focus of this section, which will consider how critical pedagogies can be enacted in the context of educational reform in Scotland.

Eraut (1994) argues that mid-career professionals need opportunities to escape their usual practice, to collaborate with colleagues and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and practices, which could lead to inequality. Collaborative discussion and collective action to change those practices and structures which lead to and maintain inequality are at the heart of the activist professional identity, argues Sachs (2001): 'First and foremost democratic schools and an activist identity are concerned to reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression' (2001: 157). Critical literacy as a project which challenges social injustice is seen in democratic discourses as a fundamental way to critique structures and practices of inequality and oppression. Teachers must take critical approaches to their professional work by, for example, being alert to how they are positioned in and by policy, which Patel Stevens and Bean (2007) see as an essential part of establishing schools as democratic sites of learning. Participants in my research study demonstrated such critical approaches, in their discussions about the perceived purpose of critical literacy as 'something new', and their reflections on colleagues' reactions to new educational reforms and initiatives.

If critical literacy practice 'moves beyond didactic, factual learning' (Patel Stevens and Bean, 2007: 7) the question arises of how it can be assessed, and whether there are any tensions between existing assessment structures in Scotland and the new curriculum. Morgan and Wyatt-Smith (2000) suggest that formative assessment practices are better aligned with critical literacy practices and they claim that modelling of accountability in a democratic classroom would be compatible with critical pedagogy. For instance, teacher-student dialogues about values, authority and power in traditional assessment practices would be a more democratic mode of accountability; however they concede that this will be challenging for many teachers whose authority hinges on their role as assessor. Participants in my research study discussed formative assessment and critical literacy, although not in the context of aligning pedagogies with assessment practices, but rather in discussing similarities between the two approaches.

Sachs (2001) claims that democratic discourses enable the development of communities of practice which, when used as spaces to discuss issues around professional practice, can profoundly affect teachers' lives. Fullan states that changes to teachers' professional cultures, including such elements as developing collaborative work cultures, finding time and allocating resources, has 'nothing to do with literacy, and everything to do with its successful implementation' (2003: 53). Thus, educators need opportunities to engage collectively in discussion and debate about professionalism and practice in order to effect change. I have previously discussed Bartlett's (2005) view that educators need opportunities to engage with Freireian theory in depth, to grasp the importance of the transformative nature of critical pedagogies; the literature reviewed in this section also reveals the importance of recognising that action for transformation of social injustices

requires an activist approach and a belief that education is never neutral. There is evidence in the literature that teachers resist becoming activists, and instead advocate apolitical practices or neutrality (MacDonald, 2004; Arshad, 1996). Although none of the participants in this research study spoke explicitly about activist approaches, making sense of critical literacy through discussion with colleagues - including giving presentations about their practices - was a common theme in the data. I would argue that just as my political position has changed in the process of 'coming to critical literacy', and I have become a critical educator and researcher, there is evidence that participants also became critical educators through enacting critical literacy. I have described feeling isolated from colleagues who did not wish to engage in critical discussions about language and social practices; this alienation was a feature of participants' accounts of 'coming to critical literacy', suggesting that the politicisation of educators is difficult, particularly in a hegemony of compliance and neutrality (MacDonald, 2004; Arshad, 1996).

Proponents of critical pedagogy might argue that embedding critical literacy in classroom practices is a positive step for Scottish education; but at the same time tensions are evident when some commentators state that critical literacy has worked well from the margins of mainstream practice, purposefully evading efforts to pin one static definition to critical literacy (Patel Stevens and Bean, 2007). The same authors are concerned that policies mandating critical literacy practice could make teachers view it as a passing fad rather than a practice with transformative, emancipatory aims, a claim which was evident in some of the data gathered for this research. Edelsky and Cherland (2007) describe 'the popularity effect' of critical literacy, arguing the need to reclaim the term critical literacy for only those classroom practices that are critical emancipatory, that is which challenge structures and

systems of injustice and give students the conceptual tools to 'challenge those systems of privilege and power' (2007: 31). I posit that we need to reclaim critical literacy from dominant constructions of 'information and critical literacy' which do not foreground social justice concerns.

Conclusion

Lawrence Stenhouse questioned 'whether learning and critical literacy should be confined to an elite' (cited in Goodson, 2003: 124), that is, only to students in private schools. He argued that a focus on 'the mere basics' of literacy skills in state schools was not adequate and made a strong case for democratic education:

> We must now find ways of ensuring that a defensive, and more apprehensive, establishment in the context of a contracting economy does not make a critical education an education reserved for privilege (*ibid.*).

Emphasising 'the important skills of critical literacy' in current reform to literacy and English practices in Scotland might be seen as an opportunity to move from 'the mere basics' to a critical education for all, in line with Stenhouse's vision. Conversely, Curriculum for Excellence can be seen as a policy response to international pressures and market regulations, and there is evidence from the dominant constructions of 'information and critical literacy' that this might be the case. Active engagement in discussions and critique about what we teach and for what purpose should be an important part of education reform. In Scotland, we are poised for significant change. Whether social justice concerns become part of mainstream literacy and English practices through teaching 'the important skills of critical literacy' or whether information literacy skills continue to dominate the literacy

discourse depends on the extent to which educators engage with the meaning and purpose of critical pedagogies, and how they are supported in doing so.

The next chapter investigates the research methods, approaches, and procedures used in exploring participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy theories and practices. I shall reflect on how the literature reviewed thus far has shaped the overall research design as well as the processes through which I collected and analysed the data.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

My overarching research question asks: *What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority?* Participants in this research study experienced a model of critical literacy training which engaged them with critical literacy theory and guided and supported them in putting theory into practice. The sub-research questions are:

- *What do participants understand by the terms 'literacy' and 'critical literacy' and what do they see as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach?*
- *What do participants think it means to be critically literate, as opposed to being literate?*
- *What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts?*
- *What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their understanding of critical literacy practices?*

In this chapter I will foremost aim to establish trustworthiness by writing as honestly and clearly as possible, and by being reflexive and critical about the decisions I made during the process of designing, carrying out and analysing the findings from this research. I also recognise that *power* is a key principle in critical research and thus I shall focus on power as it relates to the research design and process. I will discuss in detail my reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews as the main research method, as well as the use of digital data and a personal research journal. Proceeding from the discussions in preceding chapters about the theoretical lenses I use, I shall in this chapter also outline how Charmaz's constructivist/constructionist grounded theory (2006, 2008) was used as a framework within which to gather and analyse the data. I will also explain the procedures used to collect the data from my

purposive sample, the coding phases which led to generation of theories and the key ethical considerations of this research study.

Validity and generalisability

> *The confessional is a current discourse: using it identifies the writer with an abstract subject position within this discourse, claims a valid identity for the writer as the one who is self-aware and politically sensitive, and carries the claim that readers ought to join the writer within the subject's position of the discourse: agreeing to the valid identity asserted and agreeing to the implicit epistemology averred universally true* (Carspecken and MacGillivray, 1998: 178).

Carspecken and MacGillivray's (*ibid.*) statement is one to which I repeatedly returned throughout the data gathering and analysis process, as I interpret 'the confessional' to be a style of conducting, analysing and reporting on my own research which is honest, clearly imagined and articulated, critical and reflexive. In Chapter Two I discussed how three key theories have shaped my current beliefs about literacy and critical literacy, and how these beliefs have changed significantly in recent years; in doing so, I aim to be self-aware and reflexive. Critical literacy is a political subject and thus I feel the need to reflect my own beliefs and the fact that this is a politically complex landscape within which I conducted my research; in so doing I aim to demonstrate political sensitivity. It is my sincere hope that I have constructed a valid identity - a concept which was influenced by Mishler (1986) and which will be explored in more detail subsequently - throughout the process of carrying out and writing up this research; in that sense, I have aimed to convince readers that I am honest in my intentions and conduct, in gathering data and in its analysis and, ultimately, in constructing a report of this research study. To the extent that I aim to be honest and trustworthy, I do perceive this act of writing up as a confessional.

Mishler's (1986) reformulation of *truth* in objectivist research to *trustworthiness* in interpretivist research resonates with my overarching aim to be honest in action and in writing up and to earn the trust of the research community by making visible the decisions and processes used in my research. He reformulates 'validation as the social construction of knowledge' (*ibid.*: 417), positing that focusing on trustworthiness instead of truth transfers the concept of validity to the social world. Researchers who are transparent about their positioning and make visible their research methods and procedures and interpretations gain the trust of the scientific community by being trustworthy. He states: 'Trustworthiness is tested repeatedly and gains in strength through our reliance on … findings as the basis for further work' (Mishler, 2000: 137).

Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that issues of reliability and validity may depend largely on the skills of the researcher and argue the importance of the *person* as an information gathering instrument. Establishing trustworthiness and reliability in all aspects of gathering data, including in all communication and contact with participants, was thus an important consideration for me as a researcher.

Cronbach argues:

> Acceptance or rejection of a practice or theory comes about because a community is persuaded. Even research specialists do not judge a conclusion as it stands alone; they judge its compatability with a network of prevailing beliefs (1988: 6).

Hence, I understand that the findings I shall present in the next chapter will be considered and valued against the trustworthiness of my claims as well as

how they sit with previous and prevalent beliefs. I will thus make tentative claims to knowledge based on the data collected from the purposive sample of educators who undertook training in, and implemented, critical literacy practices. Although I will not attempt to assert generalisations, I will strive for validity in my research, on the grounds of trustworthiness as discussed above.

Overall research design - rationale

Debates about traditions of inquiry (Creswell, 2007) have shaped my understanding of and decisions about the research design for this project. Although Silverman (2005, 2011) states that there is no simple distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, he provides very useful discussions (*ibid.*) of the appropriateness of both approaches for different types of research. He claims that qualitative methods 'are best suited if you want to ask 'what' and 'how' questions' (2011: 25), which my research questions do ask. In this section, I will discuss briefly my understanding of the main differences between the two approaches in order to justify my research design. Quantitative research is commonly associated with the positivist paradigm (Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Thomas, 2009), which holds that knowledge should be measurable or quantifiable, following Hume's principle of verification (Thomas, 2009). Within a quantitative research design, the researcher considers that which can be measured or counted, following nomothetic principles of prediction, explanation and generalisation. On the other hand, qualitative research follows the interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with human interaction and interrelation (Pring, 2000; Thomas, 2009). In this socially constructed world view, the concept of the researcher's objectivity is displaced by that of *positionality;* that is, the researcher is expected to be conscious of the ways in

which her knowledge and beliefs affect her interactions with participants and interpretations of the research process (Thomas, 2009). In planning my research design, I carefully considered these paradigms and research approaches, to determine which methodology was most suitable in respect of answering my research questions, and will discuss this in greater detail in a subsequent section.

Critical research and reflexivity

Smyth and Shacklock (1998) highlight the importance of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, defining reflexivity as an honest and ethical stance which requires the researcher to make the situated nature of her position explicit. In Chapter Two I attempted to be as clear and honest as possible about the theories which have shaped the way I think about language and social practices, the ways in which I have been constructed by the literature I have read to date and by my own experiences as an educator. In this section I will discuss the research design and subsequent data collection and analysis processes as clearly and honestly as I can.

One of my main concerns, in designing and undertaking research on critical literacy policy and practices, was to understand what it means to *do* critical research and to conduct my research in a critical manner. Smyth and Shacklock (1998) explain one key aspect of critical research:

> Part of the 'contract', for critically framed research, is an acceptance of the historically embedded roles of the researcher, research methodology and research account and the disclosure of the interests, subjectivity and non-neutral nature of the relations between producer, process and product which exist in any research (1998: 7).

McLaren and Kincheloe (2007) state that critical research is always concerned with issues of power and dominance, so throughout this chapter I will reflect and report on instances of power and hegemony in the wider discussion of the overall research design, and data collection and analysis processes. They claim:

> Students and researchers of power, educators, sociologists, all of us are hegemonized as our field of knowledge and understanding is structured by limited exposure to competing definitions of the sociopolitical world (*ibid*.: 93).

McLaren and Kincheloe (*ibid*.) discuss Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, which holds that the dominant power is not always gained through physical force but through social-psychological constructions which gain dominance. Hegemonic ideology or ideologies take hold in complex ways, as individuals construct their world and their place(s) in it. As I have discussed in previous chapters, I perceive the constructions of literacy and what it means to be literate in sociocultural and sociopolitical terms; hence the dominant views of literacies – including critical literacy – both shape and are shaped by people and become hegemonic ideologies.

Using Smyth and Shacklock's (1998) conceptualisation, in this chapter I shall reflect on aspects of power relevant to the *producer* - chiefly, myself as researcher but also producers or co-constructors of knowledge, the research participants – and the research *process*. I will begin by looking closely at the research questions which frame the study, highlighting issues of power as I have interpreted them and giving a rationale for my decisions about the research design and process.

Rationale for research questions - explorations of power

The overarching research question asks:

What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority?

My motivation for this study arose from a critical reading of Scottish educational policy. My surprise that 'the important skills of critical literacy' were not defined or explained further in the draft cover paper to *Building the Curriculum 3* (Scottish Government, 2008) led me to investigate informally teaching colleagues' understandings of the term. Several colleagues guessed that critical literacy was in essence critical thinking, but admitted that they did not have a clear understanding. As I extended my investigation, I was introduced to a senior lecturer at the University of Edinburgh who had co-designed and led professional development on critical literacy in one Scottish local authority. My interest in researching critical literacy, specifically how educators make sense of new mandates and put them into practice, led me to design this research study around an investigation of the knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy of participants in the first year (of a total of three years) of the professional development model.

In terms of power hierarchies, I recognise that my research stemmed from concerns about lack of clarity in Scottish policy, which developed into deeper concerns about the absence of education for social justice in dominant government constructions of critical literacy. This tension between policy statements which have power over educators' work and the ways in which educators can be positioned as powerless when they are not given clear guidance to interpret and enact policy underpins my research design and was at the fore of my thinking as I gathered and analysed the data.

The first sub-research question is:

What do participants understand by the terms 'literacy' and 'critical literacy' and what do they see as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach?

I investigated participants' knowledge of literacy and critical literacy, to gain a greater understanding of how they conceptualise these terms. Through discussion with participants, I sought to understand whether they perceive literacy and critical literacy according to dominant social constructions of these terms, or whether their understandings diverge from the more prevalent model(s). Dominant definitions or models of literacy and critical literacy exert power because of their prominence in educators' minds. In seeking to discover what they see as distinctive about a critical literacy approach, I was interested to discuss participants' views on the differences - if any - between critical literacy and literacy. Specifically, through reading the feminist poststructuralist literature which identifies action/transformation/ reconstruction as the key distinction between critical literacy and literacy, I wondered if, how, and through which means, participants came to understand difference. Distinctions or differences in understandings might represent counter-hegemonic views of the terms, or they might reflect participants' understandings that their beliefs are not the dominant ones.

Issues of power did become apparent during the interviewing process. I was conscious of my position as a researcher with considerable grounding in the relevant academic literature, and initially feared prejudicing the data or seeming to criticise participants' knowledge by sharing my own understandings of the terms, which led me to be an outwardly uncritical interviewer – at least during the trial interview. Even when I wanted to ask for clarification or explore the participant's understanding of the terms, during the first interview I was silenced by my *perceived* power and my belief

that being more active in the discussion would somehow taint or distort the data. On reflection I realised that being a critical researcher means being open and active in the interview, and that by silencing myself I was not transferring power to the participant but was in fact creating a passive experience for both of us by taking the role of the neutral observer in the conversation.

This research question is also imbued with my concern that because **Education Scotland** has considerable power to influence educators' thinking and practice, in conflating the concepts of information and critical literacy it is denying educators access to accurate information. If educators use **Education Scotland**'s website as their main source of information about 'the important skills of critical literacy', the misleading, inaccurate constructions presented there are real barriers to accessing knowledge about critical literacy as a tool for social justice.

The second research sub-question asks:

> *What do participants think it means to be critically literate, as opposed to being literate?*

As with the preceding question, this research question was intended to investigate participants' views about dominant constructions of what it means to be literate and, beyond that understanding, to discuss what they think it means to be critically literate. When I posed this question during interviews, I anticipated that participants' responses might be framed within a 'functional literacy' paradigm, but I also expected to hear them discuss other literacies - such as media literacy and digital literacy. The key aim of this research question was to explore participants' beliefs about what being critically literate means, which I believed would lead to discussions about

competence in the skills of critical literacy, in the same way that participants conceptualised 'being literate'.

I recognise that by wording this research question in this way, I have constructed a binary of 'opposing' meanings of being literate and critically literate. My aim was to draw out participants' understandings of both terms to identify distinctions between them, but the research question as written gives dominance to *difference*, when in fact participants might perceive the terms to have the same meaning.

The third research sub-question asks:

What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts?

Originally, I believed that the best way to address this research question was through direct observation of critical literacy practices in participants' own settings. I perceived one possible barrier to be participants' reluctance to be observed engaging in critical literacy practices, and a second was the scheduling of observations, particularly if no 'critical literacy lessons' were being planned by participants during the data collection phase. A third major barrier related to the fact that data would be restricted to practices observed, whereas perhaps participants had experiences of critical literacy practices - which they perceived to be important or successful or otherwise worthy of discussion - which had taken place prior to the data collection phase. In fact, this last point proved to be overwhelmingly the case, as all of the participants discussed not only their own but also colleagues' critical literacy practices across sectors and subject areas.

Power is also a relevant concept when we rely on the accuracy of participants' recollections of practices which might have occurred some time in the past, as power might be seen to reside in the strength or reliability of the participant's memory of those practices which they claim to have observed or enacted. Although this might be seen as a limitation I would argue that it has proved to be a strength, as where more than one participant described a colleague's practices - which happened frequently as will be discussed in the next chapter - those accounts were remarkably similar.

The fourth research sub-question asks:

> *What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their understanding of critical literacy practices?*

This research question stemmed from my own initial concerns about the lack of clear guidance from the government, and my subsequent search to understand what critical literacy means and how it can be taught in schools. I wanted to find out which sources and resources participants use to help them better understand and teach critical literacy. The lack of data generated from this research question is an interesting finding and will be discussed in the next chapter.

My concerns about the power that dominant government constructions have to remove social justice concerns - as in the 'information and critical literacy' web pages discussed in the previous chapter - are particularly relevant to this research question. My critique of the information on the **Education Scotland** website will be discussed in the next section.

Critique and action

I sent the first email to **Education Scotland** in October 2011, which set out my concerns that although there were some very good definitions of critical literacy in the literature, what actually appeared on the **Education Scotland** website as a definition of 'information and critical literacy' was essentially a description of information literacy, with a brief mention of social problems. I included Wray's (2006) and Shor's (1999) definitions in the email and suggested Vasquez's (2004, 2009, 2010) writing as very accessible and full of possibilities for work with young children. I closed with an invitation to contact me to discuss my research or any aspects of the email in more detail. I received a prompt reply which:

- directed me to more information about higher order thinking skills on Glow, the Scottish government's educational intranet site
- agreed that 'the waters around Critical Literacy are muddied by the inclusion of Information Literacy as they are bulked together, often by teachers in an effort to rationalise how they can teach the skills'
- claimed that **Education Scotland**'s work on critical literacy is based on the work of David Wray
- proposed that we have a telephone conversation to discuss my research (2011).

Although I knew that transformation of the information on the website would not happen quickly - if at all - I was frustrated by the response: in my email I had argued that higher order thinking skills are admittedly part of critical literacy but fail to address social justice concerns, so being directed to Glow to look at more information about such skills missed the point. The accusatory nature of the second point, that *teachers* combine the terms critical literacy and information literacy to make sense of them, when there is a definite bias towards information literacy on the **Education Scotland** website and in fact the definition of the terms states that 'a person is information

literate when ...' is *government* led, not teacher led. My reasoning behind including David Wray's (2006) definition of critical literacy was to provide a concise reference point for **Education Scotland** staff, to emphasise that it involves critique and transformation of unjust social and language practices, not mere information literacy skills; however I was being told that Wray's work informed **Education Scotland**'s critical literacy resources. Clearly, we were at a theoretical impasse.

At the time of writing, there has been no change to the information posted on **Education Scotland**'s website, although I intend to continue acting in an attempt to transform the construction of critical literacy by **Education Scotland.**

Data gathering tools

Interviews - the literature

Interviews were chosen as the most relevant and important research method for this research study, given that the overarching research question concerns participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy. As Kvale (2007) states:

> A qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences .... The interview is a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee (2007: xvii).

Understanding participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy was my main research aim, so Kvale's writing resonated with me; co-

constructing knowledge through discussion with participants was exactly what I hoped to do.

Gillham (2000) provides a useful guide to different types of interviews:

- completely unstructured interviews in which the researcher is listening to participants' conversations
- asking research questions via a conversation with the participant(s)
- open-ended interviews, in which the researcher asks just a few key questions
- semi-structured interviews where the researcher asks open and closed questions
- verbally administered questionnaires, which might also be called recording schedules.

As my research questions were designed to investigate participants' knowledge and beliefs in more detail, I decided that the most effective method for my research design was semi-structured interviews, in order that I could explore the research questions with participants and give them the opportunity to raise relevant topics or issues for discussion. One of the aims of this research was to contribute to the wider literature on critical literacy practices by writing about Scottish practitioners' views, so a key reason for choosing the interview method was to ensure that space was created for participants to speak about the issues surrounding critical literacy.

Interviews are not unproblematic and including them as part of the research design should be carefully considered (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000; Gillham, 2000; Kvale, 2007). The time-consuming nature of interviews and transcription are important aspects to consider in the overall research design; however given that I aimed to collect detailed data about participants'

knowledge of and beliefs about the complex area of critical literacy, allowing sufficient time for interviews was a necessary aspect of my research design.

Gillham (2000) claims that novice researchers in particular tend to be over-controlling in the interview setting, focused more on the interview schedule than on listening to the participants and using their responses to shape the interview questions. As a novice researcher, I paid careful attention to Gillham's advice and with hindsight recognise that during the trial interview although I listened carefully to the participant, I neglected to use her responses consistently to shape subsequent interview questions. I realise now that although I aimed to be a critical interviewer - attentive to gaps, silences and issues of power and privilege in what the participant said - I did not use a critical approach in the early stages of the interview process. Instead, I listened carefully but did not outwardly challenge or question aspects which I could have. During a later phase in the research, when I sent the participant a copy of the transcript, I attempted to clarify some of the issues which I had come to understand would have been much better to have done during the actual interview. I acknowledge that I learned a great deal about how to be a critical researcher in practice - not merely in theory - during this research process (McLaren and Kincheloe, 2007; Smyth and Shacklock, 1998).

After the first interview I realised that I had acted as though I was a data *collector*, not a data *analyser*, a distinction made by Charmaz (2006). Although Charmaz was in essence writing about the need for researchers to conduct their own data collection as well as analysis (that is, not involving a third party in the research process), on reflection I see that as a novice interviewer I had not really understood my role in data collection as a critical researcher; instead of listening attentively without challenging or questioning the

participant's statements out of concern that I would be somehow leading or directing the discussion, I left many leads and potential issues for further discussion untapped because I was not actively analysing the data with the participant at the time of the interview. My concerns about having and exerting power over the interview structure and process led to a false passivity rather than active engagement.

Holstein and Gubrium (2004b)'s discussion of active interviewing shaped subsequent interviews, insofar as their guidance helped me put the theory of non-neutral interviews - in which participant and researcher are co-constructors of knowledge - into practice. In essence, they claim, active interviewing means:

> consciously and conscientiously attending to both the interview process and the products that interviews generate in ways that are more sensitive to the social construction of knowledge (2004b: 142).

Although I approached the first interview with the conviction that researchers need to be open and honest about their own beliefs and positions, my concerns about introducing bias into the data prevented me from doing so, which reveals a difficulty I had in putting theory into practice.

However, Holstein and Gubrium's conceptualisation of the passive interviewee as a 'vessel of answers' (2004b: 144) who will provide authentic data if the interviewer is careful not to contaminate the interview with bias (*ibid.*), contrasted with the active, enlivened interview subject who is involved in a dynamic, ongoing meaning-making construction with the researcher, strikes me as being like Freire's problem-posing approach in contrast with the banking model of education. I thus conceptualised the

interview as a problem-posing discussion, in which my silence was not going to eliminate bias, but rather would make me a non-participant in the conversation. In a later interview, when I raised the topic of the partial, misleading information on the **Education Scotland** website for critique, the lively discussion which ensued was a great moment in the interview process, and resulted in the participant urging me to take action to challenge **Education Scotland** with the purpose of transforming the information on its website. Together we engaged in critical literacy, critiquing the dominant structure and planning action which might lead to transformation.

Although I have identified and addressed limitations in the use of semi-structured interviews above, I nevertheless believe that this was the best research method for my research design; as Thomas argues, using semi-structured interviews 'provides the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned' (2009: 164). Certainly, perceiving myself as and acting like an *active* interviewer led to much more dynamic discussions than the passive stance I adopted during the trial interview.

Digital communication

Investigating participants' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy through the medium of digital communication was the second research method in my research design, which I hoped would yield interesting data in addition to the interviews. I planned to collect and analyse data in the form of email correspondence, wikis and blogs throughout the research process, taking care to ensure that all participants were aware that any digital communication could be used in the final write-up of this study.

Critical literacy wiki

I set up a wiki on the University of Edinburgh website to which all participants were invited to contribute information about critical literacy. Essentially 'a wiki is the simplest collaborative content management system that could possibly work' (Nations, 2010: 1), an online reference guide written collaboratively by multiple authors. One of the main advantages in using a wiki is that it can be seen as a shared space for participants, a collective memory, and can be viewed as a less time-consuming communication medium than email (Stafford and Webb, 2005). I envisaged the community of teachers of critical literacy using the wiki as a means to share and consolidate their knowledge and beliefs about the subject, an online forum of support for them which could also serve as a rich means of gathering data for this project. Unfortunately, none of the targeted group of participants used the wiki.

There are disadvantages to using a wiki, which might have resulted in the lack of contributions to it. Although I recognised from the onset that the technological demands of the wiki might have prevented certain participants from attempting to use it, I hoped that some who felt they might not have time to participate in the interview process would consider adding their knowledge and beliefs about critical literacy to the wiki. I considered asking participants to keep personal diaries for this project, but rejected this on the grounds that it would be too time-consuming for them; instead, I hoped that setting up a wiki might increase participation in this research study. Whatever the reason for the fact that no participants used the critical literacy wiki - be it due to lack of time or interest or confidence with the technology - I still believe in the potential for gathering data in this way and would attempt to use this data gathering tool in future research.

Critical literacy blog

I also set up a critical literacy blog which I hoped would generate data for this research project and, as with the wiki, might serve as an online space for the community of critical literacy educators involved in this research and further afield to post their views about aspects of critical literacy practices. As with wikis, a key advantage of blogs is that they are interactive, allowing visitors to post messages and share their views with other visitors to the blog site (Mutum and Wang, 2010). Unlike the wiki, whose use was restricted to participants in the research project who were invited to use the site, a blog can be viewed by anyone with internet access and anyone can register to post on the site. Thus, an additional advantage to using a blog is that visitors from anywhere in the world who are registered are able to post comments about the critical literacy issues being discussed on the blog. The disadvantage for me as the researcher would be to ensure clear identification of data from research participants and that from international visitors, since my research questions concern the knowledge and beliefs of participants in one Scottish local authority. I planned to ask all participants to inform me of their relevant usernames, so that I would know which of the posted comments were from Scottish teachers. One of the disadvantages listed above regarding the wiki could also apply to the blog; namely that teachers who are not confident using technology might be prevented from using a blog. I sent participants brief instructions on using the wiki and the blog, in the hope that it might encourage them to become involved in one or the other online community. Sadly, there were no posts in response to mine, either from research participants or from anyone further afield.

Personal research journal

Throughout the research process I recorded personal reflections, observations, concerns and next steps in a research journal which I regularly referred to, specifically when writing up the final report. Borg (2001) discusses his use of a perso nal research journal, delineating the *process* and *product* aspects of doing so. He states:

> The journal was not just a place where I recorded events or documented existing thoughts, but more importantly, as Maxwell (1996) suggests, a forum for reflection where ideas were generated and explored and discoveries made in and through writing (2001: 160).

I initially viewed my research journal as an aide-memoire and as a site in which to construct work plans and timetables; however from the very first month of beginning independent research, it became a much more complex part of the research process, a symbol of my personal struggle as a researcher. For instance, I quickly learned that my journal was a helpful record of which search tags I had used in online research, which I decided would be best recorded in the journal. When I discovered a particularly productive search term, I listed it in my research journal alongside the date I utilised the term for future reference. As I have consistently made a habit of what I refer to as 'tangent searching' – going off on tangents rather than staying focused on the actual search term or tag I had planned to use - making detailed notes about searches I have carried out has allowed me to track my thinking through focused searching as well as the often intriguing but frequently frustrating tangent searching.

Borg cites Janesick's view that journal writing can be viewed as 'a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own

thinking and reflection patterns' (2001: 159). Although I would not confidently say that I am a connoisseur of my own thinking and reflection patterns, I would say that writing in my research journal certainly did help me *remember* as well as *reflect* on my thinking at various stages in the research; I was aware as I read previous journal entries that at the time of writing I assumed that I would never forget the thought trail I was then writing about – and wondered if I was wasting time - but when I later came to read it I realised that it *had* slipped from my mind. In that way, my journal was an aide-memoire and it was also a very important artefact mapping my thinking at various stages throughout my research.

I also used my research journal to record responses to and questions about the data at key points which, I feel, was instrumental in the shape my analysis and interpretation took. As I invariably arrived to each interview well ahead of the agreed time, I used the time to write thoughts about previously gathered data in my journal, reflections and musings which I believe might have been permanently lost from memory had I not made a tangible record of them. These written reflections also led me to investigate and explore other literature to look for similarities as well as areas of divergence, thus expanding my thinking considerably. For example, as I reflected on convergences in the data about critical literacy as a tool to help children deal with the 'masses of information' they encounter on the internet, I began to conceptualise critical literacy as a counterbalance to censorship, moving away from thinking that hiding offensive or contentious information from children was always and only the right answer to rethinking critical literacy as a way to equip children with the conceptual tools that they would need to 'handle' – in the words of some participants –or make sense of that information. I turned to the literature on critical media literacy, which was

new to me and which provided excellent insights into current debates about protectionism and censorship, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Returning to the point I made near the start of this chapter, I also recognise that my research journal has been the repository of my 'confessions', in that within it I have been most honest, critical and reflective about my research and my abilities as a researcher. In October 2011, I had a real crisis in confidence in terms of my ability to complete the interviews, data analysis and the writing up within schedule; specifically, I worried that after several postponements of interviews certain key participants were no longer willing to be involved in this research. My research journal shows the crisis in confidence as well as concerns I had about striking the right balance between respecting participants by interpreting their ongoing silence as a message to me that they no longer wished to be involved and hoping that polite emails suggesting dates for possible meetings might elicit a response:

> *Have now emailed [participant] for the seventh time since May [when the originally scheduled interview was postponed] and feel I am badgering her. Have emailed that I am going to be around for a week only and could we meet up then. Desperate to speak to her but don't want to bother her. What is Plan B -- how can I get more participants (and interview them and type up transcripts and analyse data and write findings chapters in the next couple of months??)*

My use of words such as 'badgering' and 'bother' highlight my increasing sense that I might have crossed a line, that persistence was becoming nuisance. I also recognise that questions of respect and politeness can conflict with a researcher's drive to gather the best possible data, and that if that means repeatedly contacting participants who are held in esteem as good

practitioners, the urge to choose the opportunity of good data over polite acceptance of participants' silence might win out.

Finally, it is important to note that as well as writing in my research journal regularly, I also frequently read and re-read sections of it. I do believe that my journal has made me a better researcher, by capturing ideas which might otherwise have been lost from memory; by serving as a 'confessional' within which I could honestly record difficulties and celebrations; and helping me to become more actively critical and reflective, through the process of writing in it. As Borg (2001) argues:

> the regular engagement in utilizing the thinking skills which journal writing calls for can – perhaps assisted by feedback from a supportive reader – enable researchers to develop greater levels of metacognitive awareness and reflective depth (2001: 170).

I believe that my research journal enabled me to better reflect on my research design and the research process, as well as support and enhance my awareness of myself as a researcher.

Observation and questionnaires

I carefully considered employing practitioner observation and questionnaires as data gathering tools before deciding that neither method was the best fit for this research. Instead of observing critical literacy in classrooms, I decided that the research question *What does critical literacy look like in their classrooms and contexts?* could be answered during the interview process. Descriptive narratives of critical literacy practices; visual aids and handouts; and posters and other visual displays were gathered in the data collection phase, and the analysis of these practices will be discussed in the next chapter.

One possible limitation of this approach is that participants might not have given full or accurate accounts of their critical literacy practices, either because their declarative knowledge (or their metalanguage) does not match their intuitive knowledge, or that which they know but have not spoken of; or perhaps due to the fact that they do not see certain practices as critical literacy. There is also the chance that teachers might tell me as the researcher what they think I want to hear, rather than describe their actual practices to me.

Questionnaires were considered and rejected as a research method for this project, on the grounds that it would be difficult to gather rich data about the complexities of participants' knowledge and beliefs about critical literacy from written responses.

Procedures

Purposive sample

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, the aim of sampling is to gather rich data, which Charmaz describes as 'detailed, focused and full' (2006: 14), to answer the research questions, so in this case speaking to educators who are using critical literacy approaches was essential. Thomas explains that a purposive sample 'involves simply the pursuit of the kind of person in whom the researcher is interested' (2009: 104). I thus decided on a purposive sample (*ibid.*) of educators who undertook the initial training in critical literacy delivered by university lecturers in one Scottish local authority as the most effective way to ensure that experienced, interested practitioners were involved in the research. As I explained in Chapter One, I had access to a group of educators who were sensitised and alerted to critical

literacy as a pedagogy for social justice, by the theoretical framing of the model of professional development. I was given the names and email addresses of twenty three participants in one local authority and initially emailed them, outlining my research in brief and inviting them to participate in the research. A second email was sent containing details about the wiki and the blog, which I hoped might encourage more participation in this research process. Thus, this purposive sample was chosen with the specific aim of researching the knowledge and beliefs of an informed, engaged group of educators whose critical literacy training was grounded in theories of social justice.

After the first email, five people responded to agree to be involved in the research, one of whom was a Head Teacher of a small primary school who suggested that I could speak to all members of staff there. After the second email, another person responded to register interest in participating, so at that point I anticipated interviewing ten people. During the first two interviews I was advised by the interviewees to make contact with certain individuals who they felt would make valuable contributions to this research, with a result that a further three participants agreed to be interviewed. This emerging sample was co-constructed with participants, taking into account their recommendations and advice, which might be seen to making the sample even more 'purposive'. Thomas (2009) explains that this type of sample might also be referred to as a *snowball sample*.

It might be argued that if a snowball sample is used, the researcher is less in control of the sample when participants' recommendations are taken up. However, in aiming for methodological congruence, I believe that participants should be involved as *producers* through the *process* of research

(Smyth and Shacklock, 1998). I have explained that I sent my first email to twenty three educators who were involved in the first year of critical literacy training; as participants agreed to be interviewed, some suggested individuals who they felt I should speak to, so I contacted them again, even though they had not responded to my invitation to be involved in this research. I nevertheless feel it was entirely appropriate to contact these participants again, as they were part of my original sample population, and I believe it was important to follow the recommendations of participants regarding the snowball sample.

The research interviews were carried out between February and October 2011. After the initial good response from participants, there were some difficulties actually carrying out the interviews. Two of the original four participants who responded to my email engaged in timely correspondence and those two interviews were carried out in March 2011. It was difficult to schedule an interview with one of the remaining participants due to her busy schedule and work commitments, but we did meet up in April 2011. The Head Teacher who said that I would be welcome to speak to her and to all of the staff in her primary school suddenly and unexpectedly took early retirement in April 2011, so it was not possible in the end to interview her or any members of her staff. Thus, the ten interviews which I had originally planned were reduced to four.

It was suggested by the first four participants that I contact three of their colleagues who were involved in the first training session and who they identified as enthusiastic, excellent critical literacy practitioners, based on the presentations they gave to the whole group. I did contact those participants again, and fortunately all three agreed to be interviewed; ultimately though,

only two participants were interviewed due to ongoing difficulties arranging to meet up with the third. Thus the final total number of participants, including the university lecturer and local authority manager, was eight.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim, one key reason behind sampling in qualitative research is *convenience*; in other words, the researcher needs to have participants in order to have a research study. The purposive sample of participants who had engaged in professional development and implemented critical literacy practices enabled me to gather data which was rich and relevant to my research questions. The difficulties I had not in making but in *sustaining* contact with participants – and in rescheduling interviews where they had to be postponed – caused me to reflect on *convenience*; specifically, as my purposive sample was intended to afford me access to informed, engaged and enthusiastic practitioners of critical literacy yet yielded such considerable difficulties in actually carrying out the interviews, I wondered how convenient it is to carry out research studies with participants who might be reluctant, disaffected practitioners.

Interview process

Twenty three people who attended the first year of the training run in partnership between one university and the Scottish local authority which is part of this study were initially contacted by email to invite them to participate in my research, as were a local authority manager who facilitated the training and a university lecturer who co-designed and led the critical literacy training in the local authority.

The participants were: three primary teachers, two secondary teachers, a secondary school librarian, a manager of the local authority, and one of the

university lecturers who delivered the critical literacy training. The interviews were scheduled to take place at a time and place of the participant's choosing, so almost all were held in their school at the end of the school day or during a free period. One of the teachers, the local authority manager and the academic lecturer were interviewed in their homes. Participants were asked at the start of the interview whether they had a set timeframe within which the discussion should take place. Three interviews lasted approximately one hour although five took between one and a half and two and two and half hours.

The interview schedule was structured around the research questions and was based on the following topic set:

Topic set for interviews
- Participants' conceptualisations of literacy
- Participants' conceptualisations of critical literacy
- Whether participants distinguish between being literate and being critically literate, as opposed to being literate?
- Participants' accounts of critical literacy practices/activities/lessons approaches used in their classrooms/contexts
- Sources/resources participants have access to
- Additional issues surrounding critical literacy.

The local authority manager had access to the interview schedule, but I identified questions which were more relevant for her. The university lecturer who co-led the training discussed the same questions as the teachers and librarian, but I also asked her additional questions about the critical literacy training; specifically, I was interested to know how she had guided participants' understandings of the complex area of critical literacy. I began every interview by introducing myself, giving some brief background in

terms of my teaching experiences as well as those as a doctoral student. I explained that my interest in researching critical literacy started when I read the draft literacy and English cover paper to *Building the Curriculum 3* (Scottish Government, 2008) and my own drive to discover what the important skills of critical literacy led to an interest in finding out what other practitioners made of that directive.

Trial interview

In previous sections I briefly discussed some of the issues I had during the trial interview, in terms of being passive and outwardly uncritical, even though I was challenging and critiquing aspects of the participant's narrative inwardly. Although I had read Holstein and Gubrium's (2004b) work about the active interview and guidance on being a critical researcher (McLaren and Kincheloe, 2007; Smyth and Shacklock, 1998; Charmaz, 2006), I recognised on reflection that I was not putting theory into practice but was instead being a passive, uncritical interviewer.

In particular, during the first interview with a secondary English teacher I should have more actively asked questions about the implicit meanings, when instead I focused on explicit words. Charmaz states that 'it usually takes considerable work to discover the subtlety and complexity of respondents' intentions and actions' (2006: 34), which suggests that uncovering implicit meanings is difficult for the interviewer; however there were some statements which I actively challenged in my head yet did not discuss with the participant during the interview. For example, I anticipated that the interview with the English teacher would be a rich discussion of the critical literacy practices she uses; however I had not expected her to say that the young people she teaches are not interested in critical literacy but are

rather apathetic and self-involved. Silently, I challenged her stance: I had just finished reading Morrell's *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent, and Liberation* (2008), in which he describes critical literacy practices with young people in south-central Los Angeles. Why would they so actively engage in critical literacy but Scottish young people would not? Should, I wondered, the English teacher not have given up so easily? Was she wrong in her assumptions about the young people? In fact, the transcript reveals that I did make an attempt to raise the issue of Morrell's critical literacy approaches, although it was clumsy and by seeming to make a statement rather than pose a question, I did not invite - nor receive - a response.

Thus, although I clearly saw the need to contrast the participant's beliefs about the students' lack of engagement in deeper, critical approaches to texts with what I was reading in the literature, I made quite a passive, weak attempt to do so. During subsequent interviews I endeavoured to follow the principles of active interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004a). Holstein and Gubrium (*ibid.*) claim that interviews are *social productions* which are inherently active, collaborative and problematic.

Transcription

This section describes the technical aspects of the process of transcription; however I believe that analysis occurs *during* transcription, so in a subsequent section I will discuss this in greater detail. I recorded interviews on a digital voice recorder and transcribed them myself, using ExpressScribe software, a scribing support software package which can be downloaded free from the internet. In each case, I began the transcriptions on the same day as the interviews were undertaken and allocated time each day thereafter

transcribing, a process which often took several days to complete. Although I found transcription to be a lengthy process - due in part to my typing speed which was slowed down by considerable errors and to the fact that I had to listen again to many parts of the recording to check for accuracy of transcription - I do feel it was a worthwhile process as I became very familiar with the data, and in future research I would certainly make every effort to undertake all transcription myself. Although I am alert to Walford's (2001) claim that he rarely transcribes every single interview in his research studies - in his discussion about the 'fetish of transcription' (*ibid.*: 92) - and I appreciate that different decisions might need to be made with very large numbers of interviews, I believe that transcribing interviews myself was an extremely important part of the data analysis.

Once the first draft of the transcription was complete, I listened to the entire digital recording of each interview to check again for accuracy. Next, I emailed the transcription to each participant as a PDF (Portable Document Format) file and asked them to check for accuracy and meaning, as well as to email me with any additional comments, questions or concerns they might have had upon reading the transcript. Although none of the participants emailed with changes to the actual transcript, I did receive several comments regarding the act of reading the transcription itself:

- *I knew there would be quite a bit to read, so I needed to take 'five minutes' in order to do it. When I got round to it this evening, I could not believe how long we had talked for. The transcript feels very odd to read - as it transcribes the spoken word, not the written one. I have never had to do that before. But as far as I can see, it reads 'word perfect'.*

- *It was a pleasure talking to you too. I found the whole thing quite invigorating and it was nice to speak to someone who was so open to the role of the librarian in education. I have looked at the transcript and I'm generally happy with it. I'm*

amazed that you could make sense of my sometimes "stream of conscious" way of talking. I realise that I have a lot of ideas clambering to get out!

There was one concerning instance of *non-transcription* of note, which relates to the interview with the local authority manager. Although I had taken the digital voice recorder to the interview I failed to remember I had done so until near the very end of our discussion, which meant that although I had detailed notes I did not have an actual recording and thus unfortunately had no transcription to do. Fortunately, however, it was the only occasion on which I forgot to record an interview.

Organisation of data

In the interests of confidentiality, I assigned each transcription a code name rather than using the participant's actual name:

Participant	Abbreviated code
Secondary School English teacher 1	SSET-1
Secondary School librarian 1	SSL-1
Secondary School Support for Learning Teacher 1	SSSfLT-1
Primary School Teacher 1	PST-1
Primary School Teacher 2	PST-2
Primary School Teacher 3	PST-3
University Lecturer 1	UL-1
Local Authority Manager 1	LAM-1

The Portable Document Files were saved in a folder labelled 'Final PDF transcripts', with the individual labels as outlined above. As I began to

extract key quotations from the transcripts which I used throughout the analysis and in writing up the findings chapter, I assigned the participant label to each quotation, again for ease of reference and to ensure confidentiality. However, part way through writing up that chapter, I decided against these impersonal codes and chose pseudonyms for the participants instead, which I believe gives them greater power than alphanumeric codes. For the purpose of clarity, each participant's pseudonym as well as alpha-numeric code appear together in Chapter Six. The issue of confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Analysis

Methodological congruence

In qualitative research, the research methods need to be congruent with the research design and theoretical framework (Creswell, 2007; Richards and Morse, 2007; Manning, 1997). Morgan claims that any researcher brings a toolkit of theories to the writing process and states:

> Any investigative methodology needs to be congruent with the broader theories that frame it .... If meanings are always socially constructed and constrained, if texts are a partial representation of the 'reality' they constitute, and are uncertain, capable of multiple readings, then a positivist and scientivist model of research simply will not do (1997: 111).

In a previous chapter I discussed my toolkit of theories which shapes the ways I participate in social and language practices, including this research. Social constructionist theory informs my thinking about language practices in schools as those which conform to the dominant paradigm or model in a

given social context, particularly the ways in which hegemonic constructions privilege the interests of some individuals and groups at the expense of others (Warrington and Younger, 2006; Skelton, 2001; Warrington and Younger, 2000; Condie *et al.* 2006; Skelton and Francis, 2003). Feminist poststructuralist theory guides my thinking about how individuals can recognise, challenge and subvert instances in which they are being positioned as powerful or powerless in relation to others, to transform inequalities in language and social practices (Davies, 2003; Francis, 1999; Janks, 2010; Francis, 2006; Davies, 1989; Davies and Saltmarsh, 2007). Critical pedagogical theory is the third main theory in my toolkit, which informs how I view teaching approaches and practices as the ways in which students acquire the conceptual tools to recognise sites of inequality and injustice, thereby providing a pedagogy of hope that our social world can be made a more just place through our individual and collective actions (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992; Kanpol, 1999; Giroux, 1989; Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011). Thus, the methods I have used are congruent with the theories which frame my research design and I will discuss this in respect of the theories and methods used and how they answer the research questions.

Constructionist/Constructivist Grounded Theory

When constructing the research design, I carefully considered which methodology would best fit the purpose of investigating educators' knowledge of and beliefs about critical literacy practices and analysing the data. Aligning the methodology to the area researched was of key concern and finding a method which is appropriate to critical literacy research was of central import as I sought the best approach. Morrell (2008), in *Critical Literacy with Urban Youth,* explains that Paulo Freire's (1970) critical literacy work with Brazilian peasants is grounded theory in action:

> Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, as articulated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* is a powerful example of grounded theory. ... From his practical work with people, he was then able to coalesce, refine, and push back against these various theories about knowledge, humanity, action, and freedom to develop a grounded theory of revolutionary literacy pedagogy that has informed so much critical scholarship around the world (2008: 9).

I further researched grounded theory and discovered Kathy Charmaz's work on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2008) and subsequently decided that methodological congruence would be best achieved by using that approach (Charmaz, 2006), with its emphasis on reflecting, analysing and interpreting social processes at work in and shaped by the interview process; specifically the process of asking oneself reflexive questions about central and marginal perspectives; spoken words and silences; and power and control (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory acknowledges that the participants and the researcher have multiple standpoints, which requires a reflexive approach to interactions with participants and analysis of the data. She states that a constructivist grounded theory approach 'means learning how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships' (2006: 130) and makes visible differences and distinctions between people. This method begins with an inductive approach by looking at specific questions and cases then moves into deductive reasoning by making conjectures and hypotheses about the data as the research process continues. Charmaz explains that grounded theory invokes abductive reasoning, which

entails considering all possible theoretical explanations for the data, forming hypotheses for each possible explanation, checking them empirically by examining data, and pursuing the most plausible explanation (2006: 104).

Charmaz claims that a constructivist grounded theory approach provides the researcher with systematic strategies for collecting, engaging with and analysing the data which enable the researcher to create an original analysis through imaginative interpretation of the data, which is why I feel this method was most appropriate for this critical literacy research study. Charmaz's clearly delineated stages of data collection, analysis and constructing theories provided me with a sound framework within which to undertake this research.

Although Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006) was my main point of reference when designing and carrying out the data collection and analysis procedures, I would also like to discuss her chapter entitled 'Constructionist Grounded Theory' in Holstein and Gubrium's *Handbook of Constructionist Research* (2008). This distinction is important, I feel, as in Chapter Two I explained my understanding of the distinction between social constructionist and social constructivist approaches, and my reasons for adopting the former lens for my research. I thus carefully considered whether Charmaz's guidance on using a constructivist grounded theory approach would align with my constructionist lens and felt there was considerable congruence in using the methodology she advocates alongside critical literacy research. In particular, Charmaz (2006, 2008) urges researchers to be alert to gaps and silences in participants' accounts, which I believe is very much aligned with critical research, and thus I achieved methodological congruence by using Charmaz's (*ibid.*) approach in this research study.

I was, therefore, intrigued when I discovered her chapter about constructionist grounded theory. Charmaz explains her usage of the terms thus:

> In earlier works I have referred to my approach as constructivist grounded theory to distinguish it from objectivist iterations. The present chapter continued my earlier approach but frames the discussion under the more general rubric of social constructionism to be consistent with the purpose of this volume. Constructivist grounded theory assumes relativity, acknowledges standpoints, and advocates reflexivity. My use of constructivism assumes the existence of an obdurate, real world that may be interpreted in multiple ways. I do not subscribe to the radical subjectivism assumed by some advocates of constructivism. Consistent with Marx, I assume that people make their worlds but do not make them as they please. Rather, worlds are constructed under particular historical and social conditions that shape our views, actions, and collective practices. Constructivist grounded theory has epistemological roots in sociological social constructionism (2008: 409).

I have included the entire quotation here in order that Charmaz's argument is presented in her own words. In Chapter Two I discussed my epistemological beliefs, explaining that social constructionism is a key way of knowing about literacy as a sociocultural construct; thus, as Charmaz explains above, constructionist grounded theory is epistemologically congruent with my theoretical stance.

Process of analysis

In Chapter Two, I discussed in some detail the three main theories - social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and critical pedagogical theory - which have shaped not just this research study but also how I think and act in the world. I have previously discussed how Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory was chosen to align the methodology with this critical

literacy research study. Charmaz (2006) states that researchers who use a constructivist grounded theory approach simultaneously analyse data as they collect it. Earlier in this chapter, I explained how I experienced tensions between perceiving myself as a critical researcher, attentive to conflicts and contradictions and gaps and silences in the interview process, yet remaining silent myself when I was inwardly challenging what the participant was telling me. I was actively analysing the data I was collecting, but was not making visible to the participant the process of that critique. In later interviews, I made concerted efforts to be more honest about my own stance and position as a researcher, and I also attempted to challenge or question participants' statements instead of remaining silent. I therefore developed an understanding that critical research is not just about analysing the data as it is collected, but also being conscious of – and open and honest about – that process of analysis with participants whenever possible.

Analysis during transcription

Ongoing analysis took place as I transcribed the interviews, as listening to the participants' statements outwith the interview setting enabled me to become familiar with the data, hearing aspects I had not been aware of during the interview. I found the act of listening to digital voice recordings through headphones with no other noise or sensory distractions - such as you get when speaking to participants in busy school settings – very interesting, as subtle shifts in participants' tone, pitch and emphasis became very apparent in ways they were not during the actual interview. In fact, on several occasions I found myself wishing that I had been attentive to those verbal nuances during the interview, in order that I could have pursued the shifts in mood and tone. For example, when listening to one recording, the subtle change in the participant's voice to a very quiet, sombre tone caused

me to feel that she was declaring her concerns about her own abilities to manage the class and her subsequent frustrations and insecurities about it, which I had completely missed during the interview process. I realised that I had missed an opportunity to explore with her how our perceptions of ourselves as teachers - including as so-called classroom managers as well as facilitators of knowledge - are inextricably linked to our feelings about designing and delivering new curricular mandates. I was clearly aware that there were emotional issues at the fore of the interview, as the digital recording reveals my rush to reassure the participant; however I feel this showed my inexperience as an interviewer who should know when to be silent and let the participant disclose her emotions and personal reflections on the topic rather than intervene with what I heard in the recording as my superficial and meaningless interjections about her teaching.

Coding

First phase - initial coding

Once I had print copies of the transcriptions, I conducted a line-by-line reading to identify main ideas in small chunks of text (Charmaz, 2006) and wrote the codes in the margins. I understand coding to mean putting segments of data into categories with a corresponding brief name. Selecting and ordering data in this way enables the researcher to begin to analyse the data (Charmaz, 2006: 43). I found line-by-line coding particularly difficult as in many cases codes were not apparent in each line and I felt I was just arbitrarily writing codes that remained close to the participants' own language, without identifying *why* the codes were meaningful, or how they compared to other codes within the transcripts. Charmaz advises that such coding enables the researcher to remain close to the data, although for me it

indicated that I find identifying main themes in context much easier than finding codes in discrete lines of text. I did, however, return regularly to both the line-by-line codes I had constructed as well as the main themes I had identified in my personal research journal, using the constant comparison method to look for similar and divergent codes within transcripts and, later on, between transcripts. Comparative analysis entails checking codes within and between types, looking for similarities and differences in the data (*ibid.*).

During the interviews and throughout the transcription process, I was listening for key themes within each of the main research questions. Directly following each interview, I wrote these themes, as well as any other reactions, in my personal research journal. I then set up individual word processing documents for each of the four sub-research questions, separating the first question *What do participants understand by the terms 'literacy' and 'critical literacy'?* into two folders and within the question which asks *What do participants think it means to be critically literate, as opposed to being literate?*, setting up two charts to clearly identify distinctions in the data between the two concepts. Using comparative analysis, I kept checking for similarities and differences in the data, within and between participants' responses. I typed the main themes I had identified under the key research questions, again comparing codes against data from the same transcripts as well as between transcripts to check for frequency of codes. Using language as closely linked to the data as possible, I made every effort to use *in vivo* codes, or codes in participants' own language. Charmaz states that *in vivo* codes 'help us preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself' (2006: 55). One of the coding techniques I used was based on TAMS Analyzer, free coding software downloaded from the internet but which I did not ultimately use to help with coding. I did, however, find that

TAMS Analyzer's visual coding format supported my analysis, in that visually I found the coding technique accessible and distinctive. The software runs the text code together in one word string which is preceded by the categorising code, which I found very useful in terms of helping me use the participants' own language wherever possible. For example, in identifying codes in the category of what participants understand literacy to mean, I constructed the following codes from the first four interviews:

lit>nutsandboltsofreading
lit>communication/communicatingeffectively
lit>soundingoutwords
lit>technicalaspectofcankidsread
lit>abilityandunderstanding
lit>foundationonwhichtobuildCL
lit>communicatingwiththeworld
lit>beingabletocommunicatewiththeworld
lit>constantlychangingmeaning
lit>changingwithtechnology
lit>listeningtalkingfoundationforreadingwriting

From these literal codes, I later abstracted meaning to identify key findings from the research. I was also interested in comparing quantities of codes between categories, for example the eleven codes identified above in relation to the question about what participants think literacy means are in sharp contrast to the 79 codes identified in respect of the question that asked participants to discuss critical literacy practices. Comparing the number of codes between categories helped me to reflect on the participants' knowledge of, enthusiasm for and interest in certain research questions, and thus on the interview process itself.

Second phase - focused coding

Charmaz identifies focused coding as the second major phase in coding, in which the researcher selects focused codes to 'synthesize and explain larger segments of the data' (2006: 57), sorting through the data to critique early codes. I set up individual documents for my focused codes, but in this second phase I entered not just those codes but also quotations from the transcripts which expanded on or exemplified the codes I had constructed. As I selected key quotations, I was making conscious decisions about which data best supported the focused codes. The constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2006; Thomas, 2009) was used in this stage of the analysis to check where quotations from the same participant either supported or contradicted the code, as well as where quotations from different participants supported or contradicted codes identified in other participants' transcriptions.

Charmaz also claims that 'focused coding checks your preconceptions about the topic' (2006: 59). For me, this was especially true in the data which described critical literacy practices as being important, especially with younger children. I had unexamined, internalised preconceived ideas prior to commencing the interview process regarding the suitability of critical literacy for young children; even though I had read with great interest the works of Vasquez (2007; 2010) and Davies (2003), which describe critical literacy with young children, I did not really believe that the work they described could be generalised to the wider population. I believed that the authors must have special skills and talents which enabled them to undertake critical work with young children, which would not necessarily be transferable to other teachers. I enjoyed reading their work, but I did not expect to hear about or see examples in the Scottish context. However, in the second interview, the secondary school librarian told me:

Yes. My initial training was as a children's librarian and I actually looked at early years in particular so picture books are something I'm quite interested in and there is that whole part of you can - children are very sophisticated - young children are very, very sophisticated and I sometimes think we don't acknowledge that.

From that exchange, my assumptions were challenged and transformed: I realised as I was coding that she was absolutely right, that I had been underestimating the abilities of young children, that they are indeed very sophisticated. I reflected on the writing of Vasquez (2004, 2009, 2010), in particular, and realised that the message about children as sophisticated analysers and users of texts was in her work all along; the message was also within children I know personally and in countless children I have worked with in my teaching career, who were *showing* me their level of sophistication. From that instant in the coding process, I changed my previously held beliefs and became alert to other discussions about critical literacy practices with young children during interviews, to investigate what other participants believed. This interplay between the data and my developing conceptualisations is an embodiment of what Bulmer describes as a 'flip-flop between ideas and research experience' (1979: 260).

Third phase - theoretical coding

Theoretical codes, Charmaz explains, 'specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding' (2006: 63). They help researchers to see relationships between substantive codes and they advance analysis in a theoretical direction. The themes that I kept 'seeing' in the data were described as below in my personal research journal:

- making sense of critical literacy - policy, definitions - of how to implement policy
- conflicts/difficulties teaching 'new' content/approaches
- start as early as possible and keep teaching critical literacy - it is needed as a lifelong skill

I later refined these themes in my personal research journal to:

- making sense of critical literacy - **conflict** - feel forced ('another new initiative') / lack of support/guidance
- changing teacher identity (towards critical practitioners) - **conflict** - alienation and isolation when others are not changing/do not see the need for change
- critical literacy is sophisticated/difficult but so are young children's interactions with texts - **conflict** - we underestimate them...they *need* critical literacy

> Am I seeing conflicts because that's how I first came to critical literacy - policy directive but lack of explanation - now leading to misinformation (critical literacy = information literacy)? Am I interested in themes that conflict with prior knowledge/assumptions and am thus seeing (creating?) conflict? Am I forcing meaning because I want to create new understandings/critique existing ones/transform knowledge? -- *Go back and look for data that supports rather than conflicts with themes.*

Thus I looked for data that showed how participants reacted *positively* to new literacies and changing identities, and if and when the data reflected that critical literacy is not appropriate for young children. These themes as they appear above changed and evolved considerably as the data analysis progressed, and as I moved towards recognising what the key findings of this research study are. In so doing, I made sense of what seemed like abstract ideas and connections by using an analytic approach described by Thomas (2009), of 'tying strands together, intertwining ideas, weaving a fabric that is sometimes called 'theory' (*ibid*.: 233). At this point in the

analysis I found Thomas's conceptualisation more accessible than Charmaz's, particularly his explanation that my head, like a giant sorting machine:

> must provide little crystallisation points to which ideas ("theories" if you must) can attach themselves. And these little starting points, these tiny crystals, these inspirations, will - if you work hard at it - grow by the accretion of other ideas and insights. In this process is the development of theory (*ibid.*: 229).

This description of emerging theory gave me confidence that immersion in and constant comparison of the data was providing me with the starting points of what I was already beginning to think of as important - new, startling, challenging, conflicting - ideas in the data. I began to challenge my own construction of these emerging theories by questioning *where* they appeared in the data; *how many* participants described similar phenomena; were there *conflicts* within and between accounts; what did the literature say which was the same as or different from the data, or were these new ideas which were not represented in the literature reviewed? In Chapter Six I also discuss *how* participants reported their accounts, in terms of their linguistic constructs and the tone or inflection used, where appropriate.

When I was confident that I had, as Thomas discusses, worked hard at the analysis, I took tentative steps towards constructing a plan for the presentation of my findings in Chapter Six. Planning was difficult in that I knew that there were some interesting themes which would not be discussed due to word restrictions, and making the decision not to include some of them, and which themes to omit from the final write-up, was not easy. I also experienced considerable difficulty in the process of writing up the key findings, chiefly in constructing a cohesive narrative which I felt revealed the considerable complexities in the data, which proved much more laborious

and frustrating than I had anticipated. On reflection, I realise that I should not have waited to write early drafts of Chapter Six until I was at an advanced stage in the data analysis phase. I had believed careful analysis and planning would result in a fluid writing process but in fact, I now realise that writing the data analysis chapter is part of the process of analysing data, as Finn (2005) explains:

> Clearly, then, writing achieves more than a careful and accurate record of what you understand *before* you write: writing improves and transforms your understanding *while* you write. It is the struggle to express your thoughts in words that will force you to consider your selection of the most appropriate words, to best describe meanings and to create logical connections between sentences and meanings. This struggle represents a 'no pain, no gain' principle for writers! However, the gain is improved understanding - a fundamental goal of your doctoral research (*ibid.:* 107).

Although the key findings did not change as I wrote the chapter, my analytical frameworks did so, and I made some important discoveries about how my assumptions were challenged in the process. Explaining not just my interpretations but how they connect with and diverge from other data was a significant part of gaining greater understanding of the data, which I do not feel can be achieved from the more informal process of writing in the personal research journal, but instead from the formal act of writing up data analysis.

Triangulation

Triangulation in the social sciences refers to the application of multiple theories or methodologies in order to increase the credibility and validity of the research. As I have discussed previously, I believe that Mishler's (1986) guidance about trustworthiness in action and in word is the most important

principle of this research, rather than aiming to describe and define an objective 'truth'.

Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation:

- *Data triangulation*: involves time, space and persons
- *Investigator triangulation*: involves multiple researchers in an investigation
- *Theory triangulation*: involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon
- *Methodological triangulation:* involves using more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents.

Looking closely at my research, I considered which of the four types of triangulation Denzin describes might be applied. I employed *data triangulation,* in interviewing three distinct groups of participants: the local authority manager who instigated and supported the training; the university lecturer who co-designed and led the training; and the teachers and librarian who undertook the training and implemented critical literacy practices in their classrooms and contexts. These three groups provided me with insights into participants' varied perceptions of the reasons behind the critical literacy training and implementation of practice, and also gave me an overview of structural issues around funding and organisation of the training; and the rationale for using the model of professional development in the Scottish local authority.

I also employed *methodological triangulation,* by using a range of documents in this research study. I have analysed and critiqued the **Education Scotland** website, including the published web pages as well as other support documents and guidelines posted there; the literacy and English Experiences and Outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2009);

and materials produced by participants in this research study, including teachers, a librarian and the university lecturers who designed and led the training.

Given that I discussed in detail the theories which have influenced my thinking and actions since embarking on research into literacy in a preceding section, and in this chapter have explored how I have used Charmaz's constructivist/constructionist grounded theory to gather and analyse data for this research, to what extent might I claim to have used more than one theory in my interpretation? If I see the social world through critical, feminist poststructuralist, constructionist lenses, which influence the way I perceive and interpret social and language practices, can I make claims to *theoretical triangulation*? If so, how can such claims be *trustworthy*, such that readers of this research and in the wider scientific community believe that I am making reliable claims?

I showed, in the conclusion to Chapter Two, how I interpret and respond to texts using social constructionist, feminist poststructuralist and critical theoretical lenses. In explaining the process of my thoughts and actions upon encountering the Scottish Government's *Literacy Action Plan: An Action Plan to Improve Literacy in Scotland* (2010), which reflects and maintains the dominant paradigm of children's differences or variations in literacy development as deviances from the norm which must be corrected, using medical terminology which constructs teachers as *diagnosticians* who 'remedy' or 'fix' children's problems, I demonstrated that these theories are frameworks within which I *perceive* social and language practices. I also revealed how my interpretations led to *action* in the social world; in the case of the literacy action paper I described how I engaged in a critique of the

paper with additional support for learning colleagues, discussing how we were constructed and positioned by the paper. Following on from our critical discussion, several of my colleagues then took action by speaking to class teachers in their schools, challenging the construction of themselves as diagnosticians who could fix or remedy children as suggested in the paper. Subsequently, I was told that several teachers spoke to parents about the expectations raised by the paper that they would somehow be able to remedy or reverse their children's literacy difficulties - or differences - by recognising variances in their literacy development in Primary 1.

Thus, I have attempted to gain trust in my claims that I have used - and continue to use - multiple theories in my framing of social and language practices, by discussing one recent example of how I applied various theoretical lenses in an interpretation and critique of one policy paper, which then led to action. I do not see social constructionism and critical literacy theories as lenses which I use only for this research, but rather as ways in which I see the world and act in it. It therefore follows that I have used more than one theory to analyse and interpret data gathered for this research.

Ethical considerations

The British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines* (2004) and *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011) have been used as a framework and as a reference point throughout this research process. In planning the initial contact with possible participants and during the data collection phase, I determined to:

take all steps necessary to ensure that the participants in the research

understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported (BERA, 2004: 6)

in respect of establishing voluntary informed consent.

For instance, in the first email contact I made with potential participants in early October 2010, I identified myself as a teacher and Doctor of Education student, 'about to embark on a research project of teachers' perceptions of critical literacy'. Within a few days of sending the first email, I received a reply which challenged my assumptions and caused me to feel as though I was in danger of alienating possible participants:

> I would be happy to help if I can - however I am a librarian not a teacher so I may have a slightly different slant perhaps ....

In assuming that those who had attended the critical literacy training were all teachers, I had failed to recognise the participation of librarians. Fortunately, the secondary school librarian was willing to participate in this research study and the data collected from our conversation was rich and led me to further challenge my assumptions, as I explained in a preceding section.

In early February 2011 I sent a second email to the same distribution list – excluding those who had previously replied to the first email – which had details of how to access and use the wiki, its purpose, and a brief outline and link to further details about wiki ethics; details of how to access the blog and its purpose; and an invitation to contact me if they would be willing to meet with me to discuss critical literacy.

When interview dates were confirmed with participants I then sent more detailed information about my research study, including my motivation for undertaking this research; and the overarching research question and sub-research questions. I also included my home and mobile phone numbers so that participants could contact me with any questions or issues about the interview process or arrangements.

Power

Issues of power and authority in terms of the role of the researcher are important ethical considerations for this study, which I have previously discussed in some detail. I perceive myself as a co-constructor of knowledge in respect of this research, yet I am alert to the power that comes with being the 'main' producer of the study. I am also aware that participants might have perceived me, a doctoral student, as having more knowledge than them, or better or privileged knowledge; thus, although I view participants and myself as co-constructors of narratives, perceptions of the participants might be divergent and they might not see themselves as co-constructors of this research.

I have tried to 'share' the power (Standing, 2006) which I perceive I have in the act of writing up as the main producer of this research, by sharing those texts which I feel are relevant to participants, such as:

- a list of my research questions
- transcripts of interviews
- the analysis and interpretation evidenced in Chapter Six.

I also problematised the notion of sharing *power* as sharing *knowledge* which led me to carefully consider how much information or knowledge I should

share with participants. For instance, should I share with them my epistemological beliefs, the theoretical frameworks which I used in the research design and process? Would sharing my theoretical knowledge and beliefs be sharing power or would it be overloading participants with information about this research study in which they were neither interested nor felt was relevant to their practices? Numerous experiences of leading CPD sessions with teachers who told me they wanted to learn about 'what to do in the classroom, not theory', led me to think that sharing power through sharing theoretical knowledge was not what participants wanted. I spoke to the first few participants I interviewed about whether they would like me to discuss briefly the literature I had reviewed or the theoretical framing of my research *or* whether we should start with the interview questions, and every one of them asked that we move to the questions. Some cited time pressures, some seemed to be insecure about theory ('*I probably wouldn't understand it anyway*' was one such comment) and another said that she would be interested to read my paper when completed, but that she would rather talk than listen.

Respect

I believe that showing respect for others as I undertook and wrote up this research was the essential ethical issue (Thomas, 2009; Elliott *et al.*, 1999). Within the framework of this research design, showing respect for the participants entailed careful planning in terms of corresponding with them; arranging when and where to conduct interviews; maintaining confidentiality; being honest about the possible use of digital information as data; and allowing for alternative representations within the narrative I have created in the form of the final report (Gibbs, 2007).

I was initially surprised when one of the participants waived her right to confidentiality, telling me at the end of the interview that she would be happy if I used her actual name in the final version of this thesis. Respecting her wishes, I turned to the literature on research methodologies for advice about how to proceed officially with this request. The BERA guidelines (2004, 2011) recommend that researchers obtain written consent when a participant waives his or her right to confidentiality. Although I followed this procedure, in the end the participant instructed me to choose a pseudonym for her. The remainder of the participants either chose, or elected to have me choose, a pseudonym.

Digital communication

There are specific ethical considerations relevant to gathering data in the form of digital communication. In addition to ethical concerns about anonymity and openness, I felt it was important to also consider ethical concerns governing research participants' use of the wiki. The website DavisWiki contains a helpful guide to wiki ethics, which I included as a link at the top of the critical literacy wiki in order that participants were guided in respecting other wiki users. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that any participants accessed the wiki but I do believe it was important to inform participants of the relevant ethical issues, which might perhaps have generated awareness of the ethics of using and constructing wikis on other occasions.

Although I informed participants in the second email that the wiki could only be accessed by participants in the research study, I also wrote that:

The blog can be viewed by anyone with internet access and although I am only sending an invitation to you, the participants in [Scottish local authority], anyone with blogspot access would be able to post comments. I intend to use the data from the blog in my research; however your username would be kept confidential.

I was aiming at all times to be as honest and trustworthy as possible, to demonstrate respect towards participants and also to adhere to ethical guidelines concerning using digital communication as a data gathering tool.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have used Mishler's (1986) conceptualisation of trustworthiness in interpretivist research as being constructed through the researcher's clear explication of the research methods and procedures used; the interpretations made of the data; and of the researcher's theoretical positioning. I have shown how my understanding of critical research and what it means to be a critical researcher led me to conceptualise reflexivity as a key principle throughout the design and data collection and analysis processes, and also how I have viewed power as the central theme of this research study. I explored how instances of power influenced and intersected in my overall research design including the formulation of the research questions, through to how I envisaged and enacted the sharing of power through the final writing of this paper.

I have argued that using a purposive sample of participants in one Scottish local authority was the best means of gathering rich data from engaged, informed practitioners. I have also claimed that using semi-structured interviews was the best way to co-construct knowledge by talking to participants about the complex and contested field of critical literacy theories and practices. I have also made clear the difficulties I faced in my

development from a passive interviewer to a more critical, active one. Although the lack of engagement with the critical literacy wiki and blog was disappointing, particularly as I had hoped I would get not just *more* data but a different *type* of data, I still believe that wikis and blogs are useful forms of gathering data and will try again to use them in future research studies. I explained in some detail how I used a personal research journal to develop my critical and reflexive skills; to work through theories about the data; and as a record of research activities which I believe would have been permanently lost had I just relied on memory.

I have explained that in aiming for methodological congruence I used constructivist/constructionist grounded theory to inform the data gathering and analysis, and that underpinning not just my research but how I think generally are the three main theories in my toolkit – social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and critical pedagogical theory. I described the three phases of coding which led to a fine-grained analysis of the data, which will be discussed in detail in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS

This research began with a policy critique, as I questioned what the Scottish government meant by 'the important skills of critical literacy', a statement which was not further explained in the policy document, and I was thus compelled to investigate my colleagues' understandings of the term. Upon learning that a group of teachers and librarians had undertaken training led by lecturers at one university and had subsequently implemented critical literacy practices in their schools, I formulated the overarching research question *What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority*? My key research aims were constructed around educators' understandings of what critical literacy means and what practices look like in their settings; in other words, I have been interested in investigating how educators have interpreted and enacted educational policy, in this case 'the important skills of critical literacy'.

In this chapter, I begin with an analysis of the data which addresses the sub-research questions:

- What do participants understand by the terms literacy and critical literacy?
- What do participants think it means to be critically literate, as opposed to being literate?
- What do they see as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach?
- What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their understanding of critical literacy practices?

Several of the findings are significant in that they are new and unexpected, or challenge and contradict the existing literature, and are therefore a unique

contribution to knowledge. Firstly, participants defined critical literacy as conceptual tools which help children recognise and resist injustices in language practices, which thus enable children and young people to negotiate the myriad of texts they encounter daily. That they described critical literacy as a tool to 'protect' children from being manipulated or harmfully positioned by potentially difficult or contentious texts subverts the notion of censorship of texts; protectionism is thus reconstructed as 'being critically literate'. Critical literacy as a form of protection is not a common theme in the literature, making this a significant finding.

A second key finding is that participants understand critical literacy not as a 'high order thinking or reading skill' at the upper end of, for example, Bloom's (1956) taxonomy - as it is identified on the **Education Scotland** website and in its training sessions - but rather as a natural ability to question which young children have and which should be nurtured and embedded in educational practices. Critical literacy is thus conceptualised not as an elite, academic skill but rather as one which is an essential aspect of literacy and should be reconceptualised in this way by educators from the early years of education. This finding contradicts the dominant Scottish government constructions, but is aligned with literature reviewed for this research study (Davies, 1989, 2003; Vasquez, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2010; McDaniel, 2004, 2006).

The data revealed considerable complexity in participants' understandings of what it means to be literate and critically literate. These contradictions would seem to point to the internalisation of the dominant definition of being literate as the ability to read or decode print texts independently which several participants identify as a prerequisite for critical literacy; however the participants continued on to describe children who are critically literate but

who cannot read print texts independently, revealing that their empirical observations contradicted their declarative views. The first section begins with a discussion of these conflicts, contradictions, and alignments with the literature reviewed for this research study, to establish how participants' accounts relate to/comply with the dominate ideology.

In the second section of this chapter my analysis moves from participants' declarative understandings of the terms - or how they have interpreted critical literacy - to consider how they enacted policy. I begin the second section with a critical reflection on the structure of this chapter, in terms of organising the data into that which addresses how educators interpret and enact policy. I discuss how in writing this chapter and through the process of analysis I realised that our knowledge and beliefs always affect our practices; I use Perkins' (1998) theory of *understanding performances* as an analytical framework for the second section; and I give an overview of practices described in the data, focusing on five accounts of practice. The overview of practices (Table 1) reveals that there were twice as many critical literacy practices discussed in the primary sector (twenty) than in the secondary sector (ten), and only three in the early years. The accounts of practice demonstrate that the participants in this research study enacted critical pedagogies for social justice, in alignment with dominant conceptualisations in the literature. The discussion of the practices of this unique group of educators who experienced a unique model of professional development in one Scottish local authority is important because it adds a Scottish perspective to the international body of literature on critical literacy, and is thus a unique contribution to knowledge.

Throughout this chapter, I use the critical concepts of access and power as analytical tools, to sharpen my critical analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the finding that critical literacy enables access to multiple interpretations and alternative readings of texts which can be conceptualised as *shades of grey*. This was a new and unexpected finding and conceptualisation of critical literacy, which captures the complexities of how children experience such practices, and how educators might enable access to critical pedagogies in schools.

Introduction to the participants

Name	Sector	Subject	Gender	Code
Valerie	secondary	English	female	SSET-1
Maria	secondary	librarian	female	SSL-1
Liz	secondary	Support for Learning	female	SSSfLT-1
Anne	primary		female	PST-1
Paula	primary		female	PST-2
Brian	primary		male	PST-3
Diane	university lecturer		female	UL-1
Kate	local authority manager		female	LAM-1

The trial interview was held with Valerie (SSET-1).

I interviewed Kate (LAM-1) to gain a greater insight into the background and rationale for the model of professional development in the local authority which is the focus of this research study, but I did not pose the same interview questions to her as to the other participants. Kate's (LAM -1) voice therefore will not be heard frequently in this chapter.

Section One - Understanding/Interpreting Policy

Participants' declarative understandings of the terms 'literacy' and 'critical literacy' - conflicting understandings

The literature reviewed in Chapter Three reveals changing dominant definitions of literacy in the past century, to the current understanding of literacy as a sociocultural practice (**UNESCO**, 2004). Some of the emerging models of literacy acquisition were discussed, such as Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999); Egawa and Harste's Halliday Plus Model of Language Learning (2001); and Janks' Synthesis Model of Critical Literacy (2000). Within those literacy frameworks, critical literacy is not seen as a separate or distinct aspect of literacy but rather as an essential aspect of an individual's progression towards becoming literate. Participants were asked firstly what they understood by the term 'literacy', then 'critical literacy', and finally what they believed, if anything, was distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach. Structuring interview questions in this way necessarily invited explorations of contrasting elements between the terms, especially asking participants to identify what they saw as *different* about a critical literacy approach. I must first, then, acknowledge that the structure of my questions set up expectations of difference rather than similarity.

Participants could, however, have told me that they did not understand literacy and critical literacy as separate concepts, that they saw no distinction or difference about a critical literacy approach, but none did. They *all* spoke about differences between the terms. The data revealed that explaining one's understandings of the terms is not straightforward, can be contradictory, and that declarative understandings can differ from participants' own empirical observations. The first area of discussion will explore participants' knowledge of literacy and what it means to be literate.

Decoding or independently reading texts as literacy, a prerequisite for critical literacy

Very little data was generated from the question of how participants understand 'literacy' and 'being literate'. It was, therefore, difficult to draw out dominant themes to construct an imaginative interpretation of the data; however I decided that the lack of data was itself an important finding and turned instead to an exploration of *gaps, silences,* and *contradictions* within participants' statements about the terms. I considered how the data aligned (or did not) with the literature reviewed and I compared data between participants as well as within each participant's account, being attentive to contradictions and gaps.

Three participants identified literacy as reading, and being literate with being able to independently read texts. Maria (SSL-1) stated:

> I think my definition of literacy to me is the kind of nuts and bolts of reading and in some ways I think people use being literate as being able to read books.

Her understanding of literacy as the 'nuts and bolts of reading' reflected more traditional definitions of literacy, or of reading as the dominant 'skill' within the wider conceptualisation of literacy. Interestingly, she also discussed the dominant, hegemonic ideology that reading books is understood as being literate within the wider population.

In Chapter Two I discussed my view that the dominant paradigm in the field of Additional Support for Learning in Scotland is one of supporting individuals in improving their decoding (reading) skills, that the dominant definition of 'being literate' relates to one's functional or technical literacy skills. As a secondary Support for Learning teacher, Liz's (SSSfLT -1) understanding of literacy and what it means to be literate conformed to the dominant paradigm:

> I think coming from the stand of being a Support for Learning Teacher when I think about literacy I'm thinking about pupils who aren't literate, who are - some of them can't even read, some of them aren't even at the barking at text stage. They are literally struggling to sound out words. I mean even in the secondary school the phonetic alphabet, even able to write one sentence, reading age of a 5 or 6 year old. So you know - almost at that stage when I'm thinking of literacy, some of the kids are almost pre-literate, they're not even at the barking at text stage.

Liz (SSSfLT -1) then described her belief that children must have a foundation of technical skills before they can become critically literate. However, later in the discussion, she described her work with dyslexic and autistic young people as well as those with more generalised learning difficulties and explained that:

... depending on the nature of the child we have some children who actually are more critically literate than they are literate. Their literacy skills are very poor because of dyslexia, because of global difficulties, but if you read the text with them, or if it's a visual text or a media text, they're very good at looking at the meaning behind things and being critically literate. And especially if it's visual media - you know television or adverts, songs and things - they can be much more critically literate than literate. The exact vice versa for kids on the autistic spectrum - read fine but when you ask them to kind of look at what's going on behind it, not a clue.

Here, literal understanding and interpretation of texts was ascribed to being literate and seeing the underlying or hidden message was associated with being critically literate. In this quotation, Liz (SSSfLT -1) concluded that one *can* be critically literate without having a foundation of technical skills. As the interview progressed, Liz (SSSfLT -1) demonstrated that she understood *and* enacted critical pedagogies, revealing a discrepancy between her declarative beliefs at the start of the interview and her demonstrated knowledge throughout it. This analysis suggests that participants might hold an internalised belief that having a foundation of technical literacy skills is required for an individual to become critically literate, although as they constructed their deeper understanding through discussion they reconstructed this to demonstrate the belief that the dominant view was not necessarily a reflection of their observations. This seems to be a reflection of the 'common deficit thinking approach that many educators internalize' (Kellner and Share, 2009: 285).

Similar to Liz (SSSfLT -1), Brian (PST -3) declared his belief that independent reading skills are a necessary foundation for critical literacy:

In terms of what's happening in school and in teaching it of course their capacity for being critically literate depends on their literacy

because you can only evaluate which parts of the text you can understand and break down in the first place. And it's kids you don't always expect who can do it really well, but they're not strong readers maybe ... you tend to scaffold the breaking down of the literacy part so you can then do the critical part. Then that's where they come in. If they were asked just to be critically literate would they necessarily have the skills to break down the text in the first place?

Brian (PST -3) seems to understand being literate as the ability to *read independently* and being critically literate as the ability to *read independently in order to analyse texts*. His focus on reading as literacy revealed that the dominant definitions of what it means to be literate are those which he initially drew on in the discussion. Although not 'strong readers', those children who cannot necessarily independently read a text are those whom Brian (PST -3) described as being critical; thus the implicit meaning was that children *can* be critically literate without first being literate, if that is defined as being able to read independently. Later in the interview he explained that a teaching colleague who used adverts to develop critical capacity similarly expressed the view that children who are not seen as strong readers have strengths in critical analysis of media texts, suggesting that both teachers are challenging their own assumptions about the ability to independently read texts as a prerequisite for critical capacity.

Issues of *access* to texts might also lead educators to foreground the ability to read print texts, as access on a literal level is a dominant pedagogical concern. Brian (PST -3) and his colleague recognised that a child *can* be critically literate without *being able to read print independently* because they saw evidence of it when they used adverts and when they enabled *access* to print texts. Thus, although Brian (PST -3) began by saying that a child's critical capacity 'depends on their literacy', by this he meant *reading print*

independently. The declarative beliefs which these three participants articulated suggest that 'being literate' means 'being able to read', and is an ability which underpins other literacy competencies, making this a dominant and thus a powerful ideology within this sample of educators.

Being literate and critically literate - communicating with and reading the world

In contrast to the preceding finding, other participants described literacy and being literate, as well as critical literacy and being critically literate, in terms which recall Freire's 'reading the world as well as the word' (Freire and Macedo, 1987). If *the word* means reading texts, and *the world* represents a wider conceptualisation of society, politics, culture and interpersonal relationships, the data showed that these participants theorised about how children are positioned *within* the world, and *by* the world and the word.

Valerie (SSET-1) described being critically literate as having an awareness of self, of one's influences and also the way one influences the world through action and interaction; in other words how we are positioned and how we position others through language and social practices. She explained that she believes that the young people she teaches are so immersed in their own actions that they are *not* critically literate:

> I think it's got psychological overtones, it's how well you're aware of the influences on yourself and the spectacle that you're wearing as it were. And then aware of those of others and spectacularly in our school -*spectacularly*- our kids are so egocentric they just see the world according to them and they are creating little soap operas around themselves - spectacularly so and expecting us all to be impressed by them. So you know the critical literacy needs are *immense,* they can't see beyond their own very dramatic world.

In explaining that being critically literate means being aware of the spectacle or lens that one is wearing, Valerie (SSET-1) displayed an awareness of how understanding our position in the world is the essence of what it means to be critically literate. She described that she likes 'deconstructing' or 'reading' situations, reflecting on and being aware of her own and others' positioning in discussions and interactions, and was clearly frustrated that the young people she teaches demonstrate such a lack of awareness. Later in the interview she stated:

> I suppose I would place critical literacy at the heart of the development of the child you know, becoming aware of the impressions they're giving, so it's linked with discipline as well. You know you storm into the room like a high noon cowboy and you're going to end up in a gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

As the discussion developed, it was clear that Valerie's (SSET-1) concerns about her students' lack of self-awareness, their willingness instead to create 'little soap operas around themselves', were linked with her anxieties about her own interactions with them, what might in dominant educational discourse be described as 'behaviour management'. She declared that young people in her school viewed teachers much as they viewed police, that there was very little trust, and she explained her view that the students would not respect - and therefore 'open up' to or engage in deep discussions with - a teacher who could not manage or control a class. I interpret the two dominant themes in Valerie's (SSET-1) discussion as *awareness* and *power*. Awareness of the influences on ourselves and how we might influence others was a clearly articulated theme; however the more subtle influence of *power* was evident in Valerie's (SSET-1) discussion as well. Teacher authority was a form of power that she felt she must establish and maintain in order to create an environment of respect and trust, in which young people might feel

enabled to engage and participate in critical discussions. It also became clear to me, after repeatedly listening to the recording of the interview with Valerie (SSET-1), that she felt - at least at times - power*less* in a culture of disinterest and disaffection, to enact critical pedagogies and engage her students.

Similarly, *power* was a theme in Diane's (UL -1) discussion about her work with students in a secondary school in an area with significant socio-economic challenges, in which she focused on issues of social justice, saying 'of course critical literacy is a major tool for social justice', echoing Freire (1970) and Shor (1992), as previously discussed. She described the students' outrage at the power imbalances evident in a fictional script which she constructed for them about a secondary student from their school attending an interview for a university place, which was 'riddled' with prejudices, including those of the university lecturers who discussed the student prior to interview. The script was left unfinished so that the students could finish writing it to make it more fair or just and, when one boy exclaimed that the prejudiced lecturer should be killed off, another student vocalised that doing so would not 'solve the problem' of the injustice. When Diane (UL -1) read some of the finished scripts later, she observed that the students really understood the concept of social justice and 'the action you might take' to improve the situation. This, also, is aligned with dominant definitions of critical literacy discussed in Chapters Two and Three (Davies, 2003; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992; Janks, 2000, 2010).

Awareness of one's position in language and social practices was also a feature in Diane's (UL -1) discussion of this work with secondary students, who clearly saw the injustice in how the university candidate was perceived and portrayed in the script. She explained that the reconstructed pieces of

writing changed his speech from the local vernacular to more formal language more suited to an interview, evidence that the young people recognised that *access* to dominant, powerful dialects or ways of speaking is important in order to gain access to the world of higher education. Also, she described that the students challenged the lecturers' pejorative comments about the fact that the boy had not taken a gap year by countering that he could not afford to do so and pointed out that paid work experiences had broadened his perspective. Awareness and power are important themes in critical literacy, specifically awareness of how our positioning in language and social practices impacts on our understandings of social justice, which can lead to action and transformation.

Anne (PST-1) offered an insight into how she perceived literacy as reading and communicating with the world for *all* children, which resonates with Freireian conceptualisations of 'reading the world as well as the word' (1987). She explained:

> Literacy to me is communicating with the world, being able to communicate with the world, how they interact with their peers, generally with the world not just text. And if we don't have those skills then we're not able to function properly, I believe.

In discussing interactions with peers she, like Valerie (SSET-1) and Diane (UL -1), equated awareness of self and others with being literate. It is clear that Anne (PST-1) attached great importance to such skills, claiming that we are 'not able to function properly' without them. Such strong feeling about the importance of 'communicating with the world' evokes Valerie's (SSET-1) frustration about her students' inability to do so, stuck as they are in their own 'soap operas' about matters which she considered to be egocentric and

ultimately self-serving, inward-looking rather than looking outward. Communicating with the world in order to *change* and *improve* the world is at the heart of critical literacy (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010), but if the children and young people educators teach refuse to communicate with the world for the purposes of active engagement and change, educators might feel powerless to enact critical pedagogies for social justice.

Critical literacy as a natural acuity

One of the key findings, which challenges dominant Scottish Government constructions, reveals that critical literacy is a natural ability which young children have, which some participants revealed they were surprised to discover. Brian (PST -3), for example, discussed children's innate critical capacity:

> I think naturally - I mean I'm not saying that these kids are critically literate because of my education, it's actually just I've discovered that they *are*, you know what I mean? Or pleasantly surprised with how much you can sort of tease out of them.

Teasing out refers to pedagogical approaches which nurture or foster children's natural abilities to question, challenge and critique, with clear implications for educators in terms of recognising and acting on abilities which children already possess. Diane (UL -1) shared a similar view about critical literacy as a natural capacity which children have and which should be nurtured:

> And I think if we think critical literacy through carefully we will see that in fact it's not something new, it's an acuity that exists within human beings about their world and it is a natural state of children to question or it *should* be and it should be the natural state of teachers to help them question and also to guide their thinking as well. But to

help them question - and I think that's a signal difference between small children and older children - and it's that older children don't question. And I honestly don't think it's due to their biological state because I think adolescents question, they just don't question in school and when they do question in school we tend to see it as bad behaviour.

Young children, then, need *access* to pedagogical approaches which help them learn how to question, to 'guide their thinking' rather than consider them non-compliant. The prevalent discourse of 'challenging behaviour' in Scottish education refers to behaviour which is seen as difficult to manage in schools; it is interesting to consider how children who challenge or question (and are encouraged to do so) might instead be said to have 'challenging behaviour', subverting a pejorative label into one which recognises that children *should* challenge and that as educators we should support them in doing so. If we do not provide children with access to pedagogies which encourage and promote challenge and critique, the possibility exists that we effectively silence them, such that by the time they reach adolescence they have internalised the belief that to question is to be badly behaved.

This is an important finding, which shifts questioning from a 'higher order thinking skill' - as it is described on the **Education Scotland** website - to a capacity which is present in all of us from the earliest stages of development, and is in fact a vital lifelong skill. It recalls Gee's (2000) distinction between the cognitive notion of higher order thinking skills and the capacity to think 'critiquely', which he describes as the ability 'to understand and critique systems of power and injustice' (2000: 62). It is reasonable to argue in light of these findings that critical literacy could be an important part of literacy practices with children from the earliest years of education.

Anne (PST-1), who taught young children, held a similar view and described the potential for critical literacy practices in nursery classes, saying that young children are 'open to seeing so much more and if you can prompt them and take them in a certain direction then they can see things and take you along the road as well I believe.' Here, Anne (PST-1) was also referring to the natural capacity young children have to question, which requires nurturing in terms of equipping them with the appropriate tools, such as the *vocabulary* to question, but which would enable educators to learn from the children. This is very much a philosophy of educators and children as co-constructors of knowledge (Shor, 1992), learning from each other. She remarked that this shared journey or experience was 'fabulous':

> It's really being able to access the world but then with an eye that sees beyond the text, between the lines, beyond the lines, however you want to say it. Why it's being presented like that. Asking questions. Challenging the world, that it doesn't have to be like that. Why is it like that? Can we not do it in a different way? And you're saying about critical thinkers - it's difficult to separate that. It is so difficult to em - you can't be critically literate without thinking deeply about things.

In this statement Anne (PST-1) articulated the key distinction between dominant conceptualisations of literacy and critical literacy which was identified in Chapter Three, the *action* or *transformation* aspect, in terms of guiding children towards 'challenging the world' and imagining how it might be made better. Participants' practices which involve action for transformation will be discussed later in this chapter.

Similar to Diane (UL -1), Anne (PST-1) expressed the belief that critical capacity needs to be developed in younger children, based on the experience of her daughter who she described as having to 'pour in then pour out' facts

for her exams in secondary school, like Freire's (1970) banking model of education . She seemed frustrated that her daughter accepted this as necessary, and suggested that if she had experienced critical literacy at a younger age - or if the secondary system was not so rigid - that her daughter might have had the confidence to challenge rather than accept this model.

Paula (PST - 2) identified several dominant pedagogical approaches in Scottish education within which *talk* and *questioning* are foregrounded, such as Assessment for Learning, cooperative learning, and literature circles for example, as important ways to teach and develop critical skills development in the young children she taught:

> I think it does all merge together though, because the more kids are talking about things and talking about their learning, the more they're questioning things anyway and it's all that kind of questioning.

In a previous chapter I discussed how talking to Maria (SSL-1), a secondary school librarian, challenged my assumptions about critical literacy practices with young children. Although I had read the literature which described exactly that, it was not until I spoke to Maria (SSL-1) that I actually internalised the belief that young children do have critical capacities and need appropriate pedagogies to help them develop their innate abilities to question and challenge. Maria (SSL-1) stated:

> I genuinely believe that's [primary school] where we should be teaching it. By the time they get here [secondary school] it's too late. We need to start as early as we can. I mean that's my outlook on it. Quite often when they get here what are they twelve, thirteen? It's too late. And maybe we should be teaching them to be critical in a fun way - then, so it's automatic .... Because let's face it - these children are being exposed to far more, when

you think of adverts and television.

Although Maria (SSL-1) also spoke about the difficulties of finding time in a heavily weighted secondary curriculum which foregrounds preparation for high stakes testing and her view that the primary curriculum offers more flexibility to enact critical pedagogies, this quotation shows very clearly that she also felt that critical literacy must be fostered from the early years of education. The multiple and various texts which young children encounter require critical navigation, she stated, such that by the time a young person enters secondary school it is *too late*. Maria (SSL-1) spoke in great detail about the critical literacy approaches and practices that she and her colleagues used so I do not interpret her use of the words *too late* to mean that secondary students are too old to become critically conscious. Instead, I think she meant that young people have encountered so much information in so many forms that, without critical awareness which enables them to challenge and critique what they are seeing and reading, they will have been negatively influenced or affected by these uncritical interactions with texts. I will return to this point in the discussion of the next finding.

The main concern which I struggled with as I analysed this conceptualisation of critical literacy as a natural questioning acuity which children have, and which should be nurtured by educators, relates to the broader dominant definitions of the terms *literacy* and *critical literacy*: if acquiring literacy and becoming literate are key goals for each individual member of society, then why do we not understand critical capacity as an essential ability within the wider framework of what we think it means to *be literate*? If questioning, challenging and acting to transform that which we see as unfair constructs

the world as a more just place, then why do we not understand critical literacy as an essential skill, such as we understand literacy to be?

Data from my interview with Diane (UL -1) are illuminating in this regard. I was explaining my justification for separating out the terms in my research questions and in the interview questions I discussed with participants, and her response captures the complex problem of *literacy* and *critical literacy* separately defined and separately understood succinctly:

> Yeah, so I think that for me you have to separate out those two terms in order to think about teachers' thinking, but in terms of how they are together they are part and parcel of the same thing, and we are kind of like an elite coming back to that understanding, academically, because we'd squashed it.

Diane's (UL -1) statement echoes that of Lawrence Stenhouse, which was discussed in Chapter Four, who questioned 'whether learning and critical literacy should be confined to an elite' (in Goodson, 2003: 124) audience of private school students, and argued that in so doing made 'a critical education an education reserved for privilege' (*ibid.*). Stenhouse viewed a critical education as one which *all* children have a right to, which therefore necessitates that *all* educators must understand what a critical education means and how to enact critical pedagogies. Diane (UL -1) understood 'the elite' as educators and academics who have attained understanding of what critical education means and how to teach it, because criticality had been removed from dominant definitions of literacy. My own understanding of critical literacy developed over a considerable amount of time, and the professional development model enacted in the Scottish local authority was underpinned by academic theory and understanding which was applied in real ways to educators' own contexts. Thus, although the data showed that

critical capacity is a natural ability which children have, the historical focus on literacy as *the ability to read independently* (Gee, 1990) has effectively removed critical capacity from dominant definitions. Educators are struggling conceptually with such internalised assumptions and views in order to understand literacy to include critical questioning, challenge and critique of language and social practices in the act of imagining how we can construct our world to be more fair and equitable.

Paula's (PST - 2) discussion about hearing the voices of some children for the first time through critical literacy activities is, for me, one of the most affecting examples from the data. She explained:

> I think with older kids using the picture books and using the adverts, they could all read the text at much the same level and in fact some of the ones who couldn't read that kind of text could outperform the ones who could read that but just because it was all oral and looking at it and reading the pictures and things like that. And some - not all but some of the kids who used to sit and never say a word suddenly found voices that you hadn't heard.

I interpret this as a clear example of how using critical pedagogies, which draw on children's natural abilities, enable *access* to classroom literacy practices which might previously have excluded some children. In this sense, critical literacy is a powerful approach, one which can empower children who were previously silenced.

Critical literacy as a form of protection - conceptual tools for social justice

Critical literacy as a form of protection is a significant finding which was new and unexpected, and is thus a unique contribution to knowledge. The data revealed that several participants referred to the volume of texts that children and young people must navigate or negotiate on a daily basis, in quotes such as:

- *I think nowadays with the changes in IT and new technology we've really got to think wider because I think our pupils - us as adults and young people, we're experiencing far, far more* (Maria - SSL-1)
- *The fact that they're bombarded day on day with all these texts* (Anne - PST-1)
- *The fact that we're developing their thinking skills, really, to how to handle the masses of information that is around them all the time* (Anne - PST-1).

These participants identified critical literacy as a means to deal conceptually with the flow of information through television programs and adverts, internet, music, and so on, recalling the work of Davies (2003), discussed in Chapters Two and Three, who taught children about poststructuralism to provide them with the conceptual tools to recognise how they were positioned in spoken and written discourse. Davies foregrounds the importance of deconstructing and reconstructing texts, so that children are able to recognise the constitutive force of texts and recreate them to be more just and fair.

Diane (UL -1) described how these conceptual tools can act as protection:

> And it's about you know growing up critically literate in order to protect yourself and other people, understand the world you live in.

She then gave an example which she used during the critical literacy training, about a boy who gained unfortunate notoriety by posting a video of himself dancing with a light-sabre on Youtube, which led to such severe bullying that he had to leave school. Protecting yourself in this case is linked with *understanding the world you live in*, so knowledge and awareness are key factors in this conceptualisation of protection. This relates to Valerie's (SSET-1) understanding of being critically literate as having an awareness of self, of one's influences and also the way one influences the world through action and interaction. It could be argued that 'the important skills of critical literacy' enable us to recognise how we are positioned and how we position others through language and social practices; such recognition can lead to resistance of harmful hegemonies, and thus protects us.

In the example that Diane (UL -1) gave above, being critically literate means recognising not just how texts position you, but how the viral nature of a Youtube video can reach a massive audience. Diane (UL -1) equated being critically literate with having the tools to understand how texts are shared within a potentially massive audience, how this positions subjects of those texts, and she emphasised that children need that consciousness to make informed choices about how to share texts they have constructed.

Liz (SSSfLT -1) explained that she aimed to guide her students towards a critical understanding of *why* texts are constructed as they are and for *what purpose*. In fact, she used critical literacy as a pedagogical approach to help young people understand that reading *has* a purpose and that its purpose might be to protect them from being 'hoodwinked'. She described how she used relevant texts which were connected to young people's interests to help

them understand the purpose, which can then be extended to other texts, such as newspapers:

> I know when I was working with my ASDAN [Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network] class and we were looking at critical literacy from the viewpoint of - we were looking at things like adverts because we do a lot of work with them on things like picking mobile phone tariffs, bank accounts, kind of life skills sort of things. Looking at things on the internet and it's kind of trying to get 'Things are never quite as they seem, you know if it looks too good to be true it usually is. Look behind the scenes at things. Think a bit more don't just jump in.' And at first they really kind of couldn't get that but when they started to think 'Oh wait this does impact directly on me'. When they suddenly started thinking, 'Oh so they're advertising this but actually it might not be that'. 'Oh so they said this on the news page but that might not be exactly true either'.

By using relevant texts which are connected to the students' lived experiences, Liz (SSSfLT -1) showed them that reading has a purpose and guided them in becoming critically literate in a meaningful way. Having a purpose for reading beyond the literal meaning of adverts provided students with the conceptual tools to extend that knowledge to reading other texts, such as newspapers. Liz's (SSSfLT -1) pedagogies enabled *access* to relevant, familiar texts which provided a purpose for reading; this understanding of purpose then enabled access to critical readings of other texts.

Reading with a purpose *engages* students with literacy practices, moving away from the dominant passive paradigm. Liz (SSSfLT -1) explained in response to the question which asked what she thinks it means to be critically literate:

> It's kind of - it's being much more engaging and asking questions as opposed to just being a passive recipient of it. And I suppose it's kind

of trying to get it over to the kids that actually this isn't just something for books, it's actually at all levels. You know we say to the girls 'You can passively read *OK!* magazine or you can ask 'Why did they decide to go and have these photos taken, what's in it for them?' And it could be 'They get loads of cash'. And it might be 'Yeah they get loads of cash but then again let's look at the broader picture - didn't this couple just have a wee incident involving possibly suggestions of - you know is it possibly papering over the cracks of -?' And it's sort of saying 'Look behind the -'. I mean I'm not saying conspiracy theories are behind every stone but don't, you know, there's nothing wrong with not accepting everything at face value, if you think there's a question then ask the question.

Liz (SSSfLT -1) identified active participation with texts, challenging meaning beyond a superficial level, challenging authorial intent and recognising how they are positioned by texts as key ways to develop students' conceptual skills and helps them become critically literate. Similarly, Anne (PST-1) perceived the conceptual tools which help children recognise when they are being manipulated by texts as those necessary to be critically literate. These skills can help protect children from being manipulated, as she explained:

To be critically literate, you're making sense of the world but you have to have that - so you can know why that text is like that, the format, who has presented it, what is being asked of you when you look at that text. So it's what is being brought - it's looking at the reasons behind - you bring so much to a text beforehand but there's also someone who has produced that text. What messages can you get from that? Why are you being manipulated?... Because they do manipulate.

The conceptual tools which Anne (PST-1) described help us make sense of information, and can thus act as knowledge which protects us from ignorance or naivete. Various meanings of the term *protectionism* in media studies were explored in Chapter Three, from protection from the 'low' cultural media forms in favour of higher forms such as art and literature,

through to censorship. Critical literacy as a tool to protect children from bias, manipulation, or being positioned in ways which are not socially just reconstructs these dominant constructions of protectionism and reimagines how we can help children develop critical capacities to negotiate their way through the many texts they encounter every day.

Paula (PST - 2) described using a Barbie doll to show a group of teachers she was training how the toy can be read critically as a text, and how her colleagues resisted a critical response:

> And it's funny because people take it very personally because they can't bear to think that this Barbie doll wasn't created for their children to play with, that it was somebody raking in the money behind it .... I think there's a fear of people that you spoil the magic of being a child and I think that's a fair enough point. And I always remember saying 'But I'm not suggesting that you go home and tell your children ... It's an awareness for *you.'*

Spoiling the magic of being a child relates to the sense of children's innocence, and our fear that having discussions about certain texts will destroy that innocence. Protecting children from thinking of Barbie as a sexist toy which can be seen to establish an unrealistic - in fact, biologically impossible - ideal to which girls might aspire but can never attain is one way to resist spoiling the magic of being a child; protecting girls and boys from thinking that the physical female ideal looks like Barbie by asking critical questions such as *In whose interests was this toy created?* might enable resistant responses which deny Barbie the *power* to become embedded in children's minds as the female ideal type. In the interest of balance, it should be mentioned that the same questions could be asked about a Ken doll, to disrupt constructions of the male ideal type. The conceptual tools of critical literacy can give children

access to alternative ways of thinking about popular toys and how they construct and maintain gender.

McDaniel states: 'Children learn at an early age that certain subjects, such as sex or homelessness, are uncomfortable for adults and therefore off limits' (2004: 473). Kohl (1995: 15) claims: 'Guns and Barbies, and Babar too, are part of cultural life in the United States, and children have to develop critical attitudes toward them. These attitudes will not develop through prohibition'. *Prohibition* of topics that deal with issues of inequality is a strong and persuasive way of describing what I suspect many educators would actually consider to be *protection*. Educators might chose to protect children from certain texts by prohibiting them, possibly because they find certain topics awkward or difficult to discuss or out of fear of 'spoiling the magic of being a child' or both, but we might also begin to imagine how using critical literacy approaches could enable children to navigate the difficult terrain of social and language practices. In so doing, educators might be giving children access to conceptual tools which help protect them from being positioned in socially unjust ways.

In Chapter Three Morgan's (1997) research in one Australian secondary school was discussed, in which teachers grappled with asking young people to reconstruct texts to be more politically correct as a critical pedagogy whilst worrying that they were enacting governmentality. Diane (UL-1) similarly expressed the view that she has encountered teachers who believe that using critical literacy approaches means 'turning out politically correct prigs'. She explained that she did not 'have a problem with the term politically correct because behind political correctness sits a whole draft of action and legislation which protects and empowers'. This analysis posits that critical

literacy is a tool which can protect and empower, but it might be expected that this view will be met with doubt, suspicion, and resistance by some educators who feel that prohibition is preferable to critical consciousness-raising.

Participants' understandings of what makes a critical literacy approach distinct

In the review of the literature discussed in Chapters Two and Three, which describes difference or distinction between dominant definitions of literacy and critical literacy, critical researchers and educators such as Paulo Freire (1970) and Ira Shor (1992) perceive critical pedagogies as socially transformative practices. As I had reviewed the literature prior to embarking on interviews with participants, I was aware of this distinction in the academic writing; however I was interested to learn where participants' views about what is distinctive about critical literacy are congruent with the literature.

Diane's (UL -1) view, which is one of the central findings of the study, that critical literacy is a distinct conceptualisation in the literature because in the past century dominant understandings of literacy have not involved critical analytical skills, highlights the fact that although *critical literacy* is an academic, elite area of study presently, in fact *critical capacity* is a natural acuity which should be nurtured and fostered in children. The educational community is, therefore, making critical literacy a distinct area of research and teaching in order that we develop our awareness of and consciously teach - or support and develop - skills which children already have.

In addition, Diane (UL -1) said:

> You know I think that whole area of action is distinctive about critical literacy. It's implicit in our conventional form of literacy understanding but explicit in terms of critical literacy and that makes it important and different.

As a teacher educator, Diane (UL -1) showed awareness that the concept of action is not easy for educators, who might resist because of their unease with political implications of the term. They might also resist because they do not know what action would look like in their classrooms or contexts. Diane (UL -1) claimed that action might be developing autonomy in children and young people, undertaking a project and seeing it through to its conclusion. She also uses the word 'countertext' (Stein, 2009), explaining that it is the practice of recreating a text in a way that is more fair or just in the individual's view.

Anne's (PST-1) description of critical literacy, discussed previously, clearly contains her understanding of challenge, critique and transformation:

> Asking questions. Challenging the world, that it doesn't have to be like that. Why is it like that? Can we not do it in a different way?

As well as having a theoretical understanding of the action for transformation element of critical literacy, Anne (PST-1) showed a clear awareness of how the theory can be applied practically for the goal of social transformation. She described that Primary 7 children in some schools in the local authority wrote to the council with concerns about their school playgrounds. They found the replies which they received 'hard to access, so they wrote again and asked for it to be more - in easier language basically'.

She said that the children were acting not just for themselves but out of concern about the difficulties that younger children would have in accessing the language of the original letters, plainly identifying that the council 'needed to change it'. When I commented that it was quite a powerful example of action for transformation, Anne (PST-1) replied 'Pupil voice. Woah hoah!' The students' actions directly influenced the actions of school staff, as Anne (PST-1) explained that staff subsequently began to question whether the language of correspondence sent to parents and carers was accessible. Here, students acted to challenge *access* to dominant forms of texts, which led school staff to critically reflect on their own language practices.

None of the other participants articulated action or transformation as the distinctive element of critical literacy, even though many of them described critical literacy practices which have an element of reconstruction, change or transformation. Those practices which do involve reconstruction will be identified in a subsequent section which discusses the research question *What do critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms or contexts?*

Again, *power* is an important frame within which I have analysed the data which addresses this research question; action for transformation is such an important aspect of education for social justice (Davies, 2003; Janks, 2010) that I have chosen to follow the dominant ideology - supported in the review of the literature - that this is the key feature of critical pedagogies. Thus, I have elected to analyse how the data is congruent (or not) with the dominant ideology. That I do so is because of my deeply-held belief that critical questioning, challenge and critique are only part of how we as educators can

support children in imagining the world as a more just place; guiding them towards acting to change and reconstruct our world is equally important.

Access to resources

In response to the research question participants identified a dearth of resources which they could access, better to understand and enact critical pedagogies: *What sources and resources do the participants have access to in order to develop their understanding of critical literacy practices?* The identification of a lack of resources was completely unexpected, making this an important finding. That a book can give educators the *pedagogical confidence* to get started using a critical literacy approach is a point made by Paula (PST - 2), who identified the difficulties in locating such a resource when she wanted to enact critical literacy practices in her classroom:

> ... I didn't ever manage to get a copy of the book, but it had critical literacy lessons in it. It might have been a Scholastic book, I think it's out of print. But it really helped me because it pointed out the things that were unusual or that you should be questioning and I certainly needed that at first. And once I'd got into the way of asking the questions and looking at things it becomes easier but at first I was looking at books and thinking, 'Okay what am I going to do with this one?'

Paula's (PST - 2) difficulty finding a resource to help her plan critical literacy lessons was mirrored in participants' descriptions of their colleagues' struggles to find support materials. When discussing the **Education Scotland** website, Anne (PST-1) explained:

> There's nothing there for staff and people are asking for it ... All they've done, there is a website you know higher order reading skills I think it's down as but all it is is it's got the Bloom's taxonomy and

skimming and scanning and digging deeper and so on, but it's not beyond that.

Anne (PST-1) recognised that the website contains support materials which are more closely associated with higher order reading skills and *information literacy* - thus removing the possibility of understanding critical literacy as a pedagogy for social justice - which aligns with my concerns about the construction of critical literacy. That teachers who have accessed the website and attended the training run by **Education Scotland** (or **Learning and Teaching Scotland** as it was then known) mistakenly believe that they are using a critical literacy approach was also of concern to Anne (PST-1):

> I'd love to be able to say that masses of critical literacy is happening but it's not. It's not. People will say they are but they're not. And they tend to mix it up as well with finding and using information. And it's not about that as well. It's because of what's gone on before - this is new thinking really. I mean it's not new thinking but to be actually taught how to analyse a text, it's not just the interrogation of a text, that choice of a word and so on, it's more than that.

She described being disappointed that at the **LTS** training day all course participants were given a pack with 'resources in it like using a thesaurus and search engines' as she felt they should have been given ideas about how to use critical literacy activities with children in their classes. Just as Paula (PST - 2) suggested, so Anne (PST-1) though that educators need help with how to get started using a critical literacy approach, as they ask:

> 'Okay, what do I actually do in the classroom? What can I do? My children don't ask questions, they sit and read, how can I get them to do this? What are the first steps?' That's what staff *need*. Yeah. And staff will latch onto that and think 'Oh yeah, that's just about using the internet properly, isn't it?' *No! No!* [Anne (PST-1)]

Her frustration that course participants left the **LTS** training session thinking that critical literacy is the same as information literacy was clearly expressed. Virtually all of the participants recognised how the professional development training was instrumental in guiding their understanding of critical literacy theory and crucially how the lecturers explained how it could be put into practice at different stages of progression. Thus, the theory itself shaped participants' understandings of critical literacy, in almost all cases in terms of how it was explained and modelled during the training sessions. The university lecturers who delivered the training were identified as important resources by most of the participants, who recognised the importance of how the theory was explained and modelled to them.

Section Two - Enacting Policy

In planning the structure of this chapter, my analytical framework included two distinct areas: how educators *interpret* policy and how they *enact* policy. As I began to write this chapter, Finn's claim that 'writing improves and transforms your understanding *while* you write' (2005), became very real for me, as my understanding and interpretation were transformed. One instance which marked such a realisation occurred as I suddenly saw, in the overarching research question, a word whose presence guided the transformation in my understanding; the inclusion of the word 'practices' in the question *What are the knowledge and beliefs regarding critical literacy practices of participants who experienced a particular approach to professional development in one Scottish local authority?* In earlier chapters I described the process through which I have come to critical literacy, one which was preceded by very little thought or attention to theory, but as I sought explanations about issues of gender, access and power I engaged with social constructionist, feminist poststructuralist and critical pedagogical theory to guide my understanding.

These theories have changed the way I think and act in the world, and the message I consistently give to the student teachers I work with is that theory cannot be separated from our actions. I meet considerable resistance from qualified and trainee teachers who tell me that rather than learning about theory they want to know what to *do*, revealing not only that *doing* is the dominant ideology but also that they do not believe that understanding theory is an important, inseparable part of doing. The overarching research question reveals that I, too, was influenced by the dominant ideology of doing when I constructed it; using the word 'practices' poses a very different research aim than the one which I came to believe I was investigating, as I planned to divide this chapter into sections which focus on *interpreting* and *enacting* policy. Although initially I gave dominance to critical literacy *practices*, through the process of this research I understood that educators' knowledge and beliefs cannot be separated from their actions, that their understandings always influence their actions.

An appropriate analytical framework for exploring participants' knowledge and beliefs about critical literacy practices is one which conceptualises *demonstrations* of understanding as key to analysing how educators' make sense of and share their knowledge. Perkins (1998) describes *performance understandings* (or *understanding performances*) as:

> ... the ability to think and act flexibly with what one knows. To put it another way, an understanding of a topic is a "flexible performance capability" with emphasis on the flexibility (*ibid.*: 40).

Performance understandings are thus more like learning to improvise jazz or rock climb than learning times tables, the latter of which Perkins places in the knowledge/skill range. In other words, how do participants *demonstrate* their

understanding of a complex and abstract concept such as critical literacy? Critical capacity is not a set of facts which can be learned and recited by rote; rather, critical literacy is complex and might be best demonstrated through *understanding performances*. I will now discuss what the data reveals about performances of understanding.

How participants perform their understandings of critical literacy

There are two key areas in the data which show how participants perform their understandings of critical literacy:

- how they demonstrate understanding to colleagues
- how they perform understandings in their classrooms/contexts.

Participants who perform their understandings of critical literacy to colleagues do so formally, through CPD and other training opportunities, and informally, by supporting colleagues towards understanding and enacting critical literacy in their own classrooms and contexts. Before exploring the large amount of data which shows what performances of understanding look like with children and young people, I will begin with a discussion of how participants demonstrate understanding to colleagues.

Performing understanding to colleagues

Paula (PST - 2), Brian (PST -3) and Anne (PST-1) all spoke about how their colleagues interpret and enact critical literacy, and how understandings about new theories or concepts are developed and embedded. As the interview with Paula (PST - 2) progressed, she constructed meaning about how we develop our understanding of theories which we then turn into practices. She said:

> [W]e did a cooperative learning thing recently and the woman
> who was the tutor, she was fantastic. And she had evidence to
> show that if you're just given the theory it makes no difference to
> practice, if you give them the theory and some examples it makes
> a small difference, but what you really have to do is give them
> the theory and let them go away and teach it to somebody else
> and that's how -. And the percentage increase is incredible and
> yet it makes sense because somebody gives you theory and you
> think 'Yes that's all very interesting, thank you, bye.' There's
> nothing there to make you think 'I'll go and try that'.

Paula (PST - 2) articulated her belief that it is through teaching new theory that we understand it, that by performing our understanding of new theory we embed it in practice. She later returned to this point when we were speaking about the CPD on picture books which she delivered and which I attended, by saying:

> You can see the thing I did about picture books - if I'd actually
> given you the picture books and said 'Go sit in a group of four
> and think about your kids and how you'd teach it' you'd have
> made the connections and worked it through.

Towards the end of the interview with Paula (PST - 2) she expressed regret that other educational initiatives have pushed critical literacy to one side, not just in her practice but more widely in the schools in which critical literacy training and development work were delivered; however I perceive Paula (PST - 2) as a teacher who has adopted a critical approach to the way she thinks and acts. Thus, I believe the data show that Paula (PST - 2) performs understanding of critical pedagogical theory, even though her declarative speech suggested that she might not believe that to be the case.

Similarly, Brian (PST -3) described how he explained literacy and critical literacy to educators when delivering training:

> [T]here's two sort of fairly simple ways I try and use: one is literacy is to do with stuff in the text and critical literacy is to do with stuff outside the text. You know? The whole idea of what are the outside influences, whether it is the period in which it was written, whether it is attitudes to gender in those times, whether it is authorial intention, whether it is political issues, you know, or sales or whatever.

In explaining the key distinctions between literacy and critical literacy thus, Brian (PST -3) demonstrated his understanding of the terms. I interpret 'stuff outside the text' to be sociocultural factors, using Brian's (PST -3) own declarative examples, and 'stuff inside the text' to be linguistic or textual features. Brian's (PST -3) distinctive way of explaining the terms to others is one which I have not encountered in any of the literature I reviewed for this research study, making it a unique performance of understanding which I think could have a very useful broader application in terms of helping educators make sense of critical literacy theory.

Anne (PST-1) explained that she was guiding her colleagues towards an understanding that the *understanding, analysing* and *evaluating* aspects of the Experiences and Outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence are essential aspects of developing critical capacity. She says that they need to know how to guide children towards critical questioning in order that they can challenge and critique texts. As has been discussed previously, Anne (PST-1) has a clear understanding of critical literacy, and she also demonstrated a very good understanding of not just critical pedagogies, but also the incremental knowledge that her colleagues who are new to critical literacy need in order to begin to enact critical pedagogies.

Understanding performances with children and young people

Understanding performances involve sharing knowledge, whether through discussion or demonstration, for which the sharer requires understanding and through which s/he aims to guide the participant's attainment of understanding. Educators make sense of critical literacy by practising or performing it, through performances of understanding which they lead or are part of. The data showed this clearly, as when participants were asked what they think critical literacy *means*, they told me about how they *enact* it; they described their performances of understanding. I will now widen the discussion of how policy is enacted to explore the breadth of practices identified in the data, and sharpen the focus by looking closely at several accounts of practice which incorporate the themes of *questioning and critique, access and power,* and *action and transformation.*

Critical literacy practices in participants' classrooms and contexts

The research question which generated the most data was *What do critical literacy practices look like in participants' classrooms/contexts?* Table 1 shows an overview of the data organised into three main categories: whether the practices were identified in the early years, primary or secondary stages; a brief description of the critical literacy practice; and finally whether the practice included an element of *action* or *transformation,* which has previously been identified as a key distinction of critical literacy practices. Wherever possible, participants' own language has been used in the description of practices. Five of the accounts of practice are then discussed in some detail, to gain a greater understanding of what these practices look like in participants' classrooms and contexts, and to further the analysis of how access and power intersect with these practices. I have elected to include these five accounts for the following reasons: I have previously stated that I

am interested in researching educators' good practice, which these account represent, and the accounts included were all described as good practice by participants in this research study; due to word limitations not all participants' accounts can be discussed in detail, but other practices have been explored earlier in this chapter, and in fact there were no accounts of practice described by one participant in sufficient detail to enable an in-depth analysis and discussion.

Table 1 - Participants' descriptions of critical literacy practices

Type of activity	Description (if given)	Age (if stated)	Action/ transformation ?
Fairy tales Traditional tales	*Little Red Riding Hood* Challenging hero/baddie stereotypes in *Jack and the Beanstalk, Goldilocks* Looking at multiple versions of a traditional tale	early years/ primary	Retelling/rewriting story from alternative point of view ('rehabilitation of the wolf tales'/ Goldilocks' letter of apology to bears) Engaging with different versions of a tale opens 'their eyes to what could be'
Picture books	Comparing and contrasting points of view in *The Three Little Pigs/ The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* Teaching critical questions approach using *Voices in the Park, Into the Forest, The Tunnel, Bill's New Frock, Teaching Ted*	early years/ primary	Primary 6 children wrote to Anthony Browne to ask questions about the ending of *Into the Forest* (he replied, urging them to interpret the book in their own ways)

Type of activity	Description (if given)	Age (if stated)	Action/ transformation ?
Toys and gender	Barbie	early years	Encouraging educators to see Barbie as a text, to which critical questions can be applied ('What's the purpose and what's the message behind it?')
Drama	Using hot seating, role on the wall and teacher in role to guide children in asking questions of characters	primary	Reimagining and reinventing characters
Understanding, analysing and evaluating texts	Beginning to justify opinions about texts, asking critical questions, discussions with peers	P2	
Looking critically at the language in Maths and problem solving		primary	
Novel study - *Run Zan Run*	Health and Wellbeing - bullying	P6	
Adverts	Fruit Shoots, yogurt, Nintendo, Andrex, Lucozade - discussing what these adverts are *not* saying	primary	
Reading schemes - *Oxford Reading Tree*	Challenging gender stereotypes in illustrations and narrative using critical questioning	primary	Critical discussions about gender roles related to children's lived experiences
Film - *Hoodwinked*	Comparing and contrasting points of view in Little Red Riding Hood texts	Primary 3/4	Retelling/rewriting story from alternative point of view
Novel study - Teresa Breslin's *Dangerous City*	Sociopolitical discussion about the Glasgow Troubles	Primary 7	

Type of activity	Description (if given)	Age (if stated)	Action/ transformation ?
Writing - piece about social group stereotypes in which groups come to an understanding of each other	Using films such as *Mean Girls, High School Musical* as guides	Primary 7	The activity *is* the action for transformation
Novel study - Michael Morpurgo's *Twist of Gold*	Discussion of racism - historical perspective	upper primary	
Graphic novel and DVD - *Macbeth*	Comparing the genres and discussing characterisation	Primary 6	
Photographs	Point of view, bias, perspective, golden mean, power- Asking critical questions such as 'Who has the power in this photo?'; language of 'insurgents/ rescuers'	Primary 6 and 7	Writing about characters in the photo, shifting power/ perspective
Critical Skills Programme	Children discuss in groups with emphasis on building confidence and social skills before moving towards critical discussions	primary	
Comic book and film study (comparative)	Discussions about binary constructions and gender stereotypes in superheroes	upper primary	Constructing retellings for modern audiences
Critical study of charities - Fairtrade, Malawi	Children investigated who was behind charities, how much was donated/where it was going and why	upper primary	
Letter writing to local authority officials	Children wrote formal letters to raise concerns about the playground/ school environment	Primary 7	Children wrote follow-up letters to raise concerns about the language of the reply (concerns about access in early years) Their action led school staff to question the language of correspondence sent to parents/ carers

Type of activity	Description (If given)	Age (if stated)	Action/ transformation ?
Bloom's taxonomy	Using this concept to encourage children to begin to critically question	primary	
de Bono's thinking hats	Using this concept to encourage children to begin to critically question	primary	
Adverts/Critical media literacy	Health and Wellbeing - food adverts Critical approach to adverts for mobile phone tariffs; bank accounts - 'If it looks too good to be true it probably is.'	secondary	
Book covers - gendered marketing	Critical discussion of Jacqueline Wilson books, Cathy Cassidy's *Scarlett*	S1 and S2	Redesigning *Scarlett* to make it appealing to boys
Designing e-portfolios for Glow	Using Spinebreakers website as a stimulus, create critical responses to texts (using 'a very simple blog format')	S1 (top English set)	
History	Using relevant, local texts in mining study, such as a song about local mining disaster, archive photos of mining victims (same age as students)	secondary	
History	Using World War Two propaganda posters to discuss bias and persuasion	secondary	Design own posters
Teaching bias	Discuss contrasting powerpoints - PeTA and pro-fur groups - to study bias in images and adverts	secondary	
Modern Studies	Critical reflection on Nathaniel Hodge's diary as a primary source in study of bubonic plague ('Why is this a particularly relevant and important text?')	secondary	

Type of activity	Description (if given)	Age (if stated)	Action/ transformation ?
History - 'History Team Investigates'	Using example of Tollund Man to think critically about and engage with evidence	secondary	
Critical reading of images and reports in *The Sun* and *OK!* magazine	Using critical questions such as 'In whose interest is this photo/story?'	secondary	
Science	Encourage students to consistently challenge/ question ('You have to question. Science isn't facts - it's what we *think* we know.')	secondary	

Critical literacy practice 1 - *Using picture books to teach and develop critical questioning skills*

In January 2009, I attended an after-school CPD session at one of the primary schools in the Scottish local authority which is the focus of this study. I had been invited to attend by Diane (UL -1), after she learned that I was interested in pursuing research about critical literacy policy and practices. During the first hour of the CPD session, Diane (UL -1) discussed the following main areas, according to my notes:

- conventions of picture books - language and images
- that using picture books as part of a critical literacy approach is associated with 'turn-around pedagogies'
- common structures and ideologies in picture books
- critical literacy and the teaching of reading.

Diane (UL -1) highlighted the exploration of power relationships in texts, as well as silences and voices, gender representations and the use of genre and intertextuality. As well as being intellectually challenging and stimulating, I felt that it was an engaging and lively introduction to the session.

Paula (PST - 2) began the second part of the course by speaking about her own critical literacy practices with her Primary 6 class, specifically the use of Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* to teach children the language of critical questioning. Hearing Paula (PST - 2) speak about her use of picture books marked another significant instance in my life of *challenged assumptions*. Although I was not at that point teaching children, I would not have previously considered using picture books with upper primary children to provide intellectual challenge; however, as I listened to Paula (PST - 2) describe how the children engaged with and responded to the text, I regretted missing the opportunity to use picture books to teach and practise critical skills with the children I had taught. The issue of *access* to critical readings of language and images through picture books is one which is highly appropriate when teaching children who have difficulties reading texts independently, which represents a missed opportunity considering the children I previously taught.

The nine page handout which Paula (PST - 2) had prepared for the CPD session listed four learning intentions:

- To be able to use pictures and text to make decisions about characters
- To be able to justify those decisions

The above learning intentions only were shared with the children.

- To identify and comment on symbolism - at an appropriate level
- To explore point of view.

Four main categories were listed on the handout:

- key questions
- suggested activities
- critical literacy questions addressed
- draft outcomes and experiences.

The suggested activities for each of the four voices or four narrative points of view in the picture book cover all stages, Primary 1 through Primary 7. There is also evidence of challenge and critique of representations of *family* - in questions such as 'Position of Mum and Charles on bench - is this what happens when the children go to the park with their family?'; discussion of gaps and silences in the 'critical literacy question addressed' category, which reads 'Emphasis on what is missing from pictures as well as what is there'. Although Paula's (PST - 2) stated learning intentions about literary features such as *symbolism* and *point of view* were not shared with children, there is evidence of rich questioning which would, I anticipate, lead to deep discussions about texts. Paula's (PST - 2) handout shows how the accessible yet sophisticated medium of picture books can be used to teach and develop critical literacy skills, as well as literary features.

Diane (UL -1) continued the session with an input on Tony DiTerlizzi's *Ted*, and gave out a four page handout which stated four aims:

- To promote enjoyment in reading
- To teach children how to read critically with a focus on teaching concepts of symbolism and characterisation
- To use critical literacy questions to shape investigation of text
- To promote collaborative enquiry through group activities and through literature circles.

The four categories on Diane's (UL -1) handout were:

- key questions structure
- possible activities to help answer questions
- critical literacy questions
- language curricular areas.

The critical literacy questions included:

- Who has the power in the story? The boy? The dad? Ted?
- Who has the power at the end? Can power be shared?
- Should we take action in relation to this text?

The suggested activity related to action/transformation was:

- Working in pairs children make a poster for parents *'Ten rules for making your children happy'*. Children decide together where posters should be displayed and why.

Diane (UL -1) modelled two drama techniques, *hot seating* and *role on the wall*, to demonstrate how characterisation can be taught through such an approach. She took on the role of Ted in the *hot seating* activity and CPD participants asked her questions in role; Diane (UL -1) explained that the teacher should sit in the hot seat until children feel comfortable with and confident about the *hot seating* technique. With regard to the *role on the wall activity*, Diane (UL -1) explained that it is one of the simplest ways to look at characterisation. She modelled the process, drawing a large image of Dad on a piece of poster paper, sticking it to the wall, and asking participants to write all of the information we could think about the character on Post-it notes. We were then asked in groups (at our tables) to categorise the information into:

- appearance
- behaviour
- what other characters say/think about him
- what he thinks or feels.

She explained that change in characterisation could be discussed by having two images of the same character, representing him at the start and end of the story.

When I later interviewed Paula (PST - 2) for this research study, I told her that listening to her speak about picture books that day had challenged and changed my thinking. She later explained to me that she had first tried to use a critical literacy approach with a novel study of *Run Zan Run*, but had found it pedagogically challenging, so turned to picture books which she found more straightforward as a focus for critical literacy. In this way, we discussed how a teacher's *confidence* is such a vital part of teaching a complex subject like critical literacy, that the text is an important consideration in terms of providing *pedagogical confidence* and if picture books provide that, they are a very useful starting point. Prior to attending the CPD on picture books, I had assumed that using them as texts to teach critical skills would be strongly resisted by older children, based on empirical evidence of giving children in upper primary school certain texts which they rejected as being 'for wee ones', for example. So the question of reader *engagement* was at the forefront of my thinking, although I did not anticipate that if we can get beyond the initial resistance to a picture book, the sophisticated imagery and illustrations and potential for critical questioning would engage the children. Paula (PST - 2) describes just how actively her students engaged with picture books:

> We did do quite a lot of picture books and they just loved it. Like it would take us three weeks to read one Anthony Browne book because they'd sit for half an hour on one page. And his books were very good for what's missing from the picture as well as what's in the picture. So *Voices in the Park* - and where are all his toys? Where are the pictures on the wall? Where are the curtains? Where's the stuff that makes this a *home* rather than a house?

The CPD on picture books had a significant impact on me as a researcher and as a teacher. I had been a doctoral student for one year at the time of attending, and had yet to embark on my independent research, so it would be fair to say that the enthusiasm and excitement I felt about the work being done by Paula (PST - 2) and Diane (UL -1) made me want to pursue research on the topic of critical literacy. Importantly, attending the session gave me *pedagogical* confidence. I subsequently used the critical questions approach with picture books as a lecturer in primary English with undergraduate and postgraduate students in Initial Teacher Education. Paula (PST - 2) and Diane's (UL -1) performance understandings heightened my understanding of critical literacy practices, directly affecting my own *understanding performances*. This research suggests that picture books are important ways of providing *access* to texts and transferring *power* to children who do not conform to dominant constructions of 'being literate', a key aspect of literacy practices for social justice.

Critical literacy practice 2 - *Adverts: Critical media literacy*

Several participants discussed the use of adverts during the initial critical literacy training, and some mentioned how they - or their colleagues - have used critical media literacy in their own practices. This section will begin by discussing how adverts were used to teach participants the principles of critical media literacy, followed by an exploration of how they performed their understandings in their own classrooms/contexts.

During the interview I asked Diane (UL -1) how she had explained the difficult concept of critical literacy to the course participants. She replied that one of the key ways was using car adverts, juxtaposing a Land Rover

Defender advert and a Greenpeace advert about gas guzzlers, then discussing how each text attempts to persuade or manipulate. Diane (UL -1) continued:

> And we then start to think about all the things critical literacy covers and under the heading of text we look at what is a text but also what is the nature of texts? ... And so when we come to texts we look at what a text can be, but then we look at things that are in a text - the idea of bias or manipulation. And we look at the unfixed nature of texts and we look at - then we start to look at really an edited version of reader response theory and what the reader brings to a text and how in fact that text therefore is a joint construction between the reader and the text and their understanding of how a text works comes into that.

She then explained that participants were given a list of critical literacy questions which could be applied to any text, such as:

- *In whose interest is this text?*
- *How is gender represented in this text?*
- *Is there another way this information could be presented?*
- *Are there multiple readings of this text possible?*

I also asked Diane (UL -1) if one of the aims of the training was to give educators a 'vocabulary of dissent', to which she replied:

> I think I was trying to give them the sense that they *could* dissent .... You know and there is not any sense in which you have to accept what a text says whatever that text happens to be. But in order to explain why you don't like it - we used a still advert of a washing machine once in one of the primary schools and it came from the 1950s and I asked them to tell me how they felt about it. And it was all women except for [one male] and the women said 'It's appalling'. They had a real - they kept saying 'I hate it, I hate it'. And I said 'Well *why* do you hate it?' and getting them to tell me why they hate it.

Diane (UL -1) then explained that the teachers struggled to vocalise why they hated the ad, so she guided them in asking critical questions of the texts, such as whose view was represented and how was gender represented. After teaching them 'the vocabulary, the nature of dissent', Diane (UL -1) showed the group a current advert for washing machines:

> about a boy trying to wash his clothes and doing it really badly and the mother comes in and rescues him so - and I said 'Well has it changed?' and they said 'No!' (laugh) I said 'It's interesting that [the male teacher] doesn't feel this, well why would that be?

In this instance, female teachers resisted the constructions in the adverts but struggled to explain why because they lacked a *vocabulary of dissent*. Power is an important consideration, too, given that the one male participant did not dissent, perhaps because he felt no resistance to the dominant messages he received.

Maria (SSL-1) described the juxtaposition of language and images in advertising to teach the concepts of *bias* and *manipulation* in her secondary school, explaining that the critical literacy training was a direct influence on this practice. Both she and the Head of English determined that teaching about bias in the school was 'more implicit rather than explicit.' She constructed two contrasting powerpoint presentations, the first:

> from the point of view of fur producers. You know so the language is very, very positive, it's very luxurious. It's talking about fur as being a luxury commodity and then I do exactly the same powerpoint with the same pictures but the words are different and it's from the anti fur - PeTA and a lot of the stuff came from PeTA websites and stuff and it's exactly the same

images but with different language and then what they do is
have to look at and compare the two powerpoints - what do
they feel about it?

I have seen both powerpoints and the use of language in each of them

explicitly demonstrates contrasting perspectives; however most striking and

disturbing of all is one additional image in the anti-fur powerpoint - with

'PeTA' emblazoned in the top left corner, which shows a British pop star

holding the skinned carcass of a fox, with the following words printed along

the bottom of the advertisement:

> Here is the rest of your fur coat.
> www.furisdead.com

Each of the two other participants from the secondary sector also discussed

the use of adverts or critical media literacy in their settings. Valerie (SSET-1)

stated that the use of adverts in the training gave her confidence that she *had*

been using a critical literacy approach, as she explained that she was

discussing images and words with her students 'and how do you interpret

them and how do you read them.' She added:

> I've always liked to bring adverts into my repertoire and it's
> lovely when you get the kids to bring in adverts and respond
> to what they see but it's great if you can get them to think those
> sets of questions for themselves and working in groups and
> thinking aloud and some classes will and can.

In a previous section, I discussed Liz's (SSSfLT -1) use of critical approaches

to looking at adverts to - in her words - prevent or protect her students from

being 'hoodwinked'. Liz (SSSfLT -1) explained that she used adverts to help

young people see that there is a purpose to reading, that it might be to

question texts in terms of 'if it looks too good to be true it probably is'. Her use of critical media pedagogies also served as a starting point from which students could generalise to examining how texts other than adverts might be manipulating them, such as newspapers. One additional purpose of Liz's (SSSfLT -1) use of adverts was to prompt discussions about how to question, or the use of appropriate language to challenge or critique practices which the young people might perceive as unfair or unjust in the wider social world, such as when they move into paid employment.

Paula (PST - 2) explained the messages which adverts contain to children as 'selling a lifestyle', the fact that advertisers want to sell a product *as well as* an ideally constructed lifestyle to match, a concept which she said she is now more critically aware of in her own life. For example, she described an incident which occurred one morning when her young son was watching television and ran to her, exclaiming that they must buy Fruit Shoots, a juice drink:

> And I said 'Why do you want to buy Fruit Shoots?' And he said 'Because they're really really good for you.' And I said 'How do you know they're really good for you?' And he said 'Because they make you run fast - there's fruit in them'. And I remember thinking 'Now this is critical literacy. Just because the advert is telling you - doesn't mean that it is necessarily true. Or maybe that bit is true but what else is it not telling you?'

The *partial* nature of the language used in advertising, or the gaps and silences in those texts, is an important aspect of critical literacy. Throughout the interview, and in the data in a preceding section which discussed Paula's (PST - 2) use of picture books to teach critical questioning, she showed an acute awareness of the power of gaps and silences, in the case of adverts to

persuade or manipulate. Paula (PST - 2) also talked about using critical media literacy in her upper primary classroom:

> We looked at various adverts - the one that really sticks in my mind was some kind of yogurt one and the start of the advert is all about how there's somebody milking the cow and the long cup of milk is carried through all this beautiful countryside and handed to the woman who then turns it into this yogurt. And what we got a lot out of with the adverts was that you have to be as careful about what somebody *doesn't* tell you as what they do tell you. So you didn't see the great big milk tanker trundling down the M6 or whatever and how it would tell you that there was fruit in it and what in it but it didn't tell you there was also loads of sugar in it.

I was intrigued by the example she uses, which juxtaposes the purity of a glass of milk being transformed into yogurt with the messy reality of pollution caused by the production of that yogurt and the additives which the viewer or reader is not shown. This seems such a powerful contrast of visual images that I believe it could make a useful action or reconstruction poster or advert, and thus would be a relevant critical pedagogical approach. Anne (PST-1) discussed how, as she supported colleagues in enacting critical literacy, she advised them to use persuasive texts such as adverts with children, telling them:

> Look, get ones that they really know, hook them in with that, then get the really different ones for them to stop - and whether it's just giving them the sound or pictures. *What's happening here? What do you think is going to happen here?* It's exciting and it's a different way of teaching and you don't quite know which way it's going to go, but that's the exciting bit about it.

In this example, familiar adverts were recommended as ways to 'hook' children in, or to engage them in critical discussions about those persuasive

texts; using familiar adverts enables *access* to texts for the purpose of critical analysis. Anne (PST-1) described the unknown, unfamiliar directions which critical pedagogies can lead educators in, providing access to a different terrain. Her comment that 'you don't quite know which way it's going to go' would, I anticipate, alarm some educators who do not feel comfortable with or confident about practices which could lead into the unknown, so this uncertainty might also cause some educators to resist critical media literacy. Such resistance might be seen as a refusal to access new pedagogical approaches, out of fear of the unknown.

In an earlier section which discussed how some participants identified being literate as an essential foundation of becoming critically literate, Brian (PST -3) explained that a colleague who used adverts to develop critical capacity expressed the view that children who are not seen as strong readers have strengths in critical analysis of media texts. Brian (PST -3) stated that he helped his colleague, a Primary 7 teacher, construct a unit of critical literacy as part of the health and wellbeing curriculum, using materials which he was given during the critical literacy training. He described the work that was done as 'reading' adverts and then discussing them, explaining that his colleague:

> ... absolutely loved it and she said - as have I found - that the kids are actually very good at it. If you can explain it to them in a clear way they can do it. And sometimes the teachers are kind of scratching their head thinking 'I'm not sure if I've got a complete hold of this' and the kids can actually. Maybe it's because we haven't traditionally been taught that way.

Similar to Anne's (PST-1) affective statement about 'exciting' critical media literacy practices, Brian (PST -3) drew attention to the fact that educators

'love' such pedagogies and children are engaged *and* skilled at it. In fact, Brian (PST -3) observed that the children can be more skilled than teachers, who were described as scratching their heads while the children can read, analyse and interpret, and evaluate messages in adverts more ably than their teachers. He suggested that our relational inability to interpret and understand the message(s) might be because we were not 'traditionally taught that way'. It might also be possible that, as the data show that critical capacity is a natural acuity which children have and which must be nurtured and fostered, those of us who are adults would also have had a natural capacity to question but, as it was not fostered by more conventional 'banking' models of education (Freire, 1970) which we experienced, that we no longer have these skills - or at least do not have them to the same degree that children have. It also addresses the theme of *access*, in that children were identified as being able to access meaning and messages in media texts more skilfully than adults, and thus power shifts to children in the co-construction of knowledge (Bell, 2011). I have previously discussed the finding that children who cannot read print texts independently can be very skilled at critical media literacy, which enables access to critical discussions. Also, critical media literacy can be seen as an important way to build a repertoire of *understanding performances* (Perkins, 1998) or problem-posing pedagogies, in which educators as facilitators provide opportunities for children to develop and perform their understandings of critical literacy (Kellner and Share, 2009).

Critical literacy practice 3 - *Using comic books and films about superheroes to develop critical capacity*

Brian (PST -3) gave a presentation during the critical literacy training about his work on superheroes, using comic books and films as texts. Although I

did not witness his presentation personally, I have chosen to write about it for three reasons; firstly, every single participant interviewed for this study mentioned Brian's (PST -3) work on superheroes as memorable and engaging; both university lecturers who led the training identified Brian's (PST -3) work as good practice; and thirdly, Brian's (PST -3) work on gender stereotypes resonates with my research on the topic, as outlined in previous chapters.

The powerpoint presentation which Brian (PST -3) designed revealed that he focused on the following key areas in his superheroes approach:

- Heroes, villains and those in between
- Pre-assessment
- Daredevil and Punisher
- Retellings and point of view
- Morals
- Class debate.

The first category shows an awareness of binary opposites, common to comic books and superhero films, as well as a critical approach in terms of conceptualising those characters who do not fit the genre stereotype or pattern, 'those in between'. Using Daredevil and Punisher as the focus, Brian (PST -3) extended the children's knowledge and understanding of the story by engaging them in retellings and exploring points of view. A key element of comic book narratives and superhero films is the moral, which is also an important aspect of critical discussions about texts (Morrell, 2008; Kellner and Share, 2005). The class debate involved analysis, critique, and challenge - of one's own views and assumptions as well as others' - and was an engaging, participatory activity.

Brian's (PST -3) approach clearly demonstrates how well he enacted critical pedagogies through the use of comic books and superhero films; it also shows that *literary features* were being taught through this critical pedagogical approach. In the example below, the children's description of what is happening literally *and* metaphorically in the film *Spiderman 2* shows an excellent grasp of these literary concepts:

Slide from Brian's (PST -3) presentation to the group - superheroes and critical literacy

Film Study

What is happening literally
Peter is lying in bed thinking he is thinking of Uncle Ben who says "With great power comes great responsibility." The weather is miserable. He then leaves his flat, takes his spider suit with him, puts it in the trash can and leaves.

What is happening metaphorically
The weather is miserable like Peter because Peter is troubled. He walks outside and leaves the suit on the trash can and then leaves. That means he has chosen a normal life and leaves Spiderman behind. He walks away from the suit just like he walks away from responsibility.

Access is an important factor when analysing Brian's (PST -3) approach, when thinking about children who might have difficulty reading print texts independently. Certainly, there *is* print in comic books, but in my experience the design of comics and graphic novels motivates children who might resist books to want to read them. Films are accessible texts for children who

cannot read independently, and can provide opportunities for deep engagement and discussion about critical issues.

Power is a central theme in comic books and films about superheroes, from physical - sometimes supernatural - power to emotional or psychological power which enables characters to overcome problems or crises, and is often constructed along intersections of dominance and otherness. Readings and discussions about sameness and difference, binary categories and stereotypes are thus enabled.

In Chapter Two I discussed in some detail the literature reviewed on the subject of gendered literacy practices, specifically the social constructionist and feminist poststructuralist literature which considers boys' relative underachievement in literacy as resistance to the construction of literacy as 'girly'. Brian (PST -3) identified gendered literacy practices in his Primary 7 class, but rather than boys resisting literacy, he described girls rejecting comic books. When I asked him whether the usual student response to the work on superheroes was enthusiastic, he replied:

> There was - yeah the girls, P7 girls a few years ago they decided 'But I dinnae [don't] like comics' so they'd already gone too far down the gender stereotype I think.

I interpret Brian's (PST -3) response to mean that the Primary 7 girls perceived comic books as texts meant for boys, so they resisted or rejected them on the grounds that they were not appropriate for or relevant to them; in other words, if the dominant social construction of comic books is for a male audience, then girls might choose to reject them.

Two key phrases Brian (PST -3) used with children were 'Step outside the text' and 'Things aren't the way they are by accident', and he explained that the latter is concerned with teaching the importance of audience and purpose, or the ways 'the genre of a text affect[s] its content'.

Brian (PST -3) made the point that he fostered children's 'natural curiosity...and natural questioning' with his pedagogical approaches, yet he also theorised that in 'this postmodern age' children might also be receiving messages about questioning and challenge in 'the mainstream media'. He posited that cartoons, for example, might be giving the message to question, although he acknowledged that he did not know the genre well enough to confidently say so. This is an interesting point, given the discussion in the preceding section about *protectionism* as prohibiting certain forms of media out of concern of harmful or manipulative messages; following Brian's (PST -3) reading of critical messages in mainstream media, it might be possible that the medium itself urges children to question, challenge and critique.

Reconstruction, which as has been previously discussed is the key distinction of a critical literacy approach, was an important feature of Brian's (PST -3) critical literacy practices. He engaged children in discussions about social commentary in comic books, then encouraged them to construct retellings for modern audiences.

Critical literacy practice 4 - *Looking critically at book covers*
Maria (SSL-1) and Diane (UL -1) described critical literacy approaches to discussing, critiquing and reconstructing book covers with secondary school students, which I have chosen to focus on here as it involves all of the main elements of critical literacy theory and pedagogy.

Maria (SSL-1) stated: 'Children themselves are very critical about book covers'. She described a book club which she ran, and stated that some of the 'most interesting discussions' they had were about book covers. Maria (SSL-1) explained that she asked students whether they liked the cover or not, why they felt that way, and if they did not like it how they might go about changing it. An example she gave was Cathy Cassidy's novel *Scarlett*, which had 'a girly girly cover' and:

> the boys wouldn't touch it - not with a barge pole. I got them to redesign the cover so the boys would be attracted to it and it was really interesting what they came up with. They're very, very critical and their tastes are really quite interesting.

Similarly, Diane (UL -1) used book covers as stimuli for critical discussions about how books are marketed for various audiences and described regular meetings she had with groups of young people at a local high school. She explained:

> You know, I called it 'don't judge a book by its cover' - we looked at how marketing is done by publishers to attract readers and whether you might miss books because you're drawn in by the marketing .... They could sort out the Jacqueline Wilson and say 'That's the pile for the girls' and there are a couple of boys in the group and I asked if they used to use Jacqueline Wilson when they were younger and they said 'Yes' and I said 'You're just exactly like a group of 9 year olds I once interviewed. There was a little boy in that group who said "I think I'll read Jacqueline Wilson until I'm about 11 then I think it's only girls who read it".' You know a completely implicit understanding of the marketing of Jacqueline Wilson.

The critical literacy aspects discussed in these approaches which Maria (SSL-1) and Diane (UL -1) described relate to gender, and specifically to how

books are marketed to targeted gender groups. Maria (SSL-1) said that boys would not touch *Scarlett* 'with a barge pole', because the book was so clearly marketed for girls, so the action/transformation element she incorporated was for them to redesign or reconstruct the book to make it more appealing for a male market. In Diane's (UL -1) discussion about the group's reactions to Jacqueline Wilson's books, the young people have picked up on an interesting distinction in terms not just of gender but *age and gender appropriateness*; it was acceptable for boys to read one of her novels until 'about the age of 11' - or until puberty - but thereafter they felt it would not be acceptable to read (or to be seen reading?) a Jacqueline Wilson novel.

This evidence suggests that *access* to texts is mediated by children's interpretations of book covers along intersections of dominant gender constructions. If Jacqueline Wilson's books are seen by boys to be acceptable to read until a certain age, they show awareness of conforming to dominant constructions or stereotypes which deem this to be so; resistance to the dominant constructions of what makes acceptable reading material would presumably make boys feel 'othered'. Fear of being 'othered' is also evident in their refusal to read *Scarlett*, as the dominant construction of that novel is for girls. In guiding young people towards reconstructing the cover to challenge the dominant construction along gendered lines, Maria (SSL-1) enabled a reconstruction of the gender-appropriate market message and gave the message that meaning lies within narratives as well as in cover images. In doing so, she challenged power hierarchies inherent in gendered book marketing and in the interplay between the 'author' of a book cover and the author of the book. In Chapter Two I discussed in some detail how gendered literacy constructions can cause girls and boys to resist certain literacy practices; in opening up discussions about how book covers are gendered

constructions, Maria (SSL-1) and Diane (UL -1) engaged young people in critical practices involving challenge, critique and action for transformation.

Diane (UL -1) also described how using a critical approach to book covers can be used as a good starting point for critical discussions about texts, with the purpose of providing educators with *pedagogical confidence* to begin to use a critical literacy approach. She explained that one of the main difficulties secondary teachers who undertook the training faced was a belief that critical literacy 'needed to be something big' - perhaps because of the example of the whole-school immersion in fairy tales in one primary school which will be discussed next - which proved to be a barrier to getting started with critical pedagogies. Valerie (SSET-1) contacted Diane (UL -1) for advice about how to begin to enact critical literacy and when Diane (UL -1) visited her she discovered that 'they were using a really good anthology called *Staying Alive'* and Diane (UL -1) suggested that they begin with an analysis of the book cover 'because it has a picture of a distressed looking female on it ... and then we talked about critical literacy aspects you could question.'

This example is reminiscent of Paula's (PST - 2) discussion about having difficulty using the novel *Run Zan Run* when she was beginning to enact critical literacy, so began instead with picture books, which gave her confidence to move on to a novel study. Beginning the process of enacting critical pedagogies with critical discussions of book covers might give educators confidence, and also as the data show can engage children and young people in participatory pedagogies which might also lead to action, transformation and reconstruction.

Critical literacy practice 5 - *Fairy Tales: A whole school critical literacy approach*

Several participants discussed the use of fairy tales in a cross-curricular, whole-school critical literacy approach in one small primary school. Although in the initial phase of data collection I had been invited by the Head Teacher to speak to her and to the rest of the staff, unexpected changes in staffing meant that this was not, in the end, possible. This narrative has been constructed from the data, in which Diane (UL -1), Maria (SSL-1) and Anne (PST-1) discussed the whole-school approach.

The whole-school approach was intended as 'immersion' in fairy tales, as Diane (UL -1) explained. The approach began with an exploration of points of view and the question of whether the story could be told from another perspective. Using *Little Red Riding Hood*, 'they got lots of rehabilitation of the wolf tales', according to Diane (UL -1).

Diane (UL -1) also explained that using picture books worked very well in terms of putting theory into practice; that is, teachers were guided in using an approach which taught children 'how to address a text at the age and stage that's appropriate for them', driven by a key question. For example, one class focused on the issue of gender, asking:

> Could Little Red Riding Hood rescue herself? If it wasn't the woodcutter then who could have rescued her? Is this mother not a bit neglectful?

The central difficulty of how to apply critical literacy theory to practice was one which this school faced, and as the data show, is one which has been discussed by several participants as a problem in their own settings. Diane

(UL -1) explained that the school staff were guided in using the *key questions approach* to help them put theory into practice:

> [T]aking the key questions approach was a really good idea because you can take a critical literacy question, you can develop key questions from that and you stop at different points in the story, you do activities which help answer the key questions. It's an old fashioned way of laying out thinking but it works very well with a critical literacy approach to text.

Opportunities for shared experiences were created around the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, by going into the woods nearby and taking on the roles of Little Red Riding Hood and the woodcutter and re-enacting the story to help them answer the key questions. The focus was on the listening and talking aspects of literacy; however Diane (UL -1) explained that school staff were 'surprised by the quality of writing they got in Primary 3 and 4 as a result of doing that...the writing was an unexpected bonus'. Similarly, Anne (PST-1) spoke about the quality of writing in Primary 1, which demonstrated that they challenged the dominant construction of the wolf as the antagonist: 'They were writing to the wolf, you know, and they were appreciating that he's had a bum deal basically.'

Maria (SSL-1) articulated earlier in our discussion that she believed that a critical literacy approach should be used from the early years of education, fostering children's natural critical questioning capacities, explaining that she believed that critical literacy can be made fun when it is enacted with young children (Vasquez, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2010). Speaking about the whole-school approach she said:

But I do remember that Red Riding Hood was an excellent example of critical literacy but *fun*. You know, a real laugh. And I think in the end they had to produce - I can't remember if it was posters or wanted posters ... from the different kind of perspectives - it just sounded great. I think that's where I'm quite envious you know that you can do more [in a primary school]. We can do things like this here as well but we tend to do it with clubs and interest groups rather than as part of teaching.

The restrictions in the secondary school system prohibit a whole-school critical literacy approach, Maria (SSL-1) believed - as would the majority of educators, I suspect - which led to her conviction that primary schools are more appropriate sites of critical literacy practices, certainly if they are whole-school approaches. It would be interesting to explore perceptions of staff in larger primary schools, in terms of whether they feel it is possible for whole-school approaches in their settings or, instead, if they believe that such approaches are only suited to smaller primary schools.

Anne (PST-1) similarly identified engagement as a key element of critical literacy practices she has experienced. She opined that Curriculum for Excellence should afford educators opportunities to teach to children's interests, or 'running with their learning' as she described it. She recognised that having greater flexibility and space in the literacy and English curriculum should provide chances to have rich, deeper discussions about texts:

> Because there are some fabulous subjects you could tackle. You know pupils who get really engaged in it if they were allowed to take it a different way .... So it's amazing where all these themes that come out when you're reading a book that you think 'Oh I need to capture that. I need to take it in this direction.'

Anne's (PST-1) statement revealed her understanding that *connectedness* and *relevance* to children's interests are aspects of critical literacy practices (Janks, 2000, 2010) which could be an important part of changing practices in Scottish education, yet she also showed an awareness that these practices need to be aligned with expectations - of educators, managers and the wider assessment system, so that teachers do not resist change to the claim of 'No we've got to get through this.'

She extended the discussion about connectedness and relevance by explaining the importance of giving children the time to talk to and learn from each other:

> A lot of the learning I think is learning from each other. They're speaking about the different texts and... a lot of it is learning from each other and giving them the opportunity to learn from each other so they can hear each other's attitudes and their viewpoints. You know mine are at the starting point of giving an opinion and starting to justify. And you know they're starting to refer to the text and this kind of thing which is fabulous when I hear that. And that's giving them I think a kind of - the depth of learning and sort of opening up their minds but - slow progress. But I think it's worthwhile ...You know when they're sitting with their wee question fans and it's beyond the *who? why? what?* I'll just give them one, you know - *why*. Why did she do that? Why do *you* think that and *he* thinks - something else. I mean they love it. If you can spend the time to do that.

Access in this case relates to several factors: do only small primary schools have access to whole-school immersion in critical literacy approaches? Will Curriculum for Excellence enable more widespread access to pedagogies which question, challenge, and guide transformation? Anne (PST-1) made the point that time restraints might impede access to critical literacy approaches which children 'love', restraints which are driven by the

demands of curriculum and assessment, so will current reform in Scotland create space and time for critical practices? If so, educators will have greater *power* to enact engaging, participatory, challenging pedagogies which children 'love', if the power that a restrictive curricular and assessment structure has is reduced.

Summary

Earlier, I argued that educators make sense of critical literacy by giving *understanding performances*, which in turn form a repertoire of performances which demonstrate their own critical consciousness or capacity, and also at the same time build up a repertoire for those to whom and with whom they perform; in this section the focus has mainly been on performances with the children and young people they teach, although the data also show how educators perform understandings with their colleagues. Knowledge is demonstrated through performance understandings, which is also evident in the data as participants explained their knowledge of critical literacy by describing their performance understandings, showing a tacit awareness that this is how we make sense of new knowledge or theory, and that this is how we help children to make sense of and refine new knowledge. The data revealed engaging, participatory, challenging and often transformational critical literacy practices with children and young people; that such practices are enacted with great skill is clear, yet the data also show that critical literacy can be difficult and challenging to enact, and can be met with considerable resistance. The final section of this chapter discusses such issues.

Resistance to critical literacy

In the review of the literature which explores dominant understandings of critical literacy, I cited Shor's (1999) statement that 'coming to critical literacy' is unpredictable and contentious. The data showed several instances of difficulty in putting critical literacy into practice; the discussion which follows will begin by looking at aspects of teacher resistance before turning to explore evidence of children and young people resisting such practices.

Teacher resistance

Difficulties understanding what critical literacy means

Valerie (SSET-1) admitted in her interview that she was not confident in her understanding about critical literacy, saying 'Now when it comes to the critical literacy I'm not sure if I've quite grasped it.' Other participants spoke about their views that their colleagues have not grasped the meaning of critical literacy, or that they might *think* they have but do not accurately understand it. Anne (PST-1) described her colleagues' partial understanding of critical literacy:

> And it's not simply - I know some staff have said to me 'Oh just look at somebody else's viewpoint'. I mean yes there's an element to that as well but it's *more* than that. So they have little inklings of what critical literacy is but they don't know fully because there's hundreds of other things to do.

In the section which discussed the dearth of critical literacy resources, Anne's (PST-1) concerns about colleagues who had attended the **LTS** training mistakenly understanding information literacy skills as critical literacy were raised, and her frustration was evident. In the statement above, she posited that so many other pressures interfere with educators' deep understanding of

critical literacy. Anne (PST-1) said that the impact of critical literacy will not be seen overnight, and explained that it took Assessment for Learning about eight years to 'come on board'. She believed that just as children are now self and peer assessing, so will they also be able to evaluate texts critically, once critical literacy practices are embedded. As a teacher who performed her understanding of critical literacy to support its implementation in her colleagues' classrooms, Anne (PST-1) was sensitive to the fact that 'rolling out' critical literacy 'to the masses' will be a lengthy process and one which must be sensitive to the fact that teachers might at first resist a new initiative, saying, 'Woah, wait a minute! Another new thing? I can't take this!'

Similarly, Brian (PST-3) described the difficulties in enacting critical pedagogies, for those who experienced the professional development model and for colleagues who did not:

> Well your central question is how it is developing in [the local authority] - well, with great difficulty is the answer! I don't know what other authorities are doing but I think we've done a pretty good job. [The two university lecturers] are absolutely first rate - couldn't have hoped for a better - it is quite simply the best training I've ever had in anything. And maybe it's just because I found it so interesting but it really was good and the people on it were very, very keen and they put a lot of work into it and it was *hard*. So if we found it hard then - it's *tough* ....

Here, Brian (PST-3) recognised how difficult it is to enact critical pedagogies for those participants who were eager and engaged and who experienced the training which he clearly valued, making the connection that for those colleagues who did not have such motivation and experiences, critical literacy is being enacted with 'great difficulty'.

He continued to explain that Curriculum for Excellence is 'really rather bad timing' in the current financial climate in Scotland which has had an 'enormous impact' on educators. Brian claimed that the new curriculum is 'hard *conceptually*', that education professionals 'have a responsibility to learn about it... but at the same time they're freezing your pay as well'. He made the point that the critical literacy training *and* the preparation he undertook for the rest of the group guided his understanding, but suggested that educators who did not have similar experiences would find putting the theory into practice very difficult:

> And for teachers who haven't gone through three days of brilliant, brilliant training - well no, they don't know what it is. It takes a lot of getting your head around if you're not an expert - well not an expert but if you're not trained.

Both Anne (PST-1) and Brian (PST-3) identified *access* to appropriate training, resources and time to develop understanding of critical literacy and how to implement it as essential; such access leads to *power* to enact new policies appropriately with deep understanding.

Critical literacy as 'something extra'

In an earlier section which explored participants' knowledge of the terms literacy and critical literacy, I discussed some of their perceptions of literacy or being literate as an essential foundation for critical literacy. Diane (UL -1) described the resistance of secondary teachers from one particular school who 'saw functional literacy as being absolutely important and critical literacy as being something extra', which I have elected to include at this point in my discussion because it involves non-participants' views, and also

because I interpret it to be a clear case of resistance, rather than a conflict between *declarative* and *performance* understandings.

The standpoint which Diane (UL -1) described privileges functional literacy skills over critical consciousness raising. If critical literacy is seen as 'something extra' to be taught only when children have achieved a certain level of functional literacy, then the voices of the children who participants described as being heard for the first time during critical literacy activities might continue to be silenced. If functional literacy is seen as 'essential' and critical literacy as 'something extra', the hegemony of functional literacy is maintained, perpetuating passive literacy teaching which then becomes a barrier to active, engaging, transformational critical pedagogies.

Diane (UL -1) continued:

> And I find it quite hard to accept that perspective and I find it quite hard to challenge as well because if you're in that furrow it's quite hard to come out of it. And it's like the other approach that you need to establish which is 'My school's different'. And actually I see critical literacy as a tool for empowerment and it's often seen around the world as a tool that particularly empowers marginalised people and what they're talking about is a group of marginalised people or marginalised pupils because of their literacy skills and I found that quite difficult. And well that was a bit that still is a thorn, a bit of a thorn.

I understand 'the thorn' in Diane's (UL -1) discussion to be her resistance to arguments against enacting critical literacy, an impasse in philosophies of literacy education in which one group believes that being functionally literate is a requirement before critical pedagogies are enacted; what was apparent was Diane's (UL -1) obvious frustration at meeting with resistance

from teachers who did not believe that critical literacy should be adopted as an essential approach for young people in marginalised groups. Access to critical literacy is denied when such resistance is dominant.

Student resistance

'Malaise of thinking'

The data show evidence of student resistance in one secondary school, linked to disinterest in critical engagement. Valerie (SSET-1) described the 'malaise of thinking' in her school, continuing to say that the whole culture was 'psychologically naive'. I discussed the trial interview with Valerie (SSET-1) in Chapter Five, in which I critically reflected on my stance as uncritical and passive; however the one tension which I was aware of during the interview and spent a great deal of time reflecting on since relates to the fact that Valerie (SSET-1) described her students as being *disaffected* and *disinterested* in deep engagement with the issues. She made it clear that the students are capable of displaying strong emotion, but that such demonstrations are based on superficial interactions with peers, rather than complex social issues; the *texts* that the students react to are mobile phone messages, rather than those studied in English class. When I asked more about her comment that students need to have 'a fairly disciplined, motivated mind' to engage in metathinking about complex issues, she explained that she believed that the students *could* engage, but the *culture* prevented them from doing so, indicating that peer pressure interfered with critical discussions. In response to the question of whether it was a minority of students who display motivation and self-discipline she replied:

I think so - not that they *couldn't* it's just the culture is well you know they'll have their telephones out, a third of any one class, and it'll be questions like 'What are you doing?' 'Are you bored?' 'What subject you in?' 'Who do you hate?' And I'm not reading their texts but I think that's about the level of it. And it'll flare up because somebody'll have said something bitchy and they'll not have bothered to think whether it's true or not but they'll have created a drama, a soap opera around themselves and then that day they'll be quite thrilled that they've created it and they'll have absolutely superficial emotion - superficial fury. 'I was raging!' ... They want to rage. Born to rage - but not about anything of any real consequence.

Valerie (SSET-1) made a distinction between secondary schools which are 'tough' but which can have a more collaborative culture with good support structures in place, as opposed to schools like her own (which on the surface may appear to be 'good' schools). The former, she suggested might be more amenable environments for critical literacy practices. It was clear from the consistently expressed frustration throughout the interview that Valerie (SSET-1) felt the students in her school were not receptive to such an approach, despite the fact that she described their 'critical literacy needs' as 'immense'.

This divergence in the data reveals how one participant perceived students in her school as *disaffected*, who resisted critical literacy approaches. The data also relate to the earlier discussion of Diane's (UL -1) beliefs about teacher resistance in one school, namely that one group of secondary teachers resisted critical literacy as they perceived functional literacy skills to be essential and the former as 'something extra', claiming that their school was different. Their claim echoes Valerie's (SSET-1) belief that the students in her school were also different in that they were not motivated or disciplined

enough to engage in critical thinking. Perhaps they did not want to be *seen* to be conforming to the dominant culture.

Black and white and shades of grey - certain students resist

The data also show evidence of how certain children resisted anything *other than* literal interpretations of texts. Liz (SSSfLT -1) discussed her belief that young people on the autism spectrum can have great difficulty seeing beyond the literal meaning of words:

> Especially when you get pupils moving from Standard Grade and they're moving to an Intermediate 2 course and they're looking at Shakespeare, *Macbeth* - 'Neptune's great oceans' and they're like 'What are you talking about? Neptune, that's a load of rubbish and then all these oceans.' They just can't get any of these layers.

The layers of meaning beyond the literal interpretation, or reading 'with an eye that sees beyond the text, between the lines, beyond the lines' as Anne (PST-1) described critical literacy in a previous section, might be a site of resistance for some children and young people. Where these shades of grey might not be possible, where individuals have real barriers to moving away from black and white or literal interpretations, that too is a valid interpretation, as Anne (PST-1) explained:

> You get some children who - it's still black and white. They *cannot* see. But then even your Asperger's child you might think 'Oh no it's got to be like that, a black or a white' but then they can see things that we can't as well. And it's like staff have got to be aware of that - that there's no right answers. You know there's a lot of different kinds of answers and the fact that Nathan has given you that answer, maybe that's something else he's trying to tell you as well.

Anne (PST-1) demonstrated such a clear alignment with critical theories of literacy, which foreground multiple readings and positions, in a shift away from passive paradigms of literacy which hold that there is one correct way to respond to a text (Fish, 1990; Rosenblatt, 1994). Her acceptance not just of Nathan's answer but of his *right* to answer, his *right* to be listened to, enabled shades of grey to permeate critical literacy practices.

Analysing the data in this way, critical literacy might be seen as a grey lens through which we see texts, a lens which enables appreciation and acceptance that there are multiple meanings and interpretations of texts, that as text participants (Luke and Freebody, 1999) we bring our own meanings to texts which necessarily means that multiple readings are possible. Although we can have a strong reaction to a text which we might articulate as 'I don't like it', the shades of grey are evident in the words we use to explain why we do not like a text, as we mediate our understanding according to the spoken and written words we use to explain and defend our positions. As I imagine children explaining their black or white reactions to a text, and then explaining why they feel so strongly, I imagine the critical debates and discussions between children which open up spaces for alternative readings, possibilities and endings; in other words, I visualise critical literacy practices as producing *shades of grey* from black and white responses. I also interpret shades of grey as critical consciousness-raising in children and young people, as they come to realise that binary opposites are social constructions that present, for example, girls and boys / black people and white people as binary constructs. Reconstructing seemingly opposite categories, to recognise instead where convergences intersect, also seems to me to be blurring supposed innate differences into shades of grey, enabling spaces where diversity can be celebrated not 'othered'. I think of *shades of grey* as the very

epitome of access. In light of the argument explored in this section, I thus feel that it would be useful to extend current conceptualisations of critical literacy in line with this finding, to capture the complexities of *shades of grey*. This conceptualisation was new and unexpected, and is thus a significant finding.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As befits a critical research study, I have experienced several *challenges* to my own assumptions and beliefs; the process began with a *critique* of policy and 'thinking critiquely' (Gee, 2000) about theory, policy and practice has been a feature throughout. I have been moved to *action for transformation* by what I have perceived as injustices related to issues of access and power. I have explained that for most of my career I did not engage in challenge and critique of educational practices, policies and structures, I did not think about how my actions - or non-actions - might contribute to and maintain social injustices. This research has taught me much about myself. One of the most remarkable realisations occurred in the process of writing up the data analysis, when I clearly saw the word 'practices' in the overarching research question and understood that it revealed a great deal about *my* knowledge and beliefs when I wrote it; that I foregrounded critical literacy practices shows the dominance of *doing* in Scottish education, although through the process of this research study I have realised that *doing* can never be separated from *understanding*. After more than twelve years leading CPD and most recently working with student teachers and regularly hearing requests to 'just tell me what to *do* - I don't need to hear about the theory' I had assumed the dominance of practice over theory. 'Coming to critical literacy' (Shor, 1999) is accepting that social justice is something we actively *do* (Griffiths, 1998), that children and young people encounter injustices through language and social practices and that to deny this fails to provide them with the conceptual tools to recognise, challenge, resist and reconstruct them.

In Chapter Two, I discussed Bartlett's (2005) claim that educators must be given time and opportunities to engage with Freireian theory in depth, as without an understanding of critical literacy theory, pedagogies are not transformative. I have argued that the dominance of 'higher order thinking skills' and 'information and critical literacy' which **Education Scotland** has constructed through its website and training is *not* critical literacy for social justice but instead supports a superficial conceptualisation that supports a cognitive model. Educators who adopt this approach are enacting a watered-down version of critical literacy, one which might be comfortable for those who believe that children need to be 'protected' from the difficult and contentious texts which engage them in discussions about social injustices. The findings of this research subvert notions of protection as *prohibition* and instead propose that critical literacy is itself a tool to protect, as it enables children to challenge and resist sites of injustice. Whether acting out of a belief that children's innocence must be protected (Van de Kleut, 2009) or whether educators are in fact protecting themselves from engaging in discussions about contentious, difficult issues, this research suggests a real need for spaces to be created for teachers, librarians, parents - all of us who engage in language and social practices with children - to engage with the theory which underpins 'the important skills of critical literacy', to explore just how we can support them - and ourselves - in developing these protective tools.

Such spaces might conceivably be opened up in schools, for local discussions to be held about 'the important skills', to discuss *why* they are important and *how* educators and parents might go about helping children develop them. Inequalities and injustices, and how they are constructed and perpetuated through language and social practices, would need to be important aspects of

those discussions and prohibiting them only prevents us from acting to transform social injustices. Spaces must also be created in Initial Teacher Education programmes, in order that directives about 'the important skills' in Curriculum for Excellence are not just taught to trainee teachers, but the underpinning critical literacy theory is engaged with, so that teachers understand *why* critical pedagogies are important. Finally, if we are to remove critical literacy from the 'elite' or academic realm (Stenhouse, in Goodson, 1983) then it needs to be embodied within dominant constructions of literacy, such that critical capacity is recognised as an essential component of what it means to 'be literate'. Changing dominant understandings of literacy in Scotland might take time, and qualified as well as trainee educators as well as parents *and* children will need to be involved in making that change.

One of the key findings of this research, that critical questioning is a natural acuity that young children have which must be fostered and nurtured from the early years, suggests that early years establishments are important spaces for discussions about why critical literacy is important and how it can be taught and developed. Critical literacy skills as tools to protect children from powerless positions in language and social practices must, then, be accepted as 'important skills' and embedded in early years practices. For prohibition of texts which might be contentious or difficult to be reimagined and reconstructed as opportunities to engage in actions for social justice, early years practitioners must understand *why* such work is important and engaging with the underpinning theory will be especially important for them. Texts such as those of Vivian Vasquez (2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2010), which so seamlessly blend discussions of critical literacy theory with accounts of practice, are important resources in guiding early years practitioners towards

understanding the importance of a critical approach and how it might be enacted in their settings.

Recently, I was trying to explain what critical literacy is to a group of final year student teachers at the university in which I lecture, and I used the example - discussed in Chapter Three - of five year old Jessica, who challenged the non-existence of female RCMP officers in a promotional poster, which ultimately led to its re-design. The all-female group was obviously delighted with this example of critical literacy in action and the subsequent discussion revealed that most of us were surprised at the critical capacity shown by a kindergarten student. Jessica challenges our assumptions about the abilities and capabilities of young children, and shows us the importance of critical literacy in our work with them.

That this is not an isolated example in the works of, for example, Vasquez (2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2010), Davies (2003) and McDaniel (2004, 2006) and in the data gathered for this research reveals an urgent need to re-construct the dominant belief that children might be 'too young' to engage in critical literacy practices and instead embed such an approach from early years education to secondary schooling. I have reflected on my experience of reading the literature described above, which I found to be immensely interesting and engaging, yet it took some time to challenge my internalised belief that critical capacity is an advanced - or 'higher order' - skill. Although I could see the evidence in print, it was not until I constructed my understanding of young children as naturally critical with participants that I began to *believe* that critical literacy is a natural ability, not one which is somewhere in the hierarchy - or taxonomy - of literacy skills. Challenging and changing dominant views such as the one I held will take time, and I

foresee considerable resistance from educators and parents. *Access* to 'a vocabulary of dissent' which enables children to recognise injustices in language and social practices will give them *power* to resist such inequalities and will, I believe, contribute significantly to education for social justice in Scotland.

Lessons might also be learned from the adult education sector in Scotland, as was discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The Gorgie Dalry Adult Learning Project (ALP) in Edinburgh is lauded by Shor (1992) as an excellent example of Freireian pedagogy, and the critical literacy theory which underpins the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Framework* (Scottish Government, 2005) is both clearly defined within that policy document and supported with examples of how to put the theory into practice. Concerns with issues related to social justice are a guiding principle of adult education in Scotland, knowledge which can be shared with the nursery, primary and secondary sectors.

Critical media literacy has been identified by the participants in this study as an important area of practice, and one which they see as having increasing importance with the rapid technological changes in our society. The data show that the critical literacy training was a key way for participants to develop their *pedagogical confidence* and *content knowledge* about how to teach critical media literacy, and they also reveal that children and young people find such practices engaging. For critical media practices to become more widespread - particularly in early years settings and primary schools - educators will need access to relevant training and support. Paula (PST - 2) discussed how she could see clearly the purpose in using adverts as part of a critical literacy approach, but explained that she found the technology to be a

challenge, so physical barriers as well as pedagogical ones are possible areas of difficulty.

Issues of access and power were discussed throughout this paper and in detail in Chapter Six, in an exploration of how these themes are fundamental in the process of 'thinking critiquely' and in critical literacy practices; although participants did not talk explicitly about access and power, I used the terms as part of my analytical framework in interpreting the data precisely because I perceive them to be so important in educational research for social justice. As I reflect on my interactions with the participants, I have often thought of the work that they do to engage children in critical literacy as 'powerful'. My interpretation of the importance of their practices is not about that which can be measured by the usual assessment tools - which I appreciate is a naive perspective given that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are inextricably linked and always exert power over educators (Hayward, 2007) - but I believe that they embody Griffiths' (1998) view that social justice is an action, and these participants have demonstrated that their practices are engaging children in 'doing social justice'. In Chapter Three I discussed Janks' (2010) claim that teachers who engage their students in critical literacy act in small - but often powerful - ways to make the world a fairer place. In a similar vein, Lukes (2004) discusses how we might use *personal power* to make a difference through our actions, however small. The data gathered for this research clearly show that the participants can make a difference by engaging children in challenging inequalities and acting to transform them, and that even when these practices are on a small scale, they are still powerful.

The data show that embedding constructions of critical-analytical skills in the wider definitions of literacy could be problematic. Even within the sample group of engaged, informed educators, some articulated the belief that being able to read texts independently is a prerequisite of being critically literate. That the participants later revealed that their observations and experiences with children proved that this is not the case, challenging a dominant belief that children must be able to read before they can participate successfully in critical engagement with texts is essential if critical literacy practices are to become embedded in the early years. Educators will not enact practices if they do not think it is appropriate or possible, so challenging the dominant belief that 'being critically literate depends on being literate' is important, and it will take time.

In summary, the findings of this research study have raised some key challenges for Scottish education:

- developing awareness of the importance of engaging with critical literacy theory which underpins practice
- recognising that prohibition of social justice topics, which might be considered to be contentious or difficult, prevents the development of conceptual tools which enable critical literacy to be used as protection against taking up positions of inequality
- embedding critical literacy practices in early years education onwards
- opening up discussions about how social justice is 'done' in the formal and hidden curricula and how educators can exert personal power through the language and social practices they construct in their classrooms and contexts

• creating opportunities for educators to make sense of critical literacy theory and how it can be put into practice together.

Critical reflections on research design and study

This research study explored:

• Participants' understandings of the terms literacy and critical literacy and what they see as distinctive or different about a critical literacy approach

• Participants' understandings of what it means to be critically literate, as opposed to literate

• What critical literacy practices look like in their classrooms/contexts

• The resources and sources that participants have access to in order to develop their understandings of critical literacy practices.

I have previously discussed how the construction of the overarching research question reflects my dominant thinking at the start of this project: investigating participants' practices rather than their understandings of theoretical underpinnings was related to my experiences working with qualified teachers who wanted to know what to 'do'. That I shifted away from investigating 'practices' solely to also exploring educators' underpinning understandings reveals that I no longer believe that it is possible to separate thought from action; thus I have shifted from the dominant construction of educators as 'practitioners' to 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1989), who act for social justice. As a teacher educator, I realise that part of my work is challenging teachers to move out of the 'apolitical comfort zone' (Morgan, 1997), to accept that education is never neutral and that we must use our vocabularies of dissent actively in order to assist children in the acquisition of such language and such fundamental

acceptance that it is right to challenge, question, and act to transform that which we think is unjust, for ourselves and for others.

There is one additional critical reflection on the research questions, specifically in the one which asks what participants think it means to be critically literate 'as opposed to being literate'. I had difficulty with the wording of that research question originally, and when I look at it now the binary construction of the word 'opposed' seems wrong. My motivation was to explore the distinctions in participants' minds about the terms, and perhaps because I now posit that to be critically literate cannot be separated from being literate I have an aversion to the wording, but I do wonder whether this binary construction led some participants to identify being literate is a prerequisite of being critically literate, yet later in the interview demonstrated that they had observed that this was not the case.

Sample group

Using a purposive sample of educators who participated in the first year of critical literacy training in one Scottish local authority limits the research to a small group of people; in this case twenty three people took part in the training and six of them agreed to be interviewed. That the training was run in only one local authority also limits the possibilities of comparing data across different groups.

One advantage in using a purposive sample of educators who had elected to attend the critical literacy training is the opportunity to meet with engaged, informed practitioners with a real interest in critical literacy. I feel that the data which I gathered are rich and did enable a fine-grained analysis, even though there was a relatively small number of participants. In addition,

being able to interview the local authority manager who facilitated the model of professional development training was a real advantage in constructing my understanding of the process, as was interviewing one of the lecturers who led the training in the local authority.

That the participants were chosen precisely because they are engaged and informed clearly does not make them a representative sample from which I can make generalisations, and I do not profess to do so. Instead, I present these findings as representative of a small, engaged group of educators who have been enacting critical pedagogies for several years, and from whose practices other educators 'coming to critical literacy' (Shor, 1999) might take guidance. I also propose that policy-makers and those who produce support materials might take guidance from those practices described in this research study which could become part of more widespread practices with regard to education for social justice. For instance, participants' critical literacy practices which challenge and subvert gender stereotypes could be aligned with recommendations made by such publications as the *Gender Equality Toolkit* (Scottish Executive, 2007).

Possibilities for further research and development

Critical literacy resources

Following on from the finding that there is a lack of resources for educators to guide them in understanding and enacting critical literacy, and the data which showed that educators are asking for such resources, attention needs to be given to providing resources written for educators, some of whom might be coming to critical literacy for the first time. Clearly such resources

should explain what critical literacy is and what critical pedagogies look like. As Anne (PST-1) explained, staff are asking questions such as:

> 'Okay, what do I actually do in the classroom? What can I do?' 'My children don't ask questions, they sit and read, how can I get them to do this? What are the first steps?' That's what staff *need*.

Thus, resources which show what the first steps which educators could take are needed. Comber and Simpson (2009) argue that critical literacies need to be locally negotiated, but in order for educators to do that, they need a good grounding in the theory and they need to be guided in taking first steps, before they can walk on their own.

The question remains about the type of resources educators need. I anticipated that the research question which asked *What sources and resources do participants have access to?* would provide data about online sources that participants used; however there is no evidence at all of participants using websites to find out about critical literacy theory and/or practices. Anne (PST-1) discussed her frustration that the **Education Scotland** website does not offer appropriate or relevant resources for teachers, but apart from her comments there is nothing else in the data to suggest that educators have accessed online sources for critical literacy.

As a researcher, *I* have felt considerable frustration about the inaccurate, misleading information on the **Education Scotland** website which gives information literacy dominance over critical literacy. After critiquing their online materials and the training session which I attended in October 2010, my action with the intent to transform was to contact **Education Scotland** to

register my concerns about how critical literacy was being defined and constructed on the website; however at the time of writing there is still no change to the information published there.

The data gathered for this research study shows evidence of critical literacy for social justice practices, which could be used as a resource to support other educators in enacting critical literacy. Sharing this research is thus recommended to support the implementation of 'the important skills of critical literacy' throughout Scotland and more widely; however I would also recommend that those participants in this study who have adeptly interpreted and enacted critical literacy policy should, with their consent, be at the centre of any effort to develop a collaborative project to support other educators' efforts. Participants in this research study have shown how important critical literacy is, and how it can be enacted with children and young people in engaging, participatory ways which can lead to action for transformation and education for social justice.

Critical literacy in other Scottish local authorities

This research study started with a question about what was meant by 'the important skills of critical literacy' in a Scottish educational policy document. Though I have not found any evidence of other investigations into how educators interpret and enact this policy, I cannot conclude that no such research is being conducted at present in Scotland. Further research into how educators in other local authorities in Scotland are implementing critical literacy would enable comparison of how they are engaging with theory, how they are implementing critical pedagogies, and what those practices look like in their contexts. A comparison of which model(s) of professional development are being locally enacted would give insights into how such

training supports policy reform, how educators perceive that training, and whether those models identified as helping educators make sense of new theories and initiatives can be adopted in other local authorities to support the implementation of 'the important skills of critical literacy'.

This research study reveals that the model of professional development experienced by educators in one Scottish local authority provided access to the complex terrain of critical literacy through direct instruction; modelling how theory can be put into practice with different groups of children; tailored support whilst educators were putting theory into practice in their own settings; and providing opportunities to present those experiences to the whole group. Educators subsequently acquired pedagogical confidence, not just to use a critical literacy approach in their own classrooms and contexts, but also to support colleagues' understanding and practice. I have previously explained that such a model of professional development is not common in Scotland. Kate (LAM-1) explained that she was committed to implementing the model of professional development – even though it is undoubtedly more expensive and time-consuming – because she knew from previous experience that it works. Participants described the training as a key resource in terms of helping them interpret and enact critical literacy, making the model of professional development used in the Scottish local authority an important finding which could support curricular reform in other local authorities.

Resistance to critical literacy

The data have shown that resistance to critical literacy can come from teachers and from students. Further research into what the barriers are, and how they have been overcome in certain sites, would be a constructive way

of ensuring that 'the important skills of critical literacy' become part of practice across Scotland. Overcoming student apathy, teacher fear or insecurity - even when that is cloaked in claims of 'Our school is different', as Diane (UL -1) voiced in Chapter Six - is a necessary part of embedding critical pedagogies, and uncovering reasons for resistance is a fundamental part of enacting real change.

Final reflections about access and power

I am fully aware of my privileged position as the producer of this study, with the power to have the final word about how participants in one Scottish local authority made sense of critical literacy by interpreting and enacting policy. I have made clear that although I welcome the Scottish Government's position in advocating the teaching of 'the important skills of critical literacy' as I wholly agree with the importance of critical pedagogies for social justice, I also believe that educators have not had appropriate access to the knowledge that they need about critical literacy to understand it and put it into practice. The counter-argument that those who educate should make it their business to engage in research about new policies is a fair one, and is one which participants have not shied away from accepting as true; however I believe that if an agency such as **Education Scotland** is intended to support educators in implementing the curriculum it should do just that. My concern throughout this research has been that educators are not just inadequately supported in implementing the critical literacy curriculum, but actively led to believe that higher order thinking skills and information literacy skills *are* critical literacy. They are quite plainly not. My act to challenge with the aim of transforming these dominant constructions has so far not been successful, but with access and power as guiding aims I accept that I must continue to challenge. Sharing the participants' knowledge, beliefs and practices is one

such act to challenge the dominant construction, which I am doing through the writing of this paper and which I also aim to do by sharing the findings more widely.

Participants also discussed having difficulty finding resources to support them in enacting critical literacy practices. They clearly believe that the model of professional development run in partnership between their local authority and one university was very helpful in helping them interpret and enact policy, but the lack of resources outwith the training is an issue for them. Providing other educators access to such resources is an imminently important goal for Scottish education. That dissemination of this research study might enable such access is one of my sincere hopes.

My interest is political: I believe that children need to be taught and supported in developing the important skills of critical literacy, and thus I believe that they need access to appropriate pedagogies. This relies, of course, on educators being able to enact critical pedagogies, which relies on accurate and appropriate knowledge and beliefs about critical literacy. That 'coming to critical literacy' (Shor, 1999) happens 'with great difficulty', that it is 'tough' - as Brian (PST-3) described it - means that educators must be guided and supported not just in making sense of critical literacy initially, but in making sense of the experiences, resistances and successes they will encounter along the way. As Diane (UL-1) explained, educators coming to critical literacy need not only to think politically, but to be made aware that they *are* thinking politically. This requires serious consideration by those who have power over educators' work - including educators themselves - about how to make this happen.

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