

研究報告

The Social Construction of Literacy - A Case Study of Literacy Practices in the UK -

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Abstract

This article is a contribution, or at least signposts a contribution, to a continued exploration of third space or 'in between' literacy. This third space 'in between' literacy is a hybrid literacy discourse, apart from the autonomous vs. multiplicity polarity. It is a discursive exploration that acknowledges Literacy practices as fluid, migratory and continuously mutating, with emergent literacies simultaneously embodying and transcending the practices and ideologies from which they are formed. My intention is to imagine what a developmental framework, enabling a full analysis of this hybridity, this constant re-negotiation between the local and distant, between the local and global, between Literacy and literacy, may consist of. What conceptual tools are necessary to enable practitioners to characterise the space between literacy as expressed in the new adult literacy core-curriculum and literacy as expressed by an individual who wants nothing more than 'to feel more confident about her reading and writing'.

1. Introduction

This research project represents my ongoing attempt to explore the varying spaces surrounding adult literacy that have come to define my experience within academic and practitioner networks. It is an exploration that occurs within the context of a particular organisation's attempt to interpret and implement New Labour's Skills for Life agenda.

This agenda is, in part, an articulation of the status awarded literacy by various late-capitalist governments struggling to assert /retain ascendancy within an increasingly competitive globalised economy. Contemporary policy makers, in their drive to improve the nation's basic skills, herald and cherish a belief in literacy as possessing breathtaking qualities.

'Our success in the world, and the cohesion of the communities in which we live, depend on how well we utilise the skills and abilities of all our people. A prosperous and decent society ... [can not be achieved]... while large numbers of people lack basic literacy and numeracy skills'.⁽¹⁾

Literacy is offered as an uneasy combination of superhero and deity - economic saviour, healer of marginalised communities - it has the capacity to stimulate functional, intelligent, work-dedicated families, communities and individuals. Without literacy the country is doomed to economic oblivion, a mythology reified by continual shock: horror newspaper headlines, saturated with moral panic, invoking the illiterate as folk devil and economic saboteur⁽²⁾. The thinly disguised quantophrenics, revealed in the Big Magic numbers of international surveys of adult literacy showing Britain as lagging behind our European counterparts, rationalise this mysticism.

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The Skills for Life agenda has a localised expression that alters the institutional life of everyone involved in the delivery of adult basic skills. Providers of adult learning are cajoled and then bribed through funding incentives into implementing the Basic Skills Quality Initiative.

This initiative focuses on the delivery of four key objectives:

1. improvement in the quality of basic skills provision
2. improved experience for learners
3. increase in the number of learners participating in basic skills provision
4. improvements in the retention and achievement rates on basic skills programmes

2. Skills for Life at a London College

At Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College Literacy Centre (henceforth EHWLC Lit), where I served as the *de facto* Head of Skills for Life and Adult Development, the re-articulation of the national agenda has taken the form of firstly a vision:

'Recognising that basic skills is an important barrier to learning the EHWLC Lit aims to remove these barriers for all those with basic skills needs and support their continued learning through:

- *Discrete basic skills programme with clear progression routes and appropriate accreditation where relevant;*
- *Specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities through its SLDD provision and for deaf people through its Centre for Deaf People;*
- *Engagement programmes for specific targeted groups using a range of curriculum 'hooks';*
- *Additional learning support and open access study skills centre.'*

A vision that is further reduced to concrete activities with quantifiable outcomes:

'Over the next three years the EHWLC Lit aims to build on this provision and develop further opportunities through:

- *Partnership Basic Skills provision in the community;*
- *Short course programme of integrated basic skills and vocational/academic subjects with clear progression routes;*
- *Increased awareness by all staff of the impact of basic skills needs on the teaching and learning process and a staff development programme for teaching staff across all areas.⁽³⁾*

Rationale:

3. Professional Pragmatism

If the Basic Skills Quality Initiative represents a figurative backdrop to this study, in the foreground are various contradictions and inconsistencies that continually unfold in the process of its implementation. I discuss these discrepancies using the geographic metaphor of distance and space.

This is a metaphor inspired by the work of Richard Edwards⁽⁴⁾ who offers an understanding of education as shifting from what was -prior to the operationalization of learning society - a neatly bounded, clearly defined field of work into a de-differentiated ambiguous moor land. In using this metaphor I am suggesting that while 'literacy' may be viewed as a single terrain, a distinct country, its boundaries, its defining features, its shape and climate are far from unified.

As a literacy practitioner, I am inexorably drawn into a consideration of spaces:

- between literacy as policy construction and literacy as lived experience;

- between perceptions of what adults with poor literacy can do and what those adults so defined describe themselves as doing;
- between what policy and pedagogy determine that adults with poor literacy need and what those same adults describe as their needs

This research project represents my attempt to further define and map these spaces: to establish boundary points, contours, agreements, arguments and contestations. By gathering and analysing the words and images invoked by my counterparts when asked about their views, experiences, perceptions, values, beliefs, practices and knowledge of literacy.

This study has the potential for immediate and direct professional gain. An exploration of, literacy as it expresses itself at EHWLC Lit would provide a clearer and more sustainable framework for the delivery of the Skills for Life agenda. The introduction of a sustainable adult literacy programme to the EHWLC Lit implies an enormous cultural shift, a radically altered organisational ethos. EHWLC Lit, a large general further education college in West London, has not traditionally worked with communities who fall outside the ABC1 category. Colleagues retell, with pride, stories of their success in resisting the utilitarian vocationalism that dominates much post-compulsory education, provocatively holding onto its commitment to adult learning as a leisurely pursuit, the 'Liberal Arts'. It has in many respects the feel of a would-be university for adults. The staff newsletter boasts that staff members are not experts in their field, but 'the' experts in their field. An often-pointed out response to the possibility of identifying and supporting students with literacy difficulties is that 'we don't get such students here'. I describe the above based on my experiences of the organisation in which I work. It is and can only be a particular partisan view. An interpretation of the significance of selected utterances woven together to form an image: a

fabrication. Yet EHWLC Lit's Basic Skills Quality Initiative Vision, the removal of poor basic skills as a barrier to learning, has potency because of the context from which it emerges; a context that has not traditionally prioritised the needs of marginalized communities.

The drive to ensure this organisation becomes more sensitive to the needs of students with literacy difficulties inevitably furthers the interests of those of us working primarily with the C2DEs. Indeed, I would suggest, the nature of policy change is such that if the professional interests of particular groups are furthered, the interests of other groups are potentially undermined, compromised or in some way redefined. Inherent in the process of cultural change is the possibility of conflict.

My struggle to understand literacy at EHWLC Lit does not emerge from a desire to produce consensus, to neutralise conflict. My approach is one of wanting to establish how a programme of adult literacy can be developed in the organisation, embedded within the pedagogic practices of colleagues, in ways that cohere with their perception of literacy and its significance. At an organisational level the study furthers the sustainable and successful implantation of the Basic Skills Quality Initiative, and thus New Labour's Skills for Life agenda.

4. Beyond the pragmatic: theoretical

The literacy of policy makers is unproblematically defined by the Basic Skills Agency as: *"The ability to read, write, and speak in English (or Welsh), and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general"*⁽⁵⁾. This stands in diametric opposition to literacy as conceptualised by the ethnographers of the New Literacy Studies: *'Literacy. may be defined as the space between thought and text'*⁽⁶⁾.

There has in recent years - since the development of the New Literacy Studies - been a paradigm shift in how literacy is studied. This has resulted in a shift from a psychological or cognitive model of literacy as a set of pre-defined skills, a series of absolute behaviours to one that incorporates a view of literacy as essentially relational, a historically situated social and communicative practice. The ecology of literacy in everyday life repositions literacy and definitions of literacy as ideological. It is no longer an autonomous gift bestowed on certain individuals, but is contingent and therefore implicated in institutional purposes and power relationships.

This undermines the notion of understanding literacy in terms of lack or deficit; contemporary policy has institutionalised this view of deficit in the abstraction of literacy as level. The literacy of policy construction exists on a vertical line from Entry Level 3 to Level 2; this metaphor implies that individuals have this or that amount of literacy that can be measured using uni-dimensional scale. This abstraction co-exists with the caveat that students invariably present with a spiky profile - that is they portray characteristics and behaviours belonging to varying levels simultaneously. It is, however, possible to view the caveat 'spiky profile' as the defining feature of literacy rather than an anomaly. This is the stance of the ethnographers from the New Literacy Studies; literacy is a series of practices - literacies - in which people engage with texts in diverse ways as part of discourse communities. Literacy practices represent ways of being in the world and exist alongside other culturally defined ways of being, including - ways of talking, acting, thinking, believing, valuing and interpreting⁽⁷⁾.

These representations of Literacy (with a capital 'L' to suggest the uni-dimensional construct of policy makers) and literacies (with a small 'l' to suggest the multiple literacies of ethnographers) are for the moment presented dichotomously⁽⁸⁾. This is not

Literacy as a continuum, one unrelentlessly metamorphosing into the other, existing at a point where for an ephemeral moment at least they each become indecipherably the other. This is an absolute green / red polarity. The autonomous literacy of policy makers, emerging from what Mary Hamilton⁽⁷⁾ describes as enactive research, research which justifies particular short term policy interventions to solve a perceived problem - quickly; verses the ecological literacy of ethnographic research, with its pronounced ethical stance, that offers an in-depth portrayal of literacies and values, beliefs, practices that explain how and why people behave the way they do with text. The two notions co-exist as if they inhabited mutually exclusive zones.

The difficulty with this mutual exclusion is that autonomous models of literacy overlap continually with vernacular literacies within a single entity - an organization, person, classroom or text. They can only be viewed as theoretical polarities - a discourse dichotomy. The interaction of literacy as lived experience, and literacy as policy construct experienced by literacy practitioners and recipients of the Skills for Life agenda - is a remarkably unexplored, untheorised space. Anita Wilson, in attempting to unravel this intricacy, has described the juxtaposition as 'third space' literacy⁽⁹⁾.

This study is a contribution, or at least signposts a contribution, to a continued exploration of third space or 'in between' literacies. This third space 'in between' literacy is a hybrid literacy discourse, apart from the autonomous vs. multiplicity polarity. It is a discursive exploration that acknowledges Literacy practices as fluid, migratory and continuously mutating, with emergent literacies simultaneously embodying and transcending the practices and ideologies from which they are formed.

My intention is to imagine what a developmental framework, enabling a full analysis of this hybridity, this constant re-negotiation between the local and

distant⁽¹⁰⁾, between the local and global, between Literacy and literacy, may consist of. What conceptual tools are necessary to enable practitioners to characterise the space between literacy as expressed in the new adult literacy core-curriculum and literacy as expressed by an individual who wants nothing more than 'to feel more confident about her reading and writing'.

As the new Head of Skills for Life and Adult Development at the College, my desire is to come to an understanding of how my colleagues accommodate apparent contradictions, within a single entity: the organisation, the manager, the management team, the teacher, the student or the text - each of whom has to reconcile or hybridise contradictions, (or find some other mechanism that enables them to co-exist). In wanting to find out the possibilities for this mix, I need to uncover how agreement and contestation coalesce around my subject, literacy.

I work towards the creation of the possibility of dialogue between the two positions, inviting the autonomous view of literacy in policy construction to become alert to the insights of literacy as socio-cultural practice; the proponents of a socio-cultural view to offer an account of how and why they continually assert themselves to destabilize or further the autonomous literacy that dominates public life. In adding a dimension to an understanding of literacy, the study has a potential impact beyond the EHWLC Lit. It highlights some of the possible issues and constraints experienced by colleagues working in other similar situations.

To gain entrance to this territory, I ask a single question:

"Do students, tutors and managers at the EHWLC Lit share a common conception of what literacy is, how literacy is learnt and who literacy students are?"

In suggesting the study is about space, I have potentially already answered the question. And yet, my hunch that these differences exist is only a hunch. I may find more agreement than contestation. There is after all a popularised and publicly available definition of literacy.

My earlier discussion may have implied that an understanding of competing theorisations of literacy as a polarity is an accepted framework. I want to deviate from this position and suggest greater diversity and fragmentation than the polarity sketched above admits.

The Irish National Adult Literacy Agency (2003), offers a far more expansive view of literacy than one widely accepted and used by the Basic Skills Agency.

"The integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development, social, economic, emotional and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond the mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy practice is to enable people to understand and reflect on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change."

Yet the contrast between the two organisations is by no means definitive. A quick visit to the National Literacy Trust (2003) website offers greater alternatives:

"Literacy can be defined on a number of levels. It is obviously concerned with the ability to read and write but a fuller definition might be the capacity to recognise, reproduce and manipulate the conventions of text shared by a given community. "
(John Hertrich in the HMI Secondary Literacy

Survey)

Or

"Using printed and written information to function in society in order to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." (OECD 1996)

again,

"To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate those techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands: it is to communicate graphically. Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words or syllables – lifeless objects unconnected to an existential universe – but rather an attitude of creation and re-creation, a self-transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context." (11)

The above conceptualizations occupy ground wider and deeper than implied by an either / or binary.

My preferred consideration, a self-referential quote and chanced upon truth that emerged from my attempt retell a misread and misremembered quote, somehow manages to be of analytical value:

"An individual or a community may be understood as literate once they have learnt to mimic the conventions surrounding the linguistic and textual practices of those groups who hold authoritative positions within a given community. "

Or

"Literacy is part of our class system ... the great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who have not yet learned how to. It is between

those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition."

(Margaret Meek, Emeritus Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, *'On Being Literate'*)

An exploration of this rupture is not necessary in this context. I refer to it here in an attempt to establish lateral boundary points within which literacy as policy construction and literacy as lived experience locate themselves. I hope also to make it clear that these boundary points are not adequately conceptualised as existing along a continuum of - say - technical to social definitions of literacy. A continuum / binary does not provide a complex enough metaphor for codifying these distinctions.

I stop well short of suggesting literacy can only be understood as a fragmented and individualised construct within which each practice unfolds its particularity; what I move towards is a construct based on a multi dimensional matrix incorporating an understanding of literacy of, for and where; this may be transformed into literacy metaphors that include: literacy as skills, tasks, practices or critical reflection.

This is my attempt to explore Wilson's 'third space' or 'in between' literacy; a literacy of the twilight zone; a literacy that exists beyond, outside, within, parallel to, that is surrounded by / contained within literacy as autonomous singularity or social multiplicity. It attempts to challenge the binary these two positions insists upon and rather views the tension between the two as a creative composite. Within any organisation where literacy is part of the curriculum - implicitly or explicitly - within in fact almost any learning exchange that involves the use of text - spoken or written - there is on a daily basis a juxtaposition between the officially sanctioned and admitted literacy that managers are compelled to implement and the living literacy that participants

bring with them to the encounter. This meeting creates a culturally specific hybrid twilight literacy that within a multi-dimensional matrix has its own distinct features.

The outcome then, of this study that carefully collects and attentively arranges the words of my colleagues - is the creation of a conceptual hybrid; a discursive construction made up of competing, contradictory in/coherent fragments into a fluctuating whole.

5. Research as an analytical daydream

My epistemology, sense-making preferences are firmly located within a qualitative paradigm. In 'Understanding Social Research', Usher⁽¹²⁾ offers two allegorical, and cautionary tales about research. In one tale protagonists search for order amidst a series of computer generated random associates. Driven by the determined belief in the existence of a unitary plan all involved - the generators of the random script and those seeking to uncover its truth - die in horrible and bizarre circumstances. The second tale offered by Usher is the story of a detective setting out to discover the identity of a murderer; the crime scene is that of a library with a single book - the identity of which remains unknown - sought as providing a unitary answer. Searching for an unknown truth, the discovery of which will explain everything, has parallels with the researcher's quest for social scientific authoritative knowledge. Yet, in Usher's quoted tale, the 'truth' is discovered by chance - a dream, an accident, a misreading, misremembering or misinterpretation.

I accept the challenge presented by Usher and resist the desire for a single unitary truth 'to emerge through this study. There is perhaps no single third space or 'in between' literacy that possesses the cohesion I strive to attain. Literacy as a shape-shifting, polymorphous fluctuating fragmentation that refuses definition - may be the nature of things. My search

for a reconciliation of competing and contested literacies may compel me to acknowledge that contradictions co-exist within a single entity, with apparent ease.

My role as researcher may be to offer an interpretation of that contradictory co-existence. To define a social meaning that emerges from and is shaped by human thought and existence.

My preferred research approach to data gathering is the interview. With Usher's caution in mind, I am compelled to consider carefully the ontological nature of the phenomenon I am gathering during the interview process. Foddy⁽¹³⁾ reminds me in unambiguous terms that any claims based on interview data are extremely tenuous. According to Foddy, during interviews people do not always tell the truth - they misremember, or lie, or mis-present themselves or they speak from *egos* for one moment and *id* the next; there is a gap between what people say and what people do; their attitudes and beliefs are extraordinarily unstable - whimsical; how questions are worded, the interaction between interviewee and interviewer influences the nature of responses; people misinterpret questions and answers; they subvert, divert or simply misread; they respond to data external to the interview process, or internal but not immediately or apparently relevant to the question at hand; they respond to the way a question is asked rather than the question 'itself' - assuming it is possible to identify a 'question' itself that exists apart from the way a question is asked. They answer questions about which they have no real basis for an answer, they uni/bi-laterally de/co-construct truths at will. I lean towards an understanding of research as an auto/biographical science that wilfully churns values, politics, subjective affectation and knowledge.

I could suggest that the data gathered during the interview process is the randomly generated script of Usher's first tale. Any truth I discover within it rests on my willingness to draw on my subjectivity - to daydream as well as to analyse.

6. Discourse

"Stories are the secret reservoir of values; change the stories individuals or nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations." ⁽¹⁴⁾

In working with marginalized communities and moving them from 'dysfunctional' literacy to 'functional' literacy, those of us involved in the Skills for Life agenda are insistent that what we are doing is offering adults A Good Thing. The imperative to develop the Nation's Basic Skills is considered - without doubt - a benign enterprise. This is a questionable conviction. Tremendous amount of energy goes into persuading people back into education; within months of the publication of the Kennedy Report discourses surrounding post-compulsory education were saturated by the phrase 'widening participation'; the mere use of which signified awareness of, belonging to a particular community within the College. It is now *de rigueur* to find entire college departments - or sections within departments, certainly a senior manager, devoted to recruiting 'hard-to-reach' adult learners. There is an implicit institutional recognition that a significant portion of the communities we are called upon to 'help' - 'do not care or do not know' that they have a problem⁽¹⁵⁾.

There are counter discourses to this narrative. I would suggest that there may be times when becoming literate has ambivalent consequences; an intricately balanced relationship within a community or household may be thrown into disarray by one member acquiring autonomous literacy independence- and the beliefs, values, ways of behaving, ways of being that go along with it; if literacy is viewed as a social practice leaving dysfunctional literacy behind could be theorised as leaving behind an accepted 'self' that causes contradictory strains in other aspects of an individual's life.

Having sketched a dominant and counter literacy narrative, I want to place this discourse within an institutional setting and consider the varying ways it shapes not the explicit construction of policies but the implicit interpretation and implementation of those policies. How does the pathologisation of the illiterate express itself within an organization? How are the discourses surrounding literacy taken-up, used and/or resisted? What are its local and material effects?

What I aim at understanding is how individuals, in the context of an organisation, in the context of a life-world, in the context of a unique trajectory hear and interpret literacy discourses. How do they draw upon and actively assemble the varying discourses that affect their working lives - managerial, economic, pedagogic, exclusion, quality, work. How do these discourses impact upon and shape localised literacy discourses. My emphasis is less upon what my colleagues actually do - it is rather more focussed on what they say about what they do: a discourse about practice rather than a discourse of practice.

Discourse is here understood as ways of organising meaning, which find partial though not exclusive, expression in language. I am referring to something that cannot be reduced to a detailed textual analysis, although lexicalisations, patterns of transitivity, use of active / passive voice are part of the approach. In this study my aim is to understand how literacy, literacy learning and literacy learners - are produced, not by a single unitary individual, not as a figurative object of a linguistic system, nor as a socio-economic by product but rather how power / knowledge constructions cohere through various texts, to create the conditions of possibility for different language acts that becomes embedded in the organisation. How do the discourses surrounding literacy map onto what can be said, thought and done at the EHWLC Lit?

An immediate and localised illustration of the power of discourse relates to a concept of 'acquired learning difficulty'. Through a series of discussions, a

student who had no designated medicalised cognitive deficiency but had simply been born in a country that did not have compulsory / accessible primary schooling, and in any case had travelled extensively (as an international footballer) in his mid-40's came to the EHWLC Lit wanting to learn how to read. His independent ability to access text was limited to completing his name and address on a form, understanding the stations on the underground, struggling with the headline in a newspaper. Joining a class would have been difficult for him because of his approach to reading. Most literacy classes made the assumption that individuals can read independently, unaided. This particular individual was unable to. In order for him to gain one-to-one support - the organisation created a linguistic category: 'acquired learning difficulty'. Once discursively constructed as having an 'acquired learning difficulty' he became entitled to one-to-one support. A Student who relates to text and those around him in a similar way, but without the sobriquet 'acquired learning difficulty' is left without one-to-one support.

This is in many ways similar to the discourse surrounding dyslexia. Students designated - or to use the medicalised term most commonly used in colleges, 'diagnosed' as having dyslexia are allocated a considerable degree of financial resource. The way in which this individual interacts with text by being labelled 'dyslexic' is considered special, in any case by nature different to the way a student who is defined as having low levels of literacy even if when assessed using a similar process they may be 'measured' as at a similar level, and may be enrolled on the same programme of study. The dyslexic student is defined as 'intelligent' but with a disability that prohibits development of literacy skills; the literacy student's intelligence is not considered as relevant. This echoes the Victorian Parish Councils charitable given and the distinction made between the deserving and undeserving poor. The dyslexic - as the deserving poor with a medicalised

disability - is morally entitled to support. The person with low levels of literacy - who probably waggged school for years as the undeserving poor is given no such attention.

I quote these as an instance where discourse, where knowledge / power determine how the organisation behaves towards a particular individual, how it defines and then responds to their perceived needs. It constructs categories - that exist simply because those calling them have determined their existence. They then act as if they were real.

My attempt is to understand the stories that my colleagues tell when they talk about literacy at the EHWLC Lit.

7. Research Methods - data generating / gathering

My main source of data will be interviews - but the intention is to ask both direct and indirect questions. To focus not on the implementation of the BSQI but to share with research participants' personal and professional experiences of literacy. At some point these ideas may be used to sketch a hybrid literacy composite with some suggestions regarding how these features may impact upon the delivery of the organisations agenda.

Interviews will be undertaken with:

- Assistant Principal responsible for implementing the Basic Skills Quality Initiative
- Senior Head of Programme - Essential Skills & Learner Services
- Members of the Basic Skills Strategy Group
- Tutors working on discrete Basic Skills programme; an integrated course – usually non-basic skills specialists, student support
- Students who have joined Basic Skills classes

- Students who have joined other courses and who make use of learning support.

For the first, experimental, phase of the project, a research project into the practicalities of doing research at my place of work, I intend to interview four colleagues. The more detailed research project to follow will involve much nearer to twenty participants and may involve a revisitation of the original interviews.

The intention is to transcribe these interviews and treat the transcription as text to be analysed. Alongside these interviews, I would like to interrogate government policy by analysing in detail defining policy publications: delivering Skills for Life, the Core-Curriculum & Success in Literacy and Numeracy.

I aim at devising a series of questions that would enable me to interrogate the policy text and dialogue derived text in a very similar way. The interviews will be semi-structured and timed. The practical consideration of colleagues with intense workloads suggests this as the most likely way to encourage agreement to be interviewed.

8. Research Methods - data analysis

Stephen Ball⁽¹⁶⁾ describes discourse as about – not only what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where & with what authority. His view highlights not only the power of discourse, but also the power to make discourse. This is a power that derives not from language itself – language may describe or obscure it – but from institutional positioning.

In examining the words of my colleagues, how they are uttered, what reception they are given, and by whom, with what influence, drawing of what references, I occupy an uneasy position. My dilemma is one faced by anyone who explores the hidden territories of pre / con / sub / text. I am implicated within the very discourses I critique. Co-conspirator in discourses I describe as appearing common sensically benign. Yet,

by invoking the notion of reflexivity, I recognise my role within while placing myself outside – slightly above! – the discourses I systematically analyse. Is this possible? I have no vocabulary within which to think outside the discourse I not only inhabit but as a literacy worker actively construct. In analysing discourse and their relationship to power / knowledge constructions, I award myself the role of saviour, liberator, detective, one who has managed to rise above it all – including my colleagues. I position them as guilty, ill-informed, used by politicians to implement an oppressive agenda that marginalizes the very communities it pretends to empower.

At this point I can see no way out of this dilemma. A reversion to playful, anything goes, mine as one-story among many with no special status amounts to little more than superficial nihilistic cynicism. The insistence on validity as little more than a paradigmatically defined line of bifurcation⁽¹⁷⁾, an anachronistic hang-over from positivism, a subterranean fear of an essentialised Other – may resolve my dilemma, but render the entire exercise of questionable value. In offering the study as research into literacy at EHWLC Lit, I also suggest a secondary project, as research into the process of research. I hope to further explore this dilemma and identify a less fidgety position.

For the moment, I reserve the right to accept the words offered to me by colleagues as gifts; gifts that I have a responsibility to creatively work with to co-construct a mutually recognisable, even if not completely shared – narrative around literacy learning and learners.

9. Interrupted silences

If the discussion so far has concentrated on defining the research trajectory as technical: what I intend to do / how I intend to do it, and epistemological: what I hope to learn from the experience – the notion of publicly disseminating the research findings insists on a personal

and transforming discussion; it compels a confrontation with issues of voice, representation, solitude, solidarity and place within a knowledge generating community.

I may choose to historicize and name my location in terms which both foreground and obscure considerations of race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and other indices of oppression. But my marginalised status is undermined by my role as researcher: active and complicit in an anthropological project which scientifically validates voyeurism by placing the colonised other under the ethnographer's gaze.

The ambiguous safety of silence - here positioned as strategic resistance, a refusal to be known, a face-saving rejection of the invitation to participate in a genderised and racialised epistemological language game is shattered by the notion of sharing research. Once the research is finalised and 'approved' it signifies the possibility of my gaining access to institutionalised discourses of power, and a requirement that I argue for, in defence of, not only my own academic interest, but the interests of those who have participated in the project, or the interests of those who with or without participating, are none-the-less leading protagonists within the project: namely C₂DEs who have tentatively begun to 'opt-into' New Labour's Skills for Life Agenda. In disseminating research findings my silent sanctuary is, if not completely shattered, at least interrupted: yet another invasion on my peace and quiet!

The opportunities for this interruption are plenty:

- distribution of the full research project to colleagues at EHWLC Lit;
- Re-presentation of key considerations to emerge from interviews as a series of recommendations about the best way to implement the Basic Skills Quality Initiative to Basic Skills Strategy group - or Senior Management Team at the College;
- Submission of an appropriately slanted version to relevant academic journals;
- Participation in a doctoral students poster conference;
- Leading a discussion group at a relevant conference hosted by Research and Practice in Adult Literacy - a loose gathering of practitioners and researchers sympathetic to the New Literacy Studies;
- The re-presentation of central issues as teaching and learning materials for student teachers interested in understanding the relevance of the New Literacy Studies;
- The re-presentation of central issues as teaching and learning materials for literacy students interested in exploring the connections between how they use and learn literacy in and out of institutionalised settings.

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