Observations: a vehicle for enabling learner voice and developing expert learners

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**Abstract**

When we watch an expert perform, how does that *inform* our own knowledge and skills in that subject, or establish what our *potential* might be to become a ‘better’ learner? There is much policy and rhetoric around the development of this ‘expert’ learner through ‘Learner Voice’ initiatives, yet this is a sparsely researched area. Mainly anecdotal, with poorly documented methodology, it is also heavily biased towards compulsory-aged education. This study, set within Further Education, adds to knowledge by providing evidence of *how* learners can improve the quality of teaching, and their own learning, through direct involvement in reflection and discussion with teachers. It also considers the implications of this for those involved: learners, teachers, the organisation and wider policy.

Using an action-research model, and *observations,* eight volunteer participants from a teacher training curriculum area engaged with this study: two ‘learners’, each paired with a different ‘teacher’ for the observation; three teaching staff who were ‘observed’; and the curriculum area manager. Interviews were conducted throughout the research, with main participants interviewed up to three times to draw out their phenomenological interpretations and reflections.

Working within a *community of learning*, with multiple points of interaction and ‘layers’, two theoretical frameworks were used in analysing the interviews: communities of practice and ecological learning systems. Finding them insufficient in isolation, to improve the data analysis, and the nuances of these layers – ‘*micro’,* ‘*meso’*, ‘*exo’* and ‘*macro’ – a* ‘*continuum of practice’* was devised to combine these frameworks. Additional theoretical concepts – self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept and self-categorization theories – were also used to interpret evidence of an individual’s sense of identity and their perceived trajectory. Evidence suggests interactions within observation partnerships, including those observed, were influenced by the theoretical framework embedded within that interaction: an appropriate framework approach can enhance the quality of outcome from these collaborations.

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“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.” *Albert Schweitzer (1875 – 1965)*

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**Chapter One: Introduction**

* 1. *Watch out for the grasshoppers!*

Those amongst us, of a certain ‘vintage’ age, may remember the 1970s ‘Kung Fu’ film, featuring the Master Shaolin monk and his apprentice, Caine. In a classic scene, after having defeated the boy in combat, there follows an exchange during which Master Po asks his young charge to close his eyes, to listen and to tell him what he hears. Somewhat puzzled, the young Caine lists the obvious things – the water and the birds. Master Po asks “Do you hear the grasshopper that is at your feet?” and in response the boy opens his eyes, looks down and sees the insect: “Old man, how is it that you hear these things?” To which Master Po replies: “Young man, how is it that you do not?”

So, what has a grasshopper and a 1970s martial arts cult series got to do with learner voice and the development of the expert learner? Set in a Shaolin temple, where apprentices study in the shadows of their masters – listening, learning, practising, assimilating and eventually accommodating skills and knowledge into their own practice – our attention is drawn not only to the need to develop ‘mastery’ of a subject, but also to develop the ability to listen. The ‘grasshopper’ simply represents how easy it is to miss something which is frequently present, but all too easy to overlook – perhaps because of its ubiquitous nature: from my perspective, this is the learner voice.

This chapter forms the first steps along this road to ‘enlightenment’ by reconsidering where the interest in this subject first started: with the Literature Review (Appendix One) and those initial research questions around Learner Involvement initiatives. It then reviews the research context, and the theoretical concepts and frameworks used for analysis. It also considers the original research proposal – and whether any changes have been made as a result of such further reflection. Finally, it will outline how the remaining chapters will lead you through this research journey and on to its findings and conclusions.

1.2.0 *The Literature Review - why should we become expert at listening and learning?*

This research began with a Literature Review (Appendix One), completed as the assignment to module 5[[1]](#footnote-1). It posed a simple premise: involve your learners and listen to their voice – but whose voice is it, and who – or what – does it represent? Focusing on the potential implications for learners in a Further Education setting, this original review aimed to evaluate *how* such learners could be directly involved in the observation of teaching and learning in order to improve the quality of both experiences. The Literature Review discussed numerous policy initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC, 2007; Framework for Excellence, 2007) and their role in encouraging educational organisations to find their ‘learner voice’.

Fundamental to this research, and discussed in detail within the Literature Review, are three key aims which underpinned this rhetoric:

* the involvement of learners as individuals, to strengthen teaching and learning through ‘responsiveness’ to individual need (the personalisation agenda);
* the ‘collective’ involvement of learners, through their greater participation and representation (learner representatives, student councils, surveys, forums, etc); and
* the development of the organisation to create a culture of learner involvement (at various levels of decision-making).

The challenge had been laid down: produce a learner who can take responsibility for their learning (QIA, 2008), someone who can “become an expert learner with the skills to negotiate and challenge all elements of the learning experience” (DfES, 2006b: 8). The LSC (2007) was very clear in its directive to the Further Education sector, providing a *Learner Involvement Strategy* (2007) which urged institutions to develop a culture which ensures that learners are active participants in organisational quality improvement: “Confident expert learners can bring fresh insights to help quality improvement.” (LSC, 2007: 12) However, what began to emerge, in reviewing the literature around the implementation of these policies, was an apparent sparseness of formal research – particularly beyond the realm of the compulsory education sector. Where it did exist, it had poorly documented methodology which was mainly anecdotal (Collinson, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008). How then, were these findings to inform my own research focus?

Clearly, there were policy drivers in place which had been instrumental in bringing these initiatives to the educational table – providing us with a triple-layered selection: involvement of the ‘individual’ learner; involvement of the ‘collective’ of learners; and involvement of the learner from a ‘cultural’ perspective at organisational level. Where the emphasis is placed is what pre-empts and shapes the focus of the research.

The Literature Review (Appendix One, *Table 1*, pp XX - XXI) discussed many of these ‘options’ and categorised them for their primary foci, methodological approaches and key questions. What became evident from this review was that the majority of work conducted around ‘learner voice’ was grounded within the compulsory education sector. Most focused on an organisational perspective with the impact on the learner integrated almost as an extra ‘bonus’. Assumptions were made that learners involved in any such dialogue would be not only ‘expert’ in establishing the learning needs of themselves and those they may be representing, but also, sufficiently confident and articulate enough to do so: that they would have the “language and understanding of the concepts involved in assessment and learning.” (LSC, 2007: 8)

What continued to draw me back were some very fundamental questions around the realisation of this ‘expert learner’ (LSC, 2007; QIA, 2008). For what purpose are we seeking to develop this individual: how do we propose to do so; and what might be the implications of doing this – on the individual, other learners, the staff and the organisation? What also needed to be addressed was the limited literature and research available within the post-16 sector. There were several examples of ‘opinions’ being garnered from learners through surveys and questionnaires, learner forum, ‘discrete’ projects identified specifically within, and for, the organisation – and these are discussed in more detail within the Literature Review. However, there was little which addressed the *fundamental questions:* how were learners to gain access to opportunities to be heard; to develop; and to make a difference – both to self and others? After all, becoming ‘expert’ is not an easy step to take: it requires an element of being ‘self-aware’ (Entwistle, 2000; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; McCune, 2009) and of having the ability to act and take responsibility for one’s own learning (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Donnelly, 2007). Before going further, therefore, this is a useful point to review the initial research focus which emerged from the Literature Review. How could opportunities be provided, in a collaborative context, for learners to develop their potential as ‘experts’ through their direct involvement in the process of observation of teaching and learning? How would this ‘involvement’ provide those with whom they interact during this process, and the organisation, with an outcome which will also have value for them?

Within the Literature Review the limited examples of previous research were discussed in more detail. Even a more recent analysis and review of surveys and interviews (Katsifli and Green, 2010) conducted with colleges belonging to the 157 Group[[2]](#footnote-2) in England around Learner Involvement (DfES 2003; DfES 2006a, 2006b; LSC 2007) initiatives has revealed little further evidence within this context. Again learners have been ‘engaged’ through student councils and as student representatives, through questionnaires and surveys. However, although briefly mentioned in a bullet point (Katsifli and Green, 2010: 12), there has been no reference to learners being involved in lesson observations and no reporting of any formal research. Similarly, there has been no indication of how such initiatives could lead to the implementation of the original policy drivers and strategies towards the development of the ‘expert’ learners (QIA, 2008). Some four years on, we do not appear to have travelled very far down this road at all.

Clearly, there are challenges around how to achieve an outcome whereby learners are included “not just as sources of feedback, but also as assessors and evaluators [who….] might play a role in observing teaching” (LSC, 2007: 12): where those involved can demonstrate evidence of being ‘expert’ learners. There are also issues, which do not seem to be addressed in previous cases, around the impact on the teaching staff who might be involved in such a process (Cockburn, 2005; Hatzipanagos and Lygo-Baker, 2006; Donnelly, 2007; Morrison, 2009; Roberts and Nash, 2009). Such initiatives propose to take learners into a ‘professional’ arena where they have no credible connection or status – other than as learners. Yet they do not address how, or in what format, dialogue will exist both before, during and after any observation. Nor do they consider the potential difficulties which might arise as a result. Cockburn (2005: 48) touches on this when highlighting that even where research has been undertaken on peer observations, “the length of service, classroom competence, power relationship and personality of the proposed observer are often quoted as reasons why the observer may lack credibility”.

However, we might feel that by involving individuals who are ‘naïve’ in this context, who are simply looking for what makes a lesson a good experience from a learner’s viewpoint (Wenger, 1998; Tusting, 2005; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Walker and Logan, 2008) that we bring a fresh and uncluttered perspective to the scene. Or conversely, by placing learners into situations where the traditionally asymmetrical hierarchy of power and status exists (McGregor, 2007) that we are putting learners into difficult contexts. These are, therefore, factors which needed careful consideration when evaluating appropriate research design and methodological approaches.

Similarly, whilst intentions to engage learners in constructive dialogue, to enable them to ‘shape services’ (Forrest *et al.* 2007), may be admirable it is important to recognise that behind this ‘voice’, there may be issues around the concept of learner ‘identity’ – and what underpins this. We envisage that by providing a platform through which learners can engage in dialogue, by assigning ‘value’ and ‘worth’ – although remember, this needs to be approached with caution in terms of who is doing this – that we increase a learner’s sense of self-esteem, their self-efficacy and the potential for them to become involved in their community (Frost and Rogers, 2006; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Fielding, 2007; DeFur and Korinek, 2010). However, this implies a degree of confidence, or at least a willingness to engage in the first instance.

This metacognitive aspect internalises those cognitive activities which the learner has experienced across a range of social settings (Glaser, 1999; Rudd *et al.* 2006) and provides them with the means through which to ask themselves such questions as: how well am I doing; could I try something else; am I making progress? It is not a capacity, however, which remains either static or removed from both internal and external influences (McCune, 2009). Nor is it available to all: for learners to engage with such initiatives they have to be able to see themselves as being able to do so, to envisage a ‘pathway’ or trajectory which allows them to acknowledge such possibilities. What happens to those learners who are unable to engage with such ‘possibilities’ (Inaba, 2006)?

Whilst not addressed within this research very little attention is given to providing a ‘voice’ for “the silent – or silenced – students who find learning in school uncongenial [……] so that we can understand why some disengage and what would help them get back on track” (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006: 228). This assumes that because a learner is silent, that they are ‘disengaged’ – they may have *elected* to remain silent – that may be their chosen trajectory. It may be related to their background, their age or their personality. They may be a ‘novice’ learner, who has yet to *establish* their identity or their potential trajectory as a learner (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Fuller *et al.* 2005), but this should in no way be regarded as a ‘voice’ which is in any way inferior, or holds a less valid opinion (Supporting Skills for Life Learners, 2010).

So, questions need to be asked around *who* is speaking and *who* is listening; *who* is represented and *whom* do they represent (Fielding, 2004). If learners are to be regarded as *participants*, then educators and educational establishments, and even educational policy, needs to nurture behaviour that fosters and enables reform *with*, as well as *for*, the learners (Fullan, 2001; Fielding and Bragg, 2003). This does not mean, however, that we can be naïve in our approaches – or our expectations – nor, as already noted, should we ignore the possibility that involvement in such dialogue may result in a negative interaction and potentially have a negative impact on participants. After all “different learners perceive the same opportunities differently and react towards them differently, because of their differing dispositions.” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004: 176)

If policy is driving for an ‘expert’ learner, then both it, and we, should acknowledge that this is a learner who is encouraged to think and to reflect, to be articulate and to have credibility. Although not a focus within this research, literature has raised concerns (Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008) that learner voice initiatives may engage most readily with those learners who are *easiest* to hear and most likely to give you what you want. Even if feedback is obtained which is ‘representative’ and of potential ‘value’, there are still concerns about what happens in terms of action(s) in relation to that feedback and to establish whether or not learning has been specifically affected when changes are subsequently implemented (Powney and Hall, 1998; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Tedder *et al.* 2008).

In establishing this ‘voice’, we may simply be reinforcing, or even creating, a powerful learner élite (Fielding, 2004; Collinson, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008). We may observe tensions between fellow learners, between learners and teaching staff, even between learners and the organisation. Learners may become viewed as “co-producers and collaborators, as both subjects **and** objects of the education process” (Collinson, 2007: 7). When approaching such research, therefore, this has to be acknowledged as something which has potential to impact on the participants and the outcomes. With the wide range of initiatives, and diverse approaches taken, some of which acknowledge the difficulties surrounding the involvement of learners, and the ‘status’ of the learner voice (Powney and Hall, 1998; Fielding, 2004; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Porter, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008), what is not clear is *why* there is an absence of ‘evidence’. Are institutions simply satisfied that they have pursued, and implemented, with ‘fashionable’ zeal (Tedder *et al*. 2008) the requisite government policy/policies? When Ofsted visit and the organisation has its initiatives documented, will they have ‘ticked’ the box? Or, is there simply a lack of enthusiasm from learners, staff and organisations, to be involved in formal research (Shuttle, 2007)?

The Literature Review took this background of learner involvement initiatives and examined them within, and against, the complexities and relationships which exist between learners, their teachers, the organisation and national policy. Remembering the original premise of this Literature Review – how learners are *directly*involved in improving teaching and learning through the observation process – the jumping off point, for want of a better phrase, lies in accepting that individuals belong to ‘learning communities’ (Walker and Logan, 2008: 8). Accepting that individuals learn within a context, then as part of a community, they may also have a reciprocal impact on their learning environment (Wenger, 1998; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Harris and Shelswell, 2005). These ‘identities’ may be individually, or ‘co-constructed’, and are likely to be flexible, adaptable and to evolve through direct and indirect interactions (Eckert and Wenger, 1994). This could impact on “learning relationships, professional practice and education policy development.” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 9) Therefore, the literature considered the following: what might such ‘communities’ look like; what might contribute to the ‘layers’ or relationships within these frameworks, and how they exist or co-exist? Would it be a single ‘type’ of community that was evident, or would different ‘communities’ combine, dependent upon the context?

However, the review of the literature found that the very nature of these previous works was somewhat ‘ad hoc’ and anecdotal. Only two studies formally considered frameworks as lenses through which to examine learner involvement: Mitra (2008) employed a framework based within communities of practice; and Boylan (2005) considered whether learning environments are better understood as ecologies of practice. In addition to an opportunity to investigate the development of the expert learner through the observation process, therefore, it also became clear that most of the empirical literature mentioned previously fails to establish either frameworks, or theoretical perspectives, as a useful means through which to analyse such research findings.

Recognising this potential for a new approach, my research questions were to be considered against two frameworks of practice: communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000; Amin and Roberts, 2008); and collaborative local learning ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). A fairly detailed discussion around these two frameworks is included within the Literature Review and this provides an introductory explanation as to how these different relationships and multiple *nested* layers interact. Such interaction could be on, with, and through several ‘communities’, and may have implications for shared modes of ‘belonging’, ‘mutuality’, ‘engagement’, ‘imagination’ and ‘alignment’ (Wenger, 2000). It may also be associated with the influences of language, discourse and norms on the members of a community – both novice and experienced. Similarly, the need to foster openness and trust (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000; DfES, 2006b) if these communities are to provide opportunities for mutually supportive relationships, or learning ‘partnerships’, between organisational staff and learners (McGregor, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Hodgson and Spours, 2009).

Setting this brief context, which will be discussed further within subsequent chapters in relation to the methodological approach and the specific frameworks, different aspects and ‘modes of being’ begin to emerge. With communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) there is a breadth of involvement which ranges from the traditional master-apprentice model, inculcating the newcomer over an extended period of time (as with our young Shaolin monk!); through to more time-bound ‘context-specific’ projects within teams to ensure completion of a particular aim. With an ‘ecological’ perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009) we see a more collaborative, ecological learning ‘system’ within which there is evidence of greater ‘inter-dependency’ and fluidity of relationships than a traditional community of practice.

However, both frameworks exist across different system levels: at the ‘micro’, we focus on the individual; at the ‘meso’, the interrelations between the individual and his/her environment – professional practice; at the ‘exo’, interactions between settings and communities in which the individual participates – institutional, local and regional; and the ‘macro’ system level – national structures, policy and initiatives. Currently, research does not appear to have a focus on the ‘meso’ system level of interrelations, or the ‘exo’ system level of organisational policy and strategies and the external ‘macro’ level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tedder *et al.* 2008). Against this context, further examination is needed into what these system levels and communities might look like. In the Literature Review (Appendix One, Figures 1.1 and 1.2: 12 - 13*)* these different system levels and contexts are represented visually to facilitate understanding about what might be happening in terms of interactions across and within various boundaries. This also prompted further consideration about the variable identities and trajectories of individuals, creating a scenario whereby one framework may not ‘fit all’. Context and background may result in a merging, or switching between, frameworks as appropriate and we may, therefore, see evidence of something which looks far more fluid. Rather than a traditional community of practice, with clearly defined roles, expectations, norms, boundaries and knowledge trajectories (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000), what is happening might sit more readily within a collaborative local ecological learning system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). These two frameworks are therefore used as lenses in this study through which to interpret the involvement of learners in the observation of teaching practice, and what this might mean to the development of the expert learner (QIA, 2008).

So, if viewed as communities of practice, then we could anticipate situations in which “the social relations of apprentices within a community change through their direct involvement in activities” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 113) as they accommodate and assimilate cultural practices. However, these learners would only have temporary legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). It may be difficult for them to acquire the mutual respect, trust and norms (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006): to develop the necessary “networks of social practices [….and] particular configurations of genres: ways of acting and interacting, discourses: ways of representing, and styles; ways of being or identities” (Tusting, 2005: 43) required to establish belonging to a community. It may also be that communities of practice do not quite conform to the requirement of recent policy initiatives (DfES, 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC, 2007) to drive forward the agenda of *personalised* learning. We might ask what place *is* there for personalisation in a community of learning where knowledge is passed from ‘master’ to ‘apprentice’ in pre-defined formats which require approved ‘rites of passage’ before the title of ‘expert learner’ can be conferred? Would collaborative local learning ecologies fare any better? If we view the learners’ environments more as a “shared framework for creative action” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17) then this may align itself more with this sense of personalisation and collaboration, with shared development of outcomes (Fullan, 2001; Collinson, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008).

Against this literature and policy background, it becomes apparent that learners are being regarded as a central aspect of quality improvement within organisations (LSC, 2007, QIA, 2008), and that the most enthusiastic initiators of this have been within the compulsory education sector (McGregor, 2007; Gunter and Thomson, 2006 and 2007; Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008). As such, these full-time, almost captive, learners are much more available than those in post-compulsory education who can easily leave an institution – and who are likely to have very different expectations of their relationships with their fellow learners, the staff and the organisation (Cockburn, 2005; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Shuttle, 2007). All of this may impact on their desire even to get involved, or to do so over any extended period of time. So, what questions **did** the Literature Review raise and how did this shape my original research focus and subsequent developments?

1.3.0 *Original aims and research questions*

The original search of available literature revealed a wide range of anecdotal texts employing a range of strategies which provided some very praiseworthy examples of attempts to involve learners directly in decision-making and the desires of government for personalised learning which is demand-led (DfES, 2006a, 2006b). However, the methodological *robustness* of these studies is questionable with very few (Appendix One: Table 1, 20 – 21) applying any degree of formality to the process and most simply reporting what they have done (Collinson, 2007). Whether ‘research’ is conducted or not, however, how would one attribute impact directly to learner initiatives and not ‘other’ factors (Powney and Hall, 1998; Forrest *et al* 2008)? There are also concerns about how learners *become* participants (Gunter and Thomson, 2006, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2008). Frequently they are ‘selected’ to participate, or to represent their institution (Gunter and Thomson, 2006, 2007), based upon their “ability to speak in the style and language” (Mitra, 2008: 231) that is both recognised and acceptable (Bragg, 2001). Or, they volunteer because they are sufficiently confident to do so (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001). Yet, just how representative can an individual be of the views of others (Powney and Hall, 1998; Forrest *et al.* 2008)? How can we expect them to “both engage with their curriculum **and** (my emphasis) adopt a reflective position in terms of what their learning is like for them” (Forrest *et al.* 2008: 25)?

So, my original research aim focused on learner engagement, how this is enacted in my own institution – and how, and to what extent, government policy and initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a, 2006b) are being implemented to drive the development of the ‘expert learner’. Using the Framework for Excellence (2007) as a key indicator to measure institutions for evidence of their capability and capacity to improve, Government regards ‘learner voice’ as a vital component and driver of this agenda for personalisation (DfES, 2006b). Any research questions, therefore, had to build not only on the absence of credible evidence, but also to examine ways in which learner voice *could* be developed and used to improve both teaching and learning, and to develop the expert learner (LSC 2007; QIA 2008). In line with this, the original title of the research project was: How can learner voice be used to contribute directly to the improvement of teaching and learning? Does this have the potential to enable the development of the ‘expert’ learner?

The key questions submitted within this research project were:

1. Why do we ask our learners to tell us what they think? For whose benefit and to what purpose?
2. How do learners’ self-perceptions influence their involvement with learner voice initiatives (perceived ‘trajectories’, sense of self and cultural placement)?
3. What are the issues around language, locus of power, tensions and conflict?
4. What are the implications for practice?

In identifying what “good learning” (QIA, 2008) looks like, the aim is to urge those responsible for education to reform *with* and not *for* the learner (Wilson and Corbett, 2001). In this way, greater learner autonomy is promoted and learners and teaching staff are encouraged to learn through ‘dialogue’: learners are encouraged to reflect on *how* they are learning as well as on the *content* of what they are learning (QIA, 2008). Such an initiative would engage both staff and learners as co-producers of something, thus fostering better relationships and perhaps a greater sense of responsibility and awareness for all parties (Hargreaves, 2004). Rather than passive sources of data, learners become both “constructors and analysers of research data” (Gunter and Thomson, 2006: 845) and are empowered through a sense of partnership and ownership (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Shuttle, 2007). Yet for learners to be enabled to engage with such assessments, they “need help with developing the language and understanding of the concepts involved” (LSC, 2007: 8), they need to understand “how they learn best […in order to…] take a more active role in managing their learning” (LSC, 2007: 9).

Only a few examples are available in previous research where learners are involved in the observation of teaching and learning (Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008). The compulsory sector institutions (Walker and Logan, 2008: 21 and 23) *selected* their volunteer participants, and used very *specific* action research methods to identify when ‘deep learning’ was taking place in lessons. The limited case studies available for Further Education (Shuttle, 2007) are from institutions which are regarded as ‘mature’, and where learner engagement strategies have developed over an extended period of time. It is, perhaps, this maturity of involvement which has provided them with the confidence to embark on the use of learners in this way to drive forward improvements in line with policy requirements (DfES, 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC, 2007). How then might such research impact on the development of metacognitive skills – the *deeper* engagement with learning (Hargreaves, 2004) which sees students become active agents of change, developing a “sense of agency, […] inquiry skills and social competences, as well as supporting them to be active, creative and to reflect on their own learning” (Rudd et al 2006: 21)? Use of an action research model, rather than using learners as sources of data in a quality assurance procedure, might ensure that learners feel a sense of ownership and empowerment (Shuttle, 2007), but what might the impact be on the teaching staff? What of issues around *power* and *status* between not only the learner and teacher partnered to *do* the observation; what of the potential impact on the member of teaching staff being observed and the other learners?

Cockburn (2005) raised concerns around the observation process even where observers are colleagues, so how might a learner be regarded in such situations? They may, as adult learners, bring a range of skills, experience and knowledge from other “identities” which can “pull a community’s competence along” (Wenger, 2000: 161), but such ‘input’ may also create tensions (Wenger, 1998; Cockburn, 2005). Learners may also choose to change, or adapt, their behaviours so that they are perceived as a ‘member’ of that community – in this case the observers – so that they ‘fit’ (Wenger, 1998; Wenger 2000; Inaba, 2008; McCune, 2009). Being realistic, we know that an imbalance of power between learners and staff, learners and the institution, is regarded as the ‘norm’ so perhaps this is the reason why, when research – even in its loosest form – is embarked upon, institutions *select* those learners whom they are comfortable having a conversation with (Mitra, 2008).

With an outline against which to begin the research, however, some changes had to be made. Due to major restructuring in the college and changes to the learner involvement strategies and focus of the organisation, the original intention to partner learners with a member of the college’s Observation Team was no longer available. Looking at the difficulties, and implications, this might create for the research meant that an alternative approach was needed. I still wanted to pursue the route of learners involved in the observation of teaching and learning to improve the quality of the teaching, and to encourage the development of learners’ metacognitive skills. I needed learners who would be ‘available’ to engage with such a project, and also an area – or areas – within the college where staff would be enthusiastic about becoming observation ‘partners’. I also needed to find staff who would be comfortable being observed in such a situation.

The first proposal put before senior and middle management in the organisation was to use those learners undertaking Foundation Degrees, using second or third year learners to partner with a member of staff and for them to ‘observe’ a taught session in the year below. Learners would use their experience of this previous year as a benchmark against which to reflect – thus providing them with a developmental frame for metacognitive practice – and established ground for their discussions with the member of teaching staff. However, this proved problematic: spreading across several potential curriculum areas began to look very ‘thin’ in terms of potential access to learners and staff. Attempting to extrapolate out any findings that would have meaning for other areas began to cause concern in terms of credibility and validity. Similarly, trying to engage participants in an action research model when areas had no common ground, contact, or staff, made this an unrealistic route.

This resulted in a discussion with the curriculum area in the college responsible for the delivery of Initial Teacher Training qualifications (PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS[[3]](#footnote-3)). These are the new professional standards which detail the knowledge, understanding and professional practice for teachers and include a breakdown of these across six separate ‘domains’: professional values and practice; learning and teaching, specialist learning and teaching; planning for learning; assessment for learning; and access and progression.

Although a small programme area, potentially this provided access to learners on the two year DTLLS qualification, to staff who wanted to engage, and the opportunity – perhaps most importantly – to follow-up on emerging data over a longer period of time, to have in-depth interviews with participants across all categories, and so to produce ‘rich’ data. The learners in this instance are teachers (with varying degrees of length of service) completing their required teacher training qualification. The participants varied in their backgrounds – vocational, academic – and are ‘experts’ in their own areas. In the research design these learners are partnered with a member of teaching staff with whom they have regular contact on the course and they complete a paired ‘observation’ of a first year group. All teaching staff and learners are volunteers from amongst the course and the team, and the intention is to examine how these participants can collaborate to develop, and own, new knowledge (Shuttle, 2007) which may go some ways towards addressing concerns about the “credibility of the consultation process and its uncertain link to action” (Fielding, 2007: 329).

This design, however, still raises questions around whether this has the potential to change identities in any way (Mitra, 2008) for although all participants are teachers, we still have a context where someone is in the position of ‘learner’. There may be a sense of shared language, routines, norms and repertoires (Wenger, 2000), but we still have a position – or perhaps perceived position – of experience and power between the different participants. Will values and ‘purpose’ emerge “from a collaborative enterprise by different partners at various levels of the system” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17), whether through a framework which adheres to communities of practice, or learning ecologies – or some combination (Boylan, 2005)? Will there be evidence of mutual engagement and joint enterprise (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000) for the ‘collective’ purposes of a community, or of something which feels more like a ‘partnership’ approach (Hodgson and Spours, 2009)?

1.4.0 *Conclusion*

So, this chapter has set the context and hopefully also engaged your interest in the research topic – the development of the ‘expert learner’. You will have read of a Literature Review which began with an examination of policy, of Learner Involvement Initiatives: all with the aim of engaging the learner and, if successful, also resulting in a ‘better’ and more ‘capable’ learner. One who could be responsive, who could engage with the learning process and fulfil those initial three key aims of the LSC (2007) directives on Learner Involvement. Having got to this juncture, and prepared to embark on an actual journey of inquiry, has anything influenced my initial questions, have they changed? Well, perhaps not changed per se, but certainly developed in terms of the layers within them. Remembering that my focus has been on the potential to develop the ‘expert learner’ within the context of observing teaching in order to inform and improve learning, my first thoughts were around the ‘why’ of asking learners to tell us anything. This has not changed, but it has grown and this is discussed in detail in Chapter Two where the methodology and method are considered. We still need to know *why* we are asking learners to participate in a conversation with us and who will benefit from such a discussion. After all, what might an individual gain from being involved in such a process? There are still issues to be considered around learners’ self-perceptions and the *‘how’* of encouraging an individual to become self-aware: to develop their ‘metacognitive’ skills. As the data grew and conversations with participants were conducted, additional aspects became evident in terms of individuals’ perceptions and their sense of ‘self’: for the ‘learners’ this was in relation to their ‘placement’ as learners, their interactions with their teaching ‘partners’ and where they appeared within the frameworks of communities of practice and/or ecological learning systems. The data also began to show issues around the language used, the locus of power and potential for tensions and conflict to arise. All of these were contained within those original questions, but it was the depth that was missing. It was my own evolving interpretation of the data which needed to be developed. Like Caine I was in danger of only hearing the birds and the water, not the grasshopper!

What then of the next phases of this thesis, how does it develop and guide both you and I through this research process? Following on from this Introduction, Chapter Two provides an overview of both the methods used and my methodological position: my ontology and epistemology. This research followed a qualitative path, rooted in action-research and pursuant of a participatory approach to enable me to ‘get close’ to the research: to take an interpretive and phenomenological direction working ‘with’ the participants as contributors rather than merely sources of data. This chapter places a strong foundation before leading the reader towards Chapter Three and a review of the theoretical concepts involved from the learners’ point of view. It addresses issues around the metacognitive skills required to develop as an expert learner: self-esteem and self-concepts which might influence a learner’s perceived trajectories; and begins to consider how these relate to the frameworks of communities of practice and ecological learning systems.

Having established this background to the research project, Chapter Four begins the final steps of this journey, directing focus more sharply towards the two theoretical frameworks and the findings emerging from the data analysis. It will introduce you to the ‘continuum’ (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) within which these frameworks have been placed and lead on towards Chapter Five. In this chapter, a more in-depth analysis will draw together the threads of these frameworks, and the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter Three, and identify some of the main conclusions. Nearing the end of this research journey, Chapter Six will concentrate on discussion and reflect on the findings. It will also consider the extent to which the questions have been answered, or not. Were they the right questions to ask? This will also include conclusions drawn out from the research: how successful has the research been in adding to knowledge; what were the limitations of the research; and what are the policy implications – for both my own organisation and other colleges, and wider policy? Not forgetting, the ‘where next’ discussion.

As a final note, throughout this thesis, any recent research is integrated within the relevant chapters. In this way I will be looking not only for an analysis of the literature, but also be open to new ideas or findings which may possibly emerge. This will provide a congruent link between where the Literature Review began, what has continued to happen, or not, within the research community in recent years and my own research project.

**Chapter Two – Methodology and Method**

2.1.0 *Introduction: so, how is our young grasshopper doing?*

Although he may not have realised it, our young Shaolin apprentice apparently had a natural leaning for research, as he sought “not to know the answers, but to understand the questions”: a kernel of wisdom we should all pursue! When we begin a line of inquiry, we do not know what the answers will be – nor should we. We may be following, with interest and a healthy note of caution, the paths taken by previous research, and the outcomes from these. However, if research is to ‘add to knowledge’ or to ‘identify the gap’, then the answers it will generate cannot yet be known. What we have to do in order to get there is, as Caine suggests: “to understand the questions”.

So, where did my questions begin? What do both I – and you as the reader – need to understand? For almost two years, I had a leading role in the involvement of learners within my organisation and so had a strong interest in this topic. I also had links to other organisations that were keen to develop their Learner Involvement strategies into something which was more than an Ofsted ‘tick box’ exercise! I had also worked with staff within the organisation on various action learning projects, so had some experience with this research approach and also recognised that there was potential for a more formal, though still small-scale, research project. The original focus, therefore, identified through an exploration of policy around Learner Involvement Strategies and the emergent Literature Review, raised a basic investigative premise: how could learners be more directly involved in the improvement of teaching and learning?

For me, this was primarily through involvement in the observation of teaching and learning and a series of more specific questions thus began to emerge: why should learners want to engage with such initiatives; how would learners’ self-perceptions influence such involvement and what would the implications be in terms of relationships between learners and staff? There were also considerations around where individuals, or groups, might locate themselves in terms of a ‘framework’ within which such relationships would exist – and what would such a framework look like: when, and in what format, would there be evidence of issues around language, the locus of power, possible tensions and conflict? All of this, discussed in the Literature Review, began with those initial policy drivers: those directives aimed at seeking to develop the ‘expert’ learner – the individual who can not only reflect and improve on their own learning, but who can also be an active participant in the improvement and development of their organisation. Laudable aims, however, previous research into this area has been largely anecdotal and poorly documented (Appendix One) and does not, I believe, pose sufficient questions to test the premise that the involvement of learners in this way will, in fact, have such outcomes. There is an aspect within previous ‘research’ which would imply that Caine’s wisdom has been turned on its head, with the aim being to ‘know the answers’ without endeavouring to ‘understand the questions’: and as will be shown, there are many questions.

As Chapter One indicated, as my own research thoughts developed, the questions grew, particularly in relation to the ‘expert’ learner. Within the context of teaching, and of observing teaching, at its simplest, what is it about ‘observing’ someone teach a subject that tells you how much you know, or do not know, about that subject yourself? Having been ‘observed’ by a learner, what is it about this process that might identify how the teaching and learning experience could be improved for all those involved? From the perspective of the learner, the teaching staff and the organisation: how do you make a better learner? These were clearly questions which required the active involvement of participants in the research: this was not going to be an investigation conducted ‘at a distance’ – so how was it to be constructed and carried out?

2.2.0 *Ontology and epistemology*

If we genuinely want to know what our learners think, what their self-perceptions are, and what may potentially impact on their trajectories and development as ‘expert’ learners, then we have to involve them in an approach which is “research with, rather than on practitioners” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: xxv). We have to encourage co-operative inquiry with others (Heron and Reason, 2001). In addressing the issue of ontological perspectives, in essence I have asked “What is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social ‘reality’ that I wish to investigate?” (Mason, 2002: 14). To inform my epistemological position my ontology needs to reflect what I believe are ‘meaningful components’ of the social world as relevant to my research questions (Mason, 2002): those perceptions, interactions and contexts at play within my research setting and the consequences of bringing such variant actors together.

My pathway to ‘enlightenment’ had to accordingly acknowledge that:

“there is a land of knowledge one has only from within a social situation, a group, or an institution, and [which] thus takes into account……..the others in the social situation (Shotter, 1993: 7)” (in Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 9).

It would, therefore, have been inappropriate to follow an ontological position based on realism (Snape and Spencer, 2003) as this would have suggested that my research foundations lay in those ‘external’ realities which may exist independently of people’s beliefs or understandings. Nor would there have been much relevance in pursuing a position founded in materialism – acknowledging that there is a real world, but where only the material features of that world hold reality. I needed to consider knowledge and questions which were situated with individuals and their identities; with their interpretations, perceptions and views on their experiences as ‘learners’; with their interactions and the language associated with these. To come to understand and know this reality through the human mind and socially constructed meanings: idealism. This ontological position aimed to “reveal meaning and to understand how that meaning is connected to a person’s life experience” (Stringer, 2004: 25). It is not based in an objective, or scientific world – a positivist position – but seeks rather to discover a “human world” (Stringer, 2004: 25) and what arises within and around that world as a result of ‘human’ interaction.

By its very nature, however, this requires the researcher to interpret the data and findings: to engage at close quarters with the participants; to ‘talk’ to them; to ‘listen’ to them. It was, therefore, necessary to consider how identities might differ dependent on context and interactions with other actors; they might be multiple and unstable (Thomson and Gunter, 2011); learners might also demonstrate identities assimilated as a result of *being* a research participant. As such, there was potential for some harsh judgements in terms of claims to credibility and validity (Snape and Spencer, 2003). After all, how could research which necessitated this degree of involvement and personal interpretation by the researcher, be acceptable? How could it possibly counter these charges and doubts? However, if my epistemological position aimed to make sense of an individual’s interpretation of their world, their potential to exhibit different ‘identities’ in different circumstances and with different individuals - then counter them was what I needed to do!

These difficulties should not be, and were not, ignored. There needed to be recognition of potential issues around my ‘interpretive awareness’ and I needed to ensure that I had acknowledged:

“the subjectivity [which I] bring to the research process and that [I] have taken steps to address the implications of [that] subjectivity” (Weber, 2004: para. ix)

It would, after all, be naïve not to reflect on my own experiences and cultural background which inevitably accompanied me on my research journey. It was important to acknowledge, consider and recognise how my “own positioning might influence research” (Thomson and Gunter, 2011: 17). As such, the research design was carefully considered to address these issues (2.5.0) and to demonstrate that I had been reflexive and thought critically about what I was doing and why; had confronted and challenged my own assumptions and recognised “the extent to which [my] thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see” (Mason, 2002: 5). This was of particular relevance in the interpretation of the data: if I was responsible for defining the themes and attributing the coding, I had to ensure that what had been done was transparent and available for verification and questioning by others (2.4.7 and 2.5.0) and that I had been honest and reflective in what I had done. Accordingly, my epistemological position was interpretivist and the research began its journey from an inductive stance – from my initial thoughts in the Literature Review.

However, as the research progressed, I was also looking for associations derived from the evidence (deductive) and observations of the research ‘world’ (Snape and Spencer, 2003). I also continued to review recent research work, including that of Seale (2010) and Thomson and Gunter (2011). This continued to show that whilst there was a ‘well-understood’ learner voice in schools, this was seen in “stark contrast to student voice work in higher education where definitions and conceptualisations” (Seale, 2010: 995) continued to be underdeveloped. There was acknowledgement of the value of learners as research participants, through their positions as ‘expert insiders’ (Thomson and Gunter, 2011: 19) and a critical review by Bahou (2011: 2) had seen the potential for ‘students as researchers’ to enable the development of “collaborative relationships among students, and between students and teachers that are conducive to capacity building and agency”. There was, therefore, a strong argument for involving learners, and staff, as co-participants in research: providing opportunities to study learner identities and encouraging staff to “reflect on and consider the implications for their practice” (Verill, 2007: 79). Such dialogue - between teachers and learners – facilitated an examination of the processes and outcomes of these interactions, and investigation into the impact this might have on those involved and the wider context(s) within which they sit.

It can therefore be seen that this interpretivist, sociological tradition is concerned with how social worlds are understood and experienced, with their multiple and richly textured layers (Mason, 2002). Accordingly, the most appropriate method of analysing and exploring this particular research context was through action research. This informed not only my reflexivity, but also that of those involved, encouraging participants to utilise and develop metacognitive skills (Greeno, *et al*. 1999; Entwistle, 2000; Phelps *et al*. 2001; Inaba, 2006; QIA, 2008), to confront and challenge assumptions. To recognise “the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see.” (Mason, 2002: 5) Therefore, my ontological position could not have supported a positivist epistemological approach as this would have generated data where results could be replicated, theories tested, and with the researcher and reality as separate (Weber, 2004). Quantitative, as opposed to qualitative, methods would have been used to analyse ‘content’ from a distance and build “knowledge of a reality that exists beyond the human mind” (Weber, 2004: para. vi). Instead, my aim was to understand the perceptions individuals have of their own activities (Samdahl, 1999; Weber, 2004; Kelliher, 2005; Bryman, 2008) and the subjectivity of those meanings which then inform and ‘shape’ how individuals interact with their world.

Against this background, therefore, this study adopted an ‘action research’ approach, to facilitate not only the production of knowledge and action:

“directly useful to a group of people, [but also, through this] participation [….] to empower them at a second and deeper level to see that they are capable of constructing and using their own knowledge” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 10)

2.3.0 *Action research approach: engaging with our co-researchers!*

As mentioned previously, my own experience in relation to action research helped to inform my choice of ‘approach’. Briefly, action research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982) aims to have an “intentional, systematic inquiry by practitioners into their own practice” (Dinkelman, 1997: 251). This qualitative stance, which may not employ the detachment and quantitative generalizability of a more positivist approach, does however both welcome and encourage a deeper personal attachment to the research process. After all, participants are directly instrumental in feeding back into this reflective spiral of inquiry, there is a greater sense of collaboration in the research process: the aim being to “seek to produce knowledge useful in their own contexts, […whilst] that same knowledge may be useful to others as well.” (Dinkelman, 1997: 254)

Nevertheless, there are difficulties around assigning any form of generalizability to such research and the methods used for analysis of the data (2.4.6) were crucial to establishing both validity and credibility. In addition to the narrative and self-reflection contained within the participant interviews, it was important that the data were coded in a way which would enable the ‘pursuit’ of themes across interviews. It needed to enable analysis of the ‘pattern’ and ‘ebb and flow’ of conversations between participants, and between participant(s) and the researcher. With this in mind, coding software (NVivo) was originally considered as potentially helpful in organising the data and whilst not the only method of doing this, the software could make it easier to compare and contrast, and to look for similarities and differences within the data. However, possibly due to my lack of familiarity with the software, when this was trialled with data, it was not sufficiently flexible enough to do what I wanted. It was important that the method used for data analysis would allow for the discernment of subtleties in the interactions and interpretations expressed by participants: that the full depth and breadth of the analysis would be sufficient to identify evidence of the two theoretical frameworks (2.4.6) and aspects of theoretical concepts (Chapter Three) emerging from the discussions. Had the interviews been based on participant responses set within fairly ‘structured’ question/answer interviews, NVivo would have been useful – establishing ‘nodes’ (coded segments) and ‘relationships’ between coded sections of data. This would help to identify connections and allow frequent revisions and amendments to initial thoughts and ideas. It could also enable the ‘grouping’ of data relevant to specific aspects of theoretical concepts or the two frameworks (community of practice and ecological learning systems) being used to analyse the data.

Even more traditional copying and ‘chunking’ of data across multiple photocopies of interview transcripts and documents to group themes and sub-themes, might have been appropriate. However, although the interviews were set loosely within a semi-structured format (2.4.3), this research was based within an action research model. As such, the *overall* context of interviews were sufficiently similar to ensure opportunities for comparison of data - but it was important that participants felt able to reflect, to consider, to **interpret** their thoughts and ideas freely, and beyond the constraints of a question/answer framework. Accordingly, the method chosen for coding and comparison of data had to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the fluidity of the texts and hard-copies of the transcripts were used to assign coding, and for comparison: this is discussed in further detail in 2.4.7.

As both my ontology and epistemology were based within phenomenology and the interpretation of an individual’s perspective, a fundamental premise could thus be reached: that action research is informed by phenomenology, and that participation within it aims to:

“create a sense of community through the sharing of perspectives, the negotiation of meaning, and the development of collaboratively produced activities, programmes and projects” (Stringer, 2004: 33).

Such access to knowledge and participation may provide opportunities for participants to change where ‘traditional’ boundaries exist in educational and learning contexts: to impact on the very “conceptualisation of the possible” (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001: 74) through the ‘co-production’ of new knowledge (Thomson and Gunter, 2011). Yet a search for recent literature around the development of student participation in research contexts has revealed a mixed picture. Whilst there appears to be a consensus of opinion that student participation can “enhance the quality of learning through improvements in communication and in the social conditions of learning” (Frost, 2008: 356) questions around this involvement are also raised. Some of these questions have already been considered (Appendix One): the reasons *why* such involvement is taking place, the benefits, the priorities and the motivation for doing so; the potential for such co-participation as researchers to develop confidence and self-esteem in our learners. It would seem that to involve learners – who after all, have been on the receiving end of education for a considerable length of time – in sharing with their teachers how that teaching impacts on them is an obvious step forward.

However, relationships are complex, interactions and boundaries exist which necessitate the acknowledgement of power issues and constraints (Frost, 2008). Dinkelman (1997) highlighted the potential for action research theory and practice to contribute to the education of pre-service teachers. Dinkelman (*ibid*: 263) flagged up a very genuine issue, and one which I needed to address, that:

“power relationships inherent in teacher-educator and pre-service teacher relationships are influenced by the spectre of evaluation, which can jeopardize the likelihood of sincere and open communication.”

My main participants, linked to the curriculum area for teacher training, were those teaching staff involved in delivering the DTLLS qualification, and the learners were ‘trainee’ teachers. However, these learners were not uninitiated, nor unproven, teachers: they already worked as teachers and were established, to differing degrees, in their careers, but required formal teaching qualifications (2.4.1). Whilst this might ameliorate some of the issues around power, and boundaries in relationships, this needed to be borne in mind when coding the data. Accordingly, although this work recognised the possibilities inherent within initiating lines of dialogue between teacher educators, pre-service teachers and other educational personnel, it acknowledged, through the coding, how the modelling of such critical action research by the ‘professionals’ could influence the ‘apprentice’ teachers (Chapters Four and Five).

So, there are issues to be considered, but returning to my ontological and epistemological positions, it was the knowledge gained from within the social situation, or context, that takes into account those ‘others’ within that particular social situation (Shotter, 1993) that could “lead not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 2). This potential for research, and the data, to be contextually embedded and interpreted needed to be acknowledged. Rather than a positivist, scientific approach, which used measurements and a consistency of prediction and control around the data, with an action research approach validation is sought through the reflexivity of the research cycle (Coghlan and Coughlan, 2010). It requires the action-oriented researcher to be immersed in the setting, and as such necessitates a strongly reflective practice to be evidenced (Pedlar and Trehan, 2009; Thomson and Gunter, 2011). It is this very essence of ‘holistic’ research which makes it the most suitable approach for studying such complexities and dynamics as can be found within the difficulties of the ‘real’ world (Pedlar and Trehan, 2009). Indeed, a review by Cain (2011) into the relationships and ‘mutual influence’ present within the classroom between learners and students, discussed just how much potential there is for action research to generate:

“varied types of knowledge, including teaching approaches and resources that, while not being generalizable in the positivist sense, are applicable by teachers to new contexts, provided that they recognize those contexts as similar to their own” (Cain, 2011: 10)

It is with this focus on the potential of action research to be an emancipating experience, where insights can be used in other contexts, or to help others to pursue their own needs (Gustavsen, 2001), that my research was grounded.

2.4.0 *Method and research design*

This research needed to be capable of being responsive to the context and the data, and importantly to the participants: to learn of their perceptions, their experiences, their interactions and the language used to both express, and to make sense, of these (Mason, 2002). In order to produce rounded, nuanced and rich data (Mason, 2002) the research was focused within one curriculum delivery area: that of the 2-year Initial Teacher Training programme (DTLLS[[4]](#footnote-4)). Using an action-research model, and *observations,* eight volunteer participants from a teacher training curriculum area engaged with this study: two ‘learners’, each paired with a different ‘teacher’ for the observation; three teaching staff who were ‘observed’; and the curriculum area manager. Interviews were conducted throughout the research, with main participants interviewed up to three times to draw out their phenomenological interpretations and reflections.

The aim was to produce explanations and/or arguments, from a qualitative standpoint which could focus on “how things work in particular contexts” (Mason, 2002: 1). The intent being to produce findings which would have a degree of ‘theoretical validity’ and enable others to decide whether or not there was anything here that was useful for them. Put simply, anyone reviewing the research should have sufficient information about “both sending and receiving contexts” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 297) to make decisions about future purposive sampling. Researchers would be able to use the known characteristics of the original study (the ‘sending’ context) to decide whether or not these would be applicable to transfer to their own study focus (the ‘receiving’ context).

This research was conducted in a ‘real world’ situation and the approaches and methods needed to sit pragmatically within the position adopted. I needed repeated and regular access to the participants across a very tight timescale: the majority of the study was completed during Term Two of the academic year. Learners and teachers had to agree to work as partners, to complete observations and participate in interviews and follow-up questions throughout this third, and following term in the subsequent academic year. These were not ‘one-off interviews’ so if the participants had been spread across different curriculum areas within the college, to have replicated this degree of contact with a wider group would have been difficult to organise and sustain. In addition, data contributed from a variety of contexts would have had implications for the analysis and interpretation – contexts, relationships and interactions could potentially have been widely differing and have threatened the validity of findings. Although this has implications for generalising to a population (2.5.0), this is an interpretivist study, which although it may focus on one context, aimed to produce findings which would be available for others to evaluate and decide on their level of usefulness in different contexts. It was vital, therefore, that I did not simply ask “how do learning environments influence student learning and outcomes?” (Kek and Huijser, 2011: 186). I needed also to place such questions within the phenomenological interpretation of the interactions of learners, teachers and the organisation and to use the two frameworks (2.4.6), communities of practice and ecological learning systems, as the lenses through which the data were analysed.

A broader approach may indeed have yielded data from different contexts, however this would have been more thinly spread, and it would not have been possible to conduct as thorough, or concentrated, an investigation as through the DTLLS’ participants. As a result, “because those engaged *in situ* have a perspective on practice that affords insights unavailable to external researchers” (Dinkelman, 1997: 253) there was potential for an action research model to channel existing ‘lines of communication’ within this curriculum area. A strongly collegiate area, the participants were keen to engage with the research to form “new perspectives on their work” (Dinkelman, 1997: 255). This participant group included learners, teaching staff, and a manager from the curriculum area and provided a range of data that were as deep, and layered, as possible within the time constraints. Originally views from the Head of Quality were sought to gain an institutional perspective on Learner Voice initiatives and how policy is regarded as having been enacted within the college. This was not, however, possible in the end but an analysis of these initiatives and organisational policy was conducted and used within the discussions around implications for future practice and organisational opportunities and constraints (Chapter Five). Although an interpretivist methodology may be acknowledged for its conceptual depth, “results are often criticised in terms of validity, reliability and the ability to generalise, referred to collectively as research legitimisation” (Kelliher, 2005: 123). Using data, therefore, which could be viewed as “rich, nuanced and detailed” (Mason, 2002: 3) was one method of strengthening this qualitative data to extend the scope and depth of understanding (Onwuegbuzie and Leach, 2005; Punch, 2005; Ma and Norwich, 2007). Remembering that qualitative research is associated with an interpretivist sociological tradition, in particular with phenomenology, the aim was to interpret, understand and experience how social worlds are produced; to explore the textured and multi-layered constituents; and to “constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts” (Mason, 2002: 1) From an interpretivist perspective, it was important not to underestimate the role of “language in our construction of our world in which we are always seeking to make (or give) sense” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: 5) In order to acknowledge this, the investigation primarily used interviews (*Table 2.1* and 2.4.3) to generate data around individuals’ understandings, interpretations, ideas, perceptions and views. These included viewpoints in relation to their own participation, on action research, their sense of identity (as a learner and as a ‘partner’ in the observation process), and their interactions and social relations (both with their fellow learner(s) and with the members of teaching staff).

Using students as ‘observers’ naturally has implications for those involved (Frost and Rogers, 2006), with issues around trust, confidentiality, appropriate behaviour, a code of ethics, etc. It is also important to consider whether, and how, such activities might impact on those staff being observed (Cockburn, 2005; Hatzipanagos and Lygo-Baker, 2006; Donnelly, 2007; Morrison, 2009). Walker and Logan (2008) reviewed a range of learner voice initiatives across the United Kingdom’s education sector, discussing various case studies where such strategies have been tried: these were largely within the compulsory school sector and focused on school councils, developing school ethos, citizenship and participation in decisions around curricula activities. However, methodological approaches have been reported in a limited fashion (Collinson, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008) and formal research continues to be sparse (Forrest *et al*. 2007; Shuttle, 2007; Roberts and Nash, 2009). By using an action research approach, this study capitalised on the “exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive” (Mason, 2002: 24) characteristics of qualitative research. It enabled an emergent process which developed as:

“those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers both individually and collectively” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: xxii)]

It was not without difficulties, however, and one of those centred on the amount of time available in which to conduct the research. Action research does not particularly lend itself to completion within one or two terms (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982; Dinkelman, 1997) and yet this was the timeframe within which I have operated. Fortunately, this was not a research project which had a defined ‘end’: it was about beginning a process with the participants from which I could then withdraw, and establishing those first lines of dialogue and reflexivity which participants could then embed, or not, into their practice as they explored their abilities and capabilities as learners. In this way teachers could “investigate teaching and learning with their students, examining their influences on the students and vice-versa.” (Cain, 2011: 9)

2.4.1 *Data generation: context*

With this context explained, my research was not appropriate for a ‘random selection’ approach – a probability sample – it needed to be a purposive sample which, although typically much smaller, would generate more detailed data. In order to do this, the main body of evidence to be reviewed would be generated from the collection of data through semi-structured interviews (2.4.3), or “conversations with a purpose” (Mason, 2002: 62). As mentioned in 1.3.0, the original aim had already been put forward to several potential curriculum areas at a cross-college management meeting. Subsequently, a decision was made to work with an area involved in the training of teachers, to identify respondents who could be seen as being “potentially able to provide significant data on the research sample” (Oliver, 2008: 109). This was an opportunity to work with second year student teachers (on the DTLLS programme) who had knowledge of action research, who would be available for follow-up interviews, and who would have “special insights into the research question” (Oliver, 2008: 109). Second year ‘learners’ would be paired with a member of teaching staff, would ‘observe’ a first year lesson being taught, and would then discuss and evaluate the teaching and learning they had observed.

There were two potential groups of learners on the programme and I visited each of these separately at the start of the study (towards the middle of Term 2), after having received ethical approval from the University and approval from the organisation. Each of the teaching staff delivering to the learners in these groups had expressed an interest in being involved in the research and volunteered to act as the teaching ‘partner’. My visits to these classes were used to explain the outline of the research project and reassure potential participants of their ‘ethical’ rights. Learners were in the midst of a module focusing on action research and so were very interested in the idea. Having left a brief research outline information sheet with all learners, and providing my contact details, I invited anyone interested to contact me within the next week. One participant learner volunteered from each cohort and was paired with the volunteer member of the teaching staff. This meant that learners were paired with their main teacher on the programme, which needed to be considered when analysing the data (2.4.6) in terms of power and relationships. However, this did result in readily established ‘pairs’ where there was already a degree of trust and rapport – something which was useful in relation to the timeframe under which the project was conducted. Subsequent discussions within the team around the research project resulted in a further three teaching staff volunteering to be ‘observed’: this took the process to the end of Term 2. Although the number of participants involved was relatively small, there was a great deal of access to this one specific area within the college – something which has resulted in deep, nuanced data for analysis. In total there were eight participants: two second year DTLLS learners and two teaching ‘partners’; three staff who were ‘observed’ delivering on the first year DTLLS programme (one lesson was a joint delivery by two of the staff); and one Curriculum Manager. A detailed breakdown of the method and organisation of the research data generation is provided in the section below. Throughout the data analysis and any reference to individuals, due to the small number of participants, and the possibility of identifying an individual within the organisation, I have assigned first names which can be regarded as gender-neutral to ensure anonymity is preserved (Appendix Two).

2.4.2 *Stages*

Before discussing the method and research design it is helpful to consider the research questions (1.3.0). The particular groups of participants, and their curriculum context, opened out the research questions (2.1.0) and not only looked at the learners who participated as a partner in the observations – with the aim of improving the teaching and learning experience for others and for themselves – but also took that concept and applied it to the teachers involved as participants. After all, they were not simply ‘partners’ to the learner during observations, there would also be implications for their own practice, and for that of those teaching staff being observed. As all of the participants involved were from a teaching background – whether experienced or novice – there was a possibility for a completely different dynamic to appear as those on the DTLLS programme are striving to become experts within their own field of knowledge and learning. This is further discussed in Chapters Four and Five. The aim of the research, however, was not limited to this aspect of improving teaching and learning, it was also aimed at investigating how – and why – learners feel *able* to get involved with ‘initiatives’. How is this influenced by a learner’s sense of ‘self’ – their perceived identity (Chapter Five)? How do such identities influence where, and how, a learner places themselves in ‘context’ in relation to other learners, to teaching staff, and to the organisation (4.2.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.2)? What implications are there, when learners and teaching staff act ‘together’ as creators and contributors to data – and within these relationships, where are the issues around the language used, the locus of power and potential conflict and tensions (4.2.3, 4.2.4)? Having already made a decision, based on the Literature Review, that data would be analysed and coded through the lenses of two communities of learning –communities of practice and ecological learning systems – opportunities to generate relevant and meaningful data had to be considered within the research design which is explained within the following table.

*Table 2.1 Outline of participant activity*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Terms/Dates** | **Activity** | **Purpose** | **Method/Methodology** |
| **Term 1/2** **(2010 – 2011)** November 2010 – January 2011 | RDC1  Ethical approval from University and  Organisation | Required before research undertaken. | RDC1 completed and submitted to University.  Organisational approval sought. |
| **Term 2**  February 2011/  March 2011 | Brief outline of research and request for participants | Raise awareness of research project within the organisation; seeking curriculum areas for participation | Meeting with Head of Quality and cross-college management staff delivering on Foundation Degrees and DTLLS. (Exo-system level.) |
| March 2011 | Visits to classes: introduce research idea, obtain volunteers | Explanation and discussion around action research focus and role of participants. | Explanation of research proposal and involvement required. Q & A with potential participants. Discussion of ideas. (Micro- and meso-system levels.) |
| **Term 2/3** April 2011 | Initial combined meeting with Pair 1 and Pair 2 teacher participants.  Initial individual meetings with Pair 1 and Pair 2 learner participants. | Discuss reasons for involvement in the research – phenomenological ontology. Informed consent. | Recorded interviews using digital voice recorder (DVR). Individuals discuss interest in being involved, anticipated – potential advantages and disadvantages (micro-system level - individual, meso-system level in terms of own professional practice as teachers). Anticipated benefits for ‘partners’ (meso-system level). (Links to learner identities and perceived trajectories.) Teacher participants also exo-systems level viewpoint. Additional researcher notes for reference and to prompt follow-up questions. Fully transcribed for subsequent coding and analysis. Also added to ideas around content for pro-forma (Appendix Three) being used by participant observers – designed to encourage focus of observer on the learning taking place (links to metacognition and expert learner).  30 – 40 minutes per interview. |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Terms/Dates** | **Activity** | **Purpose** | **Method/Methodology** |
| **Term 3** May/June 2011 | Initial meetings with teaching staff being observed. | Discussion of research project, their involvement and obtain informed consent. | Ensuring staff are comfortable with process and have provided informed consent. Explained focus of research, reassured feedback would not be an aspect of this experience. Focus is on the learning and how this would be used to develop reflective skills of the participant learners and teachers.  Meso-systems level.  15 minute discussions – not recorded. |
| May 2011 | Interview with the Pair 1 teacher ‘observee’. | Discussion in further depth about involvement in the process. | Establish viewpoint from the teacher being observed: concerns, expectations, perceptions in terms of meso-systems level impact.  20 minute interview recorded (DVR), fully transcribed for coding and analysis. |
| June 2011 | Pair 1 and Pair 2 each completed an informal observation.  Follow-up discussion after observation to review own viewpoints . | Used pro-forma provided (Appendix Three) to record individual observation comments. Framework for follow-up discussions. | Researcher sat in on lessons to observe pair – no direct input, field notes.  Each pair: 1 hour classroom observation, completing own notes on pro-forma.  Immediately after observation, 30 minutes follow-up discussion recorded (DVR). Set up by researcher, but researcher not present during discussion.  Fully transcribed to inform follow-up interviews, and subsequent coding and analysis. Themes emerging related to: learning observed, discussion, language used, concurrence or divergence of ideas.  Evidence of interactions and relationships –communities of practice or ecological learning systems. (Micro- and meso-systems levels.)  Initial coding themes identified and set up in ‘continuum’ (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82).  Participants offered option to also email further thoughts to me at any subsequent point. |
| July 2011 | Follow-up interviews with participant teachers who had ‘paired’ a learner. | Impact on those involved, what were their perceptions in terms of their own practice and that of others – and for the organisation.  Informal dissemination of some interim findings to participants. | Action research and phenomenological approach, micro- , meso- and exo-systems level perceptions.  30 – 45 minutes each interview recorded (DVR).  Fully transcribed after for subsequent coding and analysis, or to provide additional ‘quotes’ in support of data findings.  Themes emerging, discussion, language used, any evidence relating to communities of practice or ecological learning systems. Impact on own practice and outcomes at an individual level. |

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| **Term/Dates** | **Activity** | **Purpose** | **Method/Methodology** |
| **Term 3**  July 2011 | Follow-up interview with the staff ‘observee’ from the pair 2 observation[[5]](#footnote-5) | Viewpoint from a member of staff having been observed | 20 minute interview recorded (DVR) and fully transcribed for coding and analysis. (Meso-systems level.) |
| **Term 1 (2011-2012 year)** October 2011 | Further follow-up discussion with ‘observee’ from Pair 1 observation | This individual had sought feedback from teacher participant after the observation | Opportunity to gain viewpoint on ‘feedback’ element of the process (micro- and meso-systems level).  20 minute interview recorded (DVR) and fully transcribed for coding and analysis. |
| September – December 2011 | Follow-up discussions with learners. | Their interpretation of learner voice, expert learners – what they had gained from the experience, used in their own practice (micro- and meso-systems level).  To provide some interim dissemination to the participants. | Summer break delayed interviews. Learner participants invited to provide additional thoughts via email if they wished to in the interim.  20 - 30 minutes each interview recorded (DVR) and transcribed. One face-to-face, one by phone.  Coded and analysed against continuum. |
| January 2012 | 1 x Individual interview with Curriculum Manager | Informed consent obtained. Management perspective on the project, how it has been enacted or not within the area. Provide some dissemination of interim findings. | Use of interim findings to inform discussion with manager. Involvement of staff in the process, impact on the area and learners. (Meso- and exo-systems level.)  30 minutes interview recorded (DVR) and transcribed.  Coded and analysed. |

As *Table 2.1* shows, it was important that participants fully understood the research project and what their participation involved, and that there were opportunities to discuss “with the students […] what they hoped would happen as a result of their research.” (Thomson and Gunter, 2011: 22) During Term 3 individual interviews were also held with each of the teaching staff being observed to ensure they had a full understanding of the project and their role within this, which was primarily to provide a vehicle for the observing pair to discuss the teaching and learning. Through this process of observation, there were opportunities for all to engage in an active process of inquiry: to “learn by observing, doing and interacting with their beliefs, feelings, experience and understanding of content” (Rigano and Ritchie, 1999: 128). Later in Term 3, these were followed by learners being involved in their own ‘paired’ teaching observations with a member of teaching staff: I was present during these sessions, but not in an ‘active’ role. The aim of my research was to uncover the participants’ perspectives on the learning and context, so I did not want to influence these – or ‘participate’ actively. My purpose was to note down any observations in terms of participant ‘activity’ such as body language during this process, and to ensure I had some background insight into the actual lesson in case there were any difficulties or issues which might have impacted on the participants.

Those observing were provided with a pro-forma (Appendix Three) to note down their thoughts during the observations: this was then used as an aide-memoire during the recorded discussion immediately after the observation. Its purpose was to prompt participants to consider what they might have seen within the lesson which they felt was providing opportunities for learning, and what might be contributing to this (people, context, resources, interactions, etc), or not. It also asked them to reflect on anything within their post-observation discussion with their ‘partner’ which they felt had made an impression on them in terms of their own development. After an observation, the ‘observation’ pair was settled in a quiet and comfortable room, I started the DVR and then withdrew from this process so as not to impinge or impact on their subsequent conversation. At this point there was no requirement for either of the ‘observing pairs’ to provide any feedback to the member of staff who had been observed, although participants’ views were sought on this possibility via the pro-forma. This is further discussed in Chapters Four and Five as one of the *observed* staff did actually request feedback.

The focus of this research was about involving learners in the observation of teaching and learning, to improve the experience for learners, and enable the development of the expert learner (1.2.1). The aim of these observations was to provide a situation within which learners could engage in a reflective conversation with their partner (Chapters Four and Five). It was to provide opportunities for data generation which could then be coded against the two frameworks (communities of practice and ecological learning systems) to support an analysis of the ways in which ‘partners’ interacted, the relationships and language used and evidence of any power-related issues. These were not intended to be situations which might put participants in difficult situations by using them as vehicles for providing ‘feedback’ to the members of staff who had been observed – although feelings around this aspect were varied, and were discussed in the subsequent interviews (Chapters Four and Five). Further individual follow-up discussions were then held with the researcher later, towards the end of Term 3, when participants had had time to reflect on the experience and, where appropriate, participants were invited to respond to some additional specific follow-up questions as findings began to emerge. The two learner participants were also briefly followed-up again in Term 1 of the subsequent academic year to see if they had any further reflections based on their involvement in the process: these were recorded and transcribed, but not fully coded as the intention was simply to identify potential evidence which might support, or differ from, the general findings in the interviews, and the participants’ original feelings about being involved. In addition, following the issuing of informed consent forms, a one-to-one interview was conducted with the Curriculum Manager to discuss the curriculum area’s engagement with learner involvement initiatives. A short discourse analysis was also conducted of the college’s Learner Involvement documentation to identify any evidence of ‘enactment’ of government policies and initiatives. In this way additional context was provided for the research and also it contributed further to the breadth, and triangulation, of the data.

Although emerging findings were disseminated to participants, no copies of the recordings, or transcripts were provided. This was done for a very specific reason: some interviews involved more than one individual, so if one had decided to change, or remove, a section of the transcript this would have impacted on the other participant and may have substantially altered the interaction and sense of flow in the conversation. As the research was focusing on individuals’ perceptions of a process, and their involvement in the action research, I also wanted to ensure that I had captured their initial ‘voice’. With time to reflect, individual participants may have amended some of their original thoughts and this could have impacted on the value and depth of the original data obtained.

Having adopted an action research approach, and looking for any evidence of metacognitive practice, development of ‘identities’ or the ‘expert’ learner, participants were also invited to email me with any further thoughts or subsequent reflections after the interviews if they so wished: there were no expectations, it was merely an invitation. As a reminder, participants were all given the opportunity throughout interviews to refuse to answer a question, to request that the recorder be stopped at any time and without any prejudice, or to withdraw from the research at any time. No participants did so and all were extremely generous with their time: some limited access was experienced in the following academic year due to changes to participant’s roles and places of work and this made contact difficult.

2.4.3 *Interviews*

My ontological position views knowledge as situated and contextual, as a ‘meaningful’ component of [an individual’s] social reality (Mason, 2002). By allowing:

“interviewers to probe and the interviewees to give narratives of incidents and experiences….[it is] likely to result in a more holistic picture of people’s understandings…and elucidate the meanings that research participants attribute to their practices and actions” (Brannen, 2005: 182).

As such it does not become a question of excavating knowledge, rather of constructing or reconstructing knowledge (Mason, 2002) in order to obtain an individual’s perceptions of a situation or context. It is this construction of social reality, of people’s “interpretation of their experiences” (Flood, 2001: 118) which links so firmly to interpretive theory. Deriving data in such an interpretive manner, however, has to be treated cautiously. I may have ‘read’ such interviews for what I *thought* they meant, or what I *thought* could be inferred about something which might have been outside of the actual interview interaction (Mason, 2002). This meant that in addition to generating data from such interviews in a ‘literal’ sense – dialogue, content, sequence – that I also needed to ensure that I was reflexive: I needed to ensure that I also included “something about [my] role, [my] interface with the interaction” (Mason, 2002: 78). In order to add methodological triangulation, in addition to using interviews as a “principle means of understanding people’s experiences and perspectives” (Stringer, 2004: 64), there was also a need to observe settings and events, and to review relevant documentation (Stringer, 2004).

All interviews were recorded on DVRs (with back-up recorder), and these were transcribed verbatim by me, and included pauses and inflections – which might add emphasis to participant’s viewpoints or thoughts. I have been the only person to have access to this full data (further details in 2.6.0).

2.4.4 *Observations*

This method of data generation was only used in a limited way, with my role being that of a ‘non-participant’ (Bell, 2003), during the observation of teaching when there was an opportunity to “record and analyse behaviour and interactions as they occur, although not as a member of the study population” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 35). This approach was useful in identifying non-verbal communication between the two ‘partners’ which I considered may further inform the framework analysis and add detail to the data. These frameworks are based within and around interactions and relationships, around the potential for perceived ‘roles’ and boundaries, and as such I looked for, and noted down, any such instances within body language which were applicable: such as hesitancy, checking on what a ‘partner’ was doing first before committing to action oneself, mimicry of actions. However, this was not an ethnographic study (Mason, 2002), requiring detailed notes and immersion by the researcher within the research setting, nor did it require analysis of any conversations which were ‘observed’. However, in having ‘sat in’ on the teaching observations, I needed to acknowledge that my presence might have had an impact on the lesson being delivered, the non-participant learners within that session, in addition to the participants. I decided that as it was the interaction of the learner and teacher participants actually *doing* the observation, that this was an acceptable factor.

2.4.5 *Discourse analysis*

Since mine is an interpretive stance, and the term ‘discourse’ can be used to capture the “way language is used, what it is used for, and the social context in which it is used” (Punch, 2005), this formed an element of the data generation. Documents, policies and written texts (from the observation process) were ‘read’ and evaluated in terms of “how they are produced, used, what meanings they have, what they are seen to be or to represent culturally speaking” (Mason, 2002: 108). There were also opportunities, through interviews, to generate data which were representative of the individual’s interpretations of these documents and the contextual placement which they held within the organisation. I looked for the use of particular language (associated with the frameworks) and the “ways in which talk and text set out to convince and compete with alternative accounts” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 201). These were ultimately incorporated into the data coding and added further depth to the validity and triangulation of the data.

2.4.6 *Data analysis*

The Literature Review had already identified potential theoretical frameworks which might prove suitable as perspectives through which to view the data. Although very limited, there were references in a few works (Boylan, 2005; Mitra, 2008; and Hodgson and Spours, 2009) to viewing the context of learner involvement against some form of knowledge communities, and the development of ‘the learner’. In the case of Mitra (2008), this was against a community of practice perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991); in the case of Boylan (2005) this was set within a framework of ecological learning systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). Unlike Cockburn (2005) and Shuttle (2007), who focused on learners involved in the direct observation of teaching and learning, these studies concentrated more on the ways in which learners *interacted* with their settings, examining ways in which to both engage with, and empower, learners, and the system levels through which such development might be conducted.

It seemed to me at this point, that there was merit in considering this further and the potential for these system levels and ‘knowledge’ communities to be suitable vehicles through which to analyse and evaluate the data was reviewed. Both frameworks made use of four system levels (Appendix One, *Figures 1* and *2*): the ‘micro’ level of the learner; the ‘meso’ level of professional practice; the ‘exo’ level of institutional, local and regional relations; and the ‘macro’ level of national structures, policy and initiatives. However, the ways in which these levels exchange knowledge, and interact, with each other is very different. The ecological learning system is one where relationships are more fluid, and although still connected, and interconnecting, each level constitutes an *ecology* in its own right. The community of practice, however, is more traditional, with defined roles and ‘rules of engagement’ within and between each system level.

How then was I to use these as a means through which to view the data? Having considered the different frameworks, their similarities and differences, the contexts within which they operated, the nature of the relationships and interrelationships, it became evident that rather than two separate frameworks, what I actually had was a ‘continuum’ of frameworks against which main themes could be analysed (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82). These themes, taken from a review of the relevant literature around these frameworks (Appendix One) focused on several key areas: relationships; working together; information exchange; getting started; knowledge; identity; language; reification; and power. Within each of these main theme headings, further sub-headings were identified which would indicate the behaviours, actions and beliefs which would be representative of each framework on the continuum. This might include, for example, within the main theme of identity, that at the end of the continuum representing communities of practice this would be evidenced by recognised styles of identity, of ‘collective’ agency and of context engaging with ‘actors’. At the opposite end, however, under ecological learning systems, identity might be evidenced by individual actors engaging with context.

Of course, things are seldom this compartmentalised, but what this continuum of frameworks offered, within the research study, was a set of lenses through which to analyse the data emerging from the participants. It provided a starting point from which to begin the first phase of coding and from this, additional codes then emerged from within the data as the analysis progressed (2.4.7, 4.2.0, 5.1.1, 5.2.0). This research, therefore, used the two frameworks of communities of practice and ecological learning systems as lenses through which to view the impact of direct involvement in the observation of teaching and learning. As such, individuals were being viewed as belonging to ‘learning communities’ (Walker and Logan, 2008: 8) and it was the relationships and interactions within these which were of interest. The research evaluated the data against these two frameworks and also sought to establish whether these learning communities belonged only to one of these frameworks, or whether they accessed a combination or variation of these; or whether different aspects of community were accessed in different contexts.

What also needed to be addressed were issues around power as this might have been present in the relationships between the researcher and participants; as well as broader contexts. It might have existed between participants (learner/teacher) and it might also have had the potential to impact on various “actors at every level of organisational and institutional relationships” (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001: 73). This also raised issues around the methodological validity of the research project: if an organisation was seeking to engage and empower its learners then it would need to have recognised that some of the issues considered through these two frameworks focused around power, which could be enacted through knowledge, language and boundaries. As such, there was potential for power inequities within the “processes of knowledge production …. [which could influence] …voice, organisation and action” (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001: 71).

2.4.7 *Data coding and interpretation*

Considering how these frameworks had developed, and the requirements of an interpretive ontology, how were the data to be coded and interpreted? I wanted, and needed, to build links (Stringer, 2004) between different forms and types of data, helping to “weave the argument and analysis derived from the different data sets together intellectually, both ontologically and epistemologically, at the level of explanation” (Mason, 2002: 35), but this needed to be flexible and adaptive to the research requirements. This was of particular importance and significance for this research which was set against a phenomenological ontology and where the data were being interpreted from a qualitative perspective through two frameworks. It was therefore essential within this coding that I was consistent and clear, that my coding labels were meaningful and relevant and that my coding was not limited to a single phase. As the majority of my data were generated through interviews, it was important to have a robust means of coding such qualitative data. However, as I have already stated, a decision was made – after piloting some coding and analysis – not to use a CAQDAS approach (computer-aided qualitative data analysis) employing the specialist computer software NVivo.

All interviews and discussions were therefore transcribed, verbatim, and produced in hard-copies. The framework headings provided coding ‘labels’, which were coloured separately, and text was highlighted appropriately against these, along with sufficient of the surrounding text to contextualise participants’ comments. These broad initial themes were then further refined and coded again against the sub-themes (again coloured differently) identified on this framework continuum (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82). The aim of this phase was to organise the data so that key influences and themes from participants’ perspectives were highlighted. The data were then reviewed again to establish if any of these sub-themes could be rationalised, or grouped, in some way to provide a clearer overview. This also helped to ensure that the meanings and content of any theme, or sub-theme, were clarified.

Although it might appear to be a more ‘old-fashioned’ approach to the coding of the data, when considered against the possibilities provided by a computer software program such as NVivo, it provided an opportunity to physically review complete transcripts side-by-side – or even several transcripts side-by-side. This made it easier to track recurrent themes, or isolated themes, for example, and to have the benefit of the full context within which these occurred, and a sense of the ‘time-line’ within an interview and across interviews. It also made it easier to see the ‘length’ of a comment, or where the interjections came from another participant during an interview: this is discussed further in 4.3.0 (*Table 4.2*: 109). Finally, all themes and sub-themes were checked back against the complete data set to ensure that nothing had been missed, that my original interpretations were credible and had validity, and to ensure that the analysis of the data had been robust and transparent (Chapters Four and Five). It also identified aspects which were outside of these frameworks which related to the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter Three: self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem and self-categorisation theory. This was of particular importance when adopting a qualitative and interpretivist approach (Weber, 2004) as I was very much ‘close by’ throughout the research and seeking to interpret the perceptions individuals have of their own actions and the meanings they attribute to these (2.2.0).

2.5.0 *Methodological validity*

In addressing methodological validity, it is useful first to establish the difference between *reliability* and *validity*: they are not the same. ‘Reliability’ is based within the premise that if a test or procedure were to be done again, it would generate similar results under “constant conditions on all occasions” (Bell, 2003: 103). With interviews, it is looking at whether or not these would be *able* to produce similar results: a difficult question to answer. Interviews can be semi-structured – and mine were – however, interviews are working with participants who are ‘individuals’ and who will therefore be influenced by what is happening, or has happened within their lives, by their reactions and interactions with the interviewer. All of this has to be taken into account when addressing the data generated and the ways in which it has been generated. Whilst posing difficulties, these were fairly straightforward factors. Ensuring ‘validity’ is a somewhat more complex process, particularly when adopting a qualitative research approach. Had this been a quantitative research study then the question of validity would have related to concerns around establishing ‘inference from items to variables, and [..] from variables to factors” (Punch, 2005: 253). With qualitative data, however, the inference is directed towards concepts and data are validated through coding and triangulation (Punch, 2005).

In order, therefore, to achieve ‘validity’ we are looking at whether or not something “tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. If an item is unreliable, then it must also lack validity” (Bell, 2003: 104). It is important, therefore, that the arguments I have made are able to demonstrate that my interpretation was both meaningful and reasonable, whether the “account given in the research connects with the lived experience of the people studied” (Punch, 2005: 29). I needed to be “concerned to show that my interpretation [was] sensitive, appropriately nuanced and valid.” (Mason, 2002: 176) Whilst I might not have combined different methodological approaches – qualitative and quantitative – I did combine different qualitative *methods* to deepen and broaden the data generated and to increase the validity of the research findings. By combining interviews, follow-up conversations, observations and discourse analysis participants were enabled to be ‘active generators’ of the data. This also provided them with platforms from which they were able to contribute phenomenologically to this research.

I needed to be able to demonstrate that I had addressed concerns relating to my “ontological clarity, and the success with which [I] have translated these into a meaningful and relevant epistemology” (Mason, 2002: 188). As such, I have been clear that my ontological perspective was an interpretive one and my epistemology followed a qualitative approach. The aim of action research was to empower participants so that they could go on to construct their own knowledge, for them to be able to create their own relationships between theory and practice through the discourses they engaged with. For these participatory methods to have had the potential to “link theory to the practice” (Seale, 2010: 1000) in order to provide a ‘voice’ to learners, and to find out what that voice looks like and what it is capable of. Use of surveys and questionnaires – a more quantitative approach – might have ensured an easier route to ‘validity’; however, they were not considered a suitable alternative. Wanting to obtain individual participant’s views and phenomenological perspectives, the use of such data gathering tools would have placed the participants as “objects of another’s inquiry, rather than subjects of their own” (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001: 75). Having chosen an interpretive stance, however, I needed to ensure that I had shown why particular methods and data sources were utilised and how “the capacity of *this* interviewee or document, or *this* set of questions, or *this* interaction” (Mason, 2002: 189) have informed the concepts I have investigated.

2.6.0 *Ethics*

With such close interaction as a researcher with the participants, matters of an ethical nature take on an additional dimension, particularly when the majority of those involved work in the same institution. It is not, of course, possible to embark on any research without considering the ethical implications which should be an integral component throughout the entirety of any research – and no research should be conducted without first having gained approval (BERA, 2004). Participants were only involved with research once they had been provided with sufficient information to enable them to give their “informed consent” (Sin, 2005). Yet what is meant by ‘informed consent’? Sometimes individuals ‘sign up’ to something without truly having understood the degree of commitment, or having fully understood the nature of the research. To this end it was vital that all participants were reassured that they could leave the project at any point and that at each interview, or contact, participants were asked if they were still happy to continue.

Before any research was undertaken, therefore, formal approval was obtained from the University via the submission of Research Outline and Ethical Approval forms. Authorisation was also obtained from my organisation to ensure there was comprehensive understanding of the research and the involvement of participants. In addition, regular meetings were held with a Supervisory Team to monitor my conduct and the research undertaken. At its most basic level, questions were also considered about whether it was worth doing, how research outcomes were to be disseminated, the availability to others of data collected and to whom the data and findings should be reported. Records of data and methods used also needed to be available to others for scrutiny after the study had been completed.

Participants were fully informed of protocols around recordings prior to any interviews being conducted: the right of volunteers to ‘opt out’ at any point during the research or interviews; to have the recorder stopped; to choose not to answer questions, without explanation; to have assurances of anonymity and confidentiality; and to have interviews conducted in a private and comfortable environment. In addition, participants were provided with full details of my role, my supervisors, where interviews would take place and the outline purpose and questions on which the research was focused. DVRs (digital voice recorders) were held securely in a locked draw to which only I had access, and all transcribed interviews and data were password-protected. From a human rights and data protection perspective, and as the sample was so small, it was essential that participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their data (2.4.1), and that the research was conducted with honesty and integrity. To overcome any possible ethical issues around the non-participant learners who were, of necessity, present in the classes during the observations, the member of teaching staff in charge of the lesson ensured that learners had been informed of the context of what was happening and reassured that their involvement was not being recorded in any way. As mentioned earlier in this section, there were also additional issues around conducting research with participants where the majority of these were colleagues. Although there were benefits to this in terms of having been able to establish strong levels of trust very quickly, I needed to acknowledge that there might also be issues around ‘power’ relations within the interview interaction (Mason, 2002).

Having established a sound methodological approach, clear method and issues around validity and ethics, the next stage in the process was to address the theoretical perspectives being considered in respect of these individuals.

**Chapter Three – Theoretical Concepts**

3.1.0 *Introduction: how goes the journey and where does it end – as student, disciple or master?*

Within the research focus (1.2.0; 1.2.1) the aim has been to investigate not only how government policy and initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b) have been implemented by organisations in order to develop the ‘expert learner’ but also the extent to which these aims have been achieved – if at all. At the heart of this is the learner and how ‘able’ or ‘enabled’ they feel, to become involved with such initiatives. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the theoretical concepts of self-perception and sense of ‘placement’: a sense of learner ‘identity’ and potential trajectories; where it might be possible for an individual to start and end their journey(s), and what happens on the way. It is about metacognitive ‘potential’ and how an individual internalises their experiences from a variety of settings and interactions (Glaser, 1999; Rudd *et al.* 2006; McCune, 2009).

The aim of this research, therefore, has been to evaluate how, if at all, learners may deepen involvement in the development of their own learning, via the direct observation of teaching and learning. How this might be achieved, and the methodological approaches taken, were discussed in Chapter Two: the more specific questions relating to the potential development of the ‘expert’ learner having been put forward for consideration in section 2.1.0. The underlying premise focused around ways in which understanding of the self, and others, is not only possible – but perhaps **more** possible – if attempts are made to view experiences from ‘the inside out” (Marsh, *et al.* 2001: 393). Such a suggestion does, however, raise questions around how this could be achieved. Could it, perhaps, be argued that:

“…‘self-made’ people do not achieve success on their own, that they do it with the support of their colleagues, friends and family…[with no individual being] completely independent or autonomous, but rather, interdependent and contextualised within a social setting.” (Marsh, *et al.* 2001: 381)

If learners could work together, learn by talking to each other, and to teaching staff – to ‘experts’ – in effect coming to know the ‘inside’ of others, then perhaps such collaboration could be used as a route for learners to follow. Such actions, however, imply that there is an element of encouraging learners to assume some degree of responsibility and ownership along the way – for them to have a feeling of control about what is happening and where they are going. Whilst it has become an almost worn out cliché in the media for anyone who has participated in an ‘event’ that has impacted in some way on their life - to have “been on a journey” – in essence, it is this ‘journey’ and what happens on it, where it starts and ends, how it does or does not get there, that will be analysed in Chapters Four and Five.

3.2.0 *Self-perceptions*

To enable this to happen, the research considers how individuals make sense of themselves – understanding who they are as an individual, where they have come from – and where it might be possible for them to travel to: “Self and identity researchers have long believed that the self is both a product of situations and a shaper of behaviour in situations” (Oyserman, *et al.* 2011: 5). If this is so, then it could be assumed that self and identity may predict, or influence, what individuals are motivated to do, “how they make sense of themselves and others, the actions they take, their feelings and ability to control or regulate themselves” Oyserman *et al.* (*ibid*: 5).

Young Caine had no doubts. For him it mattered not that he was the first person of mixed-race, rather than pure Chinese, parentage to seek acceptance into the temple, his pathway was set before him: to enter the temple as a student, to become a disciple and perhaps one day to achieve the status of ‘master’. His ‘identity’ and his perceptions of what he could achieve were strong and well-defined and he was prepared to wait patiently for days to be accepted into the Shaolin temple as a ‘novice’, his ultimate goal was always clear – to become a fully-fledged Shaolin monk. It is these *phenomenological perceptions* within, and around an individual, which are my focus. It is the ‘identity’ that the learner assumes, or feels *able* to assume: a concept underpinned by such issues as self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness. It is about how such ‘identities’ frame what is meaningful or relevant to a learner (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), how learners develop a sense of where they have come from and where they are going to – their learning ‘trajectory’. Identities can thus focus on the past, the present, or the future: “the person I feel obliged to become, or the person I fear I may become” (Oyserman, *et al.* 2011: 2).

3.2.1 *Self-concept*

There is a clear construct at work here – that of ‘self-concept’ – that image we have of ourselves, the kind of person whom we believe we are, and to some extent, the reflection of how others view us: the “looking glass self” (Cooley, 1902). It is, in effect, the:

“product of our constructive efforts […which] refers to the cognitive aspects of the self-system and expresses subjective knowledge people have of themselves as psychological and physical beings. It is the answer to the question ‘Who am I’?” (Schaffer, 2000: 159)

This self-concept, however, does not remain static, rather it changes dependent upon the introspection with which we all indulge: “the ‘I’ watching the ‘me’.” (Schaffer, 2000: 159) Perceived ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ can impact on this self-concept, of how we view ourselves in the ‘looking glass’, of how great, or small, is the imagined gap between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘perceived real self’ (Schaffer, 2000). So, what else might impact on this perceived competence? What other questions might an individual ask of themselves in relation to their abilities and capabilities? What – or who – influences this ‘construct’ of the *ideal* or *perceived real self*?

Self-concept can be regarded as that part of an individual’s self-schema which comprises of “affective perceptions as well as competency perceptions” (Hughes *et al.* 2011: 278) and it is accompanied by value judgements about the self and one’s own ‘self-worth’. In contrast, self-efficacy perceptions ask questions based on “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997a: 3) – it will ask the ‘Can I do…?’ questions, whereas self-concept perceptions ask the ‘Am I good at…?’ questions. For these learner participants, self-efficacy judgements may thus typically be tied to a specific domain or situation based on ‘mastery’ experiences (Bandura, 1997a). In contrast, self-concept judgements are “more general and less context dependent, and more likely to be based on environmental experiences, and social and self-comparisons” (Hughes *et al.* 2011: 278). So will we see evidence of these theoretical concepts leaning towards either a community of practice (Bandura, 1997a), or an ecological learning system (Hughes *et al.* 2011)?

In Chapter Two (2.2.0) the ontological position of this research was based clearly in idealism (Stringer, 2004): within an individual’s perceptions and views on their experiences, and how the subjectivity of those interpretations informs and shapes how that individual interacts with their world (Samdahl, 1999; Weber, 2004; Kelliher, 2005; Bryman, 2008). It is against this interpretivist epistemology that the theoretical concepts are reviewed, helping us to understand why, and how, that journey can be different for each individual. For learners to become ‘expert’ one would imagine that their ‘learning’ needs to be meaningful on a personal level, with activity:

“motivation and learning [all being] related to a need for a positive sense of identity (or positive self-esteem), shaped by social forces. Learning, as a deliberate activity, might be driven by the need for self-esteem in a number of ways.” (Mayes, 2002: 169)

However, the source of this ‘meaning’ may differ for the individual. The emphasis may be on the interaction with these ‘others’, rather than the activity. Or, it could be that the meaning itself is “attached to an activity that is derived from a community of practice [and it is] the individual’s identity [which] is shaped by the relationship to the community itself” (Mayes, 2002: 169).

The participant learners are volunteers, but we cannot know *exactly* why they volunteered to be involved in the research. Various reasons are given during interviews (4.2.1), including those related to the individual’s self-concept and their perceptions of their identity. By being involved in the research, did this magnify the ‘looking glass’ effect (Cooley, 1902; Oyserman, *et al.* 2011)? Did it provide opportunities for participants to feel that they were ‘able’ to become part of a community of practice? Did they have a need for some form of *reinforcement* of their self-esteem which participation in such a research project might generate?

It has already been mentioned that identity and self-concept are flexible and can change. Our perceptions are used to “define ourselves by what we are not as well as by what we are, by the communities we do not belong to as well as by the ones we do” (Wenger, 2000: 173). We thus begin to establish our sense of identity and to use our self-concept to answer the question “Who am I?” This in turn, begins to define those with whom we feel *able* to identify and those attributes and values needed in order to do so. We begin to consider the circumstances, and contexts, under which an individual might either ‘contrast’ – or ‘include’ – themselves with others when making their self-judgements, and whether commitment to such an identity is stable and fixed, or malleable. So, if such information becomes used to “organise self-concept, [then] a person may become schematic for the domain” (Oyserman *et al.* 2011: 10). This would imply that individuals are able to process, and comprehend, information which is deemed more relevant – more familiar – much more quickly and efficiently. Might this, therefore, also imply that individuals act in a way, or ways, which fit such schematic concepts?

3.2.2 *Self-categorisation*

With this developing sense of ‘self’ including “various dispositions (habits of mind, predilections to view the world in particular ways), a certain kind of self-confidence and competence, and feelings of entitlement and power” (Greeno *et al*. 1996: 139), it may be that participants viewed their involvement as a means to enhance their self-efficacy and self-concept. For this to provide opportunities to improve their self-esteem by reducing, or eliminating, the gap between their “imagined ideal and the ‘perceived real self’ identified by the individual” (Schaffer, 2000: 164), thus creating a *new* identity in the process. This revised self-image could, potentially, provide a means through which to ‘blend in’ with or to ‘penetrate’ a community or group which was previously inaccessible to the individual (Turner, *et al.* 1994*;* Woods, 1999). It may also be a means through which to reflect ‘membership’ in a particular role which involves another ‘party’ playing a complementary role. For example, one cannot be a “parent without children, a student without teachers” (Oyserman *et al.* 2011:13) – a master without an apprentice.

This self-categorisation can similarly be recognised in the ways in which individuals define themselves as:

“distinct and unique compared to others (referred to as personal identity – “I” or “me”), and as similar to others as group members (referred to as social identity – “we” and “us”). (Bizumic *et al.* 2009: 173)

Identity, or one’s sense of self, can be seen, therefore, as the *possibilities* with which one envisages being able to engage: the *trajectories of participation* which become available – the “achievement of agency” (TRLP, 2008[[6]](#footnote-6)). However, such experiences are not always ‘successful’. If good experiences can have a positive impact on an individual’s self-concept and self-esteem, increasing a sense of agency, should we not also consider the impact of poor experiences? If this is the case, these issues should also be addressed in terms of the impact involvement in this research might have had on the participants (Chapters Four and Five).

3.3.0 *Identities*

Yet this does not address the distinction between a *personal* and a *social* identity: between the relative importance of each in relation to the specific situation. This appears almost to be an extension of the self-concept, to be a deeper analysis which is based on self-categorisation theory, with the “individual now [becoming] defined more by a group or community and their motivation to learn [now being] derived from the need to carry out the activities of the group.” (Mayes, 2002: 169) It is about the ways in which we define ourselves, or consider ourselves to be defined by others. This self-categorisation theory, therefore, evaluates the ‘perceiver’ in relation to the social context (Turner, *et al.* 1994). So, at this point, is it the community which becomes the driving force behind an individual’s motivation? Is it, therefore, the *personal* or the *social* identity which is evidenced in the interviews with the learners (4.2.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.2), and is there only one identity or many? Whilst we may perceive a single identity, a learner’s understanding of who they are may well encompass several identities which may be fluid. Such identities may not work in harmony, resulting in tensions between these different ‘strands’ of identity (Turner, 1999; McCune, 2009). They may also evidence the individual’s sense of ‘trajectory’: their place in a network of relationships; how they interpret their personal history – both as a learner and as an individual – and their perceptions about how they would ‘like to be’ in the future (McCune, 2009).

Is there any evidence, therefore, for a link between a ‘sense of competence’ and a willingness to engage; for a sense of self-efficacy being present – even being **necessarily** present – if a learner **is** to ‘engage’? According to Bandura (1997a: 223):

“People need a sense of efficacy to apply what they know consistently, persistently, and skilfully, especially when things are not going well and deficient performances carry negative consequences.”

What happens, however, when self-efficacy is less than robust? How does an individual cope with situations whereby performances are going ‘less’ well? Sfard and Prusak (2005) suggest that learning can be the means through which an individual might close the gap between where they perceive themselves to be at any given point, and where they anticipate being in the future. Their involvement in such processes provides opportunities for learners to influence their identities in some way and to become valid members of a community (Baxter-Magolda, 1999). This would, however, rely on individuals being able to contribute in a way that is recognised and accepted as ‘competence’. If unable to do so, they would identify themselves as non-participants and this would *inhibit* their ability to learn (Wenger, 1998). This would raise further questions here: if, in order to have some credibility in the learning process an individual requires validation from elsewhere, then how would this facilitate an individual’s capacity for ‘self-authorship’ and their journey towards becoming an expert learner? How would it address issues around potential power relationships and conflicts? Marsh *et al.* (2001: 385) suggest there are issues around *allowing:*

“learners to take responsibility, [thus] implying a particular power relationship from the outset. Self-direction and self-responsibility is defined, monitored and measured by tutors who are in a position to both allow and disallow students from exercising such responsibility.”

Were this to be the case, then rather than – or at least in addition to – the cognitive aspects of a learner being important in defining the potential identity and learning trajectory of the individual, the implication is that it would be the ‘personal characteristics’ and the ‘fit’ of the learner in their learning environment and context, which would be important. We could expect to see evidence relating to intergroup relations, of the different ways in which individual members of a group react to situations dependent upon their “different locations in the social structure” (Turner, 1999: no page numbers).

Is it, therefore, about recognising the self-concept in others to engage in a sharing of experiences with them, and also, using this almost as an additional resource for oneself and the development of one’s own self-concept? Is it the “learning potential of the collective as opposed to just the learning potential of the individual” (Clarke *et al.* 2005: 159)? Is this self-transformation characterized by varying layers of action and interaction? It is suggested that learning is “understood as a dynamic process of social interaction and participation”, whereby the relationship between individuals and their learning community/communities is the impetus behind an “individual’s self-regulative knowledge” (Inaba, 2006: 121) and their development as a learner. This may go some way towards explaining what is happening at ‘context’ level, but does it get us any closer to understanding one very fundamental question: how does an expert learner differ from a novice learner, and how are they defined?

3.4.0 *The ‘expert’ learner*

Metacognition, or awareness of the process of learning, is regarded as a key component and skill required to be a ‘successful’ learner. However, although individuals may be considered, or consider themselves, as ‘expert’ this does not mean that they know *how* to learn. This step involves learners having devised strategies that work best for them as an individual, and being able to recognise when to use them and when to move on to something else. Hughes *et al.* (2011: 278) add further depth to this issue: “self-concept perceptions are directed toward previous experiences, whereas self-efficacy perceptions represent confidence for completing tasks that are imminent.” In order for learners to be successful, individuals need to believe that they can learn and develop: they need to have a learning identity which is fluid and capable of being flexible and adaptive (Kolb and Kolb, 2010). They need to be able to nurture their identity through such cognitive growth, with self-identity theory predicting that:

“it is through a process of internalization that self-identity tied to a behaviour becomes a more salient aspect of an individual’s overall self-concept, thus increasing in importance as a source of future action as well as consistency of action.” (Celluch, *et al*. 2010: 256)

In other words, this assimilation and accommodation of ‘behaviour’ reinforces not just self-concept, but also self-efficacy: and self-efficacy similarly acts as an important motivational construct. An individual who is deemed to be ‘expert’ will thus be aware of the knowledge and skills they do, or do not, possess. Expert learners will:

“use the knowledge they have gained of themselves as learners, of task requirements, and of specific strategy use to deliberately select, control and monitor strategies needed to achieve desired learning goals.” (Ertmer and Newby, 1996: 1)

However, it is important that we recognise that without sufficient “domain-specific knowledge” (Veenman *et al.* 2006: 5), it is very difficult to have adequate metacognitive knowledge of one’s competences in a domain. There has to be at least a degree of competence and knowledge in relation to relevant concepts, theories and basic facts before one can engage any aspects of metacognitive skills: there has to be something against which an individual can check.

3.5.0 *Conclusion*

So, when learners are involved in the ‘observation’ of teaching and learning they need to have something that they can relate to: where the environment and context is a familiar one (2.3.0). In this way, self-assessment and self-regulation can be more accurate as the individual inhabits a space which is familiar to them. However, this does not negate the need for individuals to be capable of recognising the difference between knowledge and skills – the declarative as against the procedural knowledge. In this way, it is envisaged that individuals engage with those mental processes which enable them to plan, to adjust, and to revise their strategies and approaches to learning.

If we take Bandura’s (1997b) perspective that it is an observer’s *capacities* to process information which inform the extent to which an individual may benefit from ‘observed’ experiences, then the inference is that:

“The educational implication of the application of metacognitive strategies such as self-awareness and self-monitoring is to **develop independent learners who can control their own learning and learn how to learn for life** (author’s emphasis)” (Papaleontiou-Louca, 2008: ix)

The aim of this research is to investigate ways in which learners may become involved more directly in teaching and learning, improving both their own knowledge and experiences and that of others involved in the learning process. The research involves learner participants in the ‘observation’ of a lesson and subsequent discussions and reflection around what they have seen. It enables learners, by providing opportunities to understand both their own perceptions – and that of others involved in the process – to become independent, autonomous and ‘expert’, and to realise:

“..that understanding of the self and others is possible only when attempts are made to view experiences from ‘the inside out’. But [in the process recognising that] the inside is as challenging to learn about as the outside.” (Marsh *et al.* 2001: 393)

**Chapter Four – Data Analysis: the Frameworks**

4.1.0 *Introduction: towards journey’s end?*

The original Literature Review considered how learners in a Further Education setting could be directly involved in the observation of teaching and learning, in order to improve the teaching and learning experience for both teachers and learners (Cockburn, 2005). The key policy drivers were designed to establish a culture of learner involvement: through individuals; through the ‘collective’ body; and with learners contributing to the development of the organisation. Chapter Four thus brings our focus on to the two theoretical frameworks (communities of practice and ecological learning systems) and what the findings are beginning to reveal as the data are analysed.

As the nature of these two frameworks has been considered in detail within the Literature Review the aim of this chapter is to briefly reconsider the main points of these and to introduce the continuum of ‘practice’ which developed as a result of studying the literature and consideration of the emerging data during the research process. In this chapter, the analysis will focus on the data up to and including the actual observation process. In Chapter Five the focus then becomes much more individual and reflective as participants contemplate and evaluate their engagement with the research, the implications for themselves and the organisation.

4.1.1 *Revisiting our ‘communities’ of learning*

Communities of practice view ‘members’ as having various stages of involvement and ‘rights of participation’. Referred to as shared modes of ‘belonging’ these are represented by varying degrees of ‘mutuality’: for Wenger (2000) these comprise of ‘engagement’, ‘imagination’ and ‘alignment’. Each of these, whether enacted as separate components or combined aspects, enable individuals to co-construct an image of the community – and themselves – which results in a co-ordination of beliefs, of interpretation and decisions. This encourages the development of a sense of belonging which becomes further enhanced through the norms, relationships and shared repertoire developed by the individuals within the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000). Individuals – or groups of individuals – within a community are then expected to commit to the roles within that community environment in order to reinforce individual identities: this in turn strengthens the bonds within the community and develops mutual respect, trust and norms (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006). Communities thus generate established practices, including language, with “relationships between language and other elements of the social process” and this in turn begins to represent acceptable “ways of being or identities” (Tusting, 2005). In this way, ‘knowledge’ – and knowing how to talk about it – becomes evidence of an individual’s *placement* within the community:

“For newcomers then the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 121)[[7]](#footnote-7)

The literature provides a picture of communities where the levels of expertise and authority can be imbalanced, by both default and tradition (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998 and 2000). Participation by ‘newcomers’, or those with less experience, can be either enabled, or even hindered, by those with more established positions, and the collective ‘identity’ of the community defined “as much by whom and what they exclude as by what they contain” (Harris and Shelswell, 2005: 168). Such defined ‘identities’ can exist both within, and at the periphery – or boundaries – of communities of practice, with a wide range of roles being seen: these can act as the link(s) between and across separate entities. Members of a community may become boundary spanners (crossing one specific boundary over time) or boundary roamers (moving around, moving knowledge around and creating connections). They may act as boundary outposts, bringing back news, exploring new territories, or even as a member of a boundary pair - who ‘broker’ through personal relationships. All of these aspects, therefore, also have the potential to result in the presence, or absence, of conflict and tensions and issues around the locus of power.

What then, might be seen in a community based within an ecological learning system? Relationships are still regarded as ‘inter-connected’ within this perspective, however they are more fluid and interactions are multi-directional and have a different emphasis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). Links and ‘bonds’ are more collaborative, with potential for greater ‘fluidity’ across boundaries; concepts of ‘norms’ and ‘behaviours’ are less formalised with a sense of greater “collaborative enterprise by different partners at different levels of the system as they prepare a shared framework for creative action “(Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17). There may still, therefore, be the same sense of shared values and purposes as are evidenced within a community of practice, but the constraints and expectations are much looser.

In contrast to communities of practice, with ‘norms’, ‘routines’ and ‘repertoires’ embedded within the very structure of the community, values and a sense of purpose tend to emerge from the *collaborative* nature of ecological learning systems. There is a concept of ‘partnership’, rather than the ‘master-apprentice’ model of a community of practice. There may still be a sense of ‘joint enterprise’, but the emphasis is on interdependent and bi-directional exchanges and actions. There do not appear to be any comparable ‘brokering’ or ‘boundary’ roles as in communities of practice, but this does not mean that they do not exist – they may simply appear differently, or be more transitory in their nature and so difficult to identify. Similarly, there may still be a shared development of ‘outcomes’ and we should not envisage that a collaborative learning environment does not come without tensions, constraints or issues around power. Agency is not achieved by having a created and defined identity as a result of belonging within one environment (community of practice); rather it is achieved as a result of transactional engagement with one or more environments (ecological learning systems). Even where identities and relationships are not readily identifiable as being ‘bound’ by traditional concepts, as with communities of practice, it may be that the concepts of these still exist as a result of interactions within and across the various system levels – there has, however, just been less research into these aspects.

Both of these frameworks were reviewed within the context of four separate ‘system’ levels: ‘*micro’, ‘meso’, ‘exo’* and ‘*macro’ –* each ofwhich has been reviewed previously in this study (1.2.0). The research has focused on ‘how’ and ‘where’ individuals (both learners and teachers) might act and be acted upon through their involvement in lesson observations. How relationships within, and across, these settings might evolve – both over time and through involvement with the action research project. With all of these factors in mind, the following continuum of ‘practice’ was devised (*Table 4.1*) and the headings were used to identify themes within the data: these headings are in no set order and do not define the level of importance assigned to a particular theme. However, some of these themes were *stronger* and more prevalent than others and this chapter separates out the data analysis accordingly with the first sections of this focusing on the major themes, and subsequent sections discussing more minor findings. Within each of these sections, data are analysed against both frameworks as appropriate in order to enable a balanced and detailed analysis and review. Where evidence indicates something ‘additional’ to these frameworks, this will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

*Table 4.1. Continuum of Practice*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| From ………. | Continuum | To………. |
| *Communities of practice* | *Ecological learning systems* |
|  | **Relationships** |  |
| Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflicting |  | Transitory, more fluid – a functioning unit, collaborative; changing temporal orientations and relationships to other structures |
|  | **Working together** |  |
| Joint enterprise – shared ways of engaging in doing things together |  | Interdependent relationships; impact on other areas of work and life |
|  | **Information exchange** |  |
| The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation |  | Bi-directional influences (transactional);actor and environment affected by engagement |
|  | **Getting started/progress** |  |
| Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an on-going process |  | Routes and outcomes develop within contexts that are changing and subject to re-evaluation and reflection |
| Very quick set up of a problem to be discussed |  | New forms of collaboration, self-organising and adaptive |
| Substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs |  | Environment evolves and changes naturally as a result of actions |
|  | **Knowledge** |  |
| Knowing what others know, what they can do and how they can contribute to an enterprise; enactment of particular roles (master-apprentice) |  | Strongest influences impact in two directions: mutual interaction, including peer-to-peer; active decision-making |
|  | **Identity** |  |
| Mutually defining identities; value placed upon knowledge and position within the community; identity ratified and given value by others |  | Capacity/influence to shape wider sense of local identities; identity created through transactions with others |
| The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products |  | Individual actors engage with context |
| Certain styles recognised as displaying membership; ‘collective’ agency; context engages with ‘actors’ |  | Sense of ‘self’ not as a component within community of practice: agency |
|  | **Language** |  |
| Specific tools, representations and other artefacts |  | Informal, not structured |
| Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter; conforming; dependency |  | Independent, non-conformist |
| Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones |  | Language represents the individual, the system level, does not need to move across |
|  | **Reification** |  |
| A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world |  | Variable and changing orientations; individual perspectives |
|  | **Power** |  |
| Hierarchical, value placed upon knowledge and position |  | Devolution of power |

4.2.0 *Framework analysis*

In this chapter the continuum, based on the two frameworks, has been used to analyse the data in terms of general findings emerging from the interviews and discussions. The focus is on the broader elements of the analysis in relation to the frameworks and the identified themes. More detailed consideration of the impact for, and on, individuals and the organisation, being discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2.1 *Identity*

We have briefly revisited the nature of identities within communities of practice, and ecological learning systems (4.1.1) and also considered the impact of theoretical concepts on the development of the ‘self’ and potential identities in Chapter Three. So, how did the theme of ‘identity’ appear in the data analysis? Firstly, let us consider the participants and why they got involved. Previous research where learners have been involved in the observation of teaching and learning is sparse (Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008) – and used learners who were *selected* to be participants by their organisations. The participants involved in this research project were not selected, although the curriculum area was identified and a purposive sample was used (2.4.1), but the individuals involved all volunteered to participate after the research proposal was described to the wider cohort of learners and staff. So, why did they volunteer? Having volunteered, would they change or adapt their behaviour in order to be perceived as a ‘member’ of a community – in this instance a community engaged with teaching practice – in order to be perceived as ‘belonging’ (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000; Inaba, 2008; McCune, 2009)?

Let us look first at the trainee teachers involved – the ‘learners’ in this research context. Both participants, Charlie and Alex, are experienced teachers completing their DTLLS teaching qualification. At the time of the research, they were finishing their second year and both had experience in vocational areas; Alex also had experience in an academic curriculum area. Charlie had very clear reasons for being involved: to develop skills around “critical analysis” (Int1) and being able to contribute to influencing and shaping wider identities within the classroom. Having been involved in a smaller action research project previously, Charlie related to how his/her own learners had developed as a result of their involvement: “they felt like they were part of something, being asked to contribute” (Int1). This was an opportunity to shape and develop practice, not as a member of a ‘community of practice’, but rather as an individual actor within an ecological learning system. At this stage, Alex was more flippant to start with, laughing about increased “participation with the high-ranking members of the establishment…. to climb the greasy pole…. [in order to] see what those in power think… ”(Int3). However, Alex and Charlie were both eager to participate in the observation process and displayed a strong sense of ‘self’. Alex was also confident about reviewing – and using – his/her knowledge from the first year for the ‘benefit’ of the learners in order to open up:

“…feedback, a kind of cross-feedback between learners who have done it and those who are at a higher level of the same thing….I’ve been trying to break through to some of the year ones and offer them assistance [laughs]…but whether they’re too busy, or too proud, or think me outside the relevance….what relates to them” (Int3).

Alex’s self-perception reflected an individual who had knowledge which was of *value* to the other learners, linking to the communities of practice aspect of identity. Alex wanted to ‘impart’ some of the experiences he/she had had on the first year and for this to be developmental for the course and the learners. In this interview Alex also referred to his/her teaching partner Gerry in terms of *belonging* to the “teaching profession”, following this with a comment that “As a teacher myself” he/she related to Gerry’s need to be ‘practising intellectuals’ who are “engaged in a constant process of improvement” (Int3): or at least this was Alex’s perception of a ‘shared’ professional role which placed him/her on an ‘equal’ footing. There were aspects here of mutually defining identities which were ratified by others – of practice which displayed membership of a formal ‘community’. This was further reinforced during discussions about providing feedback to the teacher who had been observed: Alex felt strongly that such feedback needed to be given from a ‘first-hand’ perspective so that it does not attempt “to be sensitive and therefore it occludes areas of meaning, it simply hides them because it can’t express them…it can’t develop on these things” (Int3). Such a comment links with a community of practice viewpoint where the individual is assessing the appropriateness of actions.

The second research interview undertaken was a joint one with the two members of teaching staff – Sam and Gerry who each partnered one of the trainee teachers. As very experienced teachers, with a long history of working together, the discussion was very quickly underway and there was a free-flow of information between them. In terms of data relevant to this theme, there was very little. These are individuals who are well-established in their careers, and there was only one comment from Gerry which could be attributed to this theme of identity in relation to value placed upon knowledge and position within a community of practice:

“I’m sure they’re both[[8]](#footnote-8) interested in going in to see any teacher because going in and observing teachers…..it means you learn things about your own teaching by watching other people. I’m sure that will be one of the things they will want to do….[…]…I’m sure that probably, one of the reasons that they’ve volunteered must be that they want to engage with us in those conversations and they’re obviously quite keen to have discussions about practice…….so it can be the process of observing, but possibly also the process of discussion is appealing as well.” (Gerry, Int2)

During Gerry and Alex’s post-observation discussion (no researcher present), there was a brief conversation about the appropriateness of the observation pro-forma provided (Appendix Three). Although Alex had previously expressed a liking for the document during a one-to-one discussion with the researcher, in the exchange with Gerry, Alex began to say that he/she felt “slightly shackled by this thing – these three points, three steps….” (Int5). However, when Gerry took a slightly different stance, arguing that it was designed to support the “evidential observation….what’s happening at the time, what contributed to it…” (Int5), Alex concurred quite quickly:

“Because I think I was figuring it out (me too – from Alex) as I was going along. It’s talking about opportunities for learning. Where we saw opportunities for learning and where we felt learning might not have been taking place and then the questions following all the way through (I didn’t see that, right – from Alex)” (Gerry, Int5).

There was no argument, just rather a very rapid agreement, with Gerry’s proposal, thus ratifying Gerry’s position – and identity – as the more experienced member of the partnership. This pattern of ‘agreement’ and ‘positioning’ of the individual was further evidenced in an extended conversation following on from this point.

In Sam and Charlie’s post-observation discussion, the participants discussed the start of the observation, the input of learners, the layout of the room, etc. During this exchange, there were fairly lengthy comments from each which evidenced how the individual actors were engaging with the context, as might be anticipated within an ecological learning system. Each participant had clearly stated views, yet there was an *easy* feel to the conversation on the recording. There was a *natural* ebb and flow between the two participants and frequent ‘transactions’ in the conversation – which was also coded under ‘*language’* (4.2.3). There was some ‘talking over’ each other within this which was impossible to decipher on the recording, however, the frequency of the interactions between the two participants can still be seen within the following extract:

“Yeah, 3 made some contributions, 6 didn’t make any – that’s, that’s just within that 15 minutes not the whole thing…..so it seemed like there was a shift there as the group (yeah – from Charlie)….. so I wonder if….. I sometimes use that layout when it’s, in this room here, where there’s 8 desks (yeah – from Charlie) really looking at a maximum of 10 people (yeah – from Charlie) usually 7 or 8, (yeah – from Charlie), erm, but I’m surprised to see it used with that many students (yeah - Charlie). That could, that can justify what you’re saying about how it seemed to work quite well when there were, you know, only 6 people at the beginning wasn’t there, (mm, mm – from Charlie), something like that, then by the end, (counting out loud) to 13 by the end (yeah – from Charlie), erm, so, yeah, it did seem to make it difficult. Now, I think also, it does kind of make it quite teacher centred maybe? (yeah - from Charlie)” (Sam, Int6)

“Yeah, I thought that myself, but then Chris did, Chris did do a lot of questioning and they (yeah – from Sam) did do a lot of answering so it didn’t…. it wasn’t so much all one way (no, no – from Sam) it wasn’t just Chris talking, but yeah, it does put Chris in the centre of things..” (Charlie, Int6)

“It does kind of bring it back ….I have though, I thought, I thought I mean what I liked about her/his questioning was, there was a good amount of time (yes – from Charlie) to answer and Chris didn’t answer the questions for them (no, it was very open, deep questioning – from Charlie)….. he/she did, … tended, rather than repeating an answer, Chris tended to kind of, kind of summarise them, or add extras to them which I thought was quite good (yeah, I agree – from Charlie). But, I think he/she tried to target questions but then it just got pulled away by the same three each time (yeah! – from Charlie). you know I noticed that Chris was looking to the left…..(looking to the right – from Charlie)……[then laughter and both talking together here for around 20 seconds …..] and….Yeah, Chris had (yes, she/he was looking to the right to try and get them to contribute more – from Charlie)” (Sam, Int6)

The recorded discussion, which continued for some time like this between these two individuals, also considered what impact *their* presence might have had on the session being observed, recognising what influence they may have had on shaping the identities of the learners – and the member of staff – during that period. The researcher was also present in the actual observation so is mentioned as the *third wise monkey*!

“Yes, and this is an interesting thing actually related to that, erm, I wonder what impact we had….. sitting as the three wise monkeys (yeah – Charlie laughs) hear no evil, see no evil and do no evil we were all there scribbling away (Sam laughs) and I think I’m always, I had a student tell me once that, you know, they can tell how the observation is going by the (Sam laughs) look on the face – I tried to remain impassive, but I suspect I might have frowned when they did that mocking and…..”(Sam, Int6)

“yeah, I thought they seemed to stop and I didn’t realise that you’d looked at them as well but (yeah and she (learner) did look straight at me – Charlie talking over Sam here) I frowned and…. Before trying to remain impassive, so…. it’s interesting, it would be interesting to know what impact did we have…… and that also related to the contributions (yeah from Charlie) you know, did that stop people from contributing or not? Did it change the nature of those contributions?” (Sam, Int6)

“I think the teacher, erm, coped well with being observed…he/she seemed quite steady and, erm, I know from past experience when I’m being observed – laughs - I seem to rush everything and erm, Chris, she/he remained calm.” (Charlie, Int6)

These fairly extended quotes from the conversation between Sam and Charlie demonstrate the nature of the ‘flow’ and ‘exchange’ of dialogue and support the analysis of the data.

4.2.2 *Knowledge*

In terms of ‘knowledge’ the data were analysed to identify where, if at all, on the continuum (*Table 4.1)* there was evidence of decision-making being based. Is it about ‘knowing what others know’, of the ‘enactment of particular roles’, as in the traditional community of practice and master-apprentice scenario, or acquiring knowledge through ‘*inter-action*’ as in peer-to-peer exchanges? Is it about seeing a degree of mutual, bi-directional influence(s) with *active* decision-making as in ecological learning systems or more an *assimilation* of knowledge as in communities of practice?

The first participant, Charlie, talks of the benefits to ‘self’ of participating in the observation process and seeing “how to teach on a different level”, (Int1) but also recognises the benefits to the partner and more experienced teacher (Sam) of being partnered with her/him as Charlie teaches in a different context: “and it [being] good for them also” (Int1). This may lean towards an ecological learning system perspective, however, Charlie later talks of improving his/her own practice through the observation process, of picking up “tips of how to teach, or how to be a better teacher….you can pick up on other things they might go through…in a different way that might be a good way to try” (Int1). This may simply be recognising that there are always situations where we can learn, or adapt, knowledge for our own benefit, or it may indicate an acceptance that there is value in ‘knowing what others know’, as in a community of practice.

In terms of the reinforcement of ‘roles’, when asked why they had chosen to participate in the research project, Gerry and Sam talked about *their* roles as ‘teacher trainers’ who “have to try and model what we’re preaching” (Sam, Int2) and Gerry talked about the process of involving learners being valuable for the learner because rather than passive recipients of knowledge, learners need to become more independent, to realise that – as a teacher – sometimes it is about managing:

“…learners’ expectations as well, because it’s not always about **us** improving (Gerry laughs) it’s about **them** understanding the limits of education and **their** own responsibilities” (Gerry, Int2) [[9]](#footnote-9)

Picking up on this a little later in the conversation, when asked what they felt their partners would gain from this process, again it was this concept of *modelling* which came through in the answers. Both Sam and Gerry felt that Charlie and Alex were probably both interested in going in to *observe* a teacher because of the opportunities afforded to *learn* by watching others – which links with the research questions (1.3.0). As well as reinforcing what Charlie and Alex had said previously about their reasons for engaging with this research (4.2.1), it also serves to evidence a community of practice approach: this is about learning, about acquiring improved skills, through the observation of – and discussion with – a more experienced ‘other’. However, although Alex recognises the difference in degrees of ‘life experience’ and perspectives between himself/herself and partner Gerry, there is expectation that this *difference* will lead to an interesting discussion during which Gerry will “take an opposing view and attempt to defend it” (Int3). Although there is no additional information relating to their experience, it is worth a reminder here that Alex and Gerry do know each other and have worked at the same institution for some time. Alex almost relishes this chance for debate and an opportunity to see whether Gerry’s “defence is rational and the process brings about….some clarification of concepts” (Int3). So, the discussion begins to lead towards a communities of practice approach, and yet, an expectation from Alex, in a following comment that any discussion should arise in a ‘consensual’ clarification, would imply more of a relationship which is based on an equal-footing, as in ecological learning systems.

Alex had earlier talked of trying to offer the benefits of her/his experiences to the Year 1 learners on the DTLLS course – without much success despite many attempts. It was interesting, therefore, to hear how Alex felt the involvement of learners in the observation of teaching and learning would be of benefit. There was a great deal of enthusiasm in Alex’s response to this, with anticipation that this could provide an individual with opportunities for:

“…building up awareness of yourself [……] the meta-skills which is looking at learners’ learning and developmental meta- skills and learners and broaden, widen, er, learners’ awareness of this process they’re undertaking if they see others doing it…[…..] it opens up opportunities for feedback, a kind of cross-feedback between learners who have done it and those who are at a higher level of the same thing...” (Alex, Int3)

This was actually a point taken up by Chris (one of the staff who was observed) during a discussion prior to the observations taking place.

“I personally feel that it’s a very important process, erm, that learners have this opportunity, as, observations are something that we actively engage in, and it is about learning about ourselves, and thinking about how we move forward within our teaching practice…[… ] help us move forward and think about where we need to develop ourselves, how we can improve, how we can share best practice. How we can hold professional discussions and think about the learner.” (Chris, Int4)

There was agreement about the need for, and the value of, these *learning* opportunities – both for the learner and the teacher – although such exchanges were discussed in relation to a process which was regarded as ‘peer’ observation as the learners involved in this research are trainee teachers. As such, they could be regarded as already having a degree of *legitimate peripheral participation* (communities of practice). Yet, Chris’ reflections also indicated that this was about ‘discussion’ – albeit ‘professional discussion’ – and so there are leanings towards an ecological learning perspective. So, does ‘knowledge’ have to be situated in one framework or the other, or can there be different locations dependent upon context?

During the post-observation discussion between Alex and Gerry, there was an extended exchange of more than ten minutes during which the teaching partner, Gerry, picked up on one of Alex’s comments about learning being ‘problematized’. Alex felt that there was a need to provide learners with the “systems, the processes, the formulae, to problematize learning [whilst at the same time giving them] confidence and structure so that they can sail, navigate through those problems” (Int5). Alex was *pressed* quite strongly by Gerry to provide specific examples of this, but could not: Alex found this difficult to do in detail and could only generalize to having felt that this was an issue: “I can’t give an example - I’ve tried to describe the problem in general” (Int5). Gerry asked Alex four times to clarify this, but he/she was unable to do so. Was this evidence of an imbalance, indicative of a community of practice approach, or Alex recognising that she/he simply did not have the knowledge to support the statement? This aspect of the conversation will be further considered in section 4.2.4 in relation to power. It was quite useful, when reviewing the conversation between Sam and Charlie, to also consider whether this aspect was evidenced in their conversation when Charlie raised an issue that Sam felt needed more explanation or justification. This may raise questions around whether different partnerships – or individuals – affect the frameworks seen, and if so, is this throughout the conversation, or just within certain contexts? If it is there, why is it there?

Sam and Charlie got into their discussion around the *detail* of the observation quite quickly, so an example of different viewpoints appeared quite early on in the conversation when Sam said, “Erm, I mean, I think I agree with you, well, I agree with certainly the issue of variety (yeah – from Charlie)” and then following on with the discussion “One thing I’m not sure I really agree with you on is ‘everybody contributing’..” (Int6). At this point the conversation discussed this point briefly, and other aspects of the session, and Charlie then reflected back to what Sam had said: “..but yeah, come back to that…I think you might be right coming to think of it. I started, I did a little contributions grid” (Int6). There was a discussion here arising out of the individual’s *knowledge*, but rather than it become a disagreement, or an example of pressing for a response to a challenge of opinions, Sam and Charlie continue to *discuss* what had been seen. In this way, Charlie had time to reflect on what had been observed and to ‘come back’ to Sam’s original *dis*-agreement with Charlie’s views. Instead of any sense of a position being ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, or needing swift justification, there was a feeling of mutual influence: of *consideration* of another’s viewpoint, as in an ecological learning system. Yet this could just be the result of individual personalities, rather than anything specific to ‘roles’. In an attempt to uncover whether this might be the case, this was followed-up within later discussions with these four main participants during one-to-one interviews after this part of the process had been completed: this is considered more fully within the next chapter.

4.2.3 *Language*

Although *language* has been separated out within this chapter, it is clearly an integral component in all of the sections: it is the physical indicator which weaves together conversation and different framework themes. However, in terms of the sub-themes being analysed within this data, what might indicate that a discussion is evidencing a community of practice approach as opposed to that of an ecological learning system? Where are the differences, and how far apart are they, or not? With a communities of practice approach, there would be an expectation of ‘jargon’ and recognised representations of the ‘tools of the trade’; there would be a sense of shared stories and backgrounds, of ‘insider jokes’; of conformity and dependency (*Table 4.1*). At the opposite end of the continuum of practice there would be an expectation that ecological learning systems would evidence a greater informality and structure in the language used; of language which represents the individual; of independence and non-conformity (*Table 4.1*).

Within this chapter, the main analysis of language has been within the two post-observation discussions between the participants: Interviews 5 and 6. This was to focus on the themes contained within the conversational *exchange* between the ‘teacher’ and their ‘learner’ partner, rather than one-to-one discussions with the researcher which will be considered in the following chapter (section 5.2). Taking the conversation between Gerry and Alex, Alex talks about the ‘rationale’ and ‘criteria’ for the assignments, and assessment ‘requirements’: but these are fairly everyday examples of words and phrases which anyone who has undertaken any educational assessments as an adult, will have come into contact with. However, Alex also makes reference to learning theory to demonstrate his/her knowledge “and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development popped in there!” (Int5) and the ways in which the teacher can become “stimulated by the students who are active and respond … […]… and the passive students get neglected. They don’t give the teacher the stimulation. They don’t challenge the teacher…” (Int5). The way in which language is used here, and the terminology, are representative of professional ‘speak’ and communicate much more knowledge than these few words indicate at a superficial level. Talking of learners who are ‘active’ or ‘passive’ requires a degree of knowledge and understanding at a professional level and indicates an *insider’s* viewpoint and demonstrates legitimate participation.

Similarly, discussing the problematization of learning mentioned previously (4.2.2):

“More, almost entirely teacher input, is also connected to teacher’s body language, tone of voice and the way… […]… both effective and cognitive skills and presentational skills, the formative skills of the teacher that lead to this, erm, there is a clear difference between the two teachers. One of them had very different body language from the other and one was able to problematize learning at the same time as making it very explicit.” (Alex, Int5)

Gerry focused in on the specifics of how dialogue was utilised as a teaching and learning strategy within the lesson and how effectively learners “stayed on task” (Int5):

“But I think if then, the teacher input had been after that, for that to come in between (aaahhh – from Alex) and they were giving the overview of ‘most people need to be careful of this’ …. there would have been one, it would have been more of a dialogue, erm, erm, more of an interesting group dialogue – a whole group dialogue – about ‘oh yes we thought that’, ‘we didn’t think that’, ‘we noticed that’ – because they would all have had the opportunity to think about it (yes, yes – from Alex) because they were so very motivated, that group of learners, weren’t they.” (Gerry, Int5)

There is, perhaps of necessity as both participants are from a teaching background, evidence in these conversations of shared representations and jargon, of ‘conformance’ to the expectations of teaching and learning. However, it can be seen from the structure of Alex’s sentences, that there is a very specific syntax in evidence which constructs – either deliberately or subconsciously – a persona of ‘knowledge’. The ‘formality’ of the language may thus also be attributed to the personalities of the participants, and in Chapter Five we shall look at some of the comments and ‘additional thoughts’ provided by participants – either ‘volunteered’ via emails to the researcher, or during later interviews – to see if there is similarity or difference of language used in these different contexts.

Turning to Sam and Charlie, at the start of their recorded discussion, Sam deliberately asked Charlie to start, in contrast to the other paired conversation where the ‘learner’ Alex, requested that Gerry be the one to start. In both conversations discussions got underway quite quickly, however, with Alex and Gerry, the starting point was around the assignment the lesson was based on, whereas with Sam and Charlie, there was a directness about getting to the actual teaching and learning: a more focused and purposeful discussion. Yet the language itself appeared less formal and more *relevant* to the individual. It has already been noted (4.2.1), through some of the lengthier exchanges between Sam and Charlie, that there is ‘informality’ in the language used, and the exchanges between the two. There was one particularly lengthy comment from Sam (Int6) which lasted for a few minutes, and contained many interjections and agreements from Charlie, but during which this felt more of a ‘shared story’ of their viewpoints from the observation (*Table 4.1*) with an easy production of joint knowledge.

In terms of *knowledge* it is not easy to assign the data to either a communities of practice, or ecological learning system, approach. As all of these participants are members of the teaching profession there will, of necessity, be a shared repertoire of language, or stories, of jargon and of representations of practice. It is perhaps more in the nature of the individual participants where a difference in the data and the themes within which this can be attributed begins to be seen. These ‘other’ theoretical concepts were discussed in Chapter Three, and this is reviewed further in Chapter Five when the ‘journeys’ these individuals have undertaken are analysed against the conversations had with the researcher.

4.2.4 *Power*

Before beginning a review of the interviews with regards to this theme, it is worth reminding ourselves of some of the aspects highlighted within the Literature Review. This research is considering *how* the direct involvement of learners in the observation of teaching and learning might be used to improve practice, and develop the expert learner. However, previous ‘research’ (for example, Cockburn, 2005; Morrison, 2009; Roberts and Nash, 2009) has not really considered the impact on those teaching staff involved in the process, the ‘observed’, nor how those doing the observing might be regarded in terms of their credibility. What then, of those issues around *power* and *status* of those involved: not only between the teacher and learner who are partnered to *do* the observation, but also of the potential impact on the member of staff being observed, and the other learners? In this research, the ‘other’ learners in the classes were not directly involved in the observation (2.4.4) but to acknowledge the potential for impact, the two available *observed teacher participants were* also interviewed (5.2.4) and the data analysed against these key themes (*Table 4.1*).

All of the participants are teachers, members of a professional community, yet their positions within that community – or their *perceived* positions – will be different. In the research context there are both individuals and ‘pairs’ – but in this context one member of each pair is in the position of ‘learner’. Can we, therefore, *anticipate* evidence of a community of practice framework, rather than an ecological learning system, simply by virtue of this inherent relationship? For Dinkelman (1997: 263) the very fact that these ‘learner’ participants are engaging in this research with their “teacher-educator ... […might be regarded as jeopardising…] the likelihood of sincere and open communication”. Were this to be accepted then the assumption would be that the context of a ‘teacher/teacher’ relationship is problematic where one is in the role of *learner.*  This would suggest a reluctance to be regarded as an ‘apprentice’ – in this context - and the potential for tension which could inhibit learning. An ecological learning system – without hierarchical ‘placement’ and histories – might thus prove better in developing learning. The research looks further into this from an individual perspective in Chapter Five, but for now, within this chapter, we shall look at how the theme of power has appeared in the interviews.

In terms of perceptions of ‘power’ and where individuals might *fit* in the hierarchy of these teaching and learning communities Charlie was asked, in Interview One, what he/she thought Sam might be looking for and hoping to get out of the process. In these exchanges with the researcher, Charlie makes several references to partner Sam which place their relationship in context. Although Charlie talks of Sam as someone who “teaches teachers…..to teach!” (Int1), as an ‘expert’ who does this ‘for a living’, there is also a perception that it might “be a bit difficult… […] as Sam already teaches within that subject area .. […] Sam knows how to deliver each session in the best way…. [so it..] might be difficult for Sam to…..[pauses] broaden ..horizons” (Int1). These thoughts might indicate an hierarchical view of their relationship, however, Charlie follows these comments with an observation that although he/she is one of Sam’s ‘pupils’, that if Sam were to observe in Charlie’s area, which is primarily vocational, then Sam would be the individual who would be the novice in terms of expertise:

“Whereas when Sam observes, erm, Sam’s pupils – for instance **me**, it’s something that Sam’s not very familiar with…..it’s a different type of students, it’s completely different subjects” (Int1).

Although in relation to a different context, this point also echoes Alex’s comments about being more knowledgeable than the first year students (p.84): both highlight that in ‘other’ contexts, both Charlie and Alex might be considered the ‘holder’ of knowledge and expertise – the ‘master’.

When Charlie is asked how she/he feels about doing an observation with a teacher, and then the follow-up discussion, Charlie still identifies himself/herself as the ‘pupil’. However, he/she is able to see that both individual participants would have something of value to add to the discussion:

“I think that’ll be good…because like I say we’re both from completely different backgrounds. I’m Sam’s pupil, so it might be a bit strange [laughs]….Sam being with me, but I think it’ll be good, I think it’ll be interesting.” (Int1)

Within this initial interview with Charlie, which takes place before the observation, there is a recognition of the knowledge and ‘position’ Sam has in terms of expertise in the field of teaching (as in a community of practice), yet Charlie is able to also recognise his/her own ‘value’ within this relationship (as in an ecological learning system).

So, what is happening in the other ‘learner’ interview, do we see something similar, or something different? At the start of this conversation with Alex, he/she was very keen to establish the background to his/her career: although he/she had taught in different contexts (which cannot be outlined in detail here as it might identify the individual participant), the format had been “the same as teaching” (Int3). As with Charlie, the interview began with Alex being asked why he/she had been interested in participating in the research, what her/his hopes were, and whether or not she/he had any thoughts about why partner Gerry was taking part. Alex placed a great deal of emphasis on drawing on her/his experience from the first year of the course (remember the participant learners were nearing completion of the second year of this DTLLS course) in order to:

“…review my experience, dredge up my feelings and, and, my impressions and also my knowledge from my first year and compare it to erm, what’s going on in this next course. I will look for developments from last year, I will look for improvements, things that I noticed last year weren’t really, er…. so exciting and so interesting and so fulfilling, and er…, didn’t meet my expectations. I look forward to seeing them done better this year. Erm, what else would I be looking for? Erm, that’s what’s hoped for, the wish list [smiles]. Erm, I might be open to what I see to a great extent as well. Open to, to observe and see how the experience of the first year, er, erm, how people who are doing it have that, er, how it is for them.” (Int3)

Alex acknowledges that Gerry will be viewing the process from a different perspective, that Gerry has a “very different life experience to mine” (Int3) and as such, considers that Gerry will make a very interesting partner. There is a difference in language within this interview to that used by Charlie. Alex talks about a ‘partner’ – and in terms of the relationship – refers to them both as members of the teaching profession, “as a teacher myself” (Int3): there is no mention of being a ‘pupil’ as Charlie does. Alex also places himself/herself in relation to the other learners on the course, which Charlie does not, and sees the role she/he plays in this research as being almost one of ‘brokering’ or ‘bridging’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as in a community of practice.

In this quite lengthy extract, included as this is an action research model based in a phenomenological approach, Alex comments on the benefits of being an *experienced* individual, and of the potential for such an individual to act as a bridge between the two communities of teachers and learners. In Alex’s conversation, there is evidence of an individual who perceives herself/himself as a more established ‘member’ of the community who can ‘model’ practice for the novitiates:

“Well, I think the presence of somebody who has graduated from the course, or at least gone through their experience and succeeded in the course, er, would be, er, just the presence of somebody like that would be beneficial, because I’m modelling to them an experience of successful completion of the course. […….] But I will model success for one, and that’s a good thing. I may be able to articulate some of their worries in a language which is, from their perspective, from a very similar perspective to theirs. I may be able to engage with the tutors, to some minor extent, in, in a way that will model again an engagement with the tutors that could be, could slightly open up the silence...” (Int3)

Alex was also asked about any thoughts he/she had around providing feedback to the member of staff who was observed. Charlie was also asked about this, however, this was commented on more in relation to it being interesting to gain “another perspective on the whole thing” (Int1), and that this was the first time Charlie had known of any instances where a learner would be involved in the observation of a member of teaching staff. For Alex, there was concern that her/his involvement in the process did not make the individual being observed anxious in any way, that it be seen as supportive and developmental rather than a negative experience. As such, Alex felt that any feedback should be “first hand” and that it was important that both Alex, and Gerry, contributed to this, although interestingly this was individually rather than as a pair. There were concerns that if this became a ‘two against one” (Int3) scenario, that there would be a lack of empathy and a perception of a power imbalance: whether Alex perceived this purely from a numerical imbalance, or two more ‘powerful’ observers feeding back, was not clear.

Reviewing the data, for Charlie, although there is an ‘assignment’ of pupil-teacher relationship with Sam, Charlie is able to recognise the value of her/his knowledge in her/his own curriculum area: there is a sense of both aspects of the continuum of practice here (*Table 4.1*). For Alex, the position is more clearly aligned to a community of practice with value being placed upon knowledge, and position, within the community. Alex places himself/herself as a fellow member of the teaching profession; as the ‘graduate’ and more experienced ‘student’ in relation to the first year learners on the course. Alex sees the benefits she/he can provide to others through the knowledge – and expertise – gained from his/her experiences as both a teacher and a learner. With Charlie, there is a greater sense of a devolution of power, as in an ecological learning system, but also the hierarchical sense of power in terms of Sam’s relationship to Charlie as his/her teacher.

Moving then to the second interview, which was a joint discussion between the researcher and the two members of teaching staff, Sam and Gerry: what evidence of ‘power’ is seen in their conversation? Again, there is reference to modelling practice in terms of developing their teaching and the involvement of learners in feedback in this exchange between Gerry and Sam:

“I think this is an opportunity for us to develop that further [involving learners in feedback]– another strand to it, and also because it’s a principle that we teach [laughs] so we ought to be able to model it well to our own learners so that they can be teachers who involve students in the learner voice.” (Gerry, Int2)

“Yeah, I mean I think that’s the key thing – that in our role as teacher trainers we have to try and model what we’re preaching if you like, erm, and by having opportunities for review of learner feedback and being able to demonstrate that we are listening and changing our practice, developing our practice.” (Sam, Int2)

There are numerous references to the involvement of learners in feedback, and having taken direct actions as a result of this: indicating devolvement of power and a sense of ownership being enabled, as in an ecological learning system.

“..actually one example is from the reader for this module (yeah – from Gerry) a student emailed ‘hey I’ve found this’ and we thought it was so good we’ve just put it straight in…and having the learners seeing that in action, I think makes it a more positive thing” (Sam, Int2)

“..and again the comments for improvement, we can discuss that with them, we can tell them the response and how we’re developing it but we can also negotiate things” (Gerry, Int2)

At this stage of the conversation, and bearing in mind that this has been an action research-based project, there was a discussion about what the focus might be for the observations and from where the ‘directive’ for this might come. Was it from the individual participants, from the researcher, had it even been decided at this point? There was a general consensus that unless otherwise directed, each participant would be looking for something different and following a brief exchange of around a minute between Sam and Gerry about what might be useful to observe, there was agreement that “students would expect to go into a classroom” (Gerry, Int2) rather than into a tutorial, for example.

At this point there was again reference to “modelling teaching” (Sam, Int2) and of the learner participants being “interested in going in to see any teacher because going in and observing teachers…it means you can learn things about your own teaching by watching other people” (Gerry, Int2). It was felt by Gerry that the learners involved in the research would be eager to “engage with us in those conversations” (Gerry, Int2). However, whether this ‘engagement’ indicates an ecological learning system or a communities of practice approach depends on the content and context of that discussion and the ways in which relationships are exhibited during that exchange. There were certainly mixed feelings about the process in relation to how the staff being observed might feel, with the spectre of “disempowerment... […as] …observation is a time when people feel that they are not in control… […] might be negative… […] would have to be managed very well” (Gerry, Int2). However, Sam had experience of being at a conference and discussing something similar which had been done in a school, and where the response had been very positive and empowering. Sam recalled, however, that this had been “structured quite a lot, to provide them [the learners] support, erm, and I guess that set, if you like, set ground rules…” (Sam, Int2). There were also concerns that feedback should not give rise to a “deficit model” (Sam, Int2) with negative connotations, and questions around how feedback would be ‘used’ from an organisational perspective and this last aspect is discussed further in Chapter Five (5.2.4, 5.3.0). With these concerns in mind, it was important that there was something to ‘structure’ the observation process around, and this function was met through provision of the pro-forma (Appendix Three) which provided a framework and ‘prompts’ for the participants: although participants’ views on this varied (4.2.1) as to whether this helped or not.

So, what of the post-observation discussions between the teacher-learner participant partnerships: Interviews Five and Six? Did they reflect the same feelings, thoughts and concerns as the earlier interviews? Rather than review these within this section, this is being analysed in the following part of this chapter under the heading of *relationships.*

4.3.0 *Relationships*

In this context, what is meant by the term ‘relationships’? Well, from the framework perspectives being used for the data coding and analysis (*Table 4.1*) this continuum of practice is used to inform whether there is evidence of a community of practice approach, an ecological learning system approach, or something else. This continuum of practice is looking at the ‘nature’ of the relationships: do these appear harmonious – or conflicting – representing sustained mutual relationships, or are they transitory, a more fluid and collaborative functioning unit?

As already mentioned, when each of these conversations began, each started differently: Interview Five (Alex and Gerry) saw Alex quickly invite Gerry (the teacher) to offer him/her thoughts first; in contrast Interview Six (Sam and Charlie) had Sam encouraging Charlie, the learner, to speak first (4.2.3). There has already been a review of some fairly lengthy extracts between Gerry and Alex (4.2.2) when there was pressure on Alex, from Gerry, for a greater degree of explanation around Alex’s comments. In the original coding, this was referred to in relation to evidence of *knowledge* and the role of this in the *enactment of particular roles* (*Table 4.1)*. Within this section, although the focus is on *relationships* there may be links to other sections, for example *power*. This considers knowledge as indicating status, or hierarchical placement, which can be established – or reinforced – through the knowledge an individual is able to display, or not, within the bounds of the community. It would be unlikely, after all, to have relationships where there was no aspect of power in place where the participants are ‘teacher-learner’ partners (Dinkelman, 1997).

When listening to the ‘paired’ conversations, there was a feeling of *frequency* of ‘interjections’ across the dialogue: not in a conversational way, these were words or statements which *cut across* the original speaker. In other words, when Gerry was speaking, for example, Alex might simply agree (usually a short word such as ‘yeah’ or ‘right’), or this might be a stronger emphasis (Yes!) or longer comment (Yes! I think with presentations that’s a good thing) which reinforced Gerry’s words, or Alex might disagree or question a statement (You mean in between?). To evaluate whether this was worth investigating further, an additional analysis was therefore done on these two post-observation discussions to establish if the evidence was leading to a simple *concurrence* of opinion, a stronger *reinforcement* of opinion from the second participant, or an opinion which *disagreed* or *queried* in some way. The data in the conversations was split so that dialogue for each individual was collated in each interview – all of Alex’s comments together, all of Gerry’s comments together, etc. The *interjections* by the secondary speaker were then highlighted and coded to ‘concurrence’, ‘reinforcement’ or ‘disagreed/queried’. A note was also made of when there was ‘joint laughter’ which might be indicative of a sense of ‘insider knowledge’, as with communities of practice. The table and data on the following page provide details of what was found in each separate individual dialogue.

*Table 4.2 – Analysis of Interviews*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interview Number | Main dialogue | Participant ‘role’: Teacher or Learner | Participant ‘interjecting’ | ‘Role’ of participant ‘interjecting’ | Total number of interjections | Total coded as *concurrence* | Total coded as *reinforcement* | Total coded as *disagreed/queried* | Total coded as *joint laughter* |
| Five | Alex | Learner | Gerry | Teacher | 25 | 16 | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| Six | Charlie | Learner | Sam | Teacher | 24 | 15 | 7 | 2 | 2 |
| Five | Gerry | Teacher | Alex | Learner | 38 | 4 | 33 | 1 | 1 |
| Six | Sam | Teacher | Charlie | Learner | 85 | 69 | 16 | 0 | 2 |

*Additional note:* Interview Six (Sam and Charlie) had around a minute where both talked over each other fairly evenly. Speech was so ‘condensed’ that it was not possible to decipher individual comments sufficiently to transcribe and code.

To facilitate comparison of the data, coding has been grouped by main participant ‘role’ so that both learner dialogues are adjacent and so are both teacher dialogues.

In terms of *teacher* participants interjecting during their partner’s dialogue, it can be seen that these were actually fairly evenly distributed across both conversations with very similar numbers of *instances* of each category, so this is not discussed further. In terms of *learner* participants, however, there is a substantial difference between Alex and Charlie: Charlie had more than double the number of interjections in total, 85 compared to 38 from Alex. Under the heading of *concurrence* there were 69 instances for Charlie, compared to 4 examples for Alex: remember this is simple short words such as ‘yeah’, ‘okay’, which almost verbalise the ‘nodding head’ during a conversation when we wish to demonstrate agreement with someone. It would appear, therefore, that there was a more general ‘consensus’ of agreement in the conversation between Charlie and Sam, with a sense of collaboration and fluidity within the exchange, an equality of status within the dialogue: as might be expected within an ecological learning system. With Alex and Gerry, this was more ‘restrained’ and this perhaps echoes data reviewed earlier in this chapter where the relationship between these two participants appears to be on a different footing to the other partnership. This is also discussed further in the Chapter Five (section 5.2) when additional data are analysed from a more individual perspective.

When looking at coding under *reinforcement* the number of instances changed with Alex having 33 examples and Charlie having 16: this is when evidence of a *stronger* emphasis is seen within the interjection, with examples indicating an individual has felt a need to say something with more depth. Did these ‘other’ interjections, therefore, provide a different picture of what was happening within the dialogue? It is therefore worth looking at the content of these interjections to see where the similarities and differences lie between the two participants. The following thirteen comments are taken from Alex’s conversation (Interview Five) and represent more ‘extended’ *reinforcement* coding where there is a stronger sense of agreement with Gerry: there were an additional twenty comments where comments were short but emphasis was stressed, for example, with ‘yes!’, ‘right’, ‘yes, yes!’.

***Alex***

“Oh, okay, yes”; “Oh, wonderful!”; “Two modules put together – right”; “Go on..”; “Me too!”; “I didn’t see that - right”; ”Go on”; ”Less active – yes”; “No, quite!”; “Oh yes, wonderfully so!”; “Yes, I think with presentations it’s a good thing”; “Oh, I see, it’s a bit more…”; “Yes, activity”.

Charlie’s conversation with Sam reveals the following with seven longer examples coded to *reinforcement* from Interview Six, and a further nine having been words such as ‘yes!’, ‘right’ and ‘no’:

***Charlie***

“No, it was very open, deep questioning”; “Yes, he/she was looking to the right to try and get them to contribute more”; “Yeah, yeah, I did notice that”; “Yeah, and Chris did look straight at me!”; “I did as well”; “Group work, or to be split up”; “Yeah – or at least writing on the board or something to prompt them to know I’ve got to record these questions now”

Looking at these, what do they tell us about the participants and their relationships with their partners? Alex’s comments are still quite short in comparison to Charlie’s and are more an ‘affirmation’ of Gerry’s dialogue. In contrast, Charlie’s comments are longer and whilst some of these are still ‘affirmation’, there is more of a sense that these are original thoughts from Charlie on the observation as opposed to echoing of her/his partner, as with Alex’s words. Interestingly, this aspect was also mirrored within the actual observations: remember the researcher sat in on these in order to ‘observe’ the actions of the participants, any body language, interactions, and so forth, which might prove relevant during the analysis of the data.

During Alex and Gerry’s observation, Alex was extremely hesitant in committing any thoughts to paper: the pro-forma was completed with pencil and there were numerous rubbings out and a reluctance to hand over the document to me after the post-observation discussion (this was always the intention and explained to participants beforehand). When the document was returned, it was electronically with only a few general thoughts added by word-processor to the ‘Discussion comments’ section: nothing else had been completed. Alex had to be gently encouraged by me, during conversations in the days following the observation, to return the original hand-written pro-forma. When this was received, it was difficult to decipher comments, which were written in very faint pencil and only the first page had been completed. Concerned that little had been provided by Alex, the offer was made of taking some more time to reflect on the session and to email any further comments to me in the following days: this was taken up and thoughts around ‘aspects of the session that could be improved’ were provided. However, this was quite ‘removed’ from the observation with generic comments around teaching and learning, rather than specific to the session, which perhaps goes some way to explain Alex’s deference to Gerry within their post-observation discussion and the nature of the interjections. Without clear, confidently-made notes to refer to in the post-observation discussion Alex was content to allow Gerry to lead on the conversation and to reaffirm points made by her/his partner (*Table 4.2).*

In contrast, Charlie’s completion of the pro-forma had been confident, and body language within the observation session supports the more deliberate nature, and frequency, of Charlie’s interjections during the post-observation dialogue with Sam (*Table 4.2)*, indicating a strength of belief in his/her own thoughts. The relationship between Alex and Gerry, therefore, appears to be one of ‘mutuality’ as in a community of practice, whereas that of Sam and Charlie appears to indicate a more ‘collaborative’ approach, as in an ecological learning system. We now need to unpick these relationships a little more.

Initially, the coding of the interviews included separation of the theme *working together.* However, when completing this ’additional’ coding (*Table 4.2*), it was felt that this aspect should be considered as a sub-heading of relationships rather than as an isolated theme: this meant looking for evidence of ‘joint enterprise’ and ‘interdependent relationships’ across the interviews. Within Sam and Charlie’s dialogue (Interview Six) there was an extended discussion of over fifteen minutes around the content of the teaching and learning which they had just observed, with the focus not only being on what they had noted in relation to that individual member of teaching staff who had been observed, but also how these aspects impacted on their own teaching.

An example of this is included in the following extract:

“…they were all really good questions [….] (yeah – from Charlie) perhaps this is where a handout or something, on the board or something (yeah – from Charlie) [….] I thought, wow, these are really good questions, these are really powerful questions (yeah – from Charlie) and going back to assessment I was wondering, what, how much has actually gone in here? (yeah – from Charlie). You know […] how many of those questions would I remember? (yeah – from Charlie)….. but then I suppose a handout to do it (yeah – or at least writing on the board or something to prompt them to know I’ve got to record these questions now – from Charlie) […] I think it’s useful to have something to take away, otherwise there’s a danger of losing (yeah – from Charlie) losing what you’ve discussed […]in your DTLLS class how many discussions can you remember? That you had, you know. Is it easy to remember them, or….? (Sam, Int6)

“No, no! [laughs] I can’t remember a single one from the courses. I think we gain the most from doing a bit all together, and then splitting up into little groups, and then…doing a bit more and then reflecting together (yeah – from Sam) I think that’s where we gained most. I think it just comes back to this session needs to be split up, it needs to be more than just (right – from Sam) yeah, a full discussion.” (Charlie, Int6)

In Charlie’s case, this also reflected on the role of a learner:

“Yeah. I mean we’ve used grid haven’t we…?” (Sam, Int6)

“I’ve used one of these before” (Charlie, Int6)

“So, I’ve used one of these before, we used these with Danny[[10]](#footnote-10) (oh right – from Sam) in year one (yeah – from Sam) and that, I couldn’t get much from that whereas using the grid (yeah – from Sam) I know exactly where I’ve got to go, I know to what section of the reader, I know…” (Charlie, Int6)

“I think the problem with the grid is that – I don’t know ‘cos I’ve only used it to teach and not as a student, that’s the issue.” (Sam, Int6)

The post-observation discussion between Gerry and Alex, Interview Five, took a different approach with the dialogue broadly following ‘prompts’ from the headings on the pro-forma which perhaps resulted in a ‘narrower’ conversation more in line with a sense of ‘shared ways of engaging in doing things together’ (*Table 4.1)*. There was also the slightly ‘uncomfortable’ segment of the discussion during which Alex was pressed to justify and elaborate on the comment around the problematization of learning (4.2.2).

4.4.0 *What else?*

In terms of the remaining themes in the original coding – *Getting Started/Progress Made, Information Exchange* and *Reification* – these became quite minor elements within the analysis of the data. The first two of these categories were essentially subsumed within the previous main headings: after all, if there is a ‘relationship’, then there will of necessity be an exchange of information; dialogue will demonstrate how conversations have got ‘started’ and ‘progressed’. What can be looked at in a little more depth is where there are specific examples of this within the interviews which might highlight particular aspects from the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1)* which are relevant to the research.

In terms of *information exchange* within Charlie’s one-to-one interview, she/he is able to see how interaction by herself/himself and other learners with Sam, during taught sessions on the DTLLS course, can have an impact on the learning environment and this may be as a result of bi-directional influences where actors and environment become affected by their joint engagement:

“We had a brief discussion in class the other week, because Sam is always trying to improve his/her practice and asking, [..] always asking for feedback so she/he can improve on next years...’how would you do this differently?’ and some people feel [laughs] in a way a bit angry towards it because….. they’re not going to get any benefit out of that they’re looking at it in like selfish perspective in a way [laughs] they won’t give him/her accurate information – ‘we’re not making next year’ any easier’ – ‘we’ve had a real rough time’ [laughs].” (Charlie, Int1)

Within Interview Two, when Gerry and Sam were discussing how their involvement in the research – and also that of the wider team – could be used to develop their teaching and involve learners, there was similar evidence of actors and environment being affected by engagement (ecological learning systems):

“Erm, I think because, as an individual teacher, but also as our team teaching, that’s something we’re very interested in ourselves and we’re working on developing learner feedback…. […]…so we ought to be able to model it well to our own learners so that they can be teachers who involve students in the learner voice.” (Gerry, Int2)

“Yeah, I mean I think that’s the key thing – that in our role as teacher trainers we have to try and model what we’re preaching if you like, erm, and by having opportunities for review of learner feedback and being able to demonstrate that we are listening and changing our practice, developing our practice - as a result of that – it shows, erm, it shows learner feedback in a positive light (yeah – from Gerry).” (Sam, Int2)

This exchange ‘hints’ at a flow of information and of ‘propagation of innovation’ (*Table 4.1)*, but we cannot know from this conversation what the extent of this actually is within the classroom, or within the team. This aspect will be revisited in Chapter Five when the follow-up interviews are analysed to see where involvement with this research project has taken the participants – if anywhere at all.

When reviewing the data provided from the post-observation discussions, at the start of Gerry and Alex’s conversation (Interview Five) there was an extended period of ‘to and fro’ during which there was this ‘rapid flow of information’ which generated new thoughts and prompted the continuation of the dialogue (community of practice). Alex talked about the “opportunities for learning” (Int5) which had been observed and Gerry responded that it had felt like “study skills” (Int5). Alex was then able to expand on this “Yes, yes, and then they were, the students were given the opportunity to reflect […] they were listening to presentations” (Int5). At this point the two participants became aware that they had not actually seen these presentations and this prompted further discussion and speculation around how successfully the presentations must have gone (these had been completed prior to the observed session) as the learners were “very elated afterwards” (Alex, Int5). In terms of *reification*, there was a shared ‘discourse’ which reflected specific perspective – community of practice – rather than individual perspectives as might be evidenced through ecological learning systems.

This was a similar picture in the conversation between Sam and Charlie (Interview Six) who equally demonstrated this ‘discussion’ and ‘expansion’ of thoughts and ideas based around what had been observed within the taught session. Sam and Charlie talked about the nature, and frequency of the contributions made by learners in the group and how this was reflected in the group dynamic:

“…as it moved to that second activity…it seemed to be that there were just a few people that dominated” (Sam, Int6); “Yeah, I thought that myself, but then Chris did, Chris did do a lot of questioning and they (yeah – from Sam) did do a lot of answering so it didn’t it wasn’t so much all one way.” (Charlie, Int6)

This was then further expanded to focus on the classroom behaviour and how the member of staff who had been observed had dealt with this:

“..you know one of them [referring to learner] knows everything or feels she knows everything and feels she doesn’t need to do this and was frustrated by the person asking questions, or whether there is something that goes on often …. suppose that’s the drawback of observations, you can’t tell, erm, what’s a long term issue and what’s just happened on the session.” (Sam, Int6)

“I think the teacher, erm, coped well with being observed…Chris seemed quite steady and, erm, I know from past experience when I’m being observed [laughs] I seem to rush everything and erm, Chris, Chris remained calm.” (Charlie, Int6)

The issue around behaviour was revisited and incorporated into discussions around teaching strategies which could have been used to overcome some of the issues which arose as a result:

“…you split them up and started to take (yeah – from Sam) them out of their comfort zone…[…]. it does help (yeah – from Sam) and it does make you work a bit harder (yeah – from Sam) if you’re working with someone that you don’t know.” (Charlie, Int6)

Within these post-observation discussions there is movement between the ‘two ends’ of the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1)* dependent upon the context. However, during Interview Two, when Gerry and Sam were invited to discuss their perceptions and ‘anticipations’ in relation to the research project, the focus becomes more individualised. The *reification* in this interview, whilst demonstrating a shared discourse in terms of teaching and learning, shows the ‘variable and changing orientations’ of the continuum of practice and leads towards an ecological learning system perspective. Gerry (Int2) talks about having “preconceived notions” that the *observer* needs to have a focus when conducting an observation: the question is – where, and from whom, has that focus come? Gerry does recognise that if that focus comes from him/her, then “it’s a power thing…about what ***I*** would like our course to develop in” – and this would be a similar position for Sam, Charlie and Alex: “this is all going to be based on what your own experiences are” (Gerry, Int2). Sam puts a different perspective forward, telling us that “unless otherwise directed….I’ll actually say ‘what do you want me to look at in particular and use that as a focus.” (Sam, Int2). In this way, Sam places the emphasis and *choice* in the hands of the observee. Although these two extracts demonstrate individualised *reification* within the discourse, the orientation of this actually comes from different sources: with Gerry, this is from the observer and with Sam, this comes from the observee.

We have begun to *unpick* some of the threads woven within the continuum of practice, with some of the coded themes coming through strongly in the dialogue: knowledge, identity, language, relationships and power. To a lesser extent, there has also been evidence of the ‘other’ themes: getting started/progress, information exchange and reification. So, where do we go from here?

4.5.0 *Conclusion – and where next?*

This chapter has focused on the *relationships* between the participants (at ‘‘*micro’* and ‘*meso’* level), and also between the participants and the *environment* (‘*meso’* level). The research has discussed the interactions, the anticipations and expectations, and the reflections which have arisen. If we return to the story of our young Shaolin monk (who has been absent for some time!) the focus has been on the *context* within which young Caine received knowledge – as a ‘learner’ – and how this knowledge was imparted by his ‘teacher(s)’. We have been eavesdropping on the practice and discussions around the monastery. What needs to be established is whether this practice and discussion are created and developed as a result of a master/apprentice interaction and ‘dependence’ on a community for one’s identity. Or does this happen as a result of a collaborative exchange and acknowledgement of interdependent relationships, but where the individuals retain their independence?

This chapter has therefore used the evidence to investigate potential alignment(s) with, and across, the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1)*: to question what might contribute to an individual’s agentic behaviour. It has considered the *perceived positions* and *identity/identities* an individual adopts and how these interactions and ‘placement’ are exhibited within the learning ‘community’. In the two *learner participants* and their ‘partnerships’, the expectations and attitudes expressed have leaned predominantly, though not exclusively, towards either a community of practice, or an ecological learning system approach. There have been times when it has appeared to be about ‘knowing your place’ – but who, or what, decides on that place? The thematic analysis of the interviews has demonstrated how individuals have ‘aligned’ themselves within these frameworks with Alex claiming membership to the same professional community as Gerry, though as a less experienced individual. Alongside this, Alex also expresses her/his greater level of knowledge than the first year learners: there is a sense of knowing ones place and of this place being *defined*. Charlie, however, has acknowledged that he/she is both ‘learner’ and someone who has knowledge which would be of value to more experienced ‘others’: this is an interaction which has mutuality and fluidity, which recognises the capacity for identity and knowledge to be developed through transactions with others.

The evidence so far would indicate that an ecological learning system is a more favourable model for engaging learners in observations and dialogue designed to improve teaching and learning. However, until the additional ‘layers’ of *self* and *identity* are analysed (Chapter Five) the evidence at this point provides only part of the conclusions. It is time, therefore, to focus on the *individual* perspectives, to look for the *impact* (if any) on the participants of having been involved in the research: to identity the potential *outcomes* for learners, staff and the organisation which will then continue to be explored in Chapter Six.

**Chapter Five – Data Analysis: Theoretical Concepts**

5.1.0 *Introduction: developing a sense of self*

The Literature Review considered how learners in a Further Education setting could be directly involved in the observation of teaching and learning (Cockburn, 2005) in order to improve the quality of both. In Chapter Three we reviewed the theoretical concepts involved in the development of an ‘expert’ learner: self-esteem and self-concept; self-categorization and self-efficacy. In doing so, we started to consider what might influence an individual’s *perceived trajectories* and how these might relate to the frameworks which were then used to analyse the data in Chapter Four: communities of practice and ecological learning systems (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82). This part of the analysis (Chapter Four) focused on the interviews and discussions conducted prior to, and including, the post-observation discussions (Interviews One to Six). It provided an interpretive lens into how the individual participants approached the action research, what they anticipated gaining from it, and also ‘content’ and ‘context’ of the evidence. It established what *might* contribute to an individual’s sense of ‘agency’. Chapter Five ‘pushes on’ from that point, focusing on the first of the three policy aims (LSC, 2007) originally identified and discussed in the Literature Review: the involvement of learners as individuals. The research reviews whether *agentic* behaviour was already in place, whether it was acquired and assimilated by the individual as part of the process, whether it was general, or context-specific and how it was evidenced in their dialogue. What insight then would this provide into an individual’s perceived identity – or identities?

5.1.1 *A sense of belonging?*

Through the involvement, in some way, of learners in ‘dialogue’ with their educational institution, the intentions of government were to develop the ‘expert learner’ (LSC, 2007 and QIA, 2008). An individual who would not only have the capacity, but also the capability (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Donnelly, 2007), to establish their own learning requirements and those of their peers, in an almost ‘bridging’ role between the community of ‘learners’ and that of ‘teachers’ (Alex, p.100). In addition, this individual would be sufficiently confident and articulate to do so. Talking of learners who are ‘expert’, this very concept might pre-empt a communities of practice approach; the implication being that such individuals also have the “language and understanding of the concepts involved in assessment and learning” (LSC, 2007: 8) to participate in such discussions (1.2.0). Yet, it is not that easy. In order to become ‘expert’, one has to have a degree of ‘self-awareness’ (Entwistle, 2000; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; McCune, 2009). In order to travel the path, one must be able to identify where one has started – or at least recognise that there must have been a start point – and to have an understanding about what has contributed to that identity. Chapter Three considered this, noting that “different learners perceive the same opportunities differently and react towards them differently, because of their differing dispositions” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004: 176). The research started to explore issues around ‘value’ and ‘worth’ and to ask questions around how these might be assigned, and by whom. It looked at the ways in which a learner’s sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, their self-concept, might *enable* or *disable* them from involvement in their community (Frost and Rogers, 2006; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Fielding, 2007; DeFur and Korinek, 2010).

My research focuses on the involvement of learners in the observation of teaching and learning, and although previous literature in this context is extremely limited, where it exists it has discussed the ‘selection’ of participant learners by a provider organisation. My participants were not ‘selected’ (2.4.1), they *volunteered*: so, why did they volunteer? If considering the role and nature of identities, then this must surely be a contributing factor. The *learner participants*, Charlie and Alex, are second-year students on the DTLLS programme, and already teaching (Appendix Two). They could not be considered as ‘naïve’ learners, however, they are still learners from this two-year course and as such have a legitimate claim to contribute to what makes a lesson a good experience from a learner’s viewpoint (Wenger, 1998; Tusting, 2005; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Walker and Logan, 2008).

It might also be hoped, that as they are more ‘expert’ in their roles as learners, that some of the difficulties associated with hierarchical contexts of ‘power’ and ‘status’ traditionally evident in educational institutions (McGregor, 2007) might be avoided. This was considered in relation to the *learner participants* (4.2.4) and the potential for this also had to be acknowledged for the *other* volunteers too - the *observed participants* – two of whom were also interviewed as part of this research[[11]](#footnote-11). The stage is set, therefore, for the analysis of how and in what ways identities are exhibited, how they might evolve or adapt, dependent upon context and interactions with other actors and the environment. Are these identities multiple and/or unstable (Thomson and Gunter, 2011), or adopted purely as a result of being a research participant? To begin to answer these questions, all of the participant interviews were analysed not just for their individual *content* and framework *coding* (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82*)*, but also to see what else was emerging: for their *reflective* and phenomenological perspectives throughout the research.

5.2.0 *From A to B via Z, Q and P!*

Contrary to what you might be thinking at this stage, this heading is not part of some bizarre coding format, but indicates the diversity and complexity of routes taken on the participants’ journeys – and perhaps brings a wry smile amongst fellow-researchers who might empathise and recognise that our own research journeys are no less complicated and rarely, if ever, go directly from A to B!

Before going further, it is useful to briefly revisit the theoretical concepts from Chapter Three as these underpin the data analysis in the following sections. We are considering the ‘identity’ which an individual adopts, or feels *able* to adopt: their self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness. The research considers whether these identities exist – or come into existence – as a result of the context or environment within which individuals make decisions around what has meaning or relevancy for them (Sfard and Prusak, 2005): their potential ‘trajectory/trajectories’. This ‘self-concept’ is not only how we see ourselves, but also how we perceive others see us – it enables or hinders what we can do based on the expectations we attribute as having come from others. Our *perceived trajectories* in life thus become framed in our *perceived competence* (Schaffer, 2000): our perceptions of what we are good at – or not.

In contrast, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997a) concentrates on the ‘Can I do?’ questions and is more specific, focusing on a domain or situation and the ‘mastery’ of that experience (Bandura, 1997a). Remember, the participants were all ‘volunteers’, so did this inclusion within the research provide a means to either *establish* or *reinforce* an identity – to claim *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave and Wenger, 1998) in a professional community of practice? Would involvement within the research provide participants with an avenue through which to enhance this self-efficacy (Turner, et al. 1994; Greeno et al. 1996; Woods, 1999)? In doing so, would there be opportunities for participants to alter their self-concept through the perceptions of others? Do we begin to see this used for *self-categorisation* to define the personal and/or social identity (Bizumic *et al.* 2009) so that such perceptions are defined in relation to the social context within which the participants are acting (Turner *et al. 1994)*? This chapter, therefore, is about examining these different concepts, by using the data, in relation to the individual participants. With that said, the analysis starts with the first learner participant, Charlie.

5.2.1 *Charlie (learner participant)*

From the outset, Charlie was very keen to get involved with the action research project and described himself/herself as a “naturally nosey person” (Int1) who was interested in having the opportunity to “observe somebody else .. mainly for personal gain…also I’d like to better it for the next students that come along” (Int1). Within the interview comments a sense of identity emerged of an individual recognising their place on the course – and on the action research project – as a learner. Having done a small action research project previously, as part of the DTLLS course, with his/her own learners, Charlie was also quick to assign value to the inclusion of learners which was seen as a “positive thing..[as..] the learners felt involved…[and had]…a sense of ownership” (Int1) in the learning. In that instance, Charlie’s role had been as the ‘teacher’ so there was evidence of Charlie’s sense of identity in different contexts: of a *personal* and a *social* identity; of an identity defined by *self* and by *others*.

In this first interview Charlie acknowledged the wider benefits to be gained through involvement with the research. For Charlie it was through engaging with teaching staff who, “work with mainstream adults usually and it’s a lot different to…the students that I work with so it’d probably…it’d be good for me to see how to teach on a different level” (Int1). However, Charlie was also able to recognise that this ‘difference’ in teaching contexts meant that there was something to be gained by Sam and the other teaching staff on the DTLLS programme through their interaction with Charlie: “it would be good for them also” (Int1). This self-concept indicates an individual who felt able to identify with others, whose self-image could envisage co-participation and co-benefits from this experience.

Relaxed when talking about the observation process, Charlie anticipated a range of benefits from both the observation and the post-observation discussion. When asked by the researcher whether these two ‘opportunities’ would reinforce each other, or provide different insights, Charlie’s answer was quite emphatic: “I think you’d get **completely** [Charlie’s emphasis] different things!” (Int1). There was a confidence in terms of ‘knowledge’ and Charlie’s self-concept in relation to his/her *environmental* experiences in the context of teaching and learning. Charlie’s value judgements indicated a strong self-concept within which there were expectations that others would also view Charlie’s contributions positively.

So, what did happen in the post-observation discussion? Well, the analysis in this section of the data indicates a very similar picture to that already seen in Chapter Four (4.2.2): with the conversation between Sam and Charlie (Int6) demonstrating a fluidity and comfortable ‘interaction’ and exchange of thoughts and opinions. Charlie made several suggestions about how the observed session could have been improved:

“I picked up it would have been better I would have thought if it was done in a table format so..” (Int6)

“There was nothing that was visual either, so if you were to do one of those and it was through discussion, I thought it would be better if it was up on a flip chart…” (Int6)

“It was just done basically through questioning, but like we said before, the same individuals were questioned…and the others were missed out..” (Int6)

In the final follow-up interview with Charlie, he/she was asked to reflect back on what he/she felt the purpose of the observation process had been and what had been gained through involvement with the research. Charlie was very thoughtful in response to this and felt that essentially it had been about looking “at our own strengths and weaknesses..[..] and where we need to improve” (Int12).

When asked to expand on this in terms of whether this related to ‘self’ or ‘others’, Charlie confirmed that it was not just about the person being observed, it was also about improving her/his own practice:

“Yeah, I think..yeah, what I could get out of it myself, see what I’m doing wrong. Looking at what I do when I’m being observed….and thinking, yeah (!) I do that [laughs].” (Int12)

When asked whether this might be comparable with ‘holding a mirror up to yourself” Charlie replied: “Yeah! It is really [laughs] and thinking – oh, I do things like that!” (Int12). This is a duality of the “looking glass self” (Cooley, 1902) for it is not only about the ‘I’ watching the ‘me’, but also being able to do that through recognising similar traits or actions in others, as in self-categorization theory. It is about being able to share experiences with others as we recognise that self-concept in both them and ourselves.

Charlie described the post-observation discussion with Sam as enjoyable and felt they had both picked up on similar issues. There was a sharing of identities here as ‘teachers’ and an emphasis on interaction with Sam. When asked if this had been any easier because of the existing relationship between Charlie and Sam, Charlie reflected for a moment and then concluded “Yeah, I do have a good relationship with Sam…[who] guided me a bit [in the post-observation discussion], but Sam is my teacher at the end of the day” (Int12). This reflection from Charlie is picked up within the review of Sam’s interviews (5.2.3) when he/she confirms that there was a deliberate act on Sam’s part to encourage Charlie to take the lead in the post-observation discussion.

However, as will be seen (5.2.3: 141), although not present at the beginning, Sam did suspect that as the discussion continued, there was a tendency for the ‘teacher’ in Sam to take over (Interview Nine). It also brings us back to the pupil-teacher relationship which Charlie has referred to previously in the first interview. Charlie’s *identity* is not static within his/her interactions with Sam, with self-concept changing dependent upon the introspection at any given point. The identity of self that Charlie *perceives* does not appear to be dependent upon a given *role*. Charlie shows an ability to relate equally well to being a ‘teacher’ as a ‘learner’: *identity* is created through transactions with others; and sense of ‘self’ demonstrates independent agency. However, as with the other participants, Charlie **is** a teacher and as such has a *membership* within a community of practice. The question is then, ‘how’ is that membership enacted, and this question will be considered again at the end of the chapter (5.5.0).

5.2.2 *Alex (learner participant)*

As with all participants, there was an initial interview to discuss the project and why he/she was interested in taking part: Alex was a *learner participant* so there was also the post-observation discussion with Gerry (*teacher participant*). In addition, Alex sent two emails. The first contained additional reflections on the observed session and how it could have been improved: remember, there were difficulties in getting Alex’s pro-forma back after the post-observation discussion (4.3.0: 112) and this particular email was sent to me before the actual, partially-completed, pro-forma was eventually received. The second was in relation to follow-up questions which I had sent to Alex – for either an email response – or a short discussion: due to time constraints the former option was chosen. These ‘follow-up’ questions were the same ones used in the final discussion with Charlie. When asked why he/she had volunteered, Alex initially talked about increasing his/her degree of:

“… participation with the high ranking members of the establishment [laughs] … I can begin to climb the greasy pole [smiles] and see what those in power think, what they think, **how** (Alex’s emphasis) they think..[…] I actually think that I have lots to give in response to the, this very interesting er… DTLLS course that I was a part of.” (Int3)

Further into the conversation, the reference to the “greasy pole” was acknowledged as a “bit of a joke” (Int3), however, Alex did feel by:

“…imparting some of my own experience, regurgitating my experience, with luck, with any luck, it will be incorporated in future courses and with any luck it will be constructive. I hope to steer it in ways which, er, will build on it…[…] …some of the experiences I have from the first year, are definitely, erm, developmental points from…(Int3)

Alex returned to this point a little further into the conversation, talking of the course not having met “my expectations” on the first year, and so looking for things to be “done better this year”: Alex is completing the second year of the course and going in to a first-year class for the purposes of the observation. Here Alex demonstrated a strong sense of self-efficacy: there was no questioning around self-belief, whether Alex ‘could do something’ or not. There was almost a sense of “entitlement and power” (Greeno *et al.* 1996) with Alex’s rhetoric indicating an individual with a justifiable belief of ‘expert’ status in a community. Alex talked about what might be gained from the observation: that she/he “might be open to what I see to a great extent as well” (Int3). In other words, to how the *observed participants* are teaching. It was only a minor comment, but it does reinforce this sense of ‘position’ within the community: Alex *might* be receptive to what other teaching staff were doing, and similarly anticipates others to be receptive of his/her observations and insight.

We cannot review Alex’s conversations, and emails, without focus on the actual language used. Throughout these exchanges, there was evidence of an individual who made frequent use of language which could be attributed as ‘professional’ speak. Alex incorporated references to texts and authors, to theoretical concepts, and there was a sense of these being almost drip-fed into the conversation: “Oh, somebody called Parker …[…].. he concurs with people like Brookfield, and *obviously* [Alex’s emphasis] he quotes, er, people like Foucault, he comments on Foucault, his power and discourse relations” (Int3). It is almost as if Alex needs to emphasize her/his intellectual capabilities and legitimacy in relation to the teaching community.

When asked what he/she felt Gerry might get out of the process, Alex talked about their different perspectives and ‘life experience’. Remember, Alex and Gerry both work at the same organisation and have professional ‘knowledge’ of each other over several years and aspects of this relationship are further discussed in Chapter Six (6.2.2). Alex felt that it would be ‘interesting’ to partner Gerry who would often “take on an opposing view and attempt to defend it - and that will be interesting if Gerry’s defence is rational and the process brings about some rationality and, and…. some clarification of concepts” (Int3). From this extract, there was a *linking* of identities by Alex, with the conversation continuing with talk of “consensual clarification” of these concepts. This self-categorization indicates a sense of identity whereby the individual, Alex, defines herself/himself as belonging to the same ‘community’ as Gerry, whom he/she regards as someone who needs “a constant touch with intellectual and practical aspects of [the] teaching profession” (Int3). Presumably if Alex has this shared sense of ‘identity’ with Gerry, then this would indicate that Alex too engages in this intellectual debate with his/her peers. This was further reinforced when Alex made reference to her/his own status in relation to Gerry:

“As a teacher myself, I see that the only way we can be legitimately, er, practising intellectuals is to be steeped in intellectual matters from morning to dusk. We need to read, to be engaged in a constant process of improvement…[…]… We, need to be sustained by constant discourse…” (Int3).

Throughout this conversation, Alex placed herself/himself within the parameters of the ‘expert’, as an individual who belonged to the same community as Gerry – as someone who was involved in academic discourse. The implication is that this is where Alex naturally ‘belongs’, that he/she is “schematic for the domain” (Oyserman *et al.* 2011: 10) and therefore readily comprehends and assimilates information relevant to that context. However, identities are not necessarily stable and fixed. If Alex’s identity was ‘unstable’ might this in some way explain why she/he made such strenuous efforts to be ‘accepted’ – to be ‘acknowledged’ – as belonging?

We have already seen in Chapter Four (4.2.4:102) how Alex has referred to himself/herself as someone who has “graduated from the course”, albeit only just. The research provided opportunities for Alex to “engage with the tutors, to some minor extent, in, in a way that will model again an engagement with the tutors that could be, could slightly open up the silence” (Int3). There was evidence here of Alex’s perceptions of how he/she could be the ‘bridge’ between these two ‘communities’ – learners and teaching staff, which echoes a community of practice approach. It is not clear, however, why Alex feels that there is a ‘silence’ which needs to be ‘opened up’ – perhaps there is something here which links to earlier expressions of dissatisfaction with the course (p.101).

Is it that Alex **needs** to be *perceived* in this role, both by self and others, and has constructed this ‘identity’ accordingly? Alex appears to be demonstrating how his/her knowledge and actions validate a claim to *legitimate* participation within the community of teaching professionals. Alex also identified himself/herself as the ‘expert’ amongst fellow-learners on the DTLLS course, with reference to being experienced on the same course, but “at a higher level of the same thing” (Int3). Yet, does this indicate that these identities are ‘strong’, or simply that Alex is behaving and *enacting* behaviours which would, in some way, reduce the ‘imagined gap’ between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘perceived real self’ (Schaffer, 2000: 164)? If Alex’s participation as a volunteer was motivated by a “need to carry out the activities of the group” (Mayes, 2992: 169), then this would become more of a *social identity* with Alex’s perceptions being evaluated in relation to a social context (Turner, *et al.* 1994).

So, what happened during his/her post-observation discussion with Gerry? When the data from this discussion were reviewed in terms of relationships (4.3.1), they highlighted the way in which Alex *reaffirmed* Gerry’s comments (p.109, *Table 4.2*) throughout their conversation. However, this was not an ‘easy’ conversation which demonstrated the ‘consensual clarification’ which Alex had anticipated in Interview Three. Although there was general discussion around the session which had been observed, there was also a quite lengthy, and ‘difficult’ extract when Alex talked of ‘problematizing’ learning, and Gerry had pressed for clarification of this (4.2.2: 92 - 93). Could this be regarded as Gerry questioning the validity of Alex’s knowledge: an issue around hierarchy and power? Or, was it simply that Gerry was frustrated by Alex’s inability to substantiate the comment: after all, these are individuals who have known each other for some time so we cannot be certain whether there were other factors in their history which were influencing this exchange. There are further references to this (5.2.3) when Gerry’s interviews are reviewed. In Alex’s last email, reflecting on his/her involvement with the research, it was interesting that he/she noted the possible influence of “The dynamics of my own relationship with the peer observer [Gerry]” as being someone who had previously taught Alex, and whom he/she regarded as a “valued colleague” (Email2).

In Alex we have an individual who appears to have an identity which he/she perceives to be linked to a specific ‘role’: that of a professional within a community of teachers. Alex’s *perceptions* acknowledge a link with other learners, but from the perspective of an ‘expert’, or someone who could ‘bridge’ the gap between the learners and the teaching staff. Involvement with the research was an opportunity to validate membership of this educational ‘community’ (Baxter-Magolda, 1999). However, if fellow-participants do not recognise contributions as demonstrating ‘competence’, then paradoxically, an individual risks being viewed as a ‘non-participant’ and perhaps this is what was happening within Alex’s exchanges with Gerry.

Having reviewed the two *learner participants*, the focus now turns towards their ‘partners’ in this process, the *teacher participants*.

5.2.3 *Sam and Gerry (teacher participants)*

The first contact with these *teacher participants* was a joint interview with the researcher (Int2). Further data were gathered in relation to each individual via the post-observation discussion and a follow-up interview a short while later (Appendix Four for timescale). Sam also sent an email with some additional thoughts after the observation. Both Sam and Gerry talked of engaging with their learners, of seeing their involvement in this research project as an “opportunity for us to develop that further..[…]… it’s a principle that we teach [laughs] so we ought to be able to *model* (Gerry’s emphasis) it well to our own learners” (Gerry, Int2). This language was echoed by Sam who concurred that in the role of ‘teacher trainers’, staff should be modelling “what we’re preaching…[…]…by having opportunities for review of learner feedback and being able to *demonstrate* (Sam’s emphasis) that we are listening and changing our practice, *developing* (Sam’s emphasis) our practice…” (Sam, Int2).

Both *teacher participants* regarded this involvement of learners as important, particularly when learners then see actions implemented as a result of their feedback: “…because it’s in their local context, rather than an organisational standard” (Gerry, Int2). There was a clear construct of ‘self-concept’ in the discussion indicating that both Sam and Gerry felt that there was a personal, and professional, need to be seen by their learners as members of a teaching community which not only valued this ‘modelling’ of good practice, but also embedded it within their own actions (Hughes *et al.* 2011). This interview emphasised the potential for action research to be a “really powerful tool for quality improvement and your own practice – and hopefully improvement within the organisation” (Sam, Int2). Although ‘organisational’ issues are not reviewed at this point, this will be revisited in section 5.4.0 of this chapter and again in Chapter Six.

This responsiveness to learner feedback, however, was not a carte blanche to implement every aspect received. Gerry in particular commented that it was also about discussion with the learners, about negotiation and adjustment of learner expectations “to something that is more reasonable … […] … sometimes it also allows us to throw that responsibility back to them – on the learner” (Gerry, Int2). Is this devolution of power to the learner, or a position of responsibility being ‘allowed’ by the tutor (Marsh *et al.* 2001)? Is it indicative of a teacher simply trying to get learners to recognise the degree of responsibility they too must share in their learning outcomes? From a teacher’s perspective, however, one has to be mindful that an individual’s sense of *identity* influences the ways in which they might be *able* to engage with such a ‘responsibility’. Might those with a stronger, more developed sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, also have the capacity and capabilities to *accept* such a responsibility? Would those who are able to do so, thus be able to demonstrate ‘competence’ and to claim membership of this learning community (Baxter-Magolda, 1999)? By default, would those who cannot do so then become non-valid members who are denied access to such a community? In earlier chapters we considered the involvement of learners and the development of learner voice: the concept of the ‘expert’ learner and concerns around who was ‘speaking’, who was *able* to speak, and who was being represented by that dialogue. As this section unfolds, the evidence will show that there are differences between Sam’s and Gerry’s approaches to and reflections on this process; to their expectations and developmental foci.

To pursue this further, each *teacher participant* was asked what *they* might be looking for in the observations; what they might *expect* to gain from the process. For Gerry, it was about needing to have a ‘focus’: the question was, “where has that focus come from?” (Gerry, Int2) and there was an expectation that everyone involved in the observations would probably have their own ‘agenda’ based on their individual experiences and backgrounds. Sam’s response was that her/his usual approach was to ask the ‘observee’ if they had a particular area on which they would like critical feedback. From early within this interview there was a divergence in ‘starting points’: for Gerry the focus came *from* the individual doing the observation; for Sam, it was about being *given* that focus by the member of staff being observed, and the accompanying discussion. At this point, Gerry acknowledged that if this focus came from him/her then this could be a ‘power’ issue as it would centre around “what I would like our course to develop in” (Gerry, Int2), yet it will be seen in the analysis of Interview Eight later in this section, that Gerry’s focus *is* centred around her/his own development.

As this process is viewed by Gerry as being centred in his/her practice and identity as the more experienced *other,* we might consider this as a traditional ‘master-apprentice’ model (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, Gerry talks of this interaction with the learner as also being used to develop Gerry’s own practice *through* that interaction with the ‘learner’: the learner is almost a *reflective tool* for the ‘master’. In that case, would this be more consistent with an ecological learning system – with ‘mutual interaction’ and the identities of both *teacher participant* and *learner participant* being ‘reinforced’ through these transactions with others? When I asked what they felt the *learner participants* would gain from this process, again this returned to the concept of “modelling teaching” (Sam, Int2) and improving their own practice:

“I’m sure that probably, one of the reasons that they’ve volunteered must be that they want to engage with us [Sam and Gerry] in those conversations and they’re obviously quite keen to have discussions about practice..[pauses]..so it can be the process of observing, but possibly also the process of discussion is appealing as well.” (Gerry, Int2)

Gerry had ‘mixed feelings’ about taking a *learner participant* into a classroom for the purposes of observation. Although Gerry had some previous experience of taking learners from one curriculum area (14 – 16 year old ‘school link’ learners) to a different curriculum area so that they could “actually experience what it’s like to be in a positive classroom”, there was concern that:

“…from the teacher’s perspective who’s being observed, I think there is such a feeling of disempowerment and observation is a time when people feel that they are not in control…[…]… I can imagine that the response to that…might be…negative.” (Gerry, Int2)

It was seen as crucial that this aspect of the process was ‘managed’ appropriately with everyone involved being fully informed, and mindful of the need for confidentiality. Sam was aware (p.105) of an example where learners in a school *had* been involved in observations. The learners were not adults, but Sam’s impression had been that the experience had been an ‘empowering’ one for the learners with quite a lot of structure provided from the teacher involved. This need for ‘structure’ in the process was recognised as important when considering the design of the pro-forma (Appendix Three) so that there was a framework to support the participants’ discussion. Both *teacher participants* stressed the need for this to be a ‘constructive’ process divorced from any connection to ‘management’ and with only the *observed* member of teaching staff receiving the feedback. There were concerns that there would be ‘resistance’ if this was implemented as a cross-college initiative and this will be reviewed further within section 5.4.0. However, the conversation between Sam and Gerry constantly returned to this aspect: this *could be* a positive vehicle for “modelling good practice for our learners” (Sam, Int2). This was not just from the actual process, but also in terms of *future* classes and other teachers and trainee teachers taking this aspect of practice forward for themselves, and this will be considered further in Chapter Six (6.3.1).

The data in the post-observation discussions have already been reviewed in terms of the interactions between each *learner participant* and their *teacher participant* partner for evidence relating to the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82). In this chapter, therefore, the focus turns to those initial reflections and concerns raised by Sam and Gerry and it is within the ‘follow-up’ interviews, and received email from Sam, that attention now turns.

Turning to Sam‘s email first, this outlined Sam’s prior experience of ‘peer’ observations, which “have usually been between myself and a colleague in the same department”. Whilst acknowledging the benefits, Sam also highlighted the drawbacks: the tendency being towards “nice feedback” as the process is a reciprocal one and “you might not want critical feedback returned, or similarly you might feel that critical feedback could disrupt office relations”. What Sam had found *particularly* interesting about the research, was being paired with a colleague who was not just from “a different subject area, but also from a different institution.” Interestingly, Charlie had anticipated that Sam would gain something from working with someone who taught in a different curriculum area (4.2.4: 100). Sam felt this “was liberating to some extent as I felt confident about discussing the session without the usual caveats and diplomacy involved”. There was clearly a degree of ‘trust’ here in the relationship between Sam and Charlie, and earlier (5.2.1: 129) Charlie acknowledged the strength of that relationship. Sam must also have felt that Charlie had sufficient *competence* and *knowledge* of teaching and learning concepts to be able to discuss those aspects of the observation (Veenman *et al.* 2006).

However, Sam was mindful that his/her ‘partner’ in this process had only recently completed the second year of the DTLLS course and had been one of his/her own former learners: the same as between Gerry and Alex. As such, Sam had deliberately adopted a ‘facilitating’ role initially, trying to “elicit as much from Charlie as possible”: seeking the mutual interaction and agency of an ecological learning system. Yet Sam also concluded that towards the end of the discussion she/he had probably started to “fit into a traditional didactic teaching role” and maybe this is indicative of the inherent potential of a “teacher-student position”: the ‘master-apprentice’ relationship of a community of practice. What was different about this observation was that the *observed participant*, Chris, independently asked for feedback from Sam: this had not been a requirement of the research project and we shall look at this from Chris’ point of view in section 5.2.4.

Sam’s reaction to this (Interview Nine) was that the:

“…initial ‘objective’ discussion with my fellow observer allowed me to come into the discussion [with Chris] with a clear idea of the key development points. I felt that this enabled me to facilitate the discussion towards stronger critical viewpoints than I have done during previous peer observations… […] … The previous discussion had allowed me to get all of the minor points ‘off my chest’ as well as the ability to check, clarify and confirm issues [with Charlie]”.

The final follow-up interview with Sam took place a few weeks after the observation and essentially recapped on what she/he had already put into the email. Once again Sam stressed that what had been of real interest was the “collaboration between teacher and trainee in the observation process” (Sam, Int9) and that there was a “conscious decision to try and sit back” (Sam, Int9) and allow Charlie the opportunity to put forward his/her own ideas. Although these were described as being ‘pretty similar’ by Sam, there was a note of caution that the “student – or trainee – will feel obliged to agree” (Sam, Int9). In the post-observation interview Charlie actually put forward a confident argument; however, it is a valid note of caution for any future practice (6.3.1). Had Charlie wanted to demonstrate both a *personal* and *social* *identity* which would validate membership in the community of practice then he/she might indeed have shaped his/her behaviour in order to do so (Oyserman *et al.* 2011).

There was also further reflection by Sam on the *observed participant’s* request for feedback as soon as the observation had been completed – which Sam declined to do as she/he wanted to “have a bit of a pause for reflection” (Sam, Int9). Again Sam made reference to the benefits of “having had somebody to bounce your ideas off first, before giving that feedback” (Sam, Int9). This had confirmed the initial thoughts during the observation and resulted in a greater clarity, with salient points emerging from the post-observation discussion which then informed a far richer ‘feedback’ discussion with the *observed participant,* Chris. Transferring this into the DTLLS course delivery was something which was felt to require further consideration, and there would certainly be potential logistical issues purely in terms of the practicalities involved in arranged cross-organisational observations. However, Sam did consider that this might help when discussions around ‘transferability’ arise and individuals protest: “… oh, it wouldn’t work with my learners – oh, mine would never do that – and actually, going into different environments, erm, could help that” (Sam, Int9). This approach could construct ‘possibilities’ for individuals to consider *how* they might be able to apply something they had ‘observed’ in a different context, and this potential for transferability in relation to the research (referred to in Chapter Two, section 2.4.0) is returned to in the final chapter.

When looking at my final conversation with Gerry (Interview Eight), there was again reflection around the purpose of the observation. Gerry felt that both the observation, and the post-observation discussion, should be around “my professional development” stressing that “I always reveal to my students ‘this is what I’m trying to get better at’….’this year I’m looking at this, this and this” (Int8).

There was a strong sense of Gerry being the source of ‘direction’, the locus of power, and that she/he would have liked the opportunity of speaking to the *learner participant* before the observation as Alex knows how Gerry teaches:

“…my student – who is going to be my partner – to go, ‘right, this is where I see my teaching and learning going…. […] … what I want from my learners is that, erm.., and for them to know….they’re doing it for me and to develop my practice in those areas… […] … when we watched this thing together, we’re looking at it …. For what we can learn about it for me – does that make sense? And possibly for Alex as a student.” (Gerry, Int8)

At this point in the conversation I asked Gerry what he/she felt Alex’s role was in this process:

“So, yes, Alex [….]…what I see is…Alex is my partner in, he’s/she’s helping me to develop (develop yourself? – from researcher), yes, (so would you see that being flipped round and you becoming Alex’s partner? – from researcher). In learning, yes, so Alex has also got to think ‘right, okay, as a learner I would do this, how I do this, and why would I do that?’ So, we both go in that sense, erm, because… I did get frustrated in our post-observation discussion… [...] … Alex was making some interesting comments but he/she couldn’t tell me what was meant because he/she couldn’t assign it to a, anything in particular...” (Int8)

To remind ourselves, this ‘sense of frustration’ (4.2.2: 92 - 93; 5.2.2: 135) had been evident in the discussion when Gerry had pressed Alex for greater clarification on the ‘problematization’ of learning she/he had referred to in their post-observation discussion. This had produced a ‘difficult’ period in the conversation, however, rather than becoming frustrated it might have been beneficial to both participants had Gerry adopted a more ‘collaborative’ approach and used his/her expertise to enable Alex to ‘unpick’ these ideas. The interview continued to consider possible feedback options for any *observed* member of staff and where – as had been implied within earlier comments – the foci of the developmental process were situated: on the observer, or the observee. In contrast to Sam’s position, Gerry felt that if the observation process was entirely focused on using what had been seen to inform and further develop one’s own practice, then this might be received more positively by the teaching staff and could also be used to further discussion with the learner involved:

“…teacher professionalism means you’re in charge of your own professionalism and you analyse your own data, you evaluate it, your progress so far, you decide on the things you’re interested in developing… […] … which may have nothing to do with the person who you are watching… […] …it’s not about being observed, actually, it’s about engaging your learners in discussion.” (Gerry, Int8)

The lesson would then be used *only* to provide the context for the discussion between the *learner participant* and the *teacher participant* and not for feedback to the member of teaching staff observed. Yet we know from Chris’ swift request for feedback from Sam that this might not be an ideal scenario for the *observed participant* who would then be isolated from the discussion. So, what did the *observed participants* think about the whole process?

5.2.4 *Chris, Morgan and Dom (observed participants)*

I was fortunate to have three very willing volunteers from the members of teaching staff on the DTLLS course team who were prepared to welcome ‘observers’ into their classrooms. To recap, Sam and Charlie observed Chris and Gerry and Alex observed a joint-delivered session with Morgan and Dom. Chris was the only *observed participant* who requested any feedback from the process (provided by Sam) and so Chris was interviewed twice – once at the start of the process and a final reflective interview towards the end. All *observed participants* had a brief participant conversation with the researcher prior to the observations to ensure informed consent. In the joint-delivered session (Morgan and Dom) only Morgan was available for a ‘reflective’ interview after the observation: there was no interview conducted with Dom.

In the first discussion with Chris, Interview Four, he/she felt that the potential for learners to engage in the observation process was important, that it would provide individuals with opportunities to consider ways of improving their teaching practice as:

“….the observation process itself, erm, can be definitely quite cathartic for the individual, but equally as a professional, as I said earlier, help us move forward and think about where we need to develop ourselves, how we can improve, how we can share best practice. How we can hold professional discussions and think about the learner.” (Chris, Int4)

Although bordering on a community of practice approach, with development and exchange of knowledge and expertise relevant to a particular practice, this research project provided an opportunity for new forms of collaboration, for identities to be *affected* through interactions with others: as in an ecological learning system. There were numerous stakeholders involved in this process, as Morgan reminds us in her/his interview which is reviewed later in this section, and as such we see these individual ‘actors’ engaging with the context: the observation of teaching and learning. There is also within this context, however, a sense of ‘collective’ agency through the simple fact that all of the participants are members of the teaching profession: whether as ‘experts’ or as ‘learners’. The research cannot, therefore, speculate too widely on the transferability of the findings to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), nevertheless, we shall consider potential developments for research and practice further in Chapter Six. As the *observed participant*, Chris was also asked what she/he felt the impact would be on the other learners, those first year learners (who are trainee teachers) present in the class during the observation: remember these ‘trainee teachers’ possess varying degrees of experience with ‘trainee’ simply indicating that they are ‘not yet qualified’. This does not necessarily mean that they are new to the profession itself, so Chris also refers to the learners as ‘staff’:

“I think it’s very important that we do, encourage staff to be aware of, erm, the whole process so that they understand it fully. That it’s not a sort of a shock or surprise or anything – we talk about – you’re going to be inspected, and therefore, I think as well from the learner’s perspective because people work at different organisations, I think it’s good to share, again, the experience of that observation process and to look at, our know, how it’s formulated and delivered in different organisations.” (Chris, Int4)

Within these comments there is an ‘echoing’ of Sam’s thoughts around sharing experiences with colleagues from different organisations: the opportunity for different perspectives. All of the participants have referred to this activity as being of value; as ‘meaningful’ on both a personal and professional level (Mayes, 2002). As such, one might anticipate that this would be conducive to the development of the ‘expert’ learner: perhaps what we need to consider, however, is where the *source* of this meaning comes from – is it from the activity, or from the interaction with others? This may be perceived differently for each of the individuals involved in this research, but the potential for a positive or negative influence on the individual’s sense of self-efficacy remains in all instances. So what else might impact on an individual’s *ability* to identify with these situations?

One of the concerns raised in the interviews was about the level of experience of any *learner participant* involved with such observations, particularly with respect to feedback: there might be a lack of awareness around the ‘choice’ of words used and the potential impact of this on any *observed participant.* Yet Chris could appreciate that “people have to start somewhere, so the process evolves for them…. […although there is also acknowledgement that…] … you can have experienced people who don’t always get it right [laughs]” (Int4). These words will no doubt resonate with many of us as we recall just such examples! A *positive* experience of observation feedback – even where the lesson has been less successful – can still leave a teacher motivated and recognising where the teaching and learning experience could have been improved. Similarly, a *negative* experience can result in an individual’s loss of confidence and a devalued sense of self-esteem and identity. It would be essential, therefore, for potential feedback options to be considered carefully in any future developments of this model (6.3.1).

As this was an action research-based project, it was important to discuss the process, and potential developments, with the participants and part of Chris’ interview focused around what he/she felt might be an appropriate feedback ‘model’. There was an expectation that in essence there would be two options: “mentoring and then the coaching model” (Int4), with these reflecting the level of experience of the individuals involved in the observations:

“…some of them might have […] taught for a long time and therefore been involved in peer observations quite a lot, erm, and the fact that they’ve been observed themselves for the DTLLS programme, I would imagine they’d have accumulated a lot of knowledge about giving feedback – supportive feedback, erm but equally the less experienced learners, that maybe they will be coached in certain – sort of – phrases and strategies, and it might be led by the actual teacher themselves and they contribute and that discussion, you know, sort of takes place, that, you know, they feel – that the more experienced person, they might feel more comfortable in just contributing rather than sort of taking a lead.” (Chris, Int4)

These aspects, and some additional reflections on the process, were revisited (Interview Ten) during a follow-up interview with Chris after she/he had been involved in the feedback discussion with Sam. Chris felt that the whole process had been very positive, including the opportunity it afforded to reaffirm with her/his own learners the need for observations to be a “sort of an open policy in terms of encouraging people to be more reflective and to…hold professional discussions” (Chris, Int10). For Chris, just as with Sam (Int9), the process had been “quite liberating because there were things that Sam was saying that I realised ‘yes!’ I did that, aaaah, and I wished I didn’t, and I wished [smiles] I hadn’t done that” (Int10). In terms of the *participant learner’s* involvement*,* Chris felt that such a post-observation discussion would be a good opportunity for knowledge of theoretical concepts, and reflexivity, to become much more embedded rather than “surface learning” (Chris, In10): the development of the metacognitive skills associated with the expert learners of government policy (LSC, 2007; QIA, 2008). However, there was a pragmatism around trying to implement something like this, especially across organisations – many of whom, like the one in which the research is based, are undergoing periods of substantial change and restructuring and individuals are under great pressure in their work environments. In spite of these concerns, Chris was optimistic about trying to find a way to take this initiative forward with the learners, in some format, in the following academic year.

The only other interview with an *observed participant* was conducted with Morgan a few weeks after the observation. A ‘newer’ member of the teaching team, although an experienced teacher, Morgan had not initially been that aware of discussions amongst colleagues about the research project, and regretted not having been involved at an earlier stage: “I am now rather curious and wish… and quite keen on it and think I would have liked to have been involved in it earlier” (Morgan, Int7). A recurrent theme within the interviews, reference was made to the desire to:

“model good practice, so we did want to say to people there will be all these bods at the back [laughs] writing away in the corner, because we would expect them to do, we would hope that they would want to be observed and do peer observations and so on in their own practice.” (Morgan, Int7)

It is almost about stressing not just the learning potential of the *individual*, but also the learning potential of the *collective* (Clarke *et al.* 2005). We then see self-identity becoming established as a result of reinforcement of a behaviour which becomes internalized within that individual or collective body (Celluch *et al.* 2010). Remember, there was no requirement for any form of feedback to be provided to the *observed participants* in this research project, however, Morgan commented that the absence of this had seemed quite strange:

“…when there’s been a process when somebody, even though one knows it’s not, not a process that’s a judgemental process, erm, it’s quite strange to have been involved in something and not….and then left… […]… there is the feeling, if you’ve been involved in something, that ‘yes’ you would like something back, or even perhaps, the opportunity just to, erm, or, or simply….[discuss with someone in some way].” (Morgan, Int7)

The main concern was that there should be *some* form of feedback, that to be left ‘isolated’ from this felt ‘odd’ and also to some extent a missed opportunity for this “modelling and sharing good practice and involving different stakeholders” (Morgan, Int7). This reference to multiple stakeholders was interesting as at no point in the research was everyone involved seen ‘together’. I cannot know, therefore, whether this might have yielded additional data in relation to the ways in which different individuals, within the overarching group, might have reacted to these situations dependent on their perceptions of their ‘place’ within the social structure (Turner, 1999). This, and the potential impact this might have had on their perceived trajectories, will be considered further within the final discussions in Chapter Six.

Having reached the end of the analysis of the interviews with the *learner, teacher* and *observed participants,* the research now reviews the organisational perspective, and potential difficulties or benefits perceived, which were evident within the interview with the curriculum area manager, Pat.

5.3.0 *Pat (manager participant)*

At the time of the research, Pat was responsible for managing the curriculum area delivering the DTLLS qualification in the college, and therefore line manager to the *teacher participants* and *observed participants*. A very experienced member of the cross-college observation team, and long-time manager, Pat brought a variety and depth of perceptions to the research project both from a curriculum area and an organisational perspective. The interview began with a review of *pre-interview* questions emailed to Pat a few days in advance. This was done for two reasons: to enable Pat to reflect on these, in terms of his/her staff and from an organisational perspective; and to maximise the time Pat had available for the interview.

When asked how staff in the area felt about the research project, Pat reported that this had been regarded as a useful activity which had generated a lot of discussion around the learning experience: this was evidenced in the data from the other participant interviews. Pat also felt that the *participant learners* who had taken part in this project were more likely to be skilled at observing and analysing learning due to the nature of their studies on the DTLLS course – and the very fact that they were practicing teachers themselves (2.4.1). However, Pat had reservations about the impact of ‘singling’ out individual learners for participation in such a study – even though they had volunteered – and the potential impact this might have on their relationship with the rest of the group: this was discussed in the methodological considerations in Chapter Two.

The research also considered ‘why’ the *learner participants* volunteered within the analysis of their interviews in Chapter Four and earlier in this chapter (5.1.1, 5.2.0 and individual participant interviews):

“Now we *asked* for volunteers, so it was somebody who **volunteered**, however, it does, even with a volunteer, it does shift that sort of relationship and other people are there, ‘oh, teachers’ pet’, you know daft things. But you know it *does* change the dynamic within a group…” (Pat, Int11).

This is an important consideration when evaluating ‘how’ this research is going to be taken forward, what the next steps are for practice and development of teaching and learning (section 6.3). From a community of practice perspective, would this offer *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to *some* learners, but not others? From an ecological learning perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Hodgson and Spours, 2009) we might be looking at something more ‘transitory and fluid’ (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82), something more ‘collaborative’, but what would the impact be of doing so on the learners ‘involved’ and those who were ‘not’ involved? Pat acknowledged that there was already a strong desire within the team to ‘collaborate’ with the learners on the DTLLS programme, however, this was tempered by the fact that, at the end of the day, although everyone is a ‘teacher’, within the classroom there is that teacher-learner relationship:

“… we do very much view them as colleagues, but … […] … at the end of the day **we’re** the ones who’re marking the assignments, deciding whether they are satisfactory teachers in the classroom or not. There is always that, it never ever goes away – even with what we see as a very collaborative, collegiate approach to teaching and learning, it’s there, you can’t pretend that it’s not and you have to be honest and open about that, you know, we talk about, erm, we do openly talk about that power relationship as well in the classes…” (Pat, Int11)

This was recognised in previous interviews with the participants: Charlie frequently referred to the ‘pupil-teacher’ context; Alex’s sense of deference towards Gerry; and Sam’s acknowledgement that she/he had deliberately attempted to ‘hold back’ in the post-observation discussion. So, what were Pat’s views on inviting learners into a taught session to ‘observe’ and provide feedback? After consideration, Pat accepted that this was a *potentially* useful “perspective to add to a body of evidence”, as an ‘additional’ means of providing feedback in order to improve teaching and learning. However, the overall judgement a learner might provide, was felt to be of less value than other feedback mechanisms and even “potentially misleading” (email from Pat). There were concerns that a *personal* viewpoint might influence the feedback or comments from a learner; that if there was antagonism towards one of the teaching staff, this could affect that learner’s judgement (Cockburn, 2005):

“… being able to **de-personalise** it, and make a judgement about teaching and learning, erm, when they are in the thick of it, erm I think is, is you know quite difficult to do.” (Pat, Int11)

In addition to issues around ‘power’ where there is an existing ‘teacher-learner’ relationship, the Literature Review also considered just how ‘sincere’ and ‘open’ dialogue *could* possibly be within such a context (Dinkelman, 1997). Pat was mindful of the impact this could have on members of teaching staff, particularly in an existing organisational climate of redundancies and restructuring:

“..you could potentially be **undermining** teachers, erm, in that and I think there are sufficient, erm, ways in which teachers are feeling undermined [laughs] in their professional competence [laughs] that we don’t really want to add any more..” (Pat, Int11)

However, this was viewed as something worth developing, but perhaps in a different format so that learners could still engage with ‘observation’ but without the direct link to an individual member of teaching staff. Pat suggested that there might be potential for the observation to become an ‘activity’ within a class with learners:

“….jointly looking at a recorded session, so as a **group** of learners, okay you know, this tutor has tried this activity out with these learners, you know, we wanted some feedback how you think this is working for these learners, what is it that you see…[…]… you know. .. […] …15 – 20 minutes of an activity.” (Pat, Int11)

Pat had strong feelings about this and the need for the onus to be on the “**teacher** to be gathering that information, because it’s information actually that’s important for **them** and their teaching…” (Pat, Int11 – Pat’s emphasis on comments). There is a consensus between Pat’s and Gerry’s views (5.2.3: 143 - 145) on this issue: the process is for the development of the teacher. However, this research wanted to position this ‘development’ not only with the member of teaching staff, but also with the learner.

When looking at the data from the interviews, and considering the context within which this research might have potential to develop, we need to remember that these learner participants are also teachers. As such, they may – by the very nature of their learning ‘histories’ and experiences – be pre-determined to engage with opportunities to observe teaching and learning: their perceived trajectories may thus be different by default of this background. When ‘DTLLS’ learners become involved in such activities, rather than the broader context of the actual ‘learning’ experienced by the student: “…. they will probably be thinking far more about teaching techniques and learning techniques and passing comments about that…” (Pat, Int11)

For Pat, there was a real *difference* between these DTLLS learners and ‘other’ learners whom Pat felt would go into an observed teaching session “looking at it probably as themselves as **learners**, and ‘how would I feel doing this?’ and ‘ooh, would that be a useful exercise to do?’, ‘ooh I think I was a bit bored and switched off when we did that’” (Int11). However, this *is* a valuable element of involving learners within such situations – to provide opportunities for them to engage with teaching and learning, to question, to reflect and to relate to that experience: developing the metacognitive skills of an ‘expert’ learner. For Pat, DTLLS learners were regarded as ‘belonging’ to a community of practice, as having ‘the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products’ (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) as identified in the continuum of practice. The ‘other’ learners, those from non-teaching backgrounds, were more likely to exhibit a ‘sense of self’ which was not a component within a community of practice, displaying agentic behaviour more in keeping with an ecological learning system (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82).

This returns us to some of the issues raised in Chapter Three (3.4.0) where the research considered the *capacity* of an individual to become *expert* dependent upon the degree of their awareness of the knowledge and skills they possess: in Pat’s comments this specifically relates to ‘domain-specific’ knowledge (Veenman *et al.* 2006) and the difference between declarative as opposed to procedural knowledge. There *is* a difference between ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’ and where this *capacity* is limited, then we may find that an individual’s *potential* for metacognition and becoming an ‘expert learner’ (LSC, 2007’ QIA, 2008) is similarly limited (Bandura, 1997a).

Before moving to the final chapter, it is useful to consider Pat’s comments about the ways in which the organisation has involved its learners to date. The college was felt to have focused strongly on the use of ‘feedback questionnaires’ (email from Pat) for the entire student cohort with Learner Voice Focus groups as well for 16 – 19 year olds: adults were mainly part-time and so included within questionnaires. Any Higher Education students were included within HE Learner Representative Groups[[12]](#footnote-12). Pat considered that whilst feedback questionnaires had the *potential* to be useful, she/he felt that currently they were of limited benefit as the data collected were too “distanced from the tutor…. […] …Data at a local level then becomes either meaningless, has limited applicability or is received too late to have any practical value for the learners currently on programme” (email from Pat). There was a sense of questionnaires being primarily regarded as a senior management tool to produce ‘overarching’ top-level data which was too far removed from the grass roots of teaching and learning: teaching staff were not involved in the design of the questions asked of learners. Questions were also raised around the ‘purpose’ and ‘audience’ of this feedback (email from Pat).

5.4.0 *Conclusion*

So, where have the data taken us so far? The study has considered how themes emerged from the data and the ways in which these contributed to the development of the *continuum of practice* (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) which brought together the two frameworks: communities of practice and ecological learning systems. In Chapter Five the research was then in a position to look for the ‘what else’ in the interviews by using the theoretical concepts of self-esteem, self-concept, self-efficacy and self-categorization which were reviewed in Chapter Three. This research has questioned whether it is engagement *with* the ‘activity’ or the interaction with the environment and the context *around* that activity which has the greatest potential to both influence, and be influenced by, an individual’s identity and their perceived trajectories. If identity, or potential identity, is defined predominantly by the activity – task-oriented – this would align more closely with a community of practice approach. If the evidence indicates an identity informed by behaviour which demonstrates bi-directional *inter-action* with the *environment* and *context,* then the alignment will move towards an ecological learning perspective: identity is fluid, and whilst influenced through transactions with others, there is ‘*agency’* – a sense of ‘self’ which does not require affirmation through belonging to a community of practice.

The evidence from this research has provided examples of both; however the indications are that it is the *interaction* - the opportunity to engage with discussion *around* the activity - which has greatest potential to aid the development of the expert learner. The evidence suggests that the involvement of learners in the observation of teaching and learning, and subsequent discussions with a ‘partner’ member of teaching staff – a more experienced ‘other’ – provides opportunities to embed learning at a deeper level, to enhance the experience for both the individual – and the collective. The potential degree of ‘success’ or ‘impact’ this has, however, depends on the quality of that interaction and in Chapter Six, we shall reflect on these various aspects and future implications for practice.

**Chapter Six: Companions Along the Way**

6.1.0 *Introduction: remembering where we started*

The focus for this research project started with the Literature Review and the ‘expectations’ of government and various policy directives (DfES, 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC, 2007 and QIA, 2008) in relation to Learner Involvement initiatives. It had a simple focus: how can ‘learner voice’ be used to contribute directly to the improvement of teaching and learning; and, does this have the potential to enable the development of the ‘expert’ learner? In Chapter One we revisited this Literature Review, the critical evaluation and reflection on existing research which had been completed in order to establish the ‘gap in knowledge’. This had examined the background of these policy drivers and government initiatives and the educational sectors within which any studies, or anecdotal evidence, had been set: in this case almost entirely within the compulsory-education sector. This research, set within the context of a college of further education, adds to knowledge by providing evidence of *how* learners can improve the quality of teaching and their own learning, through their direct involvement in observations, reflection and collaborative discussion with teachers. It also gives consideration to the implications for those involved: learners, teachers, the organisation and wider policy.

As Chapter Two explained, this study was based on an action-research centred model (2.4.0) which sought to obtain the phenomenological perspectives of the participants (Chapters Four and Five) and to analyse the data through a *continuum of practice* (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) based around two theoretical frameworks: communities of practice and ecological learning systems. Emergent themes were initially coded to this *continuum* and, supported by the evidence, additional theoretical concepts were then used as further lenses to interpret the data within the interviews: self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept and self-categorization. Chapter Three explored these theoretical concepts, the ways in which an individual’s ‘sense of self’, their perceived trajectories, might influence – or be influenced by – opportunities to engage with teaching and learning contexts. It considered the distinctions between a personal and a social identity, directing attention back to those original questions around *why* a learner may, or may not, be able to engage with learner voice initiatives. These interviews provided evidence around individuals’ perceptions about their potential trajectories within their teaching and learning contexts and the implications for their sense of ‘identity’, including whether such identities were stable or not. This had to be thorough and well-documented as this had been identified as a limitation in previous ‘studies’. To ensure these were also considered across the different system levels - *micro, meso, exo* and *macro* – data were analysed to include the individual, the ‘professional’, the organisational and national implications for practice and policy recommendations.

The fourth chapter thus focused our attention on the *context* within which the participants had engaged; it examined the evidence in relation to *how* individuals engaged with their ‘communities of learning’ and each other. This provided the first ‘layer’ of findings which might be used to inform practice, but it was only when the additional strata of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ were analysed in Chapter Five, that this became strengthened by the evidence. At this stage, the data provided the depth and the nuanced detail that had been sought in the original design: the evidence around the interaction, the engagement with discussion and metacognitive thought; the opportunities for agency and identity to embed learning at more than surface level; and to improve the teaching and learning experience.

This journey began with reflections on a simple premise – how to find a way to hear the voice of our learners, to engage with this voice and – to recognise that it even exists. At an allegorical level this was likened to the ‘unheard’ grasshopper at the feet of our young Shaolin apprentice, to his journey and development. Yet, this has also been a journey of development for me and for those who participated in the pursuit of answers to *our* questions: not just those original research questions but also those which arose along the way for me - and the participants - as part of this action research. So, this Chapter reminds the reader of those questions and sets out to identify implications for practice and future research:

1. Why do we ask our learners to tell us what they think? For whose benefit and to what purpose?
2. How do learners’ self-perceptions influence their involvement with learner voice initiatives (perceived ‘trajectories’, sense of self and cultural placement)?
3. What are the issues around language, locus of power, tensions and conflict?
4. What are the implications for practice?

Fundamentally, these original research questions did not change – but they did deepen and broaden. This chapter, therefore, sets out to examine the research aims and objectives, the questions raised along the way, and to recognise what has, and has not, been achieved from these. It will evaluate the appropriateness of the methodology, and any limitations, and will review implications for practice and policy, and put forward recommendations based on these. This will include reference to very recent government reports with regard to the potential ‘deregulation’ of teaching staff in further education[[13]](#footnote-13) and the implications this might have for future practice. To get us underway, we shall therefore begin with the organisational context for this research study.

6.1.1 *The organisation*

Previously (1.3.0, 2.3.0, 2.4.0 and 2.4.1) we have considered the context within which the research has been set. To understand the implications for practice, and the organisation, we now have to concern ourselves with the following question: *how* has this organisation engaged with policies or initiatives centred on Learner Involvement? In response to the numerous policy drivers, a three-year action plan was put in place, from 2007 – 2010, which identified the stages for the development of the college’s Learner Involvement Strategy. This original strategy and associated plan were based firmly around the three key policy aims which were discussed briefly in Chapter One (1.2.0) and in greater detail in the Literature Review: essentially the involvement of learners as individuals; as a ‘collective’ body; and in order to develop the organisation. A range of ‘standards’ was established at senior management level and objectives defined around these key areas. This strategy linked firmly back to government policy (DfES, 2006a, 2006b) and set out the college’s commitment to embed the involvement of learners at all levels across the organisation, and across all aspects of teaching and learning. For the majority of this timescale, there was also a well-developed Internal Quality Review system which included a dedicated focus on the Learner Voice. Feedback obtained from learners as part of this quality assurance process was used to inform developments within curriculum areas in respect of teaching and learning.

In 2010, a formal Learner Involvement Policy was produced by the college’s senior management team; it set out the entitlement of learners to participate in “the co-production of their college experience and in the evaluation of their teaching and learning through the mechanisms of involvement” (Policy No. 11). This ‘involvement’ took the form of Student Representatives, a Student Council, Learner Voice Forums, cross-college management groups (Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity), staff interviews where appropriate, questionnaires and appropriate customer feedback surveys. From 2012 there was also a Learner Involvement Newsletter produced and circulated on a termly basis to staff.

We can see the rhetoric, but where is the substance and how did this research project fit in? As already noted, like many other further and higher educational establishments, the college has endured an almost constant series of restructures and redundancies throughout the last decade. In this organisation, this has been particularly severe over the last two – three years and since completion of the research several of the participants have been affected by just such restructuring, including this researcher who now has not only a different role, but also is employed within a different institution. The implications for practice are, therefore, considered not only against the original context, but also in relation to my changed environment. This does, however, provide additional opportunities to review the research against a ‘different’ context, so is helpful in turning focus towards generalizability and the ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ contexts of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

With this background in place, the evaluation of this research will firstly consider each of those original questions.

6.2.0 *“Why do we ask our learners to tell us what they think? For whose benefit and to what purpose?”*

Taking those initial three key policy aims (LSC, 2007) for the involvement of learners – as individuals, the ‘collective’ and the ‘organisational’ impact – the research considered ways in which learners could be provided with opportunities to engage with teaching and learning: to have a ‘voice’. This focused on the ‘individual’ level (*micro*) in order to impact on self and also on teaching practice (*meso*), and on the organisational level (*exo*). Previous research in this area has been limited (Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008) and used learners who had been *selected* by their organisation. In contrast, this research has used an action research model, collaborating *with* learners to provide them with a sense of ownership (Shuttle, 2007), rather than using them as passive sources of data. Based in the poorly-documented area of post-compulsory education, this research has engaged with adult volunteers who had very clear reasons for their involvement. When this research asks learners to ‘tell us what they think’ it is not about a one-directional input: tell us what you think and we will take that information away and possibly do something with it, or not. It is not about separating out these parts of the process: learners from teaching staff; and both learners and teaching staff from the organisation. The purpose of *this* research is about teaching staff engaging in a *conversation* with learners which then has the potential to improve the teaching and learning experience for both staff and learners, and for this then to inform practice and organisational developments, including wider policy implications. The ‘vehicle’ for this conversation is the observation of a taught session, but how is it used and does this differ dependent upon the participant, or the participant’s role: *learner, teacher or observed participant*?

Taking the *learner participants* first, Charlie, saw this as a means of contributing to influencing and shaping wider identities within the classroom. This was an opportunity to shape and develop practice. Having had prior experiences of engaging with an action research project with his/her own learners and the impact this had had on them, Charlie recognised how such involvement can enable participants to feel as though they were part of something (5.2.1). This ‘connection’ was something which Charlie anticipated through his/her own involvement with the research, so from Charlie’s perspective, this was clearly as much for her/his benefit as anyone else’s. At a level of ‘practice’, Charlie also anticipated gains from this: from seeing someone else teach – and particularly someone as experienced as Sam (Int1). It may be that Charlie’s background and ‘positive’ expectations – in advance of the research – affected his/her engagement with the study, reinforcing Charlie’s sense of identity during the observation and post-observation discussions and contributing to the way in which the conversation with Sam unfolded.

For Alex, this was about involvement in opportunities for feedback (Int3), both with Gerry (the *teacher participant*) with whom he/she was partnered, and with first year learners on the DTLLS course: as a more ‘experienced’ learner, just having completed the second year, Alex wanted to offer “assistance” as a result of his/her knowledge, in an almost ‘brokering’ or ‘bridging’ role between the communities of teaching staff and learners (4.2.4: 102). So, in these interactions with Gerry was there evidence of a strong sense of self from Alex? Well, like Charlie, Alex had initially demonstrated a strong sense of identity, with a *perceived trajectory* which would facilitate this ‘role’, albeit this was different to Charlie’s. Yet the evidence indicated an individual whose identity was *unstable* in these interactions (pp. 133 - 135) so ‘perceptions’ – even from the individual – need to be treated cautiously and taken into consideration in future practice. The *teacher participants*, Sam and Gerry, also had views about ‘why’ Charlie and Alex would want to be involved (4.2.4: 105). Both felt that the drive behind the involvement of the *learner participants* rested in the desire to engage in conversations and discussions around practice (Gerry, Int2).

There was a coherent link within the conversations with all participants that individuals expected to ‘benefit’ from their involvement in the research: at an individual level, but also collectively through this engagement with others. This was anticipated not only through the actual direct observation process, but possibly more so, from the conversations which took place following the observation. These ‘collaborative’ discussions could provide opportunities for the participants to engage in conversation, but the ways in which these were used by participants was different (5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3).

In the interviews with Sam and Charlie, the data evidenced mutual respect and trust with discussion acknowledging the value of the individual’s *knowledge*. Where there were disagreements, the discussion continued, and there was ‘consideration’ of another’s viewpoint (4.2.2): in this way, both ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’ had opportunities to develop their knowledge, to reflect and to arrive at *new* knowledge together. Yet this was not so for the other participant pair where the focus and ‘benefit’ to be gained from the discussion were very different. There was a sense of ‘challenge’ associated with the locus of power, of concurrence from Alex – rather than debate – in response to Gerry’s comments (4.3.0, *Table 2.1:* 109).

Perhaps this is too simplistic to be fair to Gerry. This *was* an action research study, which required reflection and ‘input’ from the participants: Gerry’s *perception* was that the focus of the observation process was to improve his/her practice, and possibly the learner through the associated discussion. Would this approach be wrong if it resulted in improved teaching? Well, not if the rationale was understood by all parties involved, but this would then exclude the *observed* individual – how would they fit into this process? What would be the involvement of the learner? It may be that Gerry kept narrowly within the parameters of the task, never perceiving the ‘observee’ as being offered feedback. Sam did, after all, only provide feedback to Chris after a request – it had not been an intended outcome of the process at this stage. Whilst Gerry’s focus on this might be an ‘option’, based on the feedback from Chris, and subsequent conversations with Sam, the evidence suggests that this is not as effective in engaging with learners to improve teaching and learning.

Returning to Sam and Charlie’s experience, in terms of what *might* arise from these discussions, it is worth noting here what this *new* knowledge looked like as it is a key aspect of the findings. As a result of this conversation between Sam and Charlie after the observation, Sam (the teacher participant) felt very strongly that having had the opportunity to discuss the observation with someone else, particularly someone from a different curriculum area – and a different organisation – this had liberated him/her from the usual constraints of ‘nice’ feedback. Engaging in conversation with someone from a different curriculum background, also opened up possibilities around transferability of teaching and learning ideas, so countering the “oh, it wouldn’t work with my learners” (Sam, Int9). This ‘collaborative conversation’ also provided Sam with a critical *platform* from which to respond to Chris’s request for some feedback after the observation. Sam recalled in Interview Nine how she/he had been able to get “all of the minor points ‘off my chest’ as well as the ability to check, clarify and confirm issues” during the conversation with Charlie. From Chris’s perspective, as the ‘observed’ party, the reason for seeking this involvement with learners was simple (4.2.2: 92); it was to provide a *reflective* opportunity for everyone involved – to find a way to “hold professional discussions and think about the learner” (Chris, Int4) and in so doing, to improve teaching practice.

6.2.1 *How do learners’ self-perceptions influence their involvement with learner voice initiatives (perceived ‘trajectories’, sense of self and cultural placement)?*

In reflecting on the research, there are two fundamental questions underlying the involvement of the *learner participants:* why did they volunteer; and what did they hope to achieve in doing so? In Chapter Three, we discussed the additional theoretical concepts, the relevance of which was confirmed by the data: self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem and self-categorization. The research was, therefore, not only asking ‘how’ the self-perceptions of learners influence their involvement – or *potential* to **be** involved – with learner voice initiatives, but also the impact involvement would have on these self-perceptions.

The learner participants in this research were both volunteers, and as they were learners who were also trainee teachers, they might be expected to have a strong sense of identity which would enable them to become ‘involved’ with the research. However, it is important that we do not forget that these are ‘trainee’ teachers, they are partnered with a more experienced ‘teaching’ partner (who is also one of their teachers on the DTLLS course) and they are observing another member of the Initial Teacher Training team. Not an insubstantial task! One wonders how our young Shaolin monk would have fared if asked to observe and comment on the teaching practice of one of his ‘masters’. Involvement in this learning ‘environment’ might provide opportunities for participants to strengthen their sense of identity; their sense of ‘belonging’ to a teaching and learning community. It may serve to reinforce a participant’s self-esteem, magnifying the ‘looking glass’ effect (Cooley, 1902; Oyserman, *et al.* 2011). Conversely, however, it could have a negative affect if the outcome, or process of being involved, is not a productive one and for any future practice, or research, it is important that this is not overlooked. If an individual’s self-concept is adversely affected, then the imagined gap between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘perceived real self’ (Schaffer, 2000: 164) may widen accordingly.

The research needed not only to ask *why* learners became involved, and this was done in the first interviews with each participant, but also to consider whether an individual’s sense of agency, and the accompanying behaviour, was already in place. Did it develop as part of the process, was it *displayed* differently dependent upon context, and *how* was it evidenced in dialogue and interactions with others? If involvement with the research provided participants with a means to enhance their self-efficacy (Turner *et al.* 1994; Greeno *et al*. 1996) would this ‘inclusion’ provide a means through which to claim *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave and Wenger, 1998) in a professional community of practice? Or, to influence ‘practice’, and develop their knowledge, from a more ecological learning system perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009) through a collaborative – but perhaps more transitory – involvement with a ‘community’?

In section 4.2.1 we looked at *Identity* and how the data related to this. Alex expressed confidence in his/her ability to confer expertise in the direction of the first year learners (Int3) and of having knowledge which was ‘of value’. Alex also referred to himself/herself and Gerry as both belonging to a ‘teaching profession’. However, during the post-observation discussion with Gerry, this strength of identity appeared to waiver. As the research has noted there were differences in the post-observation discussions within the two *teacher/learner participant* pairings. Charlie’s identity remained ‘stable’ within individual interviews and the post-observation discussion with Sam. Alex’s identity, however, varied, becoming ‘unstable’ and displaying differently in the joint context of the post-observation discussion than when interviewed and ‘acting’ individually.

When the research reflects on those first interviews with Charlie and Alex as to their reasons for volunteering as participants, in addition to their own self-perceptions, and the strength and nature of these, is there also something happening with regards to how their self-concept can be affected through the perceptions of others? This self-categorisation (Bizumic *et al.* 2009) could explain why an individual may *choose* to engage with such research. After all, if a learner can ‘raise’ their profile in the eyes of the ‘professional’, they can use the conversational platform as a means to demonstrate their degree of competence and knowledge, then rather than Cooley’s (1902) “I” watching the “me”, we begin to see a revised self-image which is reflected via this ‘other’ individual. The social, or environmental (learning) context, thus becomes a tool through which to define the personal and/or social identity of the individual: as identified on the *continuum of practice* (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82). In Alex, have we seen an individual who has constructed an identity which places him/her as ‘expert’ who can impart knowledge and discuss ‘as an equal’ with other teaching professionals, yet where the evidence suggests otherwise? Is Alex’s identity less ‘stable’, almost vulnerable? Is it, perhaps, masked by the rhetoric revealed in Alex’s interviews? The ‘language’ was used to *indicate* membership to a professional community – the jargon, the ‘conformity’ to a perceived model – however it was a tentative *belonging,* an almost *illegitimate* peripheral participation (Tusting, 2005).

So, what of Charlie? With a strong sense of self, Charlie also recognised that she/he had something to offer in his/her own right: there was benefit to the *teacher participants* of being co-participants in this research with Charlie. Here was an individual who could separate out the knowledge that he/she possessed which made Charlie the more experienced, the more *knowledgeable* within his/her own context. This would indicate that Charlie not only felt able to identify with others, but also had a strong self-image which was able to evaluate the merits and value of what he/she brought to the research and the discussions. Charlie was able to relate the experience of being involved in the observation to not only the *teaching practice*, but also to her/his own experiences as a *learner* on the DTLLS course (5.2.1). Was this easier for Charlie to do as he/she had a positive outlook and experience as a learner on the course as opposed to Alex who expressed reservations about the ‘quality’ of the course experienced on the first year? Learning, or an individual’s approaches to learning, can contribute to an individual’s perceptions of agency: experiences of successful learning can impact positively on an individual’s sense of self-efficacy and self-concept (Bandura, 1986). Similarly, experiences of unsuccessful learning may impact negatively. There is little in the literature to indicate ‘why’ learners do not engage with Learner Voice initiatives and although not part of this research, if our grasshopper is not to be a plaintiff voice, this is something which should be examined in further research.

Although an individual’s sense of *perceived trajectory,* their potential even to feel *able* to get involved, will impact on those voices with which we are able to engage, we have to be realistic and accept that research such as this **is** reliant on volunteers. It can encourage and support that involvement however, perhaps more importantly it needs to be aware of what is happening to those learners once they step over the threshold. Even an *experienced* learner such as Alex, appears to have been challenged within this process, and possibly this was so for Gerry: accordingly the dynamics and the relationships within the *partnerships* need careful consideration and guidance. Sam and Charlie both reported a very positive experience, but Sam was extremely mindful of her/his position as Charlie’s teacher and made deliberate efforts to facilitate the discussion and encourage Charlie’s input (p. 141). Chris also commented on the importance of a carefully thought out ‘feedback’ model, a ‘mentoring and coaching approach (p. 149), to provide learners – and staff – with a supportive environment in which to discuss practice.

Gerry and Alex’s experience appears to have been different, with Gerry frustrated at times by Alex’s inability to add ‘content’ to his/her comments. For this to be an experience which is beneficial, and which does not threaten an individual’s sense of self, the evidence suggests that the *teacher participant* in the partnership needs to assume a degree of responsibility in enabling the *learner* to voice their thoughts in a ‘collaborative’ environment (5.2.3). However, even though this then constructs an ‘unequal’ relationship, so raising issues around the locus of power (Cockburn, 2005), this may still be a positive way of *using* that inequality to enhance learning.

Having considered implications around the involvement of learners in relation to their sense of self, what did the evidence indicate with respect to the two theoretical frameworks: communities of practice and ecological learning systems? Did a well-developed sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, prepare individuals with the capacity – and the capability – to want to accept the responsibility of ‘speaking for others’? In doing so, did this enhance their claim to a teaching and learning ‘community’: by default, would those who could not, be denied access to such a community?

6.2.2 *What are the issues around language, locus of power, tensions and conflict?*

This chapter has already touched on these issues within the previous sections, but if we think of this in relation to the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) and the two theoretical frameworks, then it may help not only to inform future practice, but also be useful in adding to the evidence base around which theoretical approaches are most appropriate in this type of context.

This action research project adopted a ‘collaborative’ format, and as such it has evaluated whether values and ‘purpose’ have emerged from this joint enterprise and if so, how this has happened. Has this been through an ecological learning system, a community of practice or a combination: as might be indicated through the continuum of practice (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82)? This continuum allows for a range of activities which bridge, or even oscillate, between the two theoretical frameworks and which are separated into key themes subsequently used for the coding of the data. In asking learners to engage in discussion with us, to co-participate in the production and evaluation of data (rather than simply being sources of data), there is an expectation that relationships may need to have greater ‘fluidity’ as “collaborative enterprise by different partners at different levels of the system … [involves them in preparing] … a shared framework for creative action” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17). Although there are still the ‘norms’ and ‘behaviours’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000) we would expect within a community of practice, these ‘’boundaries’ would need to be much looser if a genuinely *collaborative* discussion were to take place. Yet, we have seen from the two post-observation discussions (Int5 and Int6) that there **is** responsibility which needs to rest with the *teacher participant* to ensure that the process is facilitated appropriately (4.2.2, 4.2.4). In essence, in this situation, there **is** a leaning towards a community of practice approach: but is it as simple as the teacher becoming the master and the learner the apprentice?

Well, individuals could certainly become *aligned* within such roles during this process, although this would not necessarily indicate a permanency to this. Charlie acknowledges that he/she **is** one of Sam’s pupils (Int1), however, in Charlie’s environment, then Sam would be the ‘novice’ (p. 89). For Alex, there was a need to associate herself/himself closely with Gerry, with both identified as being members of the ‘teaching profession’ (p. 85). However, their exchanges do not place them on equal footings, or even possible ‘reverse’ placements as with Sam and Charlie. Nor was this Gerry’s perception of their relationship – or the purpose of their post-observation discussion (p. 143 - 144). The evidence has already indicated a difference in both style and content of the language used in the *learner participant* and *teacher participant* post-observation discussions (4.2.3). One was informal, relaxed – yet still engaged in an active and critical evaluation of the session observed; the other was almost ‘stilted’, formal and focused more on content than relating teaching and learning to practice. Remember, this second discussion between Gerry and Alex also floundered for a considerable length of time in that ‘awkward’ phase (p. 92 – 93): even if this was borne of frustration, it does raise questions around the impact on those involved. There was also the additional evidence from the *interjections* which were coded (page 109: Table 4.2) and which supported two very different positions. So, in relation to future practice, did these ‘conversations’ indicate perspectives which might be grounded in specific frameworks?

Whilst Sam and Charlie seemed quite clear that the focus of the observation was on the teaching and learning in order to improve both, this was not so with Gerry and Alex. Gerry (Interview Eight) expressed a belief that where such partnered observations took place it would be for his/her benefit: Alex would be there to contribute to a discussion which would improve Gerry’s practice. This was developed further by Gerry who suggested that this might be one way in which teaching staff would object less to being observed by a learner as they would not be involved in any post-observation feedback. Yet the research has already shown from Chris’s and Morgan’s comments, that being excluded from this feedback was frustrating and an act which ‘removed’ that member of staff from the process (5.2.4).

What cannot be forgotten within these partnerships is that in this context, one member of each pair is the ‘learner’ and one the ‘teacher’ – there is an inherent imbalance of power. Also, and this applies to all of the participants involved, these are not merely *participants* with assigned *roles* – these **are** individuals who have come to this research as just that: individuals. They have different characters, life histories, experiences, outlooks and styles of engaging with others: they may be collaborative by nature, open to new ideas; or they may be insular, protective of knowledge, wary of inviting others into the inner sanctum. These are exaggerations of course, but they do serve as a note of caution.

From an organisational perspective, it was interesting to hear from Pat (Int12), the curriculum area manager, that there were concerns around having some learners ‘singled out’ – even though they volunteered (5.3.0). Just such issues were raised in the research examined in the Literature Review (Appendix One): did this, therefore, have potential to put barriers in place between those who ‘gained’ status within the community and those who did not? Even if this relationship was seen as temporary and instigated by the learner who volunteered, might there still be questions around who was and who was not involved? After all, communities of practice develop as a result of the enactment of particular roles, of hierarchical ‘value’ being placed upon knowledge and position (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82) and being *able* or *enabled* to access that knowledge.

Although the ‘classroom’ is regarded as a ‘collegiate’ environment, Pat admitted that there is inevitably a ‘power’ relationship and there were genuine concerns that a learner who was involved in observation of a member of teaching staff might take the opportunity to ‘have a go’; to get their own back for some prior antagonism (5.3.0). Similar concerns have been raised in previous literature (Cockburn, 2005) and it is important that we remember that issues around power, tensions and conflict are not restricted to a hierarchical platform where the teacher is on the upper echelons: sometimes the roles are reversed! However, in terms of future practice, if the primary feedback is delivered by the *teacher* in the observation partnership, with the *learner’s* contributions essentially within the bounds of the post-observation discussion, this could ameliorate the potential for malicious or inappropriate comments from the learner – and may even temper those comments from the teacher! This does not, however, remove the temptation for teaching staff to pass on these comments from learners. This does, however, need to be treated cautiously as this is not based on evidence, rather ‘expressed’ concerns.

There needs to be clarity around the focus of any collaborative ‘engagement’: as the research has shown, there can be questions around where – and from whom – this focus has come; and the purpose. All of these participants are teachers, albeit some have more experience than others and in this research context, some are positioned as ‘learners’. This is an interesting dichotomy for in their ‘daytime’ roles, they all belong to an established community of practice: teachers. However, even within this, their degree of legitimate peripheral participation will be different. Some will be regarded as ‘masters’, others as ‘novice’ or ‘disciple’ serving their apprenticeship: although it is questionable whether anyone identified as a ‘teacher’ ever truly finishes that apprenticeship – although this is a personal opinion which may not be shared, or admitted to, by others! When placed within the research context, therefore, the ‘learner’ element of the relationship became very much emphasised outside of the DTLLS classroom. Equally, the ‘status’ of the learner could be perceived as being elevated to a higher level. If the partnerships are operating under a community of practice framework, rather than an ecological learning system, this may perhaps explain some of the difficulties encountered between Gerry and Alex. It cannot be known from the research whether Gerry felt in some way that Alex did not require as much support as Sam provided to Charlie. However, in this context Gerry *was* the teacher and Alex the learner: and this brings additional responsibilities.

Where conversations were most successful, individuals were able to recognise the self-concept in others and to engage in a ‘sharing’ of the experience with them. With Sam and Charlie the research demonstrated how the “learning potential of the collective [could be utilised] as opposed to just the learning potential of the individual” (Clarke *et al.* 2005: 159) at both *micro* and *meso* levels. We shall shortly turn our attention towards the organisational implications – the *exo* level – but firstly, we need to consider the implications for practice at the *micro* and *meso* levels.

* 1. *What are the implications for practice?*

This research wanted to know what it was about ‘observing’ someone teach a subject that helps you to realise how much you know, or do not know, about that subject yourself. Now it needs to consider the implications for practice and in the following sections will address these across the various system levels: *micro, meso, exo* and *macro.*

6.3.1 *The micro and the meso – development of a knowledge partnership*

In this research, the learners are trainee teachers who were approaching completion of the DTLLS qualification. As such, both the ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the subject matter are ‘teaching’, however, as already discussed these *subject* contexts can vary and provide practice, and research, with further considerations in terms of potential generalizability. Similarly, rather than restricting this ‘sending/receiving’ context to subject areas, this approach can also be applied to what is happening between the participants in the post-observation discussion: their ‘sending/receiving’ *identities* are different and will, therefore, impact on their engagement and interaction with practice.

Remember, these discussions were an opportunity for collaborative conversations, without any intervention from the researcher, and were firmly based within the context of the enquiry: but the participants had different experiences within these. The ‘outcome’ was dependent not only on the focus of the individual participants (Chapters Four and Five), but also on the ‘type’ of conversation they had: the nature of the *knowledge* produced – and how this might be taken forward – may depend on which theoretical framework was evidenced in the discussion. There were questions around the *legitimacy* of the participation, the nature of the actions and the ways in which individual actors engaged with context: the source of an individual’s ‘sense of self’ and perceived identity.

Using such a model provides opportunities for *teacher participants* to engage in a professional discussion with their *learners.* Basing this conversation around a shared observation can reinforce the learning experience for all: for the *learner participants* this can encourage development of their metacognitive skills and reflexivity; can develop a sense of ownership in terms of their own learning; involve them in conversations which will strengthen and expand their knowledge. In addition, they can provide the reflective ‘ear’ for the ‘professional’ *teacher participant.*  Sam placed particular emphasis on the freedom experienced in being able to discuss the observation with someone else first – before giving any feedback to the observed member of staff. The use of this ‘sounding board’ had provided a reflective opportunity, had clarified Sam’s perceptions of the session, enabled her/him to provide Chris with some key points for improvement. Charlie had also found it beneficial not just to his/her own teaching, but also to his/her role as a learner. Although Sam had been mindful of being the ‘teacher’, the more experienced *other* in this relationship (5.2.3: 141 – 142), the evidence supported the benefits of adopting an approach based within an ecological learning perspective. There was a bi-directionality of influence and a sense of self which was not dependent upon being a component within a community of practice and this is considered further in implications for policy (6.3.2).

There was only one *observed participant*, Chris, who was involved in receiving any post-observation feedback, and his/her comments focused on sharing best practice, about being involved in ways that would provide opportunities for staff to engage in professional discussions around teaching and learning (Chris, Int4). Chris also made the link about the first year learners in the classroom being ‘teachers’ as well as learners and Chris’s references to these individuals (who were not active participants in the process) moved between these two ‘identities’ (5.2.4). However, Chris also acknowledged the impact a ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ experience could have on an individual and that, from a teaching point of view, it was important that great care be taken in developing an appropriate feedback model. There was a useful discussion around this (p. 149) with Chris demonstrating a great deal of reflexivity about the need for there to be a “mentoring and then the coaching model” to ensure feedback to the member of staff observed should not become a negative experience. What Chris had found particularly enlightening, when interviewed after the feedback (Int10), was in complete agreement with Sam’s earlier comments: the discussion had been a reflective and liberating experience.

Although this feedback requirement had not been included within the original research project, due to concerns about how this might be done and the impact on the *observed teacher participants,* the interviews with Chris (Int4 and Int10) provide thoughts for future policy and practice. Chris recognised that were learners to be involved in the actual feedback opportunity (this was focused towards the context of trainee teachers) this could provide opportunities for knowledge of theoretical concepts and reflexivity to become embedded, rather than “surface learning”: our expert learner! Enthusiastic about trying to find a way forward with this, Chris was pragmatic about the difficulties: working across different curriculum areas, or even different organisations; staff actually having time to do this with learners; the organisation of this and establishing of ‘ground rules’ to ensure a ‘no harm’ environment – for all parties.

This research study has engaged with an academic context in which the evidence indicates the use of an ecological learning system approach; this fluid and collaborative state lending itself to the primary aims of the post-observation discussion: an ecological learning system. However, what might happen were we to transfer this to a vocational area wherein a more traditional ‘master-apprentice’ route is acceptable practice? Learners in *this* environment would be striving to learn a ‘trade’, to develop practical skills in addition to theoretical: they are also more likely to be younger learners, primarily in the 16 – 25 year age range. It could be argued that teaching is equally about learning a ‘trade’, practising the skills of actually teaching: however, the learners are more likely to be adults over the age of 25; they may also bring a diversity of background and experience which will impact on the ways in which they might interact with others. Their sense of identity, their perceived trajectories as learners, and their self-categorisation is likely to be more developed: though as we have seen, this does not mean that it is guaranteed to be a stable identity. In a different context, with younger adult learners, therefore, it may be more difficult to establish a collaborative exchange based within an ecological learning system. The traditional asymmetry of the learner-teacher relationship may make it difficult to move away from a community of practice and a more hierarchical, power-based scenario: would teachers feel ‘able’ to engage in such conversations and how would any feedback be received by the member of staff observed? The Literature Review established the concerns raised in previous research (Cockburn, 2005) about the validity and impact of feedback from observations: the credibility of the observer, and the impact the observation process can have on staff. So, what are the implications at an organisational level, and even for policy?

6.3.2 *The exo and the macro – the organisation and beyond!*

As already outlined (1.3.0) this study was about devolution of power, of enabling individual actors to engage with context, of establishing new forms of collaboration with potential to impact on other areas. So it is important that there is recognition of the variety and nature of the different stakeholders involved, and the influence this may have on the learners and the teachers. From a practitioner’s point of view, this also impacts at an organisational and *cross-organisational* level: the ‘research’ organisation, Charlie’s place of work, and now – as a result of a change in the researcher’s employment – the potential to engage with a higher education environment.

From an organisational and policy perspective, therefore, how effective could the model adopted in the research be in improving and developing teaching and learning? Well, this was about the pursuit of *direct* learner involvement – individually, collectively and organisationally (LSC, 2007): a means to engage in meaningful face-to-face dialogue between teaching staff and learners; and to establish opportunities for professional discussion which could be informed by this learner involvement in the observation process. The evidence presented from the research, and the subsequent recommendations for policy, would suggest a model which works alongside a peer observation format. Traditional peer observations can, as Sam points out, revert to “the natural diplomatic tendencies [which] impair focus on key development points”, (email from Sam). The additional element of ‘learner’ involvement changes the dynamics and structure of the feedback. The post-observation/pre-feedback discussion enables focus: checking, clarification and confirmation of issues.

This benefit was further enhanced through the availability of viewpoints from the different curriculum areas, and also from different *institutional* contexts (p. 141). Perhaps this actually made it easier for both Charlie and Sam to comment on the observation, to be frank and open in the exchanges as they were not work colleagues: there was no relationship beyond the boundaries of the DTLLS course, unlike Alex and Gerry. This might also clarify why their post-observation discussion aligned more readily with an ecological learning system than a community of practice. Although Pat had stressed the ‘collegiality’ encouraged within the classroom environment (p. 153) Charlie had no ties to bind him/her to a community of practice, no shared mode of ‘belonging’ (Wenger, 2000) which existed in a more permanent structure. From a policy aspect, this is interesting in terms of establishing clear guidance at the start of similar experiences, but also for taking into consideration the ‘context’ of the teaching environment with which participants engage, and the nature of the relationship(s) with which individuals might align.

It raises questions around *how* this model might transpose to a different setting: different contexts may exaggerate both the positive and the negative aspects so far discussed. Pat’s reservations may be relevant in other contexts: academic or vocational settings; younger learners; those engaging with learning in different environments – the workplace, for example; or for different reasons – career goals or ‘hobby’. This was a small-scale study focusing in one specific area and findings would be further enhanced by research in other teaching and learning contexts. With regards to policy findings, it is also worth noting here a minor point in relation to the pro-forma (Appendix Three) and the way in which this was used. Based on feedback from the participants, in any future research the use of this would be improved by being handed to participants in advance of the observation session. Participants would then have the opportunity to reflect on the developmental foci: this might have alleviated the confusion felt by Gerry and Alex as to the purpose of this format.

Charlie’s identity was not defined through her/his connection to the DTLLS course, yet there was a possibility for Charlie to ‘span’ or ‘roam’ across boundaries in his/her role as a learner. Rather than traditional ‘brokering’ or ‘boundary’ roles associated with a community of practice, perhaps what the evidence has shown is a means through which individuals can engage in a sense of ‘joint enterprise’ in a looser, less defined ecological learning system: a more ‘transactional’ environment.

Staff and learners were all eager to participate in the development of good practice: the *teacher participants* and the *observed participants* all talked of the value placed upon modelling good practice to their learners. Similarly, the *learner participants* saw this as a valuable opportunity to engage in professional discussion and to use this as a means to improve their own practice – and that of others. When questioned again at the end of the research, using similar questions as the initial interviews, participants were all still positive about the process and felt that the experience had been of benefit. The curriculum area saw potential in bringing this model into the first year of the DTLLS course to encourage the trainee teachers to develop the skills of peer observation, of reflection – and of the application of this to their own teaching and learning. It provides a valuable platform through which cross-organisational experiences and insights can also be used to improve teaching and learning. By offering this within a ‘safe’ environment as part of the DTLLS course, this is a way in which to develop deeper learning, the metacognitive aspects which facilitate the transfer of knowledge into practice. Some learners, on this and other courses, may not work in organisations which facilitate peer observations, so this also widens participatory opportunities and the dissemination of knowledge. Certainly this would be a means of engaging in a meaningful way with those original LSC (2007) key aims of learner involvement and the ‘personalisation’ of learning.

However, the current climate is a difficult one: many educational establishments are undergoing periods of great change – restructuring, redundancies and reduction in funding. Policy is currently under review (BIS, 2012a) in relation to the future professionalization of staff in the further education sector, with question marks over the relevancy and appropriateness of the DTLLS qualifications: there are moves to ‘deregulate’ the teaching profession in Further Education, to change the qualification requirements and structure of teacher training. What would this mean for future practice and the suggested models to take this research forward? Well, the interim findings show support for the practitioner route advocated by higher education: teaching staff are encouraged to take post-graduate teaching qualifications and to acquire fellowship of the Higher Education Academy as advanced practitioners:

“The review panel suggests that both government and LSIS, might consider whether there are elements of the approach of the HEA in higher education which would be suited to FE, bearing in mind the close parallels which exist between the two sectors in relation to the ‘dual professionalism’ of lecturers (occupational specialist and teacher) and the growing provision for HE in FE providers.” (BIS, 2012b: 23)

This study is now nearing its conclusion and this last point is a good one from which to consider the implications for my practice. Having moved from an FE environment, I am now in an HE environment – thus echoing the sentiments in the BIS (2012b) report. In addition, that role now encompasses the delivery of the HE teaching qualifications and support for lecturing staff pursuing the HEA Routes to Fellowship: so new opportunities begin to emerge to take forward the findings from this research into this HE environment, to act as a ‘bringer’ and ‘sharer’ of knowledge. Not in the strictest sense of *bridging* or *brokering*, as in a community of practice – for these are different communities with different norms and behaviours – but perhaps, like Charlie this is an opportunity to bring that cross-organisational perspective: that transactional environment of an ecological learning system. There is an element of *spanning* the two communities (further and higher education), but this is not a permanent behaviour as I no longer *belong* to the previous community. However, the experience and knowledge is retained, as are connections to previous colleagues: there is opportunity to bring forward this ‘joint enterprise’ through interdependent relationships which can impact in other areas of work – into an HE environment. As such I am currently working with colleagues at the University to identify ways to disseminate this research and encourage teachers to engage with their learners; and to present findings to appropriate research ‘outlets’: conferences and journals.

* 1. *Limitations and further research*

Having thus reviewed the implications for practice and policy – what of the limitations? As already discussed (Chapter Two) this was, of necessity, a small-scale study. It would not have been practicable to involve a large number of participants across various curriculum areas. The ontological perspective has been one based in a phenomenological approach, employing an action research method to engage with the participants in the co-construction of data and knowledge. As such, a qualitative approach was appropriate and the interpretive analysis of the interviews provided in depth and nuanced data. However, this research structure did not directly include the ‘other’ learners on the course – those first year learners who were subjected to the ‘three wise monkeys’ at the back of their classrooms! Although they were aware of the process and the limits of their involvement, it must have been strange for them to have no direct participation. In an email from Alex, this was one of the areas that he/she felt was ‘missing’ – possibly because one of the reasons for Alex’s involvement was to impart his/her knowledge to these first year students (5.2.2). Within the confines of the study, however, this would not have been a realistic option and would not have linked to the original ontological and epistemological approaches of this action research study, so remains for future investigation.

Although the involvement of other curriculum areas was considered before the study was undertaken, the strength – and relevance – of the data would have been affected had this been done. This may have implications in terms of limiting the generalizability of the research findings, however, the analysis of the data has been detailed and provided in depth methodology and evidence to ensure readers can decide on the relevance and applicability of the research to any other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

A limitation which had *potential* to impact on the evidence and recommendations for future practice was the absence of any requirement for feedback to be provided to the *observed participants.* Whilst this was done for very specific reasons (2.4.2: 49) and to avoid potentially negative experiences for the participants, the fact that Chris sought this out *independently* of the research proved fortuitous: but this was done at Chris’s request and in agreement with Sam, albeit this excluded Charlie from the ‘direct’ feedback. The feedback and data which arose from Chris’s discussion with Sam, and the additional interview which took place as a result following on from this feedback, provided valuable evidence and insight relevant to the theoretical frameworks and to a suggested model for future practice.

6.5.0 *Conclusions*

So, for this research, and the involvement of learners in observations, what is it about this process that might help all those involved to identify ways in which the teaching and learning experience could be improved for all parties? From the perspective of the learner, the teaching staff and the organisation there were essentially two fundamental questions: how do you make a better learner; and in doing so, how does this make for a better teacher?

In terms of practice, the main outcome of this research is that it indicates that a ‘developmental’ observation is a good vehicle around which to structure a ‘learning conversation’. By engaging in this process in *partnership,* this enables the teacher and learner to have both a reflective, and reflecting (Schaffer, 2000; Oyserman *et al.*2011) discussion as perceptions are shared and explored. In using such a vehicle successfully, however, the research also suggests that there are several important considerations. Firstly, the pro-forma (Appendix Three) is found to be an important supportive ‘scaffold’ in this process around which thoughts, observations and ideas can be recorded and framed: this then enables the post-observation discussion to follow a structure and focus. This may be of greater significance if observations are used with less experienced, younger learners as their sense of identity and self-categorisation (Chapter Three) may be less well-defined (p180). In addition, it also needs to be recognised that there are developmental implications around the awareness – and expectations – of both staff and learners in relation to such an approach (Cockburn, 2005). The research has identified issues around power and relationships, language and knowledge – and identity (Chapters Four and Five). As such there is a responsibility which lies with the ‘partner’ teacher in this relationship: to facilitate the process (p174); to *enable* the learner in their participation and exploration of their ideas around learning – their metacognitive development. So, against these recommendations for practice, it may be useful to briefly revisit some relevant points for the reader.

The study used an action research format, and aimed to provide learners with a sense of ‘ownership’ and ‘empowerment’ (Shuttle, 2007), answering these questions from ‘within’ the context of the enquiry, from a collaborative and co-constructed framework. All participants, not just learners, were invited to comment at any point in the research outside of the interviews: to express their views and reflections on the process. Participants were interviewed at numerous points throughout the research (*Table 2.1:* 109and Appendix Four) and in true action research mode, as a result of Chris’s decision to seek out feedback from Sam (5.2.4) the research evolved – and additional data were generated that had not initially been anticipated. This was an example of how, on the *continuum of practice* (*Table 4.1,* 4.1.1: 82*)* this evolution of the environment, and changes occurring naturally as a result of actions, link with the ecological learning system approach.

All involved had agreed on the need for this process to be a developmental one: for the *learner participant,* the *teacher participant* and for the *observed participant*. Whilst the foci of this development were different between the two pairings, the ‘model’ which answers the research questions best, is demonstrated in the relationship between Sam and Charlie. At work here was a largely ecological learning system approach which facilitated the collaboration and capacity to shape and influence others. Not in a pre-defined sense of ‘collective’ agency, as with a community of practice, but through the sense of individual *agentic* behaviour embedded within the individual participants: and with capacity to impact on self, on peers and on the organisation.

Although separate theoretical *communities* these frameworks share similar structures in terms of the layers within which, and across which, they work: *micro, meso, exo* and *macro*. What the research has sought to identify is the ways in which these actions and inter-actions occur, and their applicability to practice, learner involvement initiatives and policy. The research initially questioned whether a community of practice approach *could* be linked to a *personalisation agenda* (LSC, 2007; QIA, 2008): after all, such communities are rooted in a master-apprentice model. What did become evident was the *potential* for the collaborative environment of an ecological learning system to align itself more *easily* with this political agenda. We may be ‘four years on’ from the original policy drivers and government rhetoric on learner voice initiatives, but what this research has done is to demonstrate the possibilities for enacting these in a way which truly can develop that *expert learner*.

6.5.1 *A researcher’s journey*

So, to the final thoughts in our conversation: that exchange of professional discussion between the researcher and the reader - and at this closing point the thoughts become more personal. This ‘journey’ started almost four years ago on the Doctorate of Education wherein I was most assuredly the apprentice seeking knowledge and wisdom from the masters. Was I part of a community of practice? Well yes, but certainly this was at the edges, it was the *legitimate peripheral participation* of Lave and Wenger (1991). The aim was to listen, to question, to practice – to learn. Did it change? It is hoped so: but in what way? Part of the process, the reflections and professional discussion engaged upon throughout this time, is responsible for moving me beyond my comfort zone. Whilst still working in a familiar schematic domain, the perceptual point of view – both of the “I” watching the “me”, and of that reflected by others – also impacted on *my* sense of self, *my* sense of ‘identity’ (Cooley, 1902; Schaffer, 2000).

As the research unfolded, it was not just about the involvement of the participants in the study, but also about the ways in which I was engaging with the research, with my colleagues, the organisation: but perhaps most importantly for my development, with the doctoral process and my supervisory team. This became a reflection of the theoretical frameworks being used as lenses through which to analyse the data. Although there were elements of a community of practice approach, where my development happened most – where I had *possibilities* to become a better learner – was in the collaborative process of professional discussion around the research and the research findings. This was a sense of self developing as a result of ‘agency’ not solely as a component within a community of practice: and it is that, which I shall take forward into my own practice.

Looking back to those early reflections, and associations with our young Shaolin monk and his ‘master’, this has been a process of development and whilst in no way at the same stage as Caine, perhaps – on preparing to leave the temple, were I to be asked by Master Po: “What do you hear?” I would be able to smile and reply: “I hear the grasshopper.”

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**Appendix One:** Reference purposes only as this has already been assessed as part of Module Five of the Ed.D.

**Involve your learners and listen to their voice! But whose voice is it, and who – or what – does it represent?**

*Introduction*

Over the last decade, policy initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a, 2006b) have encouraged, and directed, educational institutions to implement Learner Involvement strategies (LSC 2007). Embraced by institutions in diverse formats, and with varying degrees of learner ‘involvement’, this literature review will assess the ways in which this has been approached. Although there is evidence of learner initiatives being implemented across the full range of educational settings, the literature review will show that the greatest ‘take-up’ of learner involvement has been within the compulsory education sector. However, much of the literature is anecdotal and there is little formal research even within these texts.

Underpinning and driving these strategies (LSC, 2007) are three key aims which ultimately seek to develop the ‘expert’ learner: involvement of learners as individuals, strengthening teaching and learning through ‘responsiveness’ to individual need (personalisation); the ‘collective’ involvement of learners, through their greater participation and representation; and the development of the organisation to create a culture of learner involvement. This literature review is being undertaken against this background with the aim of considering the effect of direct involvement of learners in the teaching observation process within the setting of Further Education.

With individuals viewed as belonging to ‘learning communities’ (Walker and Logan, 2008: 8) then it would be sensible to consider what these ‘communities’ might look like: are they communities of practice; ecological learning systems; a combination or variation of these; or do different aspects of ‘community’ apply in different contexts? For now, the term ‘community’ is not being used as any particular definition, rather as a simple categorisation to aid our discussion. My particular focus is, as stated, on learners in Further Education who are directly involved in the observation of teaching and learning. These learners sit within and across various ‘communities’ within their organisation dependent upon their perceived role at any one time. Learners will have different relationships with their peers, staff and the institution and there are multiple ‘nested’ levels of interaction, and several communities which act on, with, and through each other.

All of these different communities have points at which they interact (see *Figures 1 and 2*) and all do so within the overarching community of the institution, which ultimately resides within a wider policy-driven community. Where there is directed involvement designed to empower learners, for them to gain ownership over their own learning, then ‘mutually supportive relationships’ need to be established between learners and teaching or support staff (Forrest, *et al.* 2007). Communities may thus be used to provide opportunities for the location of relationships which become learning ‘partnerships’ between organisational staff and learners (McGregor, 2006; Hodgson and Spours, 2009).

We shall consider whether, in fact, these ‘communities’ can be defined as traditional communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000; Amin and Roberts, 2008) or should be seen more as ‘collaborative local learning ecologies’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). The literature on communities of practice does present different aspects and ‘modes of being’ for such concepts: from traditional master-apprentice models designed to develop the newcomer over an extended period of time; to more time-bound contexts with teams established solely for the completion of a specific project. However, all would have a shared common goal: this may not be strictly accurate for learners whose involvement in the observation process is transitory. The literature review will therefore also consider whether such contexts would be more appropriately viewed from an ‘ecological’ perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009): more as collaborative, ecological learning ‘systems’ within which we see the ‘inter-dependency’ of these relationships, but where the purposes of the systems are more dynamic and fluid than a community of practice (*Figure 2*).

Emergent questions from this literature review will focus on post-16 learners, however, there is evidence from research, policy and practice for the promotion of learner voice initiatives across compulsory and post-compulsory sectors of education (Walker and Logan, 2008) which is informative and has relevant generalizability. From a methodological standpoint, a wide range of initiatives have been undertaken (Fielding, 2004) and these serve to highlight both the diversity of approaches, as well as some of the difficulties around the involvement and ‘status’ of the learner voice (Powney and Hall, 1998; Fielding, 2004; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Porter, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008). Although methodological and empirical details may be commented upon, they will not be evaluated in any detail within this review as the aim at this stage is purely to assess the differences, similarities and approaches used across different educational sectors, identifying some of the main themes and issues arising from the attempts to implement strategies around the ‘learner voice’.

It is important to recognise that what may enhance student engagement, and relationships between teachers and learners, may also result in tensions between using learner voice to support personalisation of learning and whole organisational improvement. If we begin to think of our “learners as co-producers and collaborators, as both subjects **and** objects of the education process” (Collinson, 2007: 7), then we also have to recognise that this has implications for the distributed and collaborative processes – and thus, for the locus of power. Whilst it is an admirable goal to engage in dialogue with learners, encouraging them to take responsibility, enabling them to ‘shape services’ (Forrest, *et al.* 2007), by empowering learners, we may actually create a powerful learner elite that could serve to reinforce, rather than remove, barriers to engagement (Fielding, 2004; Collinson, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008).

Previous research related to ‘student voice’ has been mainly in the setting of compulsory education (Forrest *et al.* 2007) reviewing school improvement strategies and links between student voice and leadership. There are numerous case studies (Walker and Logan, 2008) which establish how learners have been engaged in ‘distributed leadership’: working with senior leadership teams in schools; in peer mediation; increasing self-esteem; of developing ‘learning conversations’ with teachers around pedagogy (Walker and Logan, 2008). In these instances, learners are viewed as part of a community, learners are ‘engaged’ because “the [learning space has been] conceived of as a knowledge-building learning community” (Fletcher, 2005 in Walker and Logan, 2008: 2).

Learners are viewed as **participants**in a process of change and organisational life (Fullan, 2001): the ‘learner voice’ needs to be about fostering behaviour that enables educators to reform **with** and not **for** the learners. In order for this to work, however, educators need to be able to assimilate and accommodate a viewpoint that empowers learners and which facilitates ‘dialogue’ aimed at reaching an understanding. Unfortunately, power relations are not equal or without problems: tensions and conflict will inevitably arise. What learners say will not always be positive and we need to ensure that we have developed methodologies which will enable us to listen to **all** voices including the ones we may not wish to (Bragg, 2001). It is, after all, easiest to hear what you want to hear, and thus to access the voices most likely to give you what you want (Walker and Logan, 2008).

In discourses we need to consider who is speaking and who is listening, who is represented, where such conversations are taking place (Fielding, 2004): such factors will impact on the meaning and importance, and credibility, of what is said. For such dialogue to empower, rather than undermine, we need to be aware that “The very language you use in your descriptions is likely to be saturated with values, frequently your own”, (Fielding, 2004: 297), therefore, we may ask how discourse could ever be ‘value-free’? From the perspectives of Government and the relevant educational institution, of course, this may be precisely what is hoped for – but it still places a question mark over who is assigning such values and to what end. Prejudices and assumptions can be reaffirmed and reinforced until they conform to what is expected and discourses or behaviour which challenges this may be ignored, or even manipulated, until it ‘fits’ (Fielding, 2004; Porter, 2008, Walker and Logan, 2008). Alongside this, we should also consider what happens when feedback **is** collected about learning and teaching experiences, what action is taken based on that feedback and what evidence is there that learning is specifically enhanced when changes are made as a result of that feedback (Powney and Hall, 1998; Tedder *et al.* 2008).

One of the most serious methodological issues around the impact of Learner Involvement strategies is how to measure and **directly**attribute improvements to a specific intervention or initiative implemented by an institution (Forrest *et al.* 2007). Whilst there is no shortage of evidence about student feedback, supporting evidence that students’ subsequent learning is enhanced, is sparse (Powney and Hall, 1998). What isn’t clear, is why this ‘absence’ of evidence exists. Is it the lack of an appropriate mechanism to capture this data; are institutions satisfied simply to ‘tick’ the box; or is there just a lack of enthusiasm from the learners to be substantially involved as research participants (Shuttle, 2007)?

To engage with the breadth of sectors and approaches used, this literature review will be set out in four main sections, with a final discussion to consider areas for future research and development. The first section will introduce the reader to a review of relevant policy (DfES, 2003; 2005; 2006a, 2006b; LSC, 2007; Framework for Excellence, 2007) establishing the foundations from which current policy drivers have been set and their influence on the post-compulsory sector and the need to develop ‘expert’ learners (LSC, 2007; QIA, 2008). The second section will examine the role of the learner ‘voice’ and learner ‘identity’ and further consider the impact of self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness – or the lack of any of these attributes – on the development of such expert learners. With limited literature related to Further Education, this will incorporate texts from primary to Higher Education setting. It will be seen from the evaluation of these works that there is a lack of rigorous formal research, that much ‘evidence’ is anecdotal, and that there is an almost ‘fashionable’ zeal to implement learner voice initiatives without any ability to attribute cause or effect (Tedder *et al.* 2008). As the focus of my literature review is based around the complexities and relationships established as a result of learner involvement initiatives, this second section will close by placing these within the context of a framework of communities of practice and learning ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger 2000; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009).

Having established the framework within which this literature review is set, the third section will further evaluate the role of communities of practice, or ecological systems, in relation to learner voice involvement strategies with the aim of evaluating some of their differences and similarities, and the contexts within which they have been employed. It will consider the implications of shared modes of ‘belonging’, ‘mutuality’, ‘engagement’, ‘imagination’ and ‘alignment’ (Wenger, 2000) and the influences of language, discourse and norms on those who may be experienced or novice members of a community. There is the potential for impact on a learner’s identity from such experiences – and also on the identity of others less directly involved – and questions around who is viewed as a suitable ‘voice’ (Mitra, 2008). Such processes will inevitably result in tensions and conflicts (Flores, 2007) and issues around power relations which may threaten existing boundaries and roles (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006). The potential for this to impact, particularly where individuals have ‘multi-membership’ of communities (Wenger, 1998) is considered in relation to the different learning involvement approaches.

In bringing some of the existing research together, section four, will review the differing methodological approaches which have been implemented across a range of case studies and educational settings. It will seek to identify where there are similarities and differences, key questions which have arisen, findings and contexts. Finally, this will lead to a fifth section which will discuss the findings of the literature review and identify emerging questions.

*1 Review of relevant policy*

A clear strand of policy related to learner involvement and empowerment developed from the DfES (2003) papers *21st Century Skills: Realising our potential* and *Every Child Matters*. Determined to find a means through which children’s and young people’s voices can be effectively heard, Government appointed a statutory Children’s Commissioner with the aim for this individual to not only advise Government, but also to engage with others, to “develop effective ways to draw on children’s views, locally and nationally, and make sure they were fed into policy making” (DfES, 2003: 84).

The Further Education sector took this initiative forward within its ‘Every Student Matters’ (DfES, 2003) interpreting and implementing this policy in the post-compulsory educational sector. This was swiftly followed by the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: Putting people at the heart of public services* DfES (2004); and specifically for the post-compulsory sector, the FE White Paper *Further Education: Raising skills, improving life chances* (2006a) and DfES (2006b) key policy driver *Personalising Further Education: Developing a vision.* Similarly, a focus on the skills of the 14 – 19 year old cohort, and the associated need to raise the skills-base of our future workforce (Foster, 2005; Leitch, 2006) continued this desire to produce an autonomous learner who is able to take responsibility for their own learning: the so-called ‘expert learner’ (QIA, 2008).

To ensure that colleges and providers are performing in the delivery of high-quality, **responsive** provision to the needs of learners – and employers – the *Framework for Excellence* (2007) is designed to play a key role alongside the FE White Paper *Raising Skills* (2006a). This will establish a ‘balanced scorecard’ of information for colleges and providers to benchmark against and also to inform Ofsted Inspector’s assessments (*Common Inspection Framework,* 2005). The FE White Paper (2006a) recognised that when learners participate in decisions which affect their learning experience, that they are more likely to become ‘active’, successful learners who are integrated within their respective provider’s quality improvement process (DfES, 2006). Such ‘personalisation’ drives the development of the individual to become an ‘expert learner’: someone who pursues their learning journey as an active participant; who engages **with** the process, rather than having it **done** to them. The LSC’s directive to the Further Education sector, *Learner Involvement Strategy* (2007), to develop a culture where ‘learners are motivated to give constructive feedback’ has a simple message: make sure your learners are participating **actively** in quality improvement across the organisation, “Confident expert learners can bring fresh insights to help quality improvement” (LSC, 2007: 12). However, if learners are to be involved in such dialogue and ‘expert’ in understanding their own learning needs – and able to express this – then there is an assumption that they are confident enough to do so: they are ‘self-aware’ (Entwistle, 2000; Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; McCune, 2009). Whilst empowering **some** learners, however, it does not address what happens to those who are less articulate; less confident; those who are unable to engage in appropriate dialogue about learning (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Donnelly, 2007). Interestingly, by potentially raising the confidence of those learners involved in the process, it may lead “paradoxically, to a short-term increase in what might be initially perceived as negative or unfocused negative feedback, or even complaints.” (LSC, 2007: 12)

The FE White Paper (2006a: 20) talks of providers putting in place “effective mechanisms for engaging with learners collectively, including through student committees”: it similarly talks about obtaining the views of the individual and identifying those learners and groups of learners ‘least likely to succeed’. There is further development of this, through the LSC’s *Learner Involvement Strategy* (2007: 12) directives to use learners “not just as sources of feedback, but also as assessors and evaluators [who ….] might play a role in observing teaching”: organisations thus have ‘evidence’ of learners involved as ‘experts’ in the teaching and learning processes. The aim is, ultimately, to ensure that learners are going to be successful and achieve – factors which impact on colleges’ retention and success data. There seems to be little discussion, however, around the impact on teaching staff involved in the process (Cockburn, 2005; Roberts and Nash, 2009).

There are undoubtedly challenges for all involved about how to achieve a productive level of engagement. At the moment this “is approached […] at a micro level of what it means for practitioners and at the macro level of policy-making.” (Tedder *et al.* 2008) There appears to be little in the way of research into the ‘meso’ level of interrelations between settings and communities in which the individual participates, or the ‘exo’ level of the institution (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) with its internal policy initiatives and strategies and the external policy and strategy drivers at ‘macro’ level. The aim of this review is now to discuss how such learner engagement is enacted within institutions and we shall start this process by considering what is meant by the term ‘learner voice’ and how government policy and initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a, 2006b) are being used to drive the development of the ‘expert learner’.

*2 Learner identity and the learner ‘voice’*

Policy (DfES, 2006a, 2006b; LSC 2007; Framework for Excellence, 2007) has greatly changed both the professional status, and the identity of teachers (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004) and learners alike. If their identities are ‘embedded’ within the context in which they co-participate (Fuller *et al.* 2005), then ‘policy’ is being used to drive the creation of more expert and independent learners: moving the individual towards a more active engagement in their learning process. In this way, learners are expected to acquire broader, transferable skills, becoming self-motivated, adaptable and assertive negotiators. They will have strong, independent analytical skills, be more economically productive, better-skilled members of the workforce (Foster, 2005; Leitch, 2006). Through their improved ability to learn, they should also, of course, impact on an institution’s retention, achievement and success data (Framework for Excellence, 2007). In terms of the Government, the aim is for:

**“..**all learners in FE [to] have the opportunity to develop skills to help them gain the most from their learning experience and take responsibility for their learning journey.” (DfES, 2006b: 18)

This ‘personalisation’ of learning in Further Education recognises the potential to raise the ambitions of learners. It does not, however, anticipate individuals who may choose to remove themselves from this, or be excluded from the process through their inability to act and take responsibility for their own learning (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Donnelly, 2007). Similarly, it may elicit a voice which we do not wish to hear: the “incomprehensible, recalcitrant or even obnoxious” (Bragg, 2001). The independent National Learner Panel, involves learners via means external to their learning organisation. It aims to represent the learner voice at national level, to provide an opportunity to “influence policy design and delivery […] that will affect learners across the FE system” (DfES, 2006b: 19). They strive, however, to ensure that learners ‘speak’ only at an individual level: they represent neither their institution, nor any group of learners with which they are associated (Forrest, *et al.*, 2008).

The Framework for Excellence (2007) takes the White Paper forward (DfES, 2006a) along with the themes and key policies supporting the 14 – 19 reform (DfES, 2005) and Lord Leitch’s report (2006). The Framework is seeking evidence of the capability and capacity of providers to improve, with the ‘learner voice’ being used to shape the service from below: this should show personalisation, the engagement of users through ‘voice’ and co-production and show a methodology which aligns with the LSC’s recommendations for a demand-led system (LSC, 2007).

Through the engagement of these ‘expert’ learners the Government’s vision is for a system where “Programmes will be tailored to individual needs and learners will take responsibility for their learning” (DfES, 2006a: 17). How is the identity of these ‘expert’ learners being created; is it an individual, solitary construct, or the social construction of the individual as a group member; and who, or what, is responsible for assigning its legitimacy (Mitra, 2008)?

*2.1 The ‘expert’ learner*

Firstly, we have to recognise the extent to which a learner’s perceptions of ‘who they are’, where they ‘come from’ – and where they envisage being able to ‘go to’ – will impact on how they feel able to engage with their studies and their sense of ‘identity’. The internalisation of cognitive activities experienced in various social settings (Glaser, 1999) enables learners to ask themselves questions about how well they are doing, other approaches possible and whether or not they are making progress. However, this perception is neither a one-dimensional facet, nor one which remains static or impervious to influence in different contexts (McCune, 2009). If it is intended that this megacognitive aspect be applied to the ways in which individuals negotiate their roles within the community, it fails to address the difficulties which may be experienced by learners who are ‘unable’ to do this (Inaba, 2006).

There may be agreement that an ability within learners to reflect, and through this to recognise when they need to apply different strategies to overcome difficulties, is a useful tool in the armoury of the ‘expert’ learner (Entwistle, 2000). Unfortunately, not all learners will know how to do this, or perhaps have the confidence to apply beliefs they hold which may be tentative and uncertain. Care needs to be exercised not to imply that ‘novice’ learners (Supporting Skills for Life Learners, 2010) are somehow inferior to their counterparts as they may not use reflection, or self-evaluation, to adjust their learning approaches (Phelps *et al.* 2001). They may simply still be deciding on ‘who’ they are, what their identity as a learner is, of looking for their own trajectory as a learner (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Fuller *et al*., 2005).

Diaz-Greenberg’s comments (2001) about the emergence of voice in the classroom raise pertinent issues in respect of some of the difficulties learners will have in establishing their ‘voice’: confidence, self-esteem, their perceived cultural ‘placement’ in an educational setting – and also whether this voice is truly understood. We need to remember that individuals not only learn within a context, but that they also have a reciprocal impact on their environment (Wenger, 1998; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Harris and Shelswell, 2005). Similarly, ‘identity’ not only encompasses the learner, but also the institution in which that learner is placed: it is flexible, malleable and evolves over time (Eckert and Wenger, 1994), contributing to one’s sense of ‘self’. If we are viewing learning as a contributing factor to a sense of ‘identity’, then we have to consider it not only from a community of practice viewpoint, but also from an ecological perspective. As part of an inter-connected set of local and wider factors which might impact on learner motivation: “learning relationships, professional practice and education policy development” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 9). By engaging learners in dialogue, by giving validity and worth to their comments, we may aim to increase their sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy and involvement in their ‘community’ (Frost and Rogers, 2006; Ruddock and Fielding, 2006; Fielding, 2007; DeFur and Korinek, 2010). However, we may simply be providing another platform to those who are already confident and once again failing to provide a ‘voice’ for “the silent – or silenced – students who find learning in school uncongenial [….] so that we can understand why some disengage and what would help them get back on track” (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006: 228).

If learners find their ‘sense of self-efficacy’ and aspirations raised in relation to their involvement in such dialogue, then, what might be the outcome if such interaction is negative? Would this ultimately then have a detrimental impact on their levels of confidence? However, should we simply assume that because a learner is ‘silent’ that they are in some way ‘disengaged’? Learners may simple choose to be silent as a means of exercising their own control over the process.

Amidst this focus on learner engagement, we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the impact on the teaching staff involved in the process. There are similar implications for the confidence and self-efficacy of teaching staff – in particular those new to the profession who do not, as yet, have sufficient professional ‘history’ on which to draw or reinforce their own levels of efficacy (Cockburn, 2005; Donnelly, 2007). Whilst it is suggested that greater pupil involvement may result in a “positive impact on areas including pupil behaviour, confidence, communication skills and achievement” (Morrison, 2009: no page numbers) concerns have been raised by staff that morale can be damaged by children who “think they are their teachers’ equals” (Morrison, 2009: no page numbers). We also need to remember that individuals will want to get different things from the experience and “different learners perceive the same opportunities differently and react towards them differently, because of their differing dispositions.” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004: 176) For such practices to work, therefore, there must be a widely collaborative approach, and a clear focus on the ways in which an institution intends to both engage and involve its learners, and to what purpose. This now brings us to a point within the review where we can consider whether we are viewing approaches to Learner Involvement strategies (LSC, 2007) through a single, or combined, framework of communities of practice or collaborative ecological learning systems.

*3 What perspective: community of practice, or collaborative learning ecology?*

Through policy initiatives (DfES, 2006a; DfES, 2006b; LSC, 2007; Framework for Excellence, 2007) institutions have been charged with implementing learner involvement strategies which not only develop the individual as a learner, but also as an integral component within, and across, the organisation in the development of the ‘learning journey’. If learners are to be encouraged to become more active, evaluating their own learning and contributing to improvements within their institution, we need to ensure that we are moving away from students as simply components of the process, to actual ‘drivers’ (Gunter and Thomson, 2006).

Various approaches to this have been tried within educational establishments, from primary through to higher education: learners as researchers and/or co-researchers; involved on governing bodies or student councils; straightforward learner surveys and forum meetings; student representatives, etc (Frost and Rogers, 2006; Gunter and Thomson, 2006; Mitra, 2008; Morrison, 2009). Another strategy of involving learners very directly in commenting on what might impact on their learning is through the process of observation of teaching practice. This can range from learners receiving very formalised ‘training’ in the observation process (Ofsted, 2005) to learners being involved less formally but provided with opportunities to provide their feedback and comments on what makes a ‘good lesson’ (QIA, 2007; QIA 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008).

We can look at these learning contexts against two frameworks: mapped in *Figure 1* is a visual interpretation of what this might look like as traditional, defined and separate, communities of practice; *Figure 2* interprets these within the systems of ‘collaborative local learning ecologies’. Both depict the differing contexts against system levels: at the ‘micro’ level is the learner and those issues and factors contained in their immediate environment: curriculum path; relationships with peers, etc. At a ‘meso’ level, are the interrelations of “two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates […including…] the role of education professionals” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 10): the level of ‘professional practice’. Both of these will sit within the ‘exo’ level, whereby the individuals are no longer actively participating, but where events, policies and strategies will be enacted which will impact on them at institutional, local and regional level, including those implemented as a result of external policy drivers. At ‘macro’ level we have the envelope which encompasses all levels and locates wider national policy, strategies and external factors which will impact on, and shape, those communities and systems within it.

*Figure 1: System levels interpreted within the context of communities of practice*

**External Policy and Strategy Initiatives**

**Internal Policy and Strategy Initiatives**

**Learners**

**Teachers**

**Graded**

**Observation Team**

**Learners as**

**Observers**

From the perspective of learner involvement in teaching observations, we can see that such directed participation has the potential to change the placement of such learners within the organisation. They may become placed not only within their own ‘traditional’ community and system level (micro) – as a learner, but also within the communities of those involved in lesson observations (meso) – albeit from a peripheral and transient standpoint. They also become an influencing, and influenced, component of the wider community of the institution (exo), which in turn is impacted by external policy initiatives and strategies (macro). What impact, therefore, does this have on their relationships with their ‘non-involved’ peers when they ‘return’ to the learner community; their interactions with their teachers; and also with their institution? They may have bridged various communities within these interfaces, but to what extent has their role within these communities changed? Are they now the ‘master’, or expert, learner returned to the apprentices who remained behind? They may have been allowed a degree of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and been briefly engaged as a limited ‘apprentice’ within the community of observers, however, there is no possibility that they will move beyond this role to that of ‘master’, even if they have received formal training.

In this way, we begin to see evidence of an overlap between different communities of practice, or ‘ecologies’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009) whereby the ways in which individuals interact and develop, are influenced by factors and practices operating at different ‘systems levels’ within an overarching ecological structure “in which each level exerts reciprocal influences on the others” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 10). We can now, therefore, consider our ‘systems’ against the perspective of collaborative local learning ecologies.

*Figure 2 System levels interpreted within the context of collaborative local learning ecologies*

***Meso-system***

Professional practice

May interact directly or via any intermediate levels

***Exo-system***

Institutional, local and regional relations

***Micro-system***

Learner

***Macro-system***

National structures, policy and initiatives

It is important that we remember that our learners are in post-compulsory education. There are different contexts, different purposes and learning trajectories (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004; Fuller *et al*. 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009) which may ‘fit’ better within an ecological perspective, rather than a community of practice. Relationships are more fluid, though still inter-connected, with each of the levels in our ‘system’ constituting an ecology in its own right, but which will interact with the other three – and this will be multi-directional and with different emphasis. The exo-system contains settings “that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what is happening in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 25). Such an approach helps us, perhaps more completely, to link our learner to “the interactive levels of human relations and organisations” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 10) which impact on their evolution as a learner.

So, in terms of communities of practice and the ‘learner’ voice, what might this mean? Learners involved in observations of teaching practice do not take the roles of a traditional ‘apprentice’. Ordinarily, “the social relations of apprentices within a community change through their direct involvement in activities”, (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 113), they will both absorb, and be absorbed into, the ‘culture of practice’, until it becomes their own. However, with our learners, this can never actually be the case within this context. They engage with the community at its periphery, but this is a transitory relationship and one which does not confer legitimacy on the newcomer.

How then, might such learners fare in respect of local collaborative learning ecologies? We know that recent policy initiatives (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC 2007) have pressed the development of personalised learning, learner involvement and a more ‘holistic’ approach to learning. Institutions have been encouraged to recognise the inter-connectedness of learner motivation, patterns of provision, opportunities for formal and informal learning; institutional relationships and an “understanding of the specific combination of community, local and regional factors [that] can shape our thinking” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 13). Perhaps, rather than communities of practice, we are seeing evidence about what ‘partnership learning’ means to different populations: collaborative local ecologies when our learners participate in learner involvement initiatives such as teaching observations.

Whichever ‘community’ is considered, there is still the same potential for tension and conflicts and issues around boundaries and power. However, perhaps it is their potential for ‘fluidity’ across boundaries and less rigid adherence to concepts of ‘norms’ and ‘behaviours’ associated with communities of practice, which may see learning ecologies fit more easily with the context of learner involvement. It is the “collaborative enterprise by different partners at different levels of the system as they prepare a shared framework for creative action “(Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17) which may nurture the sense of shared values and purposes, similar to those of a community of practice.

*3.1 Norms, relationships and shared repertoire*

Communities of practice are based upon shared modes of ‘belonging’, or aspects of ‘mutuality’. According to Wenger (2000), these consist of ‘engagement’, ‘imagination’ and ‘alignment’, during which we do things together, we co-construct an image of our community – and thus ourselves, and we co-ordinate our perspectives, interpretations and actions in order to fulfil the ultimate goals of our particular community. These aspects of belonging are further enhanced through the norms, relationships and shared repertoire we develop: communal resources, language, routines and stories. There is a need for commitment to the role of ‘communities’ in supporting the development of individual identities, whilst simultaneously developing mutual respect, trust and norms (Ruddock and Fielding, 2006).

In the context of learner involvement, although these may be evidenced in their own learning community, there will be difficulties in the acquisition of these in the role of observer. Learners may assimilate some of the language involved in the process: the evaluative ‘judgements’ accepted as supportive evidence on the quality of teaching practice. Similarly, the routine of observation can be implemented via the relevant documentation. However, when we are newcomers to a community, we may “feel an urgent need to align our experience with the competence they define” (Wenger, 2000: 161). It may define what knowledge is, and isn’t, and may also encourage us to act and speak in ways which we think may hasten acceptance into such communities. However, there remains substantial debate (Donnelly, 2007) about what actually encourages, or supports, learning and although observations should be designed to encourage reflection – to be **developmental** – the role of a ‘novice’ in this process is highly contentious (Cockburn, 2005). What do they know of theories of learning and teaching? How can their feedback be viewed as part of a reciprocal process? What impact might there be in terms of the ‘levels’ at which curriculum is delivered, the subject-specialist knowledge of those involved?

Within the social practices which both construct, and constrain, communities, there is both action and interaction: with the “relationships between language and other elements of the social process” (Tusting, 2005: 41). Something which we also see evidenced at various ecological system levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, if we view our learners within the context of communities of practice then we recognise that there are different “networks of social practices, there are particular configurations of genres: ways of acting and interacting, discourses: ways of representing, and styles: ways of being or identities.” (Tusting, 2005: 43) Knowledge circulates amongst peers, and ‘near-peers’, through the use of observation of learning and access to the community’s resources, for example. However, this raises questions around how they do so: the language that is used and **how** it is used: “For newcomers then the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 121).

There is a need to establish “clear expectations of individual identities within the collective” (Mitra, 2008: 230). However, what do these ‘identities’ look like? We need to be aware that these learners do not have the shared repertoire of routines, words, norms, etc, available to teaching communities. They would need to develop a ‘shared’ language – however, this may then set such learners apart from their own ‘community’ of learners in the classroom as their language and norms change to reflect those of the ‘teaching’ and ‘observation’ communities of practice. Yet this might be necessary if learners are to have credibility in terms of making change and recommendations to staff. There is, however, a “difference between talking *about* practice from outside and talking *within* it” (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 119).

This may be less of an issue if we view our learners’ ‘environments’ as part of collaborative local learning ecologies where there is more of a “shared framework for creative action” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17) which recognises a more participative and ‘inter-dependent’ approach. Rather than ‘norms’, ‘routines’ and ‘repertoires’ which are imposed from above – or a perceived position of experience and power – values and ‘purpose’ emerge “from a collaborative enterprise by different partners at various levels of the system” (Hodgson and Spours, 2009: 17). Perhaps it is this concept of ‘partnership’ and the contexts within which learners exist, which will impact on whether we view them as belonging to a community of practice, or a learning ecology. Learners in compulsory education are, perhaps, more recognisable as participants in a community of practice (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007; Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008): as learners they will remain within the same year group, perhaps even the same class, for several years; they will have contact with the same small group of teaching staff; will ‘learn’ in the same institution; and their norms, language and repertoires may reasonably be expected to be working towards the mutual engagement and joint enterprise of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000).

So, there are questions to be considered. Is the literature leading us towards communities of practice, with evidence of learners actively seeking to change their behaviours to link in with a particular ‘community’ (Inaba, 2008) such as ‘observers’? This would also indicate a potential for transference of any new behaviours and/or knowledge into other communities with which they engage through a ‘bridging’ role (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998). Do we see them acknowledging, or creating, different learning/learner identities in different contexts in order to ‘fit in’ (McCune, 2009)? Or, is there evidence of collaboration, or partnership working and shared development of ‘outcomes’ which may indicate that collaborative local learning ecologies are more appropriate (Fullan, 2001; Collinson, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008)?

*3.2 Locus of power, conflict and tensions*

Focusing first on communities of practice, the literature indicates that levels of expertise and authority are, by tradition imbalanced (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998 and 2000). Within the context of learner involvement attempting to establish a credible degree of collaboration between learners and teaching staff, therefore, contradicts the ‘norm’ (Mitra, 2008). Similarly, within the observation process, the observer is frequently viewed as more powerful (Cockburn, 2005; Donnelly, 2007): bringing learners into this process, therefore, further strains relationships and raises questions of power.

Attempting to place this within a framework of collaboration and learning ecologies, *Figure 2*, we may wish to emphasise the need for teachers to understand “Student perspectives on learning and teaching….[and] establishing genuine partnerships with young people” (Fielding, 2007: 324). Whichever framework is adopted, however, we need to be aware of the dangers of staff choosing “**how** to empower students rather than conferring **with** students about how this might happen, and often adults focus on preserving their power rather than engaging in co-constructing the roles of the group with students” (Mitra, 2008: 235).

Legitimate peripheral participation may enable the newcomer to become involved, to become part of a community of practice and therefore allowed to interact both with it, and within it. Such participation is not exclusive of either model we are considering. However, the ways in which “power is exercised can make legitimate peripheral participation either an ‘empowering’ or ‘disempowering’ experience.” (Fuller *et al.* 2005: 53) We have seen that ‘legitimacy’ and membership of a community of practice are not without problems. Communities, and one would suspect ‘ecologies’, become defined “as much by whom and what they exclude as by what they contain” (Harris and Shelswell, 2005: 168). However, such acts do not ensure survival in either context: an apparent lack of conflict or tension, does not guarantee its absence.

Our ‘observer’ learners are not seeking to create or maintain an identity over an extended period of time, as they might in a traditional community of practice. However, it is important to recognise that individuals have different reasons for wanting to belong, or having to belong, to a ‘community’. We must not forget that in the context of learner involvement, our ‘participants’ – regardless of the model of engagement we view them against – are **volunteers**. It should be remembered, however, that many are also **selected** by their school (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008). Their personal motivation “within collective activities can be [..] dependent upon individuals being able to realise their personal needs through participation in the satisfaction of collective needs.” (Harris and Shelswell, 2005: 173). This may be for mutual benefit, but has the potential for tensions to arise when individuals find themselves in competing communities: membership in one community may imply marginalisation in another (Wenger, 1998). This may result in what Wenger (1998: 159) refers to as a “nexus of multi-membership [which is] more than just a fragmented identity” and can result in an individual experiencing severe conflict within their identities. For example, a learner electing to become involved as an ‘observer’ may find themselves externalised from their former learner ‘community’ and peers.

As new members, our ‘observers’ may bring fresh perspectives and enlighten ‘old-timers’ by questioning assumptions (Lave and Wenger, 1991). As adults, learners in Further Education may bring skills, knowledge and experience from other ‘identities’ which can be used to change, or pull “a community’s competence along” (Wenger, 2000: 161). However, discourses can “carry implicit messages about membership” (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) and introducing such ‘different’ viewpoints can elicit tensions (Wenger, 1998; Cockburn, 2005) However, if we were using *Figure 1* as our framework, what exactly is the role of the learners taking part (Forrest *et al.* 2007) and is it viewed differently by the different communities?

Boundaries exist across both our frameworks. The differences may be in how they are interpreted, whether they are seen as sources of new opportunities between communities (Mitra, 2008), or as potential difficulties. With an expectation of greater fluidity and interaction between ecologies there does not appear to be a specific role for ‘brokers’ between communities (Wenger, 2000). With communities of practice we may see a variety of roles which provide the link between defined and separate entities: boundary spanners (crossing one specific boundary over time); boundary roamers (moving around, moving knowledge around and creating connections); boundary outposts (bringing back news, exploring new territories); and boundary pairs (who ‘broker’ through personal relationships). With learning ecologies, the literature (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boylan, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2009) does not appear to have identified any comparable roles: this does not mean that they do not exist, however, merely that they have not been specified.

The ways in which learners are becoming central to quality assurance, and the improvement of organisations, is aligning with other public services (Forrest *et al.* 2007). This is not, however, a natural orientation for a public-sector educational institution. Perhaps due to the nature of its learners, such initiatives have been picked up most strongly and enthusiastically in the compulsory education setting (Forrest *et al.* 2007; LSC, 2007). Although full-time learners in schools are unlikely to move institutions if dissatisfied, or not involved in the quality improvement process, they are a ‘captive’ audience with which the school can engage. It is also the area where most research is conducted: again, perhaps because of the accessibility to participants and the potential for longitudinal studies to measure impact.

With this in mind, and having considered at length literature around communities of practice and collaborative learning ecologies, we turn now to a review of some of the most relevant case studies.

*4 Case studies*

As the introduction state, although there is a wealth of anecdotal texts around learner involvement initiatives, there is a limited supply of credible research. As a lead into our final section – the discussion and suggestions of emergent research questions – we shall now consider some examples of research that **has** been completed: this includes literature from a wide variety of institutional contexts, and also one study from the United States of America. Although our focus is on Further Education colleges in England, it is necessary to include this breadth of literature in order to have sufficient texts to consider. The main features of these have been incorporated into *Table 1* (following pages) to provide an overview of the content and focus these have pursued. We shall then consider where there may be similarities or differences in approaches and research focus, the methodologies used and whether we can see any emerging themes for review in our final section.

*Table 1 – research undertaken for learner voice initiatives*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Authors and institutional context | Focus | Methodologies/research approach | Key research questions |
| Forrest *et al.* (2007)  FE College, Yorkshire and Humber region | * Distribution of leadership * Personalisation * Impact on policy * Quality improvement * Learner empowerment | * Qualitative – literature review re policies; audit of current practices in case study college * 6 action research projects; links to development of a regional learner panel (NIACE) * Steering group * 2 learner surveys – across contexts and curriculum areas * Student forum * Learners involved in self-assessment process | * Most effective strategies to capture learner voice * Implications for quality improvement strategies * Leadership implications |
| Shuttle (2007)  FE Colleges and Adult Learning organisations | * Ownership of learning * Communities of learning | * Qualitative – survey of 180 organisations (29 respondents) * 2 detailed case studies * Learner engagement and its impact on institutional decision-making * Joint lesson observations (learners ‘trained’) * Phenomenological | * How effective are various kinds of student representation? * How do institutions act on learner views – is learner voice taken seriously? * What mechanisms are in place to enable learners to develop an informed view of the educational work of an institution? |
| McGregor (2006)  Networked Learning Communities Programme – secondary schools | * Conceptualising leadership * Students as active agents in improving learning * Development of partnership relationships between adults and young people * Empowerment * Communities of practice | * 135 networks across 90 Local Authorities: 1533 schools, networks ranging from 6 – 44 schools * Review of research, but a useful text | * Investigating ways to engage multiple voices in schools * Different modes of engagement between adults and young people – learners as contributors to data, rather than passive sources |
| Powney and Hall (1998)  Small-scale study of 2 HE institutions in Scotland | * Autonomous ‘expert’ learners * Metacognition * Collaboration | * Documentary analysis of feedback and procedures * Interviews with staff/students * Questionnaire * Tracking of feedback * Seminars/workshops * Interviews with other interested parties | * How do learners know what is done with their feedback? * Problems with attributing impact to learner involvement |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Authors and institutional context | Focus | Methodologies/research approach | Key research questions |
| Cockburn (2005)  FE colleges | * Action research * Peer observations amongst staff * Learners involved in teaching observations * Observation as a developmental not quality assurance process * Self-esteem of staff | * Interviews with range of professionals involved in classroom observation practice * Documentary analysis of observation feedback forms * Review of college policies and literature * Focus groups of observers and those observed * Action research projects | * Impact on those observed and the observer * Impact on the teacher and the students in the lesson * Credibility of observer and ‘power’ of that individual * Impact on professional identity * Impact on quality assurance processes and policy initiatives |
| Walker and Logan (2008)  Across all education sectors in UK – majority in schools at both primary and secondary levels | * Personalised learning * Communities of learning * Empowerment * Self-esteem and confidence * Distributed leadership * Collaboration | * Case studies - discussion * Summary of evidence from research, policy and practice * Review of various learner involvement initiatives | * Learners as researchers and co-researchers * Hearing the ‘voice’ of all learners * Power, conflict and tensions * Impact of learner involvement strategies |
| Mitra (2008)  Senior schools (USA) | * Communities of practice * Identity * Self-esteem * Distributed leadership * Language and norms | * Action research * 13 schools already firmly embedded in learner initiatives: grants provided * Data collection via semi-structured telephone interviews (minimum of 2 and maximum of 5 individuals per participant group) | * Empowerment of learners through action research * Development of ‘youth-adult’ partnership relationships |
| Gunter and Thomson (2006;2007)  Secondary schools | * Personalised learning * Students as researchers * Communities of learning * Learner voice * Active participation | * 2 different projects – second builds on findings of the first * First : 8 students selected by the school * Second: 10 students selected by the school * Interviews with learners, staff, governors * Observation of meetings and lessons (by research authors) * Questionnaires – to staff, parents and governors | * Project 1: Establishing a culture of achievement and improvement * Reviewing student experience of the curriculum * Personalised learning * Project 2: Students as ‘objects of elite adult plans * Learning through activism |

The ‘institutional’ context for these varies considerably, though most can be seen to deal with learner involvement strategies from the perspective of compulsory education: primary and senior schools (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; McGregor, 2006; Gunter and Thomson, 2007; Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008). Post-compulsory education institutions are included in texts by Cockburn (2005), Forrest *et al.* (2007), Shuttle (2007), Walker and Logan (2008). There is also an earlier text (Powney and Hall, 1998) which reviews the acquisition and usage of learner feedback in two Scottish Universities.

Although all follow a qualitative methodology, sizes of the participant ‘samples’ and the number of institutions involved varies: individual organisations using a handful of learners; the surveying of some 180 Further Education/Adult Education institutions (although only 29 of these responded and only two institutions were ‘followed up’). For this review, ‘research’ is used as a ‘catch-all’ terminology and does not denote that there is formal research evidence to discuss, simply that there are case studies and anecdotal comments considered for evaluation. As for example with Walker and Logan (2008) who consider examples of learner involvement strategies initiated at a number of educational establishments. Also, the review by McGregor (2006) of the NLCP’s (Networked Learning Communities Programme) development of partnership relationships between adults and young people across some 135 networks across 90 Local Authorities. All of these concentrate on learner involvement strategies: learners as researchers/co-researchers; peer mediators/mentors; student representatives; student governors; ‘budget’ holders and contributors to institutional decision-making; learner surveys and alternatives for ‘hearing’ the learner ‘voice’. What we do see coming through is a desire for learners to be ‘involved’, rather than simply ‘sources’ of data (Shuttle, 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2008). To what degree this is accomplished, however, is variable and we need to be honest about the difficulties in assigning direct outcomes to learner initiatives: we may be able to attribute some impact directly if there is evidence of an improvement of success rates and performance (Powney and Hall, 1998; Forrest *et al.* 2008), however, how could we be sure that they would not have happened anyway?

In addition, there are concerns (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007; Forrest *et al.* 2008) that often learners are **selected** to participate, or to represent their institution, based upon their academic ability. These learners may also have “the ability to speak in the style and language” (Mitra, 2008: 231) that would be recognised and accepted (Bragg, 2001). Even where this is not the case, we have to be cautious in accepting that any ‘individual’ learner can be truly representative of the views of others (Powney and Hall, 1998) and whether they are acting in a “consultative or representative capacity” (Forrest *et al.* 2008: 25).

If we have learners who are “expected to both engage with their curriculum and adopt a reflective position in terms of what their learning is like for them” (Forrest *et al.* 2008: 25), then we can link this to a metacognitive approach and the ‘expert’ learner our policy drivers have been seeking (DfES 2003; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; LSC, 2007). In the two studies undertaken by Gunter and Thomson (2006; 2007) they engaged with a particular senior school at the invitation of the Head Teacher. Students were again **selected** by the school to work with the researchers to develop a ‘students’-eye’ set of evaluative categories to be used in a school-wide student survey. Having undertaken a baseline study with the school prior to anything being implemented to develop ‘personalised’ learning, the aim was for the research authors to then work with a group of 8 students to focus on key issues which they felt were appropriate for further investigation. All involved were keen that students would be regarded as “constructors and analysers of research data” (Gunter and Thomson, 2006: 845) rather than passive sources. A questionnaire was designed **with** the students, evaluated by them and eventually distributed to the school. Gunter and Thomson met again with the learners a year later, shared the data from the questionnaire, and then collectively arrived at a focus for subsequent research on attitudes and conceptions around bullying (Gunter and Thomson, 2007). The success of these projects was very much down to the support and determination of the organisation, especially the Head Teacher, to drive the research: he saw “the personalisation agenda as an opportunity to further the ongoing aims of the school” (Gunter and Thomson, 2006: 843).

The most successful examples tend to evidence the empowerment of learners through ‘partnership’, through the development of “models of effectiveness that are owned by the students and institution alike” (Shuttle, 2007). Only a few examples are provided which include the involvement of learners directly in the observation of teaching and learning (Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008). Once again, however, we see mention (Shuttle, 2007) that **selected** learners are chosen: in this instance paired with staff for training and then observing volunteer staff members in a different curricular area to their own. The two organisations who contribute to the case studies (Shuttle, 2007), however, are classed as ‘mature’ institutions who have increasingly engaged their learners at all levels over an extended period of time. Perhaps this ‘confidence’ and experience of doing so is what is needed in order for an organisation to feel able to take the step towards involving its learners directly in the process of observation of teaching and learning. Similarly, Chichester College of Further Education, which has previously won the ‘Learner Voice Awards’, could also be regarded as a ‘mature organisation’, and involves its learners in classroom observations in order to drive forward improvements (Walker and Logan, 2008: 29).

Walker and Logan (2008: 21 and 23) provide two separate case studies (not formal research) where senior schools (Charles Edward Brooke Girls’ School and St Boniface’s Catholic College) have engaged their learners in observation of teaching and learning. The first links 12 of its students with 14 staff in a research project designed to identify when ‘deep learning’ is taking place: through an action research focus they work together to establish what is either enabling or blocking such learning to take place in lessons, videoing and discussing lessons together. In the second case, 9 students work as a ‘Teacher Development Team’ exploring teaching and learning methods used by teachers and then share their feedback ‘informally’ with staff to identify what went well, and what could be improved.

As the focus of this literature review is on learners involved in the observation process, we should consider a study by Cockburn (2005) into the impact of the classroom observation process on staff and those involved: their perceptions and attitudes. Favouring an action research approach to observation, rather than a quality assurance procedure, there are links between Cockburn (2005) and learner involvement initiatives. The opportunity for peer observation and the use of ‘professional’ dialogue subsequent to an observation is seen as more supportive. However, this highlights concerns around the authenticity and credibility ‘our’ learners if they move into a ‘professional’ arena with which they have no connection. From a ‘communities of practice’ viewpoint, our learners would have neither the norms, language nor the repertoires of the professional (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger 2000). Cockburn (2005: 48) acknowledges that even where observers are colleagues, “the length of service, classroom competence, power relationship and personality of the proposed observer are often quoted as reasons why the observer may lack credibility”. If this is the case, how would a learner fare? However, there is also value in someone coming to the process who is ‘naïve’, does not feel the need to adhere to ‘tick boxes’, and who is simply looking for what makes a lesson a good experience for the learner (Wenger, 1998; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Cockburn, 2005; Tusting, 2005; Walker and Logan, 2008).

Involving learners through an action research model appears to be one of the most successful ways to ensure that learners truly feel a sense of ownership and empowerment (Shuttle, 2007). It is this process of collaborative enquiry, the conceptualisation of leadership in relation to students’ roles as active agents in improving learning that ensures that they are more than passive data sources, rather constructors and analysers of the emergent data (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007). This does now, however, remove residual issues around ‘power’ and ‘status’. We may aspire to a “relational process of influence rather than of hierarchical power” (McGregor, 2006: 1) but asymmetry is, after all, the norm in education with staff, and institutions, often worried about conferring power and responsibility to learners. This may be why institutions **select** those learners with whom they wish to engage: not via surveys or general feedback mechanisms, but when there are **real** opportunities for learners to be handed power, as in the instance of learners involved directly in teaching observations, budget decisions, changes to curriculum design.

There is only one study (Mitra, 2008) which specifically uses communities of practice as a lens through which to evaluate its research. It is concerned with aspects of power, mutual responsibility and respect, shared language and norms and joint enterprises aimed at “fostering voices that have previously been silenced from decision making and knowledge-building processes” (Mitra, 2008: 221). The intention is to examine how groups of learners can collaborate to develop new knowledge, to transform “the collective identity of the group and of individual identity” (Mitra, 2008: 223) – as in communities of practice. This may be more in-line with such frameworks, rather than learning ecologies, as we have mentioned before – schools form longer-lived relationships with their learners, and between their learners, than post-compulsory education: the ‘adult’ learner is also more likely to view their ‘tutors’ differently and therefore feel that a ‘partnership’ approach (Hodgson and Spours, 2009) is more acceptable than the ‘master-apprentice’ model (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, the very fact that learners of compulsory age are *not* adults, may conversely impact on their ability to become part of a community of practice – at least one that is established over longer periods of time. Similarly, it may not be seen to be ‘cool’ to some learners to be so actively involved with teaching staff and the school.

*5 Conclusions and discussions of emergent research questions*

We started this literature review with areas of specific focus: policy; learner involvement strategies and the ways in which ‘learner voice’ is represented; frameworks of communities of practice and learning ecologies; and case studies where there is evidence of research, or at least sufficient comments about initiatives for us to consider. We should not, however, ignore the potential for impact on any staff involved (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001; Cockburn, 2005; Fielding, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008) or additional concerns about the “credibility of the consultation process and its uncertain link to action” (Fielding, 2007: 329). There are questions about who we listen to and whether these are the most appropriate to represent their own views and those of their peers. Also, have learners been involved in identifying the focus of consultation; is the interest of adults real or contributed; and is there discussion of learners’ suggestions and active follow-through (Tedder *et al.* 2008)? Are we only hearing the articulate, those with sufficient confidence to express their views clearly, or are we including those who have been ‘excluded’ or ‘marginalised’ in some other way?

At stake here are matters of “subjects [being] positioned through power relations and the social or academic classifications they sustain.” (Arnot and Reay, 2007: 316) Any changes in power relations, therefore, could be used to sustain or bridge such boundaries, and impact on the voices being ‘heard’. Yet Gunter and Thomson (2007: 184) caution us that “Student voice is not automatically authentic and is certainly not pure”. It may not be welcomed, or expected, and this needs to be recognised when engaging with the learner voice (Monahan, 1999; Bragg, 2001; Hadfield and Hawe, 2001; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002; Black-Hawkins, 2005). Ultimately, we need to consider the learners: how do they feel about issues being suggested; are they best addressed through an individual’s voice, a collective voice, or a voice which represents the ‘collective’ body? According to Diaz-Greenberg (2001: 57), voice is “an essential part of identity and, as such, central to the development of self-esteem.” So, if having one’s voice heard fosters “feelings of self-worth, importance and contentment [then having] their voices silenced [can cause] negative sentiments, low self-esteem and feelings of being outcasts” (Diaz-Greenberg, 2001: 60). Similarly, we cannot know how having someone else **misrepresent** one’s voice may impact on that sense of self-esteem and identity.

There is a duality between membership in a community and issues of self-perception and identity. There may be issues around the language, norms and routines – even the environment in which discussions occur (Fielding, 2004). All of which may result in “memberships [which] contribute to aspects of people’s sense of self and influence individuals’ values and standards in the domains of community activity” (Greeno *et al*. 1999: 139). Relationships within ‘communities’ can also become stretched, resulting in tensions and conflict: the ideas and practices of ‘old-timers’ and ‘newcomers’ can push and pull the direction of the community (Flores, 2007). However, even where there is such tension, learning can still take place: it may even be a direct outcome (Wenger, 2000).

There appear to be only two studies which use specific frameworks to examine learner involvement: both are based in compulsory education. Mitra (2008) examines learner involvement through a community of practice framework and Boylan (2005) considers whether learning environments are better understood as ecologies of practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson and Spours, 2009). Boylan (2005: 1) is not restrictive, however, and suggests “there [may be] a possibility of developing some of the features found in communities of practice” in ecological learning environments: so combining different frameworks. Further literature available on ecological systems in relation to education is limited (Hodgson and Spours, 2009): it is usually a concept applied within biological, environmental, health or technological perspectives. The inter-relatedness and fluidity of ecological systems may fit Further Education: such learners are transient; they have no long-term ties to their institution or peers. They are also either ‘adults’ or rapidly emerging adults, who expect a different type of learning relationship with their tutors than they may have had with their school teachers! However, as can be seen from literature on communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2000) this very aspect of their different ‘relationships’ may actually better facilitate their ‘belonging’ to a community of practice. An interesting set of questions thus begins to emerge: how might we use these different frameworks as vehicles to analyse what is happening to our learners, and learning – and is educational context an issue? Are they mutually exclusive, or can they ‘co-habit’? Would one be more helpful than the other in obtaining our objectives?

Anecdotal texts, and limited research feedback, indicate that positive results occur when there is a collaborative and co-productive approach: learners help to frame the questions; they are active researchers rather than passive sources of data; they are teamed with staff from the institution to work together (Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007; Shuttle, 2007; Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008). The methodology is qualitative and employs an action research model, thus empowering those involved – learners, staff and institution. Assigning directly attributable outcomes is problematic, however, and where responses have been made to surveys and learner forum meetings, for example: we can not say whether any improvements would have happened anyway, or been influenced by ‘other’ factors (Powney and Hall, 1998). It can be seen, therefore, that rather than a critical exploration of the outcomes of learner involvement initiatives, there is narrative, and discussion of the process, yet little else. We do not know, other than Ofsted (2005) and the Framework for Excellence (2007), what ‘policy’ is using to measure how learners become ‘expert’ and empowered (DfES 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, QIA, 2008), or learning becomes ‘improved’ (LSC, 2007). There is previous literature, however, which has indicated that an action research model is successful in empowering and involving learners (Forrest *et al.* 2007; Gunter and Thomson, 2006; 2007; Mitra, 2008; Walker and Logan, 2008).

The involvement of learners in the observation of teaching (Shuttle, 2007; Walker and Logan, 2008) has provided some ‘evidence’ of developing ownership of learning, distributed leadership and ‘communities of learning’, yet methodology is poorly documented and studies have again not identified how impact and outcomes are measured. We should ask, therefore, how do we define appropriate mechanisms for measuring the outcomes of learner involvement initiatives?

It can be seen, therefore, that there is a dearth of empirical investigation in this context yet an interesting set of questions has emerged. It is suggested, therefore, that by using an action research approach, a small-scale study could be implemented to focus on learner involvement in the improvement of teaching and learning: formalised observation of classroom practice providing the means of appraising whether the action research has been successful.

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**Appendix Two:** *Identities of participants and organisation, including ‘naming’ protocol used to ensure anonymity*

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Background | ‘Research’ name assigned | Details |
| Long-established organisation | Central College of FE | Fairly large college of further education in central England which, like numerous FE colleges, has undergone a substantial restructure, changes to working practices and culture. |
| *Pair One – observed Chris* | | |
| *Teacher participant*  Very experienced teacher in academic area | Sam | Joint interview with Gerry and researcher before observation. Recorded discussion with Charlie after observation. Follow-up discussion with researcher. Additional comments provided by email. |
| *Learner participant (*trainee teacher)  Experienced teacher in vocational area | Charlie | Interview with researcher before observation. Recorded discussion with Sam after observation. Follow-up questions later by phone. |
| *Pair Two – observed joint-delivered session: Morgan and Dom* | | |
| *Teacher participant*  Very experienced teacher in academic area | Gerry | Joint interview with Sam and researcher before observation. Recorded discussion with Alex after observation. Follow-up discussion with researcher. |
| *Learner participant (*trainee teacher)  Experienced teacher in vocational and academic areas | Alex | Interview with researcher before observation. Recorded discussion with Gerry after observation. Follow-up discussion and further comments by email. |
| *Teaching Staff Observed* | | |
| *Observed participant*  Very experienced teacher in academic area | Chris | Observed by Sam and Charlie  Interview with researcher before and after observation process. |
| *Observed participant*  Very experienced teacher in academic area | Morgan | Observed by Gerry and Alex  Interview with researcher after observation process.  Joint-delivered teaching session with Dom. |
| *Observed participant*  Very experienced teacher in academic area | Dom | Observed by Gerry and Alex  Participant happy to be involved in the process, but no interview conducted.  Joint-delivered teaching session with Morgan. |
| *Management participant*  Curriculum area manager – Initial Teacher Training | Pat | Interview with researcher after completion of research process. |

**Appendix Three**

***Paired Informal Observation (Learner)***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Learner Participant’s Name** | |  | | Signature |  |
|  | | | | | |
| Room | Date | | Time | Teacher(s) | |
|  |  | |  |  | |
| Comments | | | | | |
| What opportunities for learning do you feel happened in the session? |  | | | | |
| What made you think this? |  | | | | |
| What was happening at the time? |  | | | | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What contributed to this? |  |
| People - individuals, groups, learners, teaching staff |  |
| Context of the session |  |
| Subject content |  |
| Other influences (please explain) |  |
| Were there any times when you felt that learning was not taking place? |  |
| What made you think this? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Discussion comments | Please note down anything from your discussion with your partner that you feel has been particularly important, or made an impression on you for your own development. |
|  | |
| On this occasion you are not being asked to provide any feedback to the member of teaching staff whose lesson you have just observed. However, were this this to be done, what do you think would be the most appropriate method? For example, directly from you, through your observation ‘partner’, through a written feedback sheet? Or, a combination of these? | |
|  | |

Many thanks for completing this. Please ensure this is returned to Val Hall at the end of your discussions.

***Paired Informal Observation (Teacher)***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Teacher Participant’s Name** | |  | | Signature |  |
|  | | | | | |
| Room | Date | | Time | Teacher(s) | |
|  |  | |  |  | |
| Comments | | | | | |
| What opportunities for learning do you feel happened in the session? |  | | | | |
| What made you think this? |  | | | | |
| What was happening at the time? |  | | | | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What contributed to this? |  |
| People - individuals, groups, learners, teaching staff |  |
| Context of the session |  |
| Subject content |  |
| Other influences (please explain) |  |
| Were there any times when you felt that learning was not taking place? |  |
| What made you think this? |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Discussion comments | Please note down anything from your discussion with your partner that you feel has been particularly important, or made an impression on you for your own development. |
|  | |
| On this occasion you are not being asked to provide any feedback to the member of teaching staff whose lesson you have just observed. However, were this this to be done, what do you think would be the most appropriate method? For example, directly from you, through your observation ‘partner’, through a written feedback sheet? Or, a combination of these? | |
|  | |

Many thanks for completing this. Please ensure this is returned to Val Hall at the end of your discussions.

**Appendix Four : *Interview schedule***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Interview Number** | **Name** | **Participant** | **Interview details** | **Type (all recorded on digital voice recorder)** |
| 15.04.11 | One | Charlie | Learner | First interview with researcher | One-to-one |
| 28.04.11 | Two | Gerry and Sam | Teachers | First interview with researcher | Joint |
| 05.05.11 | Three | Alex | Learner | First interview with researcher | One-to-one |
| 13.05.11 | Four | Chris | Observed teacher | First interview with researcher | One-to-one |
| 14.06.11 | Five | Gerry and Alex | Teacher/Learner | Second interview - discussion between participants, researcher not present, immediately after observation | Joint |
| 15.06.11 | Six | Sam and Charlie | Teacher/Learner | Second interview - discussion between participants, researcher not present, immediately after observation | Joint |
| 18.07.11 | Seven | Morgan | Observed teacher | First interview with researcher | One-to-one |
| 18.07.11 | Eight | Gerry | Teacher | Third interview with researcher, reflections on the action research | One-to-one |
| 21.07.11 | Nine | Sam | Teacher | Third interview with researcher, reflections on the action research | One-to-one |
| 10.10.11 | Ten | Chris | Observed teacher | Second interview with researcher, reflections on the action research: had received feedback from Sam | One-to-one |
| 28.10.11 | Eleven | Charlie | Learner | Third interview with researcher, reflections on the action research | Via telephone, one-to-one |
| 02.02.12 | Twelve | Pat | Curriculum manager | First interview with researcher | One-to-one |

In addition, emails were received from Sam, Alex and Pat in response to the research and these were included in the data analysis.

1. This module constituted part of the Ed.D. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 157 group is a membership organisation representing 27 large, regional Further Education colleges in England. Members are viewed as key strategic leaders in their locality who take seriously the roles of leading policy development, and improving the quality and reputation of further education [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. PTLLS – (Award) Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector; CTLLS - Certificate to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector; and DTLLS - Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Diploma of Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Joint delivered session but only one member of staff available for interview [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. TRLP: Teaching and Learning Research Programme. Learning Lives – Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course. No. 51. July 2008. No author. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Emphasis in author’s text [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Refers to Charlie and Alex [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Emphasis in participant’s own words [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Teacher from previous year, not involved, pseudonym used [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The third member of these teaching staff, Dom, was happy to volunteer for the research project and to be observed, however, was not available for interview. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Student Representative Focus Groups for these learners [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Further Education (FE) and Skills system reform plan*, New Challenges, New Chances* (December 2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)