

The assessment of trainee teachers: an ethnography

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Declaration:

This thesis results entirely from my own work, and has not been offered previously for any degree or diploma.

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Previously published work

Parts of this thesis have been previously published in several journals. Full references for the previously published work appear in the bibliography, and are reproduced here:

Tummons, J. (2008) Assessment, and the literacy practices of trainee PCET teachers. *International Journal of Educational Research* 47(3) 184-191.

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Tummons, J. (2010b) Institutional ethnography and actor-network theory: a framework for researching the assessment of trainee teachers. *Ethnography and Education* 5(3) 345-357.

Tummons, J. (2011) 'It sort of feels uncomfortable': problematising the assessment of reflective practice. *Studies in Higher Education* 36(4) 471-483.

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Abstract

Dominant discourses of quality assurance in UK higher education posit assessment as a transparent and rigorous process through the ascription of the two key and inter-related concepts of validity and reliability. Drawing on ethnographic research into the assessment procedures and practices of one teacher-training course in England (a part-time course for teachers in the learning and skills sector which is delivered on a franchise basis across a network of further education colleges), this thesis demonstrates that claims to assessment validity and reliability are contestable. The thesis draws on three complementary social practice theories (communities of practice, new literacy studies and actor-network theory) in order to reveal assessment as being a complex, localised practice characterised by contingency and improvisatory behaviours on the part of both tutors and students, mediated by a variety of genres of textual artefacts. These divergent and complex practices are shown to disrupt dominant managerialist discourses of assessment practice in higher education. They are also shown to disrupt dominant definitions of learning, teaching and assessment in higher education, which predominantly rest on models of individual cognition and transferable skills, and which this thesis critiques through the use of social practice accounts of learning within communities of practice. The thesis demonstrates that assessment is more contingent and complex than dominant discourses of assessment practice in HE allow, thereby problematising claims to reliability and validity. The thesis makes contributions to current literature and research in two ways. Firstly, it concludes by offering a series of suggestions as to how assessment validity and reliability might be enhanced or reframed. Secondly, it demonstrates how communities of practice theory can be used critically to explore pedagogic activity, including assessment, within formal educational settings.

Chapter One

Establishing the field: the assessment of trainee teachers as a focus for research

This PhD thesis is about assessment: specifically, the ways in which assessment is experienced and practiced by both tutors and students on a part-time teacher training course for teachers in further, adult or higher education that is delivered across a network of further education colleges in the North of England, on a franchise basis from a large post-1992 university. This teacher-training course has been part of my professional and academic life for several years now. I was a student on this course, receiving my post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) in post-compulsory education and training (PCET) in 2000. Subsequently, I was a tutor on the course from 2003 until 2009, working in three different colleges within the network, where I also had course management responsibilities. The professional questions and challenges that eventually led to this thesis began to emerge some years before this period however. When working as an adult education tutor, from 1995 until 2003, a number of issues and questions relating to the ways in which my (then) students were assessed began to emerge. These issues fed forward firstly into my professional experiences as a teacher-educator, and subsequently into my own research which began as a small-scale research project for one module on my masters degree in education (MEd), before leading me to the research that now lies behind and within this PhD thesis.

Briefly, my research is and has been about a few things. I am interested in unwrapping the assessment process, of thinking about how both tutors and students not just set about the process of 'doing' assessment, but also about how they 'get to know' what the assessment is actually about in the first place. I developed this area of interest during the time I spent working in adult education, and particularly when I was simultaneously studying towards my MEd. But I am also interested in how Holgate University,¹ from where the course is franchised, actually manages to deliver its teacher-training course across this busy network of further education colleges, an interest stimulated in no small part by the fact that such higher

¹ 'Holgate' is a pseudonym, as are all other proper nouns (people and places) in this thesis with the exceptions of references to Leeds and York on the next page.

education in further education (HE in FE) provision had been, until 2003, entirely outside my professional – or any other kind of – knowledge and experience.

In this first chapter, I provide a more detailed account of how these research interests have developed over the last few years. Firstly, I will provide some brief biographical notes, partly to explain my developing research interests, but also to begin to construct a sense of myself as a researcher as well as a classroom practitioner. I briefly introduce the different theoretical perspectives that I began to learn about during my studies for my MEd, and talk about how they have influenced both my research interests more generally, as well as my initial proposal to study for a PhD. And I shall briefly outline my research questions. A more detailed unpacking of my final research questions will come later, however. After this first chapter, I will then spend the next two chapters discussing in depth the theoretical perspectives that I only introduce in this one. But for now, it is to the development of my research interests that I shall turn.

Setting the scene

Between 1995 and 2003 I worked as an adult education tutor, teaching both accredited and non-accredited courses in medieval and early modern history. My major employer was the (now defunct) School of Continuing Education (SCE) at the University of Leeds, where the students whom I taught worked towards a range of part-time certificate or degree qualifications. Although I did not realise this at the time, my first year of teaching coincided with a significant shift in the nature of adult education provision across the higher education (HE) sector more generally (Wallis, 1996). From the point of view of the student, the most immediate impact of these changes was the requirement to attempt formal assessment as part of the programme of study. At Leeds, as well as at the University of York, where I also taught a small number of similar adult education courses, the academic essay was the dominant mode of assessment used within the history curriculum. And for the first three years of my teaching (that is, the period before I began my PGCE), the ways in which I approached assessment (and, indeed, my teaching more generally), were informed primarily by my own

experiences as an undergraduate: I ran seminars and marked essays in a manner similar to those lecturers who had made the greatest impact on me.

In 1998, I began studying for a PGCE in post-compulsory education and training (PCET) at Friargate College, a further education (FE) college that ran the course on a franchise basis from Holgate University. As I read and took part in classroom discussions, I started to develop a more critical awareness of the difficulties that my students, now understood to be 'adult learners', faced. Reflecting the content of the PGCE (PCET) curriculum of the time, I conceptualised these difficulties in two ways: firstly, as being related to issues of motivation and self-esteem; secondly, as being related to transferable academic study skills. Both of these issues were presented in the PGCE curriculum as discourses of individual deficit: that is to say, the difficulties faced by adult learners returning to HE were explained as being due to a lack of motivation and/or self-esteem, and a lack of the necessary academic skills, such as essay writing or note-taking. The construction of the part-time degree programme at Leeds shared these concerns, attempting to meet them through the provision of compulsory study skills modules that included subjects such as note-taking, time management, and presentation of written work.

From 2000, I taught solely on two part-time degree schemes at Leeds: the BA in Local and Regional History, and the BA in Combined Arts. At the same time, I had begun studying with the Open University (OU), and the modules that I was both writing and teaching provided me with excellent material for the assignments that I needed to write for the first module of my Masters in Education (MEd) degree. But it was through working for my second MEd module, *Supporting Lifelong Learning*,² that the whole issue of the assessment of student learning, as I understood it, began to unravel. Two *overlapping* theoretical frameworks (Ashwin, 2009) contributed to this: communities of practice theories (Lave and Wenger, 2002; Wenger, 2002), and academic literacies theories (Baynham, 2002; Hamilton, 2002).³

² The OU no longer offers this module, but a 'legacy' website consisting of papers from the colloquium that led to its development is still online at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/lifelong-learning/> [date accessed: 14 September 2011].

³ These theoretical excursions are at this time necessarily brief, as they are discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The references that I provide here are to

Until this time, my working understanding of learning had been firmly located within a psychological and cognitive tradition, reflecting the curriculum of the PGCE that I had recently completed. Theories of learning that posit learning as a decontextualised and individual cognitive process continue to form the dominant paradigm in the PCET teacher-training curriculum, reflected in many of the popular textbooks used by both students and tutors on PCET programmes generally (Hillier, 2005; Reece and Walker, 2007; Wallace, 2007). This working understanding informed my lesson planning, my approaches to assessment and my responses to the difficulties that my students exhibited or talked about. Study skills provide a convenient example. During previous years, I had subscribed to a skills-based approach to student reading and writing, the kind of approach that views study skills as discrete, transferable and generic. This approach suggests that students should not normally experience any meaningful difficulty in reading and understanding their assignment brief, and then completing their assignment. If students were finding their assignments difficult, then it was because they had yet to learn how to do assignments properly. Therefore, a study skills module would be able to meet this need (Burns and Sinfield, 2003; Cottrell, 2003). However, as I worked with students, I was struck by how many of them complained that the study skills modules that they were obliged to take did not prepare them adequately for their 'proper' modules. Students on the Combined Arts programme stressed that the differences between the requirements of (for example) their history modules and their English modules (the most popular arts and humanities combination) were barely addressed by these generic modules. For students on the single-subject Local and Regional History programme, by contrast, there were no generic study skills modules. The academic development of these students (by which I mean their developing abilities in writing essays or taking part in seminars) was encouraged through the simple fact of studying their modules. To paraphrase the words of the Director of Studies at the SCE, who was also head of the Local and Regional History degree programme, the job of the level four modules was simply to get the students ready for level five, after which their marks actually counted towards their final classification.

pertinent chapters in the course readers published to accompany the E845 module (several of which, in fact, are derived from papers delivered at the colloquium referred to above, including the chapter written by my PhD supervisor).

The two theories of communities of practice and of academic literacies, introduced to me in my MEd, allowed me to make sense of my professional practice in new and exciting ways. I began to conceptualise each of my history groups as a community of practice. Mutual engagement was seen in our shared endeavours in the seminar room; joint enterprise in the ways that non-traditional students from a diverse range of backgrounds came together to study on these history modules; and a shared repertoire in the textbooks and documents that were used across the curriculum. For such students, difficulties in writing essays were not due to any deficit in study skills; rather, they were due to the fact that the students had yet to acquire the academic literacies that they needed in order to participate fully in essay writing. I posited academic literacy as a dominant literacy in order to contrast it with the ways in which students made meaning, through literacy, outside class contact time: when studying at home, or in a peer group, for example. Consequently, my end-of-module research project applied an academic literacies approach to the assessment on one of the modules that I then taught. Enthused by the ideas that I was having, and the findings of my project,⁴ I began to consider the possibility of doing a PhD that would allow me to take my academic literacies research further.

My research journey was temporarily discombobulated by a career change that was partly planned for, partly enforced. The continued demise of university provision for adults that eventually led to the closure of the SCE at Leeds coincided with my increased interest in education as a field of study and research. And so in 2003, I began teaching in the FE sector, teaching and managing the same teacher-training course that I had studied a few years previously. At the behest of my new employers, I completed my MEd studies with a module that focussed on management in education, but I continued to read about communities of practice and the new literacy studies as time permitted. I outlined a research project that would compare the ways in which adult education history students and PCET teacher-training students acquired academic literacies, but as I was soon offered a full-time post in teacher-training (and therefore had to stop working in adult education entirely) I began to focus

⁴ The project was later presented as a paper at *Discourse, Power, Resistance*, Plymouth University (2005), titled: "the words we use and the words they use: talking with non-traditional undergraduates". The abstract is available at: http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/dpr_06/2005abstracts.pdf [date accessed: 14 September 2011].

exclusively on research in this area. Later in this chapter I shall provide a brief reflective account of how I originally envisaged my research and how it evolved; firstly, however, I shall provide a brief description of the PGCE/CertEd course in order to set the scene for my research questions.

The PGCE/CertEd (PCET): some contextual notes

Holgate University is a university in the north of England with a history of training teachers for the learning and skills sector that stretches back forty years. For a long time, the university has delivered its teacher-training courses on a collaborative basis with a large number of further education (FE) colleges. FE colleges predominantly cater for students aged 16-19 who are following technical or vocational programmes of study. On completion of their courses, most students will enter employment although some will progress to university. FE colleges offer a range of programmes for adults, some of whom may be returning to learning after a protracted period out of formal education and training and some of whom may be returning to college to update or refresh existing skills. FE colleges also deliver courses in literacy and numeracy to adults. The vast majority of teachers in the FE sector enter the profession on the basis of their vocational or technical qualifications, rather than whether or not they have a teaching qualification. For example, a new lecturer in electrical installation would be expected to have appropriate and up-to-date trade qualifications or endorsements. After being appointed, s/he would then study for a teaching qualification on a part-time, in-service basis, and the course would therefore take two years to complete. Over four-fifths of PCET teacher training is carried out in this way; the remainder rests on a model that is more akin to schools-based training (that is, a full-time course with a teaching placement, completed within one year). The course is available as a professional graduate certificate in education (PGCE) to graduates, or as a certificate in education (CertEd) to non-graduates, who are teaching either part-time or full-time in post-compulsory education. These teaching contexts include FE colleges (the majority of students on the course), accredited adult education, and higher education. The course is endorsed by both the Learning and Skills Improvement Agency (following the demise of Lifelong Learning UK which until 2011 was the

body responsible for professional standards in teaching in the further education sector in England and Wales) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA: the body that holds equivalent responsibility for the higher education sector). It takes two years to complete on a part-time in-service basis.

A little over half of all of the students on the course take the CertEd route: for these students, this teacher-training course is their first experience of higher education (HE). Consequently, this aspect of the provision can be seen as being one of a number of methods through which wider participation in HE more generally can be offered (Parry et. al., 2003; Parry and Thompson, 2002; Thomas, 2001). This provision of higher education courses within further education institutions is generally referred to as *HE in FE* provision, and has expanded considerably over recent years (Bird and Crawley, 1994; Connolly et al., 2007; Hilborne, 1996; West, 2006).

The PGCE/CertEd is by any account an impressive entity: Holgate University delivers the course across a network of nearly thirty colleges, involving over one hundred tutors working with nearly two thousand students. Although the scale of provision varies between colleges,⁵ a broadly similar set of structures exists at each. At each college there is a course manager who is responsible for the academic and managerial leadership of the programme. The course manager oversees the applications process at a college level (which are then, on a sample basis, checked by the university), and is responsible for the return of final marks to the university at the end of the academic year. As well as this, they teach on the programme, usually with a small number of other tutors as well. In some colleges, PGCE/CertEd tutors maintain a teaching load within other curricular areas; in other cases, tutors are seen as 'education specialists' and work solely within the teacher-training curriculum. The course is modular, and course content is mapped onto the relevant professional standards. It is rolled out across the college network through an infrastructure that consists of handbooks, course meetings, visits to colleges by Holgate staff, websites and emails: in this way, the university

⁵ I carried out my research at four of the colleges within the network, all of which are somewhat different in terms of the size and profile of the PGCE/CertEd student body. These colleges are described in more depth in chapter seven.

maintains contact with all of the colleges, and colleges are in turn enabled to maintain useful working relationships with each other, for example through the cross-college moderation process. Put simply, there is a considerable amount of communication between and amongst the university and the colleges that serves to ensure the quality of the PGCE/CertEd provision, to enable scholarly conversation about learning and teaching in the PCET sector, and to encourage feedback and discussion regarding the PCET profession.

Research questions: initial development and evolution

During the five years I worked as a tutor on this PGCE/CertEd, I used to spend what I at first thought was rather too much time talking with my students about the assessments that they would have to do during the course. And I discovered that colleagues at other colleges where the course was delivered had to do the same thing. Nor was this talking restricted to academic discussions, such as whether one particular theoretical perspective on learning rather than another would be an appropriate topic for a 2000 word essay. Much of this talk was about more practical, almost prosaic matters: which bit of paper goes where in my portfolio? Which handbook or form do I need for this? How do I fill in this assignment cover sheet? What does this section in the assignment brief actually mean? There were also a lot of questions and concerned comments about essay writing from both CertEd and PGCE students. For those students who had come from technical and vocational backgrounds, essay writing was sometimes, quite understandably, a difficult task. But I was surprised by the extent to which PGCE students also found writing essays to be problematic, even stressful.

Initially, I approached these puzzles through the concepts that I had studied during my MEd, and I drew on these to inform my initial research questions, which foregrounded theories of communities of practice and academic literacies. As my PhD progressed I began to acquire more sophisticated and nuanced understandings of the conceptual frameworks that I was working with. I began to acquire and analyse data that allowed me to create a richer, more

detailed picture of the ways in which the PGCE/CertEd course was assessed.⁶ I also began to develop an interest in the ways by which the PGCE/CertEd was delivered across such a geographically and institutionally varied consortium. Drawing on another theoretical strand that I was introduced to by my supervisor, actor-network theory (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Latour, 2005; Law, 1994), I started to consider the systems and procedures by which Holgate University 'made' the PGCE/CertEd happen in the different colleges, and the ways in which the different activities that happened across the network of colleges were coordinated. Together with a broader use of theories of literacy as social practice (new literacy studies), as distinct from the more narrow focus on academic literacies that I had initially adopted, actor-network theory provided me with ways to both enhance and critique communities of practice theory. I began to think about my research not only in terms of exploring the literacy practices that surrounded assessment, but also the ways in which I could add to debates surrounding communities of practice theory. Specifically, I wanted to explore the extent to which I could 'knit together' these theoretical approaches (Ashwin, 2009: 41), although it was the two fields of communities of practice and academic literacies that remained at the centre of my research.⁷ I also found that my investigation of the literacy practices of assessment was proving to be more complex than I had anticipated. Rather than focusing on student learning within communities of practice, and the role played by assessment in this, I found myself focusing on how I might conceptualise assessment as an activity within a community of practice in a way that would be reconcilable to communities of practice theory more generally, an area of exploration that had hitherto been only seldom discussed by other writers (Price, 2005; Rømer, 2002).

As I continued my research, my attention turned away from my students' encounters with assessment practices, to my own and those of my fellow tutors. How did we respond to the instructions that the university sent us? Was the way in which I completed the feedback pro-forma similar or dissimilar to the ways in which my colleagues completed them? When talking students through an assignment, how might my interests and biases affect what I was saying

⁶ I began to carry out data collection on a pilot basis in the field within three months of beginning my PhD.

⁷ Refer also to Tummons (2008).

to them? Perhaps a different tutor would explain the assignment in a different way and in turn receive qualitatively different work from their students? Fortunately tutors do not work in institutional isolation. The moderation processes that are embedded within the quality assurance procedures for the course would allow me to talk with colleagues from other colleges about how they went about explaining assessments and giving feedback. I would be able to read the moderation reports and then the reports from the external examiners as well. But as I began to take a more reflexive turn, I questioned the manner in which I might be responding to, for example, the module specifications, or the recommendations and comments of moderators and examiners, in comparison to other tutors. It gradually became clear to me that those tutors on the programme with whom I had spoken shared some of my concerns or reservations about the way that it was being assessed. It also became apparent that some of the students whom I interviewed shared these concerns in a more or less overt manner. As tutors themselves, all of my student respondents would be experienced assessors (to varying degrees) and some drew on their professional experience when discussing how they completed their PGCE/CertEd assignments and how they responded to the marking and feedback processes.

During the initial stages of my research I had, put simply, hypothesised that the nature of the contribution that my thesis would make would be centred on the need to rewrite module guides and student handbooks

so that they might be more easily navigated and understood. But after the first year or so of study, this hypothesis had given way to a more profound critique of the validity and reliability of the assessment process. These concerns informed my

1. What are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?
2. How are the meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment facilitated?
3. How are these assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries?
4. What does a social practice account of assessment imply for how assessment is carried out: specifically, how does it inform debates about assessment validity and reliability?

Figure 1.1: research questions.

research questions (figure 1.1). These concerns also led to a move away from a focus on

communities of practice as a problematic issue within my research. Partly this was due to the expansion of the other areas of investigation; and partly this was due to an increasing sense on my part that an analysis of communities of practice theory, in the light of both my own research and of a wider developing body of scholarship, would be simply too broad in scope (Ashwin, 2009; Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Hughes et al., 2007; Kimble et al., 2008).

In summary, my research interests, and hence my questions, narrowed in focus in response to my reading, my data collection and my writing during the early stages of my PhD. In many respects this process can be seen as akin to the 'funnelling' that is characteristic of qualitative research, particularly ethnographic research, in general (which is how I would characterise my research, and to which I shall return in chapter six). As my research has progressed, I have found myself responding in a reflexive manner to both the increasing sophistication of my theoretical understandings and the conceptual literacy that I have brought to bear on my research, and to the quality, complexity and richness of the data that I have analysed.

Some brief notes about the structure of this thesis

My research questions will be unpacked in more detail after I have explored the theoretical frameworks that underpin them – frameworks that I have only briefly considered in this chapter. Communities of Practice theories will be explored in chapter two, in which I will explain how the PGCE/CertEd, its assessment processes, its tutors and its students, come together as a constellation of communities of practice. In chapter three, I will provide an account of the supplementary theoretical frameworks that I have drawn on: new literacy studies, and actor-network theory. I shall explain how these perspectives allow my analysis to travel in ways that communities of practice theory do not. Chapter four then presents a literature review relating to research in assessment in HE, and will focus both on broader research themes relating to assessment on part-time professional courses in HE, and more specifically on other 'communities of practice' analyses of assessment in HE, and the ways in which these have helped me to frame my own research. And then, in chapter five, I shall return to my research questions in order to provide a theoretically informed account of them.

The subsequent two chapters of this thesis relate firstly to research methodologies, and secondly to research methods. Chapter six contains a critical exploration of the different methodological and conceptual frameworks that I have drawn on in conducting my research and writing this thesis. Chapter seven contains a detailed account of the practicalities and procedures of my research.

Having established the methodological and theoretical background to my research, I shall then present and analyse my empirical data. Chapters eight, nine, ten and eleven deal in turn with my four research questions. Thus, chapter eight provides an analysis both of the literacy artefacts used, created and acquired for assessment, and of the literacy events within which they are employed. Chapter nine explores the ways in which meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment are facilitated. Chapter ten analyses how these assessment processes are ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries. And in chapter eleven, I provide a critical analysis of assessment on this PGCE/CertEd from this social practice perspective, with a specific focus on assessment validity and reliability. In chapter twelve, the final chapter of this thesis, I shall pull together the different strands of my analysis in order to present a number of coherent conclusions and recommendations for both research and practice. I shall offer some brief points of reflection relating to the research as a whole. And I shall also offer some conclusions relating to the innovative approaches that I have taken in combining a range of theoretical perspectives in carrying out my research. At the end of this thesis, a series of appendices are attached. The documents included in these are representative of the different kinds of activities that I have carried out in my research and of the materials and sources that I have collected and used. In compiling these appendices, I have likened the process to memories of studying mathematics at school, when teachers would always remind us to 'show our workings as well as the answers'. And so what I have tried to do in my appendices is indeed to show my workings, captured in a range of modes, including transcripts, field notes of varying kinds, photographs, reports generated by Atlas-Ti (a computer software application that I have used to help me organise the storage and analysis of my qualitative data) and other documents such as feedback forms, student essays and course handbooks.

Conclusion

This thesis is about the practice of assessment. Specifically, it is about the particular kinds of texts that students and tutors use in order to take part in the practice of assessment. I shall show that assessment is a practice that can only be understood through texts of different kinds. What started as an inquiry into academic literacies, as a way of exploring the difficulties faced by students when writing essays or compiling portfolios, became an inquiry into the fundamental characteristics of the very assessment practices that such academic literacies are posited as facilitating. Rather than finding ways by which students could improve their experience of assessment by improving their academic literacies, I have instead found that there are more complex and fundamental concerns regarding assessment that need to be addressed. Using the combined lenses of communities of practice, new literacy studies and actor-network theory, I argue that there are significant problematic aspects to assessment on this PGCE/CertEd, specifically relating to assessment validity and reliability. Although challenges to assessment validity and reliability are not new in themselves, the ways in which I have approached these problematic issues do constitute an original contribution to a much larger debate about assessment not only in teacher-training, but, as I shall go on to argue, in other HE courses where similar modes of assessment are employed.

Chapter Two

The PGCE/CertEd as a community of practice

In both this chapter and the one that follows, I set out the conceptual frameworks that have informed and guided my research. In this chapter, I explain why the PGCE/CertEd can be understood as being a *community of practice*. I draw on several key components of the theories posited by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) to show why a communities of practice framework is an appropriate analytical tool for my research. I also draw on works produced by other writers about communities of practice, in order to establish a critical as well as coherent theoretical understanding. In the chapter that follows this one, I make substantial use of two other well-established theoretical frameworks that have allowed me to carry my analysis in some particular and important directions which communities of practice theories are incapable of doing. These two frameworks are the *new literacy studies*, and *actor-network theory*. In chapter three I provide a brief critical account of their main aspects before going on to show how I have mapped them onto communities of practice theories in order to further my research.

Introducing communities of practice

"...communities of practice are everywhere"

(Wenger, 1998: 6)

When introduced by Lave and Wenger, the term 'community of practice' was left relatively unexplored, only loosely defined as a "largely intuitive notion" that required further investigation (1991: 42). Arguably, the term was introduced as a by-product of their more sustained analysis of learning as legitimate peripheral participation (which was in fact the focus of their book), in order to create some sense of the kinds of cultural and social places where learning might happen. How a community of practice might be identified, described or defined, or questions relating to what the constituent components or characteristics of such communities might be, were only later explored in depth by Wenger (1998). Subsequently, a

qualitatively different perspective on communities of practice was presented by Wenger et al. (2002), an account that can be seen as speaking to a neo-liberal economic discourse, focusing on how the development of communities of practice within organisations might lead to improved economic performance (Barton and Tusting, 2005: 5-6). Here, however, it is to the earlier works (that is, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998)) that I shall turn in order firstly to explain what communities of practice are, before going on to define learning as an aspect of participation within them.

Communities of practice are everywhere. We are all members of multiple communities of practice, some of which overlap with others. Sometimes, we are not even aware that we are members of a particular community, not least because only a very few have been subject to methodical, critical scrutiny (invariably by academic writers in books, journal articles or theses). As people in a social world, we engage in all kinds of activities – *practices* – as part of our ‘everyday’ lives, interacting with other people, sometimes in close proximity and sometimes at a distance or by proxy: at work, at play, with families or with friends. In order to take part in these various practices people come together in *communities* so that they can talk about their practices, share them and learn more about them. These *communities of practice* can be found in formal, institutionalised settings and in informal, vernacular ones. Lave and Wenger’s examples include tailors, midwives and butchers (1991). Wenger’s examples include amateur radio operators, recovering alcoholics and office-based computer users (1998). Other examples include adult learners in a basic skills class (Harris and Shelswell, 2005), teachers of mathematics (Cobb and McClain, 2006), and education researchers (Hodkinson, 2005; Tummons, in press).

In some communities, members will meet and talk on a regular basis; in others, they will meet only infrequently. Some communities have existed for a long time; others are relatively new. Some communities establish and sustain close relations with others, sharing aspects of their practice, whilst others are relatively self-sufficient. All communities of practice, however, share specific structural qualities. There are three attributes that are posited as maintaining

the coherence of practice within a community: *mutual engagement*, *joint enterprise* and *shared repertoire* (Wenger, 1998: 73-85).

Mutual engagement is the term used by Wenger to refer to the ways in which members of a community of practice interact with each other and do whatever they do. Members of a community might engage with others in a complementary manner or an overlapping manner, depending on the relative competence and positions that they occupy. Because working together creates differences as well as similarities, mutual engagement is never homogenous. Things can be done, argued over or spoken about in various ways so long as these are reconcilable to the *joint enterprise* of the community of practice. *Joint enterprise* refers to the shared work or endeavour of the community of practice. In order to engage in practice, members draw on the *shared repertoire* of the community, the habits, discourses, routines, ways of talking, tools, structures and other artefacts that over time have been created or adopted by a community of practice. Such artefacts serve a number of functions. They allow the members of a community to make statements about their practice, to express their identities within the community, and they represent the history of mutual engagement within the community. The repertoire can be seen as *reifying* aspects of the practices of a community (to reify something means to turn a concept or mental construct into a physical thing – for example, abstract notions of justice can be reified into statutes). And, reflecting the different ways in which members engage in practice, so members draw on the repertoire of the community in differential ways as they learn.

For Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), learning is a consequence of engagement in social practice. Learning is 'the same' whether or not any kind of educational structure has been established to provide a context for it: there are no contrasts between 'formal' or 'informal' learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 40). As people engage in practice, their engagement "entails learning as an internal constituent" (ibid: 35), a process that Lave and Wenger refer to as *legitimate peripheral participation* within communities of practice. Such engagement is described as a *condition* for effective learning (ibid: 93). That is to say, learning happens when people participate in practice. And it is important to note that learning

is not a phenomenon that occurs solely 'in the head'. Rather, learning involves and entails changes to the whole person, and how s/he acts and moves within the social world. Learning changes how people think, act and speak: it changes people's *identities* within their community (ibid: 151). Consequently, as members become more expert in the practice of the community, they draw on, employ and even enhance the repertoire, tools and artefacts of the community in an increasingly fluent and expert manner. Their participation, within the community, becomes more full.

Communities of practice do not exist in isolation. Although communities can be relatively self-sufficient, some of them establish and sustain close relations with others, and might even share aspects of their practice. Indeed, the practice of one community may be influenced by the practice of another. In order to explain how practices, artefacts or even people from one community might be able to move up, down or across into other communities, carrying meaning and intention with them, Wenger explores the nature of the *boundaries* that exist between communities, created by the "discontinuities between those who have been participating and those who have not" (1998: 103). Notwithstanding the existence of these boundaries, elements of one practice can be introduced into another in two ways. Firstly, this can be achieved through the use of particular kinds of tools or artefacts that are called *boundary objects*. These are objects that can connect people to communities of which they are not (yet) members, and which carry with them some aspect of the practice, which can be made sense of or used by non-members. Such an artefact might have been specially made as a boundary object, or it might simply be an artefact from the everyday practice of the community that can serve as a boundary object as well. A second aspect of this process is known as *brokering* (ibid: 109). Brokers are those members who are able to coordinate activity and meaning across communities of practice, creating new connections between them. Brokers are therefore members who are particularly adept at maintaining a presence at the boundary of their community, whilst sustaining their own engagement in practice. Thus, both artefacts and members can move across community boundaries, to help create a *constellation* of practices, which may be kept together by people, or shared repertoires, or artefacts, or any combination of these (ibid: 127-8).

It is important not to confuse brokerage with *multimembership* (ibid: 159). This is the concept used by Wenger to explain how people participate differentially in multiple communities and thus to consider the ways in which these different forms of participation impact on the identity of a member as s/he moves within and across communities of practice. That is to say, the ways in which a member participates in one community (whether fully or peripherally) are impacted on by the ways in which s/he participates in others, as a consequence of multimembership. The extent of the impact of multimembership on participation depends on the kinds of communities of which one is a member: if the experience of multimembership is of highly disparate communities, there will be little opportunity for a member's practice in one to be influenced by her/his practice in another. By contrast, if a person is a member of several communities that are arranged in a constellation, then opportunities for alignment between practices become much greater. And it is to such a constellation that I shall now turn.

The PGCE/CertEd: a constellation of communities of practice

Within any FE college, there are multiple communities of practice, each with their own routines, stories and processes (Avis et al., 2009; Viscovic, 2005; Viscovic and Robson, 2001). These communities are situated within staff rooms, workshops and classrooms. These communities emerge and evolve, rather than appear one day in prefabricated form. Groups of people are engaged in shared forms of social activity that necessitate a variety of mutual forms of engagement, drawing on a shared repertoire of resources and artefacts to engage with a joint enterprise (Wenger 1998: 72-85). Some of these communities relate to the administrative and managerial practices within a college, and many more relate to the different vocational, technical and professional curricula or courses that are offered within a college. They have their own practices, their own artefacts, systems and routines, their own shared histories and even their own shared sense of humour, all of which serve to both bind a community together, to create a boundary around it, and to exclude others who do not belong. The payroll department is a community of practice; the functional skills department is another; the electrical installation department is a third, and the business management department is a fourth. And there are many others, all of which overlap to a greater or lesser degree to form a

constellation of communities that can be seen as being circumscribed by the boundaries of the institution itself (Wenger, 1998: 127). Thus, a further education college can be seen as a constellation of communities of practice that overlap to varying degrees.

Within any one of the colleges that make up the PGCE/CertEd network can be found a PGCE/CertEd community of practice, itself part of a larger PGCE/CertEd constellation of communities that encompasses all of the colleges within the Holgate Network. As is often the case with communities of practice, so this one is readily recognisable, due to the practices of its membership, the tools and artefacts that they use and the stories and histories that they share and take part in. Its members engage in the community in a number of ways: the weekly meeting of the PGCE/CertEd class; the shared workload of class and assignment preparation; or the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to support the work of the course. The efforts of the students are focussed on a particular joint enterprise: their successful negotiation of the course, leading to the award of either a Cert Ed or a PGCE, and hence a license to practice in the PCET sector (Atkins, 1995; Lester, 2009; Taylor, 1997). The award of this license to practice in turn allows the students, who will have thereby become qualified practitioners,⁸ fuller participation as tutors in those communities of practice that embody the different courses, vocations, trades and occupations that the further education sector more broadly works to prepare students for. Put simply, as a consequence of the time that they spend in the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, they are able to increase their participation in some of the *other* communities of practice to be found in both the college and the FE sector more generally.

Expanding 'communities of practice': beyond Lave and Wenger

Thus far I have provided an account that has drawn on concepts outlined in the initial works written by Lave and Wenger, and Wenger. Before I proceed, however, it is necessary to spend time considering some of the theoretical questions that subsequent researchers and

⁸ That is, possessing a recognised teaching qualification. Practitioners already hold subject-specific qualifications when entering the PCET teaching profession: indeed, having a relevant subject-specialist qualification is a criterion for entry onto the PGCE/CertEd course.

writers, working within educational contexts, have posed to communities of practice theory. But before I can fully establish my communities of practice framework in this chapter, I need first to insert some additional theoretical components that Lave and Wenger and Wenger do not provide.

A critical appreciation of different understandings of 'community of practice' is problematic. Partly, this is because one of the begetters of the term has fundamentally changed his definition and understanding of what a 'community of practice' actually consists of (Barton and Tusting, 2005; Wenger, 1998, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). Partly this is because some researchers and writers have posited definitions and understandings, more or less explicitly, of 'community of practice' that have contributed further to what might be described as conceptual slippage relating to the term (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002; Linehan and McCarthy, 2001; Warhurst, 2008). And partly this is because other researchers and writers have added to communities of practice theory through studies that have also served to explore and critique perceived deficiencies or weaknesses, particularly though not exclusively in Wenger's original (1998) theorisation (for example: Billett, 2007; Fox, 2000; Harris and Shelswell, 2005; Jewson, 2007; Lemke, 1997; Trowler, 2008; Tusting, 2005). Works such as these tend to draw, to varying degrees, on two approaches: firstly, on empirical research that generates data and conclusions that challenge or belie some aspect of the theory; secondly, on alternative theoretical frameworks that share the social epistemological and ontological foundations of the theory. A good example of the former is provided by Harris and Shelswell (2005), who draw on their research of ICT implementation in adult basic education to propose the novel theoretical component of *illegitimate* peripheral participation in order to create an epistemological and ontological space for *meaningful non-engagement* in the practice of a community. A good example of the latter is provided by Billett (2007), who argues that much theorising regarding communities of practice has privileged the social and the situational at the expense of the agentic individual, who has remained under-theorised. He suggests that this is a deficit that can be addressed through using activity theory, which provides more multi-faceted tools for thinking about individual action and, specifically, individual learning.

In my research, there are three specific theoretical problems that I need to solve in order to continue my account of the PGCE/CertEd as a community of practice. I have already introduced the first of these: namely, the fact that students in the PGCE/CertEd community of practice are only members of *this* community so that they can participate more fully in *other* communities that relate to their field or area of technical or vocational employment and training. The other two problems relate to the exact nature of 'practice' in the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, and to the place of pedagogy within it. I shall return to these shortly. To begin, I need to find a way to explain the ways in which PGCE/CertEd students travel through the PGCE/CertEd community in order to participate more fully in others.

First problem: deliberately partial participation

People who come to communities of practice are frequently referred to as "newcomers" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29), "apprentices" (ibid: 108) and "learners" (ibid: 97). Established members are commonly referred to as "full participants" (ibid: 105), "old-timers" (ibid: 115) and "masters" (ibid: 95). When describing their journeys, or *trajectories*, through a community of practice, both Lave and Wenger and Wenger rest their analyses on two assumptions. Firstly, they assume that *full membership* is the assumed consequence of increased participation; secondly, they assume that mastery of the practice can be had *solely* by participating in that practice (Lemke, 1997: 42-43). These two assumptions raise important questions regarding the PGCE/CertEd community of practice.

In the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, I suggest that the students are the 'apprentices or 'learners' and the tutors are the 'masters' or 'old-timers' (although none of these terms, as metaphors, are entirely satisfactory). But only a very few PGCE/CertEd students go on to become PGCE/CertEd tutors. The time that they spend within the PGCE/CertEd community is always deliberately *partial* and never aspiring to fullness. The students are not seeking to be full participants in the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, therefore (although a small number may one day become teacher-educators themselves (Noel, 2006; Simmons and Thompson, 2007)) but in those communities of practice that are aligned to those areas within

which they teach, such as plumbing, web-page design or beauty therapy. By spending some time in the PGCE/CertEd community, therefore, they are able to participate more fully in others, a full participation which can only happen as a consequence of their participation in the PGCE/CertEd community:

What if mastery of a practice is not to be had solely by participating in that practice?

Then increasing participation in a particular community of practice will never be enough by itself to achieve full membership. It may be that one must also participate in some other community of practice or engage in some other practices in order to master or be counted as having mastered the practices of the first community of practice.

(Lemke, 1997: 43).

I propose that the PGCE/CertEd community of practice has been constructed and has evolved in such a way that for some of the members – the students – participation will always be deliberately partial. This is not to intentionally marginalise or disempower the students. Rather, the recognition of their deliberately partial participation is simply intended to reflect the fact that they will only spend a predetermined amount of time within the PGCE/CertEd community: the time it takes to learn certain things about teaching and working in the lifelong learning sector, a process which is symbolised by the receipt of their qualifications.

However, whilst students' trajectories within the community are always partial, those of their tutors are not. Linked to this is the fact that the practices of the students are, and will always be, qualitatively different from those of the tutors. And it is these differences in practice, and how they can be reconciled, that I shall now address.

Second problem: the 'practice' of the PGCE/CertEd community

The practices of tutors within the community are conspicuously different from those of the students. Students write assignments, but tutors mark and write feedback on them; students work towards a professional license to practice, but tutors help to grant it through their

assessment decisions; students learn about pedagogy, theories of learning and reflective practice, but tutors already know these and consequently plan teaching sessions that cover these topics. At first look, it would seem to be the case that the practices of tutors and students are so different, that positioning them all within the same community of practice would appear to be impossible, or at best unhelpful, as a way of theorising the learning, teaching and assessment, that is taking place (Ashwin, 2009: 41-45). It is necessary therefore to consider what the 'practice' of the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, actually might be.

I propose that it is the 'doing' of the PGCE/CertEd – the assignments, the reflections on practice, the completion of individual learning plans, the filling in of feedback forms, the submission of work for moderation, and so on – that constitutes the practice of the PGCE/CertEd community. These activities (and there are others) are different and involve a varied, rotating cast of participants, but they all revolve within, amongst and around each other as aspects of the PGCE/CertEd course. Without the course, none of these activities or practices would be happening in quite the way that they do. Put simply, it is the practice of teaching and learning that makes the PGCE/CertEd a community or, more precisely perhaps, *a disciplinary community of pedagogic practice*:

We understand teaching and learning to be equally and inextricably situated in social practice within the disciplinary community. Teachers' pedagogic identities involve the negotiation of meaning, with learners, as members of a disciplinary community of pedagogic practice.

(Malcolm and Zukas, 2007: 17).

For Ashwin (op cit.), the practices of teachers and students are so different that they cannot be considered to be within the same community of practice. However, I argue that if the practice is understood to be 'the work of doing the PGCE/CertEd', then they can indeed be members of one community. Consider the completion of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) as an example (which I shall return to in greater depth in subsequent chapters). PGCE/CertEd

students complete an ILP during each of the two years that they spend on the course. Before they begin work on the ILP, tutors invariably devote class time to going through what is required. Some students look at ILPs that their peers have completed, in order to 'get an idea' about what needs to be done. Rough drafts of ILPs are handed in to tutors to look over prior to formal submission. Many tutors run ILP 'top-up' sessions throughout the academic year to encourage students to complete them on an ongoing basis. And at the end of each year, the ILP forms part of one of the portfolios that students submit for assessment. It seems right to consider the activities of both tutors and students as two aspects of the same practice: the 'doing of the ILP', which includes how it is initially explained, how it is completed, how feedback is given, and so on. And if we extend this approach to include the 'doing' of academic essays, lesson observations and so on, then the 'doing' of the whole PGCE/CertEd becomes the practice, and the people involved in the doing – the tutors and students – become the members of the community.

Nonetheless, although placing the PGCE/CertEd students within this community of practice is relatively uncontroversial (they are learners after all, and learning – understood to be legitimate peripheral participation – is one of the core characteristics of any community, not just this one), the role of formal instruction, of *pedagogy*, within a community is rather more problematic, even though this is what might be termed the defining characteristic of the tutors' practice. I shall discuss this next.

Third problem: pedagogic discourse within a community of practice

Much of the research that has been done with communities of practice theories has focused on what has been termed 'informal learning' (Boud and Middleton, 2003; Rock, 2005; Viskovic, 2005). This is emphatically not because communities of practice theories posit a distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' learning, however. Rather, this is a reflection of the fact that communities of practice theories reject the notion of pedagogy as a discrete form of instructional discourse:

...in a community of practice, there are no special forms of discourse aimed at apprentices or crucial to their centripetal movement toward full participation that correspond to...the lecturing of college professors.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991:108).

Within a community of practice, the ways in which members speak with each other – their *discourse* – is one of the many things that participants will learn. Indeed, it is in part through learning how to talk as members of the community, that participation becomes more full.

Didactic instruction, by contrast, leads to quite different practices:

There is a difference between talking about a practice from outside and talking within it. Thus the didactic use of language, not itself the discourse of practice, creates a new linguistic practice, which has an exercise of its own.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 107-8).

Although other accounts of communities of practice have indeed been sited in what might be termed more formal educational contexts that would assume some kind of pedagogic discourse to be present, (Harris and Shelswell, 2005; James, 2007; McArdle and Ackland, 2007), such accounts have tended to shy away from addressing the position of the possibility of a discourse of instruction – of teaching – within communities. This is surprising, as there are some aspects of the theories posited by Wenger (1998) that can be fruitfully employed in this context, although they have been relatively under-used by other writers. Specifically, I propose that through the use of Wenger's concept of *learning architecture*, the position of pedagogy, of teaching, within a community of practice can be satisfactorily explained.

A learning architecture consists of an assemblage of components that may allow learning to take place. Such an assemblage might consist of a place (rooms, workshops, facilities), tools and equipment (textbooks, materials, handbooks, reading lists), and activities that require and encourage mutual engagement (seminars, tutorials, practical tasks). But however well-designed the architecture might be, there is always an unanticipated element:

...teaching does not cause learning: what ends up being taught may or may not be what was taught, or more generally what the institutional organisation of instruction intended. Learning is an emergent, ongoing process, which may use teaching as one of its many structuring resources.

(Wenger, 1998: 267).

In this sense, 'teaching' is understood as being part of the learning architecture, rather than a separate process that stands outside it. As such, it becomes part of the repertoire of the community of practice, to be employed by those members of the community who have the appropriate expertise to access it: the teachers. But teachers need to do more than simply draw on aspects of the community's learning architecture in order to encourage participation:

...teachers need to "represent" their communities of practice in educational settings. This type of lived authenticity brings into the subject matter the concerns, sense of purpose, identification, and emotion of participation. ...for students, it is the kind of access to experience they need in order to feel connected to a subject matter. This principle suggests that being an active practitioner with an authentic form of participation might be one of the most deeply essential requirements for teaching.

(Wenger, 1998: 276-277).

In the previous chapter, I referred to the fact that the vast majority of teacher-education for the post-compulsory sector occurs within further education colleges, taught by HE in FE tutors, as distinct from 'mainstream' HE lecturers. The teacher-education workforce in the HE in FE sector is predominantly female, and teacher-educators tend to come to teacher training after having first taught in the social sciences, arts or humanities (Noel, 2006; Simmons and Thompson, 2007). So, although the teacher-education workforce *per se* does not represent the FE workforce as a whole (because there are comparatively few teacher-educators from construction and engineering backgrounds, for example) it can nonetheless be seen as representative in the sense that teacher-educators are also practitioners in 'mainstream' FE as well. Many teacher-educators continue to work within other parts of the FE curriculum,

alongside their commitments to the PGCE/CertEd programme. This multimembership of different communities of practice allows them to provide that sense of authentic representation and experience within the PGCE/CertEd community that the students within that community look to access.

To conclude: the process of solving these three theoretical problems has allowed me to do two things. Firstly, I have been able to provide theoretically and critically robust solutions to particular problems or criticisms of a communities of practice analysis. And secondly, I have been able to continue my exploration of the PGCE/CertEd as a constellation of communities of practice. My account of the three problems that I had identified (deliberate peripheral participation, the nature of practice, and pedagogic discourse) has provided me with the tools and concepts that I need in order to complete my description of the PGCE/CertEd constellation.

The PGCE/CertEd: complexities and diversities in practice

I have established that the PGCE/CertEd community is just one of the many communities of practice that can be found within an FE college. The PGCE/CertEd communities from across the Holgate University network are arranged in a *constellation*, and by travelling across the *boundaries* of the communities, both people and things can travel across this constellation. Within a PGCE/CertEd community the students, as *novices*, travel along a trajectory that is deliberately partial, never aspiring to fullness. This is because they aspire to fuller participation within those communities that belong to their technical or occupational specialism (theatre studies, accounting, or electrical installation), and it is through their peripheral journey within the PGCE/CertEd community, that this can be achieved. The *old-timers* of the PGCE/CertEd community are the teacher-educators, often maintaining multi-membership of other communities within the FE sector. Through this multi-membership, as well as through access to the resources that constitute the *conceptual architecture* of the PGCE/CertEd, the teacher-educators are able to sustain a pedagogic discourse that becomes part of the repertoire within the community.

However, not all colleges in the network operate in exactly the same way, despite their use of the shared architecture that supports their constellation. In a sense, this is hardly surprising. The colleges are quite different in terms of their geographic location, the economic, social or business needs of the populations that they serve, the curricula that they deliver and the management structures that exist within them. There are nearly a hundred tutors working on the PGCE/CertEd programme in these various locations. In turn, these tutors have a variety of professional, vocational and academic backgrounds that influence how they approach their teaching of the PGCE/CertEd course (Noel, 2006). Their identities within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice have been formed over time through multimembership of other communities of practice that relate to other professional or occupational roles, other histories and experiences. PGCE/CertEd student groups are similarly different. They vary in class size; in terms of their own vocational, professional or academic background; in when they attend class; in their motivation for studying on the PGCE/CertEd; in their employment status.⁹ Some of these variant factors are bound up with the college where they work and frequently, though by no means always, attend their PGCE/CertEd class. For example: particular curriculum areas are more strongly represented within the PGCE/CertEd groups at some colleges than at others; at some colleges, the majority of PGCE/CertEd students are members of staff within the same institution: at others, staff will form a minority of the student cohort. Such diversity and complexity is characteristic of the PGCE/CertEd provision across the college network as a whole.

It should not come as a surprise to find that the way in which the course is run differs between colleges: with such a diverse student and tutor body, and such diverse local situations, the PGCE/CertEd stretches the technology of programme standardisation. The university at the centre of this network provides, through the *architecture* of handbooks, assignments and procedures, the potential for a PGCE/CertEd community of practice in each of the locations to which that architecture is delivered, a process that Wenger refers to as *alignment* (1998: 238-9). But what Holgate University cannot do is predict exactly what kinds of communities of

⁹ Although the PGCE/CertEd is an in-service course, it is available to students who teach for as little as three hours a week, on average, during the academic year.

practice might emerge and, thus, what kinds of practice – of learning, teaching or (of most importance to my research) assessment – might actually happen.

Communities of practice: insights, questions and ways of thinking

The portrayal of the PGCE/CertEd as a community of practice that I have presented in this chapter is far from complete. In fact, it has been necessarily brief. This is because it is through answering my research questions that the contours and ecologies of this particular constellation of communities will become apparent in much richer detail. In my research, I am using communities of practice theories in a manner that is more closely aligned to the theories as they were originally established by Lave and Wenger and Wenger, elegantly summarised by Lea as a way “to examine and understand learning in an organic context” (2005: 188). So in this chapter, I have explained why the PGCE/CertEd is a community of practice, and have also begun to attach some key concepts to my analysis, in order to show how the theory fits. But my fuller explorations of student and tutor participation, of the learning architecture of the community, and of those other paradigmatic components of communities of practice as they pertain to the PGCE/CertEd community, will emerge only as this thesis proceeds.

When introducing the diversities and complexities that can be found across the PGCE/CertEd constellation of communities, I proposed that notwithstanding the establishment of a sophisticated learning architecture of handbooks, course documents and the like, Holgate University is incapable of predicting exactly what kinds of learning will emerge within the different college-based communities, however hard it tries to align them. This is not because Holgate is doing anything ‘wrong’: far from it. It is simply a reflection of what communities of practice are like. And so rather than trying to understand assessment as something that can be faultlessly managed, homogenised and standardised, as dominant discourses of managerialism and quality assurance would have us believe and aspire to, I instead suggest that it has to be understood as complex, local, with context-specific meanings attributed to it that are fixed in particular times and places. These are ways of examining and understanding that communities of practice theories provide me with, and which, as I explained in the

preceding chapter, have informed my research questions. Thus, through exploring particular aspects of these PGCE/CertEd communities of practice, I can begin to provide solutions to those very questions. This has to be a selective process: to examine every aspect of the PCCE/CertEd constellation would require a much greater amount of time and space than this PhD thesis, and the research that it rests on, can provide. Conveniently, as my emerging interests and preoccupations over recent years have increasingly revolved around assessment, this process of selection, of what to focus on, has been relatively easy for me.

However, I have already referred to the fact that communities of practice theories are not the only theories that I am drawing on for my research. I shall also be drawing on the new literacy studies, and actor-network theory. But this is not simply because I have found a 'flaw' or an 'inconsistency' within communities of practice theory that needs fixing. Rather, this is because these other theories allow my analysis to travel in directions that communities of practice theories are incapable of reaching. A metaphor will illustrate my point.¹⁰ When browsing the world wide web I sometimes come across content that my web browser is incapable of displaying – a particular sound or video file, for example. So before my browser can open up the file, I need to download a particular piece of software, called a *plug-in*, such as adobe flash player. The best way that I can find to explain my use of the new literacy studies and actor-network theory is to describe them both as plug-ins. And so in the next chapter, I explain why my communities of practice browser is unable to download particular kinds of content, and why I therefore need these two plug-ins in order to see the whole picture.

¹⁰ Borrowed - and stretched – from Latour (2005).

Chapter Three

The PGCE/CertEd, new literacy studies, and actor-network theory

This is the second chapter in which I explore the theoretical frameworks that underpin my research. In the preceding chapter, I drew on communities of practice theory to situate the PGCE/CertEd within a conceptual framework in which learning, teaching and assessment are understood as being socially situated practices. I explained how the PGCE/CertEd students, as newcomers or apprentices, followed a pathway through the community that was always, deliberately peripheral. I explained the role of the PGCE/CertEd tutors, the old-timers of the community, in using the conceptual architecture of the community in their teaching. And I explained how it is the practice of doing the PGCE/CertEd that joins all of these together.

However, as my analysis drills down into assessment matters, some of the limitations of the communities of practice framework become apparent. And so, in order to answer the research questions that I have set for myself, I have made significant use of two further theoretical approaches. The first is *new literacy studies*, a social practice approach to literacy that focuses on literacy practices, which are “the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 6). The second is *actor-network theory*, which to some extent resists a pithy definition but can be understood as a sociology of association, a way of thinking about how social actions are accomplished across spatial, temporal and institutional boundaries (Latour, 2005). In this chapter I also continue my account of the PGCE/CertEd, and again draw on a small number of further elements of communities of practice theory. But I do so in part in order to illustrate those areas where this theory is unable to provide me with the ideas or tools that my research questions need, thereby necessitating the introduction of alternative frameworks.

Assessment: a new literacy studies perspective

Assessment is a practice that is *bound up* in all kinds of text-based documents. By this I mean that how assessment gets done on the PGCE/CertEd course, how it is thought about

and discussed by students and tutors, by internal moderators and external examiners, is reified by texts which in turn are created and changed by assessment. Some of these are institutional texts, created by the university or by one of the colleges where the course is delivered. Examples include course handbooks, guides to Harvard referencing and assessment worksheets. Tutors create others, perhaps as teaching aids or as part of a classroom-based activity. Examples include PowerPoint presentations, posters and handouts. Students themselves create many different kinds of texts, some of which become assignments. They keep notes, write essays and compile reflective journals. They also create other kinds of texts in their roles as teachers, many of which are transferred into their PGCE/CertEd assignments. Students – as tutors – write schemes of work and lesson plans, and design handouts, worksheets and other classroom resources. And, finally, the quality assurance processes of the course create texts. Examples include feedback forms, moderation reports and external examiners' reports. The majority of these documents are in physical form, printed on paper and collected into portfolios or handbooks. They are also available electronically. Tutors, students, moderators and external examiners often use Microsoft word templates to create documents, which are then emailed and/or printed prior to distribution. Both Holgate University and the colleges within the network use email and a virtual learning environment to distribute and receive documents. In chapter eight, I will begin an in-depth exploration of text-based documents such as these. For the present, however, I want to make the point that it is important to recognise that assessment is mediated by text-based documents that have to be investigated in order to explore assessment practice.

Wenger, and Lave and Wenger, provide conceptual tools for thinking about these documents, which, using their terminology, we can refer to as text-based *artefacts*. Lave and Wenger discuss the *transparency* of artefacts, the interplay between the use of an artefact and the understanding of its significance, as an aspect of participation. As participation becomes more full, so artefacts become more transparent to the practitioner (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 101-2). Put simply, the more we learn within a community of practice, the more easily we can make use of the artefacts on the community. In part, this is simply because we know more. And in part it is because as we know more, we are better able to understand the full

significance, to grasp the full potential or maximal utility, of the artefacts themselves. Wenger takes this further, through the concept of the *communicative ability* of an artefact (1998: 64). This communicative ability rests on two factors. The first of these is participation and this relates to the extent to which a member of a community understands the significance of the artefact as a consequence of the extent or depth of her/his participation. The second of these is reification and relates to the extent to which an artefact, once in reified form, manages to continue successfully to embody meaning. In the previous chapter, I referred to a statute as an example of reification. Some statutes, arguably, are reified less successfully than others: as a result, their meaning continues to be debated by lawyers and scholars of jurisprudence. The impact of reification (a statute is a lot easier to carry around and circulate than a purely abstract, mental legal notion) is thereby lessened (the meaning of the statute becomes subject to negotiation): a process referred to as the *double edge* of reification (ibid: 68).

I shall provide an example here in order to illustrate the concepts of transparency and communicative ability. The individual learning plan (ILP) was introduced to the PGCE/CertEd in 2007 and acts as a locus for diagnostic and ipsative assessment at the start of the course, and for ongoing ipsative assessment and reflective practice, as well as the recording of formal achievements during the course. ILPs tend to be completed by students both during private study time, and during tutorials. However, both tutors and students often find ILPs to be cumbersome, time-consuming, and overly bureaucratic (Hamilton, 2009; Thompson et al., 2009). There is some aspect of their material form, the ways in which they have been reified, and the ways in which they are required to be used, that diminishes their transparency and communicative ability, and stops them working, as forms of assessment, as usefully as they otherwise might. Partly, this is due to issues such as the physical layout of an ILP and the vocabulary used (issues to which I shall return). And partly this is due to the politics of ILPs. By this I mean that the dominant audit cultures of HE and PCET more generally serve to influence the ILP process in such a way that the ILP becomes an object of audit and inspection, displacing the developmental assessment role that a concern for the primacy of teaching and learning would place at the centre of the process.

But if the example of the ILP serves to illustrate well the concepts of transparency and communicative ability, it also serves to foreground issues of power, of the politics that lie behind the (mis)use of artefacts, and of the ways in which broader cultural practices (such as audit cultures) can influence the actions of tutors and students. It is these latter issues that communities of practice theories do not address in detail. Lave and Wenger do acknowledge that access to artefacts is liable to manipulation, but go no further in analysing the causes and consequences of any such manipulation beyond any impact on transparency (1991: 103). Similarly, Wenger only briefly refers to the causes or consequences of the deliberate manipulation of artefacts (1998: 64). Here, the potential for political influence within a community of practice is raised, but this is couched in terms that are essentially affirmative: politics as a force for beneficial intervention, not for intervention that might lead to undesirable consequences such as the diminution of the ILP process (ibid. 91-3).

Before being able to consider fully how such artefacts are used by students in the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, it is clear that a different theoretical framework is needed in order to explain which artefacts are encountered, where they come from, why they are the shape they are, who they are intended for, why and when some are privileged at the expense of others, what political forces impact on them, how and when students and tutors come to know how to use them and how and when they are used. Such a framework is provided by the *new literacy studies* (Barton, 1994; Barton et al., 2000, 2007; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Belfiore et al., 2004; Gee, 1996, 2004; Lillis, 2001; Street, 2005; Tummons, 2008).

The new literacy studies has provided me with several key concepts for the critical analysis of text-based artefacts, which are conceptualised as being employed within *literacy events*, which are any activities where literacy has a role. The ILP tutorials that I have referred to are examples of literacy events. Such events arise from *literacy practices*, which are those general ways that people use written language in all sorts of social contexts, whether at work, at home or elsewhere. Literacy events are relatively straightforward to observe. Literacy practices are not, however, and this is because they involve how people feel about, or the

extent to which they value, the literacy in question (Barton, 1994: 7). Thus, “literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts” (ibid: 8). However, literacy is not the same across contexts: there are different literacies, enfolded in different literacy practices, which are identifiable and which belong to different social contexts or *domains*. The ways in which PGCE/CertEd students write their essays are quite different from the ways in which – as tutors – they write end-of-module evaluation reports, for example. And just as literacies vary across contexts, the ways in which meaning can be taken from written texts vary as well. Readers bring knowledge to their reading of a text, and the meanings that the reader makes will be mediated by this knowledge. A PGCE/CertEd tutor might read an article from the *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* more quickly, and with a more immediate understanding, than might a PGCE/CertEd student. This is because the tutor has a greater working knowledge of the kinds of issues and themes discussed in the journal more generally. But it is also because the tutor is more used to reading texts within the *genre* of academic journals.

It is also important to recognise that much literacy learning takes place within relationships of unequal power, where some forms of literacy are acknowledged and encouraged (dominant literacies) and others are marginalised or deemed inappropriate (vernacular literacies).

Arguably, the dominant genre of academic writing that is of most relevance to my research is *essayist literacy* (Gee, 1996; Lillis, 2001). This term is used to describe the ways in which students are expected to write their assignments, aspects of which include expectations as to the use of literature or other secondary sources (which have to be correctly referenced using appropriate academic conventions), the creation of a linear narrative, and often (though this is increasingly changing) the use of the third person when writing. At the same time, students also use vernacular literacies during their studies: during email exchanges with their tutors, for example, or when establishing peer support groups on facebook. And finally, it is important to note that social practice accounts of literacy rest in part on the that learning and knowledge are also understood as being constructed within social practices. That is to say, there is an epistemological and ontological alignment between the new literacy studies framework that I

am drawing on here, and the communities of practice framework that I have already established.

New literacy studies: earlier analyses

Within what might be termed the new literacy studies 'tradition' there have been several analyses of assessment in HE that are pertinent to my research, which can be placed into three group or strands. These are: explorations of professional and part-time HE courses from an academic literacies perspective; of the literacy practices of non-traditional undergraduates; and of HE practice more generally. These works have tended to focus on the acquisition of academic literacies, and particularly essayist literacies, although other genres of assessment such as reflective writing (which is commonplace in teacher-education) are also frequently explored (Creme, 2000, 2005; Hoadley-Maidment, 2000; MacLellan, 2004). There is a considerable focus on the confusion that is experienced by students who are unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing, both in terms of actually getting the job of writing done, as well as in terms of their constructions of themselves as expressed through discourse. I shall briefly discuss each of these three strands.

First strand: explorations of professional and/or part-time courses in HE

A number of earlier accounts draw on social practice accounts of literacy to explore a range of writing practices, and the ways in which identity is enmeshed in discursive practice, across a range of professional courses in HE. Baynham (2000) explores the shift into academia of nurse education, and ways in which student nurses bring both theoretical and practical knowledge into their discursive practices. Scott (2000) argues for a critique of the competing discourses of academia and the workplace through an analysis of the writing practices of student teachers. Stierer (2000), writing about schoolteachers who are studying for an MA in Education, challenges what he defines as an institutional assumption that these students aspire to be novice academics, rather than more effective professionals (ibid: 193). The relevance of these accounts to my research lies in the interplay between the theoretical study

of teaching and learning and the practical experience of the students as classroom practitioner, the ways in which these can be reified in assessments, and the ways in which students approach the different genres of writing that these require.

Second strand: literacy practices of non-traditional undergraduates

Other accounts seek to provide detailed, close-up analyses of the literacy practices of non-traditional students within higher education. Ivanic (1998) and Lillis (2001) follow an ethnographic approach in producing rich and highly detailed accounts of the writing practices of such students. They produce accounts of the ways in which the student writers who are the focus of their research (all part-time and, in the case of Lillis' research, all women writers) construct images of themselves in their writing. They also account for ways by which student writers feel that opportunities or freedoms for particular forms of expression are excluded by the genres within which they are required to write, thereby highlighting a power differential between tutors and students that has also been acknowledged in research about ethnolinguistic minority students:

...when teachers and educators adopt classroom and curriculum practices which do not accommodate non-traditional students' language and literacy needs, some sort of coercive power, in all likelihood unwittingly, is being exercised.

(Leung and Safford, 2005: 322)

The relevance of accounts such as these to my research rests in the ways that they foreground students who are not 'typical' or 'traditional' UK HE students. In this sense, I ascribe the term 'non-traditional' to *all* of the students on the PGCE/CertEd. A little over half of the students are on the CertEd path: that is, they are new to HE, and all of the students are studying part-time whilst in work.

Third strand: higher education practice generally

A small number of studies have moved academic literacies debates away from a focus on non-traditional students to *all* students. Haggis (2003) uses an academic literacies approach to critique the dominant discourses of 'deep' and 'surface' learning in HE, concepts which are frequently used in books about teaching practice (Fry et al., 2008; Nicholls, 2002). She argues that these discourses, created and defined by lecturers – gatekeepers – serve to perpetuate particular forms of exclusion from HE: the kinds of exclusion that Ivanic and Lillis have explored. Lea (2004) focuses on course and curriculum design, and argues that the creation of new curricula through an academic literacies perspective (this can be face-to-face provision, although it is an example drawn from a distance learning programme that the article revolves around) can facilitate the meaning making practices of *all* students, not just those who might be defined by their non-traditional or 'marginal' status, about which much previous research has centred (Street, 2005). Accounts such as these are meaningful to my research as I rest my claims to research transferability or generalisability in part on a theoretical alignment between my own research, and that referred to here.

Plugging the new literacy studies in to communities of practice

In addition to the three strands outlined above, a small number of works have sought explicitly to enhance the relationship between communities of practice theory and the new literacy studies (Jacobs, 2005; Lea, 2005; Tummons, 2008; and see also Ashwin, 2009: 41 ff.). Jacobs (2005) positions communities of practice in HE as being situated within academic knowledge disciplines, at the same time arguing for a trans-disciplinary community of practice that would revolve around learning and teaching issues generally, and academic literacies specifically. Lea (2005) argues for the use of academic literacies to fill the gap in "the situated learning paradigm, which has paid so little attention to any explicit account of language practices or the complex relationship between language and learning" (2005: 191). In this, she foreshadows my own approach both in this thesis, and specifically in an earlier article where I draw on a new literacy studies framework to analyse the ways in which PGCE/CertEd

tutors explained assignment requirements to their students (Tummons, 2008). In sum, through such a theoretical alignment, I can interrogate the text-based artefacts that reify assessment within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice more thoroughly and more critically than would be the case if I were to rely solely on Lave and Wenger, and Wenger.

My thesis complements this new literacy studies research in two main ways. The first of these relates to an exploration of *portfolio-based assessment*. In comparison to essay-based forms and reflective-practice based forms of assessment, research into portfolio-based HE assessment from a new literacy studies perspective is scant. And yet many professional courses in HE, in addition to the PGCE/CertEd, rest on assessments that are portfolio based (Johnston, 2004; Klenowski, 2003; Young, 1999). The construction of a portfolio, as a literacy artefact, may include a variety of other text-based artefacts, in addition to essays or reflective commentaries, which are sometimes included. It may include artefacts drawn from the student's workplace such as curriculum documents, feedback forms, handouts, worksheets and lesson plans. It will also include the ILP (already referred to in this chapter), and written reports from observations of teaching practice. All of these artefacts in turn rest on what I have previously termed a "complex assembly of literacy practices" (Tummons, 2008: 190), which can be interrogated by the new literacy studies more fruitfully than by communities of practice theories alone.

The ways in which students complete their assignment tasks are not the only focus for my inquiry, however: the ways in which they *come to know what they have to do* are also problematic. Let me explain: some of the students are new to HE; others are not. Some students are new to study in the social sciences (where teacher-education tends to be located); others are not. Some students have worked with portfolio-based assessment before, perhaps in their lives as tutors, perhaps when they were students on earlier, different courses; others have not. But, as I shall establish later in this thesis, confusion about what is required is not restricted to those students for whom the PGCE/CertEd is a first HE course. For *all* students, coming to know what the assignments are asking them to do is a process bound up in literacies: assignment briefs and course handbooks; checklists or activities

created by tutors to explicate the process; rough drafts and feedback. It is the actual process of making sense of the assignment, before actually starting to complete it, that I problematise here.

My research, therefore, explores the literacy practices and artefacts of assessment that are created, used and moved within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice. But it also focuses on how the assessments 'get to' a community of practice at one of the further education colleges *in the first place*. This final question necessitates a look to the world outside the PGCE/CertEd community of practice within the FE college: specifically, it requires an exploration of the PGCE/CertEd community of practice at Holgate University. As I have already stated, the PGCE/CertEd 'arrives' in colleges as a fully-formed *learning architecture*, reified in a number of documents written at the franchising university, which consequently exercises a great deal of control over the PGCE/CertEd across the constellation of colleges. And so is to the franchising university, the influence it has over PGCE/CertEd communities, and thus to the next element of my theoretical composite, that I shall now turn.

Assessment: an actor-network theory perspective

At the franchising university, as at the network colleges, there are multiple communities of practice. The PGCE/CertEd is delivered at the franchising university as well as at the partner colleges, and so there is a PGCE/CertEd community of practice there. But this is a PGCE/CertEd community of practice where the creation of the course, as distinct from its interpretation or delivery, is part of the shared enterprise. By creation I mean the writing of the syllabus, the design of the assessment strategies, the authorship of the module packs and course handbook, and the organisation of procedures such as internal moderation, external examination and external accreditation. This university community (as I shall call it) shares many of the practices of the college-based PGCE/CertEd communities. The 'doing' of the PGCE/CertEd remains at the heart of the community's activity, and both tutor and student members draw on the same conceptual architecture, the same repertoire and many of the same artefacts as those employed in colleges. It is in the creation of that architecture, by

some of its members, that the university community distinguishes itself. And it is the ways by which this architecture and its repertoire of artefacts gets transported or carried to the colleges that are of interest here. How does the university community interact with the PGCE/CertEd communities of practice at the thirty colleges within the network? How does the course travel across institutional, organisational and spatial boundaries? Or, to put it another way, how does the university community 'make' a college-based PGCE/CertEd community of practice 'do' things: specifically, things to do with assessment?

Wenger considers the ways in which the enterprise, repertoire or membership of one community can interact with another in terms of relationships across community *boundaries*. He discusses the ways in which *boundary objects* can coordinate the activities of different communities, and the ways in which individuals who are called *brokers* can facilitate shared activity between communities (Wenger, 1998: 106-9). A boundary object is a particular kind of artefact that is reified so that someone who is not a member of the community to which it pertains can understand it. A university prospectus is one example of a boundary object: an artefact designed to inform people outside a community about how it works. Brokers are those members who are able to occupy places at the periphery of a community and can therefore communicate easily and readily, across boundaries, to other people in other communities of practice. Quality assurance procedures across the Holgate network provide a good example of brokerage. The delivery of the PGCE/CertEd within any one of the colleges is validated, for quality assurance purposes, every three years. As part of this re-approval process, a team from Holgate visit the college in question to meet a panel that consists of college staff involved in the PGCE/CertEd provision. In this situation, the visiting team from Holgate can be seen as acting in a brokering capacity, helping sustain links between Holgate and the college.

Both things and people can help communities to connect, creating a framework that Wenger describes as a *constellation*. A constellation of communities of practice might share an enterprise or might share artefacts; it might share members or discourses or ways of working. And it might share some, all or just one of these (Wenger, 1998: 126-128). As such, the thirty

different college-based PGCE/CertEd communities of practice, together with the university-based PGCE/CertEd community, can be defined as a constellation. However, Wenger does not address the issue of power relations between communities within a constellation: the consequences of one community being more powerful than another, of forcing particular patterns of behaviour on another, are never explored. When discussing connections between communities he acknowledges the existence of differences of viewpoint or interpretation, but does not acknowledge the possibility of one or more viewpoints being forcefully silenced by another. Arguably, it would be unrealistic to consider the PGCE/CertEd on his terms: as a group of communities working towards a consensual understanding of how a course should be written, examined and organised (Trowler, 2008: 53-4). The reality is that the university community tells the college-based communities what to do, how to do it and by when. So how can this more unequal relationship be conceptualised? How might the methods or technologies by which the university community *orders* the work done in the college-based communities be theorised and explored? An appropriate framework with which to consider these issues is provided by *actor-network theory* (ANT) (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Clarke, 2002; Czarniawska and Hernes, 2005; Fenwick, 2009; Fenwick and Edwards, 2010; Latour, 2005; Law, 1994, 2004; Nespors, 1994; Tummons 2009, 2010b).

Perhaps appropriately, bearing in mind its antecedents in post-structuralism, ANT defies a simple definition. It has been described in several ways: as a component or characteristic of ethnography that is concerned with “the processes of ordering that generate effects such as technologies (Law, 1994: 18); as a “way of talking... [that] allows us to look at identity and practice as functions of ongoing interactions with distant elements (animate and inanimate) of networks that have been mobilized along intersecting trajectories” (Nespor, 1994: 12-13); and as a “sociology of the social and ... [a] sociology of associations” (Latour, 2005: 9). ANT literature allows three key themes to be teased out in such a way that a working definition of ANT can be established. Firstly, ANT is a *sociology of association* (Latour, 2005), or of *ramifying relations* (Law, 2004). It is a way of exploring how social projects are accomplished, in ways that can be traced, across networks of associations or links. Such networks can consist of concentrations of all sorts of stuff: stories, people, paperwork, computer

simulations, routines, texts and voices. ANT is not concerned with what such stories or routines might mean, however: rather, the focus of an ANT account is on what such stuff – people as well as objects – might do once they have been linked or associated into a network (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010: 8; Fox, 2000: 864).

This emphasis, on doing rather than meaning, leads to the second key theme: ANT provides ways of thinking about how networks or associations both carry influence and influence each other, and foregrounds the ways in which people are made to do things across networks of geography or time or across institutional boundaries. “How to make someone do something” is a central concern (Latour, 2005: 59). In order for a social project to be accomplished, the network (of people and things) needs to be brought together. A network can be established through persuasion, inducement, coercion, or any combination of these. It is important to note that ANT is not concerned to explain or justify such networks, but simply to account for how they might expand or retract, so that the project that they wish to carry through can be successfully accomplished. A network can break down at any point or link. Consequently, the social project can be slowed down, misdirected or even lost, whether the broken link is an object (for example, a text-based document that has been lost or misinterpreted), or a person (for example, someone who has decided for whatever reason not to act in the way that the network requires). Both people and objects can make (or fail to make) other people do something; that is to say, both people and objects are granted *agency* within ANT.

ANT's insistence on analysing people and things in the same way introduces the third key theme: the principle of *symmetry*, which states: “humans are not treated differently from non-humans... Humans are not assumed to have a privileged *a priori* status in the world but to be part of it” (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010: 3). In an ANT analysis, therefore, it makes no difference whether the network constituents being explored are people or things. Both human and non-human elements can come together and be held together in order to ensure the performance of the social project in question. Indeed, it may be the case that both human and non-human elements are *always* present and *need to be so*. This is not because such a mixture of people and objects makes a network seem to be more sustainable. Rather, this is

a reflection of the fact that to attempt to bifurcate people and things when considering how the social is enacted creates a false dichotomy: it is simply the case that the one cannot be without the other (Latour, 2005: 75-6).

Actor-network theory: earlier analyses

Actor-network theory has, arguably, been under-used in educational research (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010). This notwithstanding, a proportion of extant ANT accounts of educational research use ANT in order to critique or expand on communities of practice theory (Fox, 2000, 2005; Jewson, 2007; Nesper, 1994), or in conjunction with new literacy studies (Clarke, 2002; Hamilton, 2001; Pardoe, 2000), or even combine both (Barton and Hamilton, 2005) and as such are of relevance to my own research. These studies are all quite different in scope, and defy simple categorisation. So I shall instead limit myself to drawing out those significant analytical themes that previous writers have focused on which in turn are relevant here.

One of the earliest ANT accounts in education is that of Nesper (1994), an account of learning and teaching within two quite different curricula within a US university: physics, and management. It is his study of an undergraduate management curriculum that is of interest here. This is because the management department, as he describes it, is complex: management courses are delivered at different times, to constantly rotating student groups, arranged across a number of institutional sites: an institutional and temporal complexity that echoes the complexities of the Holgate PGCE/CertEd network of colleges. In considering this complex provision, Nesper poses some questions similar to my own:

If people are spatially and temporally distributed and courses are the fluid intersections of elements stretching out across and moving through space and time, then the problematic we have to make sense of is the network of relations that tie things together in space and time: to understand what's going on in one intersection we have to look at the mesh that connects it to other intersections.

(Nesper, 1994: 22)

A later ANT account by Edwards (2003) explores differing, and sometimes conflicting, discourses of lifelong learning, and considers how actor-networks might be shaped by these. He posits three dominant discourses of lifelong learning: a neoliberal model that positions the individual learner as someone who acquires and then drops particular bodies of skills throughout her/his working life; a model that looks back to the liberal adult education tradition of 'learning for learning's sake'; and a model that equates lifelong learning with social inclusion (Edwards, 2003: 64-5). Admittedly, these three models are by no means new (Morgan-Klein and Osborne, 2007; Wallis, 1996). What, for Edwards, an ANT sensibility provides, however, is a critical insight that the analyses of these discourses otherwise lack. For example, arguments about lifelong learning as social capital rarely acknowledge that self-fulfilment or learning can have negative outcomes. Similarly, neoliberal analyses of individual learners fail to acknowledge those factors that *require* individuals to up-skill in order to sustain their employability. For Edwards, the central question is the extent to which these learners, enfolded within networks, "feel their interests to be represented" (2003: 66). Each of these three dominant discourses positions the individual learner as agentive: what an ANT account provides, by contrast, is a way of thinking about how such individual learners are acted *upon*. And the ways that learners – and tutors – are made to do certain things in certain ways, even if it is not necessarily something they feel comfortable in doing, are also important in my research.

A third example of an ANT account that pertains to my own research is by Fenwick (2009), which consists of an analysis of modes of assessment on part-time courses for education, accountancy and pharmacy professionals. The methods of assessment that Fenwick discusses in her article correspond closely to several of the methods used in the PGCE/CertEd: individual action planning, self-assessment and reflective practice. In her critique of these assessment practices she uses three theoretical lenses, of which one is ANT, in order to explore ways to "assess professionals' learning in ways that honour the complexities of practice and expertise, and that acknowledge more fully the important connectivities among [*inter alia*] workplace and academic disciplinary knowledge" (Fenwick, 2009: 237). Fenwick's article is in some ways a position piece, arguing for socio-material

analyses of learning and assessment of which ANT would be just one example – the other approaches she uses are complexity theory and cultural-historical activity theory. In her conclusion, she indicates that one area of potential insight might be in exploring “problems of validity” in assessment (ibid: 242), although her analysis goes no further than this. But the notion that assessment validity might be rendered problematic through a social practice approach such as ANT is one that I shall, in later stages of this thesis, follow up and expand upon.

Plugging actor-network theory into communities of practice

How might ANT contribute to an exploration of a constellation of PGCE/CertEd communities of practice and, specifically, an exploration of the *ordering* that exists between the university community and a college-based PGCE/CertEd community (Law, 1994)? What can ANT contribute to an analysis of coordinated activities across social settings that communities of practice theories do not sufficiently address? As I acknowledged earlier, my thesis is not unique in explicitly drawing on actor-network theory in order to – in part, at least – critique or otherwise challenge aspects of communities of practice theory. For Nespor (1994), Lave and Wenger's original theorisation (1991) is problematic because it lacks any means of explaining temporal and geographic relations within and between communities of practice. Wenger does address these issues to some extent in his later work through the concepts of constellations and boundaries. But subsequent writers have described his approach as lacking a critical appreciation of power relationships between communities, and have drawn on ANT to provide a way of accounting for power within social spheres (Barton and Hamilton, 2005: 31-32; Fox, 2000: 857; Hamilton, 2001: 180).

I have already alluded to the inequalities of power that are distributed between different communities of practice within the PGCE/CertEd constellation, specifically that the university community exercises particular forms of influence over the college-based communities. As such, power, and the differential experience of it, is part of the practice of this constellation of communities. But to follow Wenger, and simply say that power exists as an element of

identity, is insufficient (Fox, 2000: 857). Rather, it is necessary to account for how this 'power', as an aspect of the social, is brought into being or, to use the language of ANT, is produced or composed (Latour, 2005: 64). Rather than treating power as a nebulous social force that is somehow 'out there' to be drawn like water from a well, ANT instead searches for the practical means – the routines, objects and people – that are enrolled and mobilised in order to make things happen. Power can be accounted for through exploring the social actions accomplished by both people and things, which, in ANT, are both (all) given agency. Earlier, I used the example of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that PGCE/CertEd students complete during their studies, to unpack Wenger's concepts of transparency and communicative ability in artefacts. The ILP can also illustrate some of the ways in which an ANT account can provide insights that a communities of practice analysis cannot. As before, I wish to highlight that further analysis of the ILP appears later in this thesis: but by drawing on a very small part of my research at this early stage, I can provide a meaningful example of my use of ANT.

ILPs are delivered to college tutors in a form or shape designed by the university. The different boxes and sections on each of the several pages that go into the ILP are preceded by various headings, sub-headings and even prompts. These have been designed in order to try to encourage particular kinds of response. Holgate even provide a 'dummy version' of the ILP in which many of the boxes have already been completed with examples, questions and comments all relating to the kinds of things that students might put. Different colleges can and do sequence ILP-related activities in different ways: for example, in terms of when they schedule tutorials, or when they run class-based sessions around the ILP. When completed, the ILP has to be submitted by a specific time, set by the university.

From an ANT perspective, the ILP is an object that manages to create particular kinds of coordinated actions across institutional and geographic boundaries. These actions involve tutors and students being made to do particular things relating to the completion of the ILP. However, as I have already said, whilst many tutors and students find the ILP to be a useful tool for reflection and self-assessment, others find it cumbersome, pedagogically unhelpful,

and poorly designed (Hamilton, 2009; Thompson et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the ILP is still completed *by everybody*: that is to say, the ILP still succeeds in *making particular people perform particular actions*, more or less willingly. This is not to say that communities of practice theory might not be able to offer some way of understanding ILPs, and the ways that students and tutors respond to them. Wenger acknowledges that reified forms can only travel a “limited distance [...] if unaccompanied by people [...] without the risk of divergent interpretations” (1998: 111). But ANT takes us further: “it is not that some materials are more durable than others. [...] Rather, it is that some network configurations generate effects, which, so long as everything else is equal, last longer than others (Law, 1994: 103). That is to say, communities of practice theory explains what might be termed a more or less divergent use of the ILP solely through a consideration of the ILP as a reified form and the effects that travel have on it. The further it travels, the greater the risk of misuse or misinterpretation. However, ANT explains the same more or less divergent use as being an effect of the actual act of travelling, notwithstanding any inherent attribute of the ILP itself. It is the process of travelling in itself that is problematic, not the extent of the distance travelled, or the time that the journey takes.

In sum, ANT provides a conceptual framework for exploring the routines, habits, procedures, objects and technologies that are used by the university community to organise, schedule, reify, distribute, monitor and standardise (that is to say, to *order*) the assessment process across the network of colleges. And this is a framework that considers the effects of movement across institutional, temporal and spatial distances in ways that communities of practice theory does not. At the same time, I do not mean to discount entirely the possibilities that communities of practice theory offers to my analysis of relations amongst the colleges, and between the colleges and the university. The concepts of boundaries, boundary objects and brokerage are helpful in allowing me to theorise some aspects of the relations between these different communities of practice. But ANT provides me with particular tools and sensibilities that are necessary to explore how Holgate University manages to coordinate a range of activities relating to assessment across the network of colleges, in terms of both the people and the things that are involved.

Conclusion: literacies, networks, actors and communities

At each of the thirty colleges where the PGCE/CertEd course is delivered, there is a PGCE/CertEd community of practice. This community derives much of its practice from a *conceptual architecture* of procedures, curricula, handbooks and guides that are created and delivered by the franchising university. One of the crucial components of the practice of a PGCE/CertEd community is assessment. Assessment is a textually mediated activity. That is to say, it is a process that is reified within and enfolded by a variety of text artefacts. These artefacts are created by different people within the constellation of communities (tutors, and students, although there are significant differences in the kinds of texts produced by individual tutors and individual students). And they are created for different reasons, and employed in a number of literacy events (a tutorial, a seminar, an internal moderation meeting). Assessment is an activity that is distributed across time, space and place, across the PGCE/CertEd constellation of communities of practice. Within this constellation, power is unevenly distributed: the Holgate University community of practice, by virtue of being that community within which the conceptual architecture of the PGCE/CertEd is created, influences the practice of the constellation as a whole in ways for which there is no counterpart within the college-based communities. But this does not mean that the ways in which this architecture is understood or employed across the constellation is homogenous or predictable.

There are several issues to think about here: the roles played by text-based artefacts of assessment: the ways they are understood, relied on, interacted with; the ways they travel and are picked up or ignored; the ways by which the university makes things happen in the colleges. These problematic issues, which lie at the heart of my research questions, stem from a consideration of the PGCE/CertEd as a community of practice, but need other forms of analysis so that these issues can be unpacked and thought about with the complexity that they deserve. And this is why I need to do more than rely solely on communities of practice theories. Some writers have suggested ways in which the key concepts of Lave and Wenger and Wenger might be altered or re-tooled: for example, James (2007) who posits the notion of *dis-identification* within a community, or Myers (2005), who posits the concept of *illegitimate*

peripheral participation. Other writers have sought to 'solve' or 'fix' some of the problems that they have found within communities of practice by moving towards other theoretical frameworks: activity theory (Engeström, 2007; Martin, 2005); network analysis (Jewson, 2007); informal workplace learning theories (Boud and Middleton, 2003); or discourse analysis (Tusting, 2005). I am not adopting such approaches, however. As I explained in the preceding chapter, communities of practice theories provide me with many useful ways of thinking about the assessment processes that I have set out to problematise. These theories do not do anything 'wrong' or 'misleading' or 'incorrect': they simply aren't designed to answer some of the questions that I wish to ask. Consequently, I am drawing on new literacy studies and actor-network theory not to challenge communities of practice theory, but because they can 'plug in' to communities of practice and help me explore the assessment practices of the PGCE/CertEd community.

During this chapter, and the two that have preceded it, I have provided detailed accounts of my developing research interests relating to assessment in HE, and of the three theoretical frameworks – communities of practice, new literacy studies and actor-network theory – that I shall draw on in order to explore assessment practice in the PGCE/CertEd community. In the following chapter I am going to provide the final element of what might be termed the contextual and theoretical background to my research: a critical analysis of other research literature relating to assessment in HE, including other work that has drawn on the same three theoretical frameworks that I have already explicated.

Chapter Four

Assessment, and communities of practice: a literature review

In this thesis, I make a number of claims about the ways in which the PGCE/CertEd is assessed. Through an exploration of the social practices of the PGCE/CertEd assessment, I argue that there are fundamental concerns regarding the validity and reliability of the assessment process as it is currently constructed, and it is only through a social practice account, rooted in the theoretical framework that I have already expounded, that these problematic concerns can be properly understood. Furthermore, I argue that although the research I present here is based on an analysis of just one teacher-training programme, the conclusions that I draw are transferable, or generalisable, in part because of the ways in which they complement a broader debate about assessment from a social practice perspective, that is represented in current literature. This literature rests in turn on a broader body of work relating to assessment in higher education that during recent years has sought to describe and explicate assessment practice generally, not least through the establishment of commonly understood definitions of key assessment characteristics such as validity, reliability and authenticity.

In this chapter I provide a brief analysis of contemporary discussions about assessment. This analysis comes in two parts. Firstly, I consider the ways in which assessment within higher education, and specifically within part-time courses leading to professional qualification and accreditation, is understood, in terms of delivery and construction, as well as in terms of validity and reliability and other relevant concepts. Secondly, I consider the ways in which other accounts of assessment from a social practice perspective, including examples that have drawn on the same three theoretical lenses that I am employing (communities of practice, new literacy studies, and actor-network theory), have challenged these dominant discourses of assessment in higher education. Following this, I comment on the ways in which my research adds to and extends this debate.

Assessment: delivery, construction, validity and reliability

The PGCE/CertEd rests within the *professional curriculum* within UK higher education. Over the last thirty years or so, and particularly since 1992, an increasing number of professions have adopted HE qualifications (degrees, diplomas and certificates) as the threshold qualification required for new entrants to that profession. Such qualifications are invariably endorsed by professional bodies, and frequently mapped onto professional standards: the Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS) framework originally published by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), which the PGCE/CertEd follows, is a typical example. There are three modes by which courses within this curricular area tend to be delivered in a higher education context: through obtaining a degree which is then followed by an approved additional qualification; through 'sandwich' courses in which full-time study is interspersed with full-time work placements; and as is the case for the PGCE/CertEd, through part-time study, aspects of which incorporate the students' employment (Eraut, 1994: 101).

Professional courses are characterised by, amongst other things, the certification through which they designate the student as ready for professional practice (Taylor, 1997). Consequently, such courses are perceived to rest on *high stakes* assessment, because the consequences of the process can have a material impact on the careers and lives of students (Brown, 1999). The PGCE/CertEd corresponds to this model quite closely. Upon completion of the course, students are deemed – having met the LLUK benchmarks for professional practice that the curriculum maps on to – to be ready to enter the profession. However, formal professional recognition through QTLS endorsement is only awarded *after* initial qualification, subject to the successful participation in continuing professional development (CPD) that are audited by the Institute for Learning (IfL), the professional body for teachers in the post-compulsory sector. A further *high stakes* element is to be found in the fact that for part-time in-service PGCE/CertEd students, successful completion of the award is invariably linked to a probationary period of employment, and completion of the PGCE/CertEd within two years of appointment to a lecturing post (the length of time it usually takes to complete the

award) is often linked not only to the probationary period, but also to subsequent remuneration and/or salary scale progression.

There is a good level of consensus regarding the ways in which such professional courses should be assessed, so that the professions into which students are seeking to enter, and by extension the public at large, can be confident that the students have been proven to be competent and ready to practice. Firstly, there is a consensus that such courses need satisfactorily to assess not only theoretical knowledge (arguably a more 'typical' or 'standard' requirement of HE more generally (Taylor, 1997)), but also skills and competence in the workplace. The interplay between theoretical and practical learning centres on *reflective practice*, which thereby becomes a significant component of the entire assessment process. Both Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and the Institute for Learning (IfL) posit reflective practice as a professional attribute, a characteristic of professional activity that is required in order to enter the profession through initial qualification and maintain good standing within it through continuing professional development (Institute for Learning, 2009; Lester, 2009; Lifelong Learning UK, 2007). The position held by these institutions rests in turn on an established body of literature relating to reflective practice in education and teacher training (Hillier, 2005; Moon, 2004; Wallace, 2007). Reflective practice, a common component of professional courses in HE generally, is therefore positioned as a desirable characteristic for a qualified professional to embody, and as such is encouraged within such courses. For skills and competence to be assessed in their own right, however, additional modes of assessment are needed that can capture or represent the authentic activities and practices of the student whilst they are in the workplace, and a *portfolio* is the most frequently used method of doing this (Atkins, 1995; Brown and Knight, 1994; Klenowski, 2003; Klenowski et al., 2006; Young, 1999).

Portfolios tend to consist of three main elements: firstly, documents, papers and other artefacts created by the students whilst in the workplace, the authenticity of which help to ensure the *validity* of the assessment; secondly, reflective commentaries relating both to both these documents and artefacts, and also to the wider learning that the students feel that they

have acquired in the workplace, and the ways in which this learning aligns with the theoretical learning that they have experienced during university classes; and thirdly, more 'traditional' academic essay-style assignments through which theoretical or propositional knowledge can be assessed, although in many professional courses, including the PGCE/CertEd, such academic essays invariably contain reflective elements as well (MacLellan, 2004). Portfolios can be seen as having both formative and summative purposes. In terms of formative assessment it is through the sequential compilation of the portfolio and reflection on its compilation, that learning can be facilitated. In terms of summative assessment, it is through the 'snapshot' of professional abilities and competences that the portfolio demonstrates that it can be seen as evidencing learning that is appropriate and sufficient to allow the students to enter the profession. At the same time, the ways by which portfolio contents – and, indeed, the product of other assessments – are shown to meet the professional standards or benchmarks established by LLUK (which are required of all students on similar courses across different HEIs), serve to ensure the *reliability* of the assessment (Knight, 2001).

There is therefore a high level of agreement regarding the practice of portfolio-based assessment in both teacher education specifically and professional education more generally. At the same time, it is important to recognise the dominant discourses that surround assessment in HE that are scripted and then sustained by the broader managerialist and performative discourses that have both accompanied and been promulgated by massification in HE since 1992, and which in turn sustain the benchmarking and audit practices of LLUK and the IfL (Barnett, 2003; Scott, 1995; Shore and Wright, 1999, 2000; Tight, 2003). These discourses position assessment as a transparent, efficient and accountable process, open to the scrutiny of stakeholders, whether they are students, employers, awarding bodies, endorsing bodies, lecturers or government ministers. Assessment by portfolio can be seen as sitting comfortably within such a learning and teaching regime, through the use of learning outcomes and specific assessment criteria in order to ensure that efficient and reliable assessment judgements can be made (Baume, 2001: 10-12, 2003).

There is nonetheless an ongoing debate regarding the ways in which professional behaviour and conduct can be sufficiently or reliably assessed. For example: whilst the use of a portfolio to assess workplace competencies such as lesson planning or the creation of classroom resources is assumed to be unproblematic, the use of a portfolio to assess the development of 'professionalism' – a somewhat nebulous and certainly contested concept – is less straightforward. Arguably, the role of reflective practice within a portfolio is to capture and encourage those qualities of self-assessment, evaluation and independent learning that are part of 'being a professional' (Brew, 1999; Klenowski et al., 2006). However, this perspective assumes two things. Firstly, it assumes that a shared and agreed definition of professionalism actually exists. And secondly, it assumes that 'professionalism' can be straightforwardly assessed. Debates about professionalism in teacher education – or in any other sphere – are beyond the scope of this chapter (and of this thesis as a whole, in fact). It is sufficient for the purposes of this discussion to note that professionalism is a contested concept: nonetheless, some shared notions or definitions of what constitutes professional, and unprofessional, behaviour can be extracted from relevant literature. For the PGCE/CertEd, as for many other courses, it is through the creation of a set of professional standards or benchmarks that these values become most conspicuously espoused. But although such standards undoubtedly help establish and sustain a shared curriculum and assessment regime within PCET as a whole, they can also be seen to encourage a performative or technicist discourse that focuses debates about professionalism on observable behaviours that can be straightforwardly assessed (Elliott, 2000; Nasta, 2007). And even if we accept that definitions of professionalism can be shared, the ways by which reflective practice might nurture or sustain it, or allow it to be assessed, are far from straightforward, in the same way that an espousal of professional values (expressed in the writing of a reflective journal, for example) does not necessarily equate to their actual employment in practice (Atkins, 1995; Brown, 1999).

Moreover, there continues to be a discussion over more technical, practical matters relating to portfolio-based assessment. What kinds of object or document should go into a portfolio, and how many such objects need to be included in order to demonstrate competence at an

appropriate and sufficient level? Can a portfolio adequately serve both to measure student learning and, simultaneously, capture that learning (Smith and Tillemma, 2003)? Questions such as these problematise the *reliability* of the assessment. Does a portfolio indicate a fully developed teacher, or one who occupies a liminal position and who can only be afforded probationary rather than full professional status? To put it another way, what is the *predictive validity* of the assessment? Are the different dimensions of validity equally understood by assessors (Messick, 1989; Tigelaar et al., 2005)? There is, to be sure, a lively debate regarding portfolio assessment in teacher education courses – and in other courses as well.

Much of this debate continues to reside within two dominant discourses. Firstly, there is the dominant discourse of managerialism, performativity, audit and benchmarking that I have already referred to. Secondly, there is what might be termed the dominant discourse of current HE practice (both in the UK and further afield) that defines learning through acquisition rather than participation metaphors (Sfard, 1998), and that rests on individual cognitivist notions of learning and teaching (Fry et al., 2003; Kahn and Walsh, 2006; Nicholls, 2002; Ramsden, 2003). Thus if, as I propose in this thesis, we move from a cognitivist to a social practice account of assessment, from an acquisition to a participation metaphor, we can continue to raise and respond to the kinds of problematic issues that I have referred to here. But we can also raise additional questions that a cognitive/acquisition paradigm cannot. And we can find ways to challenge the assumptions of managerial and performative assessment regimes. Therefore, it is to social practice accounts of assessment and, specifically, communities of practice accounts, which I shall now turn.

Communities of practice, and assessment

There is now extant a significant body of research literature that has sought to explicate learning, teaching and assessment principles and practice in HE through the use of social practice theories (Ashwin, 2009; Bamber et al., 2009; Brown and Glasner, 1999; McNay, 2000; Trowler, 2008). This literature can be seen as part of a broader sociocultural turn in educational research that has – though by no means universally – seen a body of theory that

was initially focussed on informal learning and apprenticeship learning (Chaiklin and Lave, 1996; Coffield, 2000; Kirshner and Whitson, 1997; Lave, 1988), become more widely applied to the learning that takes place within educational institutions, including higher education. Assessment in itself was relatively under-represented within this body of literature at first, perhaps reflecting the fact that formal educational provision has only gradually come to be widely explored in this socio-cultural context. But there has in recent years been a proliferation of work specifically relating to the exploration of assessment as sociocultural practice. More specifically, there exists a body of work that has variously drawn on communities of practice theories as well as the new literacy studies (although this perspective has predominantly been employed to research students' academic writing rather than the *assessment* of writing specifically (Read and Francis, 2005: 210)) and actor-network theory in order to not only explore some of the difficulties relating to assessment that have already been referred to in this chapter, but also introduce new problematic issues relating to the nature of knowledge, and the ways in which it can or cannot be conspicuously displayed for the purposes of testing. But these different theoretical perspectives are used in different ways with greater or lesser degrees of coherence and rigour. Whilst accounts of research into assessment practice that draw on aspects of the new literacy studies (and specifically academic literacies) or actor-network theory tend to draw on these theories both critically and explicitly, research that makes reference to 'communities of practice' is not always so rigorous. Indeed, there are many examples in extant literature of narrow, passing references to communities of practice perspectives, a phenomenon that requires a considered exploration when reviewing the literature.

Communities of practice, and assessment: restricted accounts

Let me provide some examples relating specifically to the use of the community of practice model that demonstrate what might be termed a *restricted* use of the theory. In an article that proposes a model of assessment practice in HE wherein criteria are negotiated between students and tutors in an attempt to generate greater understanding of the assessment process amongst students, Rust et al. state that "a social constructivist view of

learning...argues that knowledge is shaped and evolves through increasing participation within different communities of practice” (2005: 232). And yet the article makes no attempt to consider where, within a HE context, these communities of practice might be, how they might be defined or how their different practices may be understood. A similarly cursory use of the community of practice metaphor is found in an article by Elwood and Klenowski (2002) in reporting their research into assessment practices on a masters-level education module. In the article, two terms are employed: ‘community of shared practice’ (a rather tautological expression) and ‘community of assessment practice’, sometimes interchangeably. And yet the model of learning that the article rests on as a whole draws more on individual cognition and acquisition models of deep and surface learning, metacognition and constructivism. Assessment is equated with participation, but left otherwise unproblematised. Once again, the fundamental characteristics (the shared repertoire, the joint enterprise, the mutual engagement) of the community or communities of practice that the paper refers to are left unexplored. In reporting research that explores the reliability of portfolio-based assessment within a masters-level course for teachers in higher education, Baume and Yorke (2002) propose that one of the ways by which portfolio-based assessment can be defined as *reliable* is through the development of shared understandings of what the assessment process entails between course participants, course tutors and the course team (the academic staff who create the course in question). They go on to propose that the ways in which these three sets of actors interact and work together “come close to constituting a ‘community of practice’” (Baume and Yorke, 2002: 23). But there is no further discussion about how this community might be understood. Nor is there any discussion about what it is about this group of actors and their shared endeavours within the course that means that they only ‘come close’ to being a community of practice: what is stopping a ‘community of practice’ from emerging, and why?

Other writers refer to communities of practice but in fact go on to make more extensive use of different social practice theories. In reporting research that focuses on the difficulties of establishing assessment reliability, Knight (2002) provides an implicit definition of communities of practice as being situated within academic disciplines. Knight positions these communities as local insofar as it is difficult for the assessment criteria used in one to be

understood in another (ibid: 280), but otherwise does not provide any further detailed description or analysis of how these local discipline-based communities of practice might be defined, or how they might share artefacts or discourses across their boundaries. Here, it is the localism of assessment practice rather than the theorisation of assessment within a community of practice that is the central concern, as reflected in subsequent works (Knight 2006a, 2006b). Through her research into assessment practices across two different academic departments within one university, Shay (2005, 2008), posits assessment as a socially situated interpretive act, and highlights the tensions and ambiguities that surround emergent definitions of assessment validity and reliability, and the emergent definition of assessment criteria, within what she terms *academic communities of practice*, although these are never explicitly defined (a point also noted by Trowler (2008: 95-97)). Here again, although communities of practice are cited as a way of understanding something about the places within which assessment happens, the delineation or explication of these communities of practice is not the central theoretical concern of Shay's research, which in fact consists primarily of a Bourdieusian analysis.

Communities of practice, and assessment: elaborate accounts

However, there is a further body of literature which can be defined as being thoroughly enfolded within *communities of practice theories*, where the paradigmatic components of the theories, usually derived from Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) are elaborately and critically foregrounded, used in depth in the analyses presented.¹¹ In a discussion on assessment practice generally, Rømer (2002) explores the differential aspects of communities of practice theory as they evolve over time (that is, as the theory shifts from the position inhabited by Lave and Wenger (1991) to the positions later inhabited by Lave (1996) and Wenger (1998)). He suggests three different aspects of theorising assessment within a community of practice, which rest on these differing iterations of the theory. The first posits assessment as acknowledging the "right and proper way" (Rømer, 2002: 235) of showing knowledge/practice that has been gained/acquired over time, based on tacit and intuitively

¹¹ A degree of researcher reflexivity is required here. Arguably, my own 2008 paper could be included in this survey of the literature (Ashwin, 2009: 41).

grasped criteria. In this, he makes use of the epistemology of communities of practice theories, stressing the socially constructed nature of knowledge to argue that externally set criteria or standards are incompatible with the more 'organic' way by which a community generates and mediates knowing. The second highlights the power relations that must be established between apprentices and old-timers: power relations that, in common with other writers, Rømer argues have been insufficiently investigated by Lave and Wenger. The third, drawing additionally on postmodernist discourses, suggests that ways of knowing are necessarily multiple and complex. By drawing on aspects of Wenger (1998) in contrast to Lave and Wenger (1991), Rømer stresses the multiple trajectories and multiple ways of knowing that legitimate peripheral participants can and do occupy, necessitating similarly complex assessment processes.

Rømer's work is highly theoretical and presented in abstract terms. In comparison, other writers have used communities of practice theory to provide more grounded, worked examples of research into practice. Jawitz (2007), in an ethnographic analysis of a single department at a university in South Africa, suggests that the department consists of two communities of practice, one of which is centred around teaching, and one of which is centred around research (though see Ashwin (2009) and Trowler (2008) for critiques of this approach, and Lea (2005) for a more generalised critique of the ways in which communities of practice in HE are conceptualised). Although normally quite distinct, with academic staff aware of the different practices and repertoires that each one enfold, Jawitz suggests that it is in the assessment of a specific piece of work – an honours level “long paper” (equivalent to a third year undergraduate dissertation at HE level six) – that these two communities overlap. Drawing on Wenger's concepts of learner trajectories and boundary crossing, Jawitz uses the artefact of the “long paper” to explore how academics move within and between the teaching community and the research community.

More fine-grained analyses are presented by Dysthe and Engelsen (2004), Lindberg-Sand and Olsson (2008) and Cobb and McClain (2006). Dysthe and Engelsen draw on specific aspects of Wenger's theories in their analysis of portfolio-based assessment in teacher

training in Norway. They do not describe or position in detail *which* communities of practice they are examining, however. Instead, drawing on Wenger's concepts of participation and reification, they focus on portfolios as reifications of practice, and seek to problematise the extent to which portfolios can capture or document authentic participation in practice in order to ensure the validity of the assessment process as a whole. Lindberg-Sand and Olsson also focus on the objects created by assessment practices within the communities of practice that they identify within the different departments that make up a single faculty of engineering at one university in Sweden. In their analysis (which primarily consists of an exploration as to why particular groups of students fail), they position assessments as boundary objects with a double function: firstly, to reify learning within the community of practice that equates to the course or module that has just been studied; and secondly to provide reified evidence of learning as students move across boundaries to begin studying another module (Lindberg-Sand and Olsson, 2008: 172). Similarly, in their analysis of the different communities of practice that are engaged in the teaching and assessment of mathematics in three US middle schools, Cobb and McClain (2006) make use of Wenger's concepts of boundary crossing, brokerage and shared repertoire in order to explore the professional work of mathematics teachers and curriculum managers across a number of schools within one urban district. Specifically, they position assessment (both formative and summative) as one aspect of the joint enterprise of this group (they do not use the term 'constellation') of communities of practice, distinguishing the 'teaching' community within one school from the cross-institutional communities that had the leadership and management of the mathematics curriculum as their shared repertoire.

Communities of practice, and assessment: positioning my research

Such elaborate accounts clearly demonstrate the ways in which communities of practice theory can be effectively and critically used as a lens for theoretical analysis, an approach that is, arguably, closely aligned to the perspectives expressed by Lave and Wenger. By aligning my research with such elaborate accounts I am at the same time distancing myself from the organisational, 'human-resource management' perspective (Barton and Tusting, 2005; Drath

and Paulus, 1994; Wenger, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002). But shifts in meaning of the 'community of practice' model have not come about solely because of changes in the way in which it is theorised and expressed. It could be argued that the metaphor has in some way become divorced from the theoretical sphere within which it emerged through a form of conceptual slippage that has firstly seen the model used quite liberally but without any underpinning exploration or analysis, and secondly seen the model used in conjunction with other more-or-less compatible sociocultural theoretical frameworks. This is not to deny the theoretical or conceptual rigour of such works, nor is it in any way to diminish the relevance of their findings for my own research. Rather, I wish to highlight the fact that although the community of practice model is frequently referred to, the rich and nuanced body of ideas that it encompasses more or less perfectly is not infrequently left behind: a phenomenon that, I would argue, is also characteristic of work that employs a community of practice approach to explore other aspects of educational practice within HE (Avis et al., 2002; Avis and Fisher, 2006; Barber, 2003; Kahn and Walsh, 2006; McArdle and Ackland, 2007).

Conclusion

In this thesis I am aligning myself with what I have termed *elaborate accounts* of assessment that draw on communities of practice theory. When I talk about communities of practice, and about the assessment processes that can be found with them, I am not seeking to remove myself from debates about the theory, which I have acknowledged and discussed in chapter two. Nor am I positioning myself as a theoretical essentialist: my conspicuous use of two other theoretical frameworks (new literacy studies and actor-network theory) is evidence of this, and represents an innovative approach to researching assessment. Nonetheless, a rigorous and critical use of communities of practice theory can and should, I argue, contribute in a meaningful way to the broader debates about assessment that I am presenting here. I am also positioning my research within the broader body of literature relating to the pedagogic practice of assessment in higher education that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. At the same time, I suggest that the ways in which I use communities of practice theory in this thesis, akin to the elaborate accounts I have discussed above, represent an attempt to move

away from what I have called restricted accounts, and instead infuse a greater theoretical sensitivity into current educational research literature that seeks to explore practice – whether assessment, or something else, through a communities of practice framework.

Chapter Five

The PGCE/CertEd: research questions unpacked

In chapter one I provided a brief account of my research interests, but I deferred a more in-depth discussion of my research questions until after establishing the theoretical framework upon which my research rests, which I have done in chapters two and three, and also after

providing a critical account of assessment practice in HE more generally in order to contextualise my own research, which I did in chapter four. In chapter eight, I shall begin to describe and discuss my data.

Before then, in chapters six and seven, I shall provide a detailed account of both the methodologies

and methods that have underpinned my research. Firstly, however, I shall return to my research questions, to discuss what each of them seeks to do, and why.

5. What are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?
6. How are the meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment facilitated?
7. How are these assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries?
8. What does a social practice account of assessment imply for how assessment is carried out: specifically, how does it inform debates about assessment validity and reliability?

Figure 5.1: research questions

First question: what are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?

In this thesis, I argue that assessment is a textually mediated practice. By this I mean that how assessment gets done, how it is thought about and discussed by tutors, students, internal moderators and external examiners, is reified by texts which in turn are created and/or altered by the practice of assessment. What I want to stress is that on this PGCE/CertEd course (and, as I shall subsequently argue, on other HE courses as well), the quality or nature of assessment practices cannot be properly understood without a consequent understanding of the roles played by texts within them. This is an arena of study that is potentially massive, however, and as such I have needed to circumscribe my research field in some ways. For example: one of the texts that impacts on assessment practice within this PGCE/CertEd is the

set of professional standards published by Lifelong Learning UK, the now-defunct government sponsored organisation responsible for originally drawing up professional benchmarks for the PCET sector (LLUK, 2007). To unpack the reification of these standards would involve an analysis of a number of broader themes: credentialism within UK higher education; the reprofessionalisation of the teaching workforce in the PCET sector; the development of a professional body for the PCET sector; audit cultures in higher education, and governmental attitudes to the provision of vocational and technical education and training (Avis, 2005; Gleeson et al., 2005; Strathern, 2000). But this thesis is not about policy, nor is it about changing definitions of professionalism that have been attributed to the PCET teacher workforce. Thus, whilst I have to ensure that I recognise the role of professional standards as a curriculum driver, it is the assignments, not the professional standards, which my analysis will begin with, and around which the rest of my analysis will orbit. External examination provides a further example of the boundaries of this thesis. At one level, external examination can be seen as a component of a more pervasive audit culture that is characteristic of HE practice more generally (Hayes, 2003; Shore and Wright, 2000), contributing to the work of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2004). Thus, the ways in which assessment happens across the network of colleges impacts on HE processes and policies more generally. But to follow the consequences of assessment through to such a level is beyond the scope of this thesis. I acknowledge the impact of external examination on how assignments are conducted, particularly in relation to how feedback is given and how internal moderation is conducted. But I do not go further into the broader audit cultures of HE, as to do so would lead me to lose sight of the assessment practices, and the students and tutors, about whom I am writing.

So in answering this question, when I write about texts, assignments, how they work and what they do, I am writing about groups of students in colleges and the tutors they work with. The artefacts that I shall write about are those that get used in the exposition of, preparation for, and writing of assessments. Some of them are simply taken off a library shelf (such as textbooks); others are created to help the students (such as the handouts or feedback forms that are written by tutors); and many are created by the students themselves (such as essays,

reflective journals, schemes of work and the like). And it is through the lens of the *new literacy studies*, which I explicated in chapter three, that I shall primarily carry out this analysis.

Second question: how are the meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment facilitated?

A skills-based discourse of student reading and writing, the kind of approach that views study skills as discrete, transferable and generic, would suggest that students should not have any meaningful difficulty in reading and understanding their assignment brief and then completing their assignment (Burns and Sinfield, 2003; Cottrell, 2003). Either their prior professional experience as teachers or their prior experiences as students should have equipped them with the toolkit of transferable skills and strategies necessary for successful completion of their PGCE/CertEd assignments. The social practice approach that I adopt, however, suggests that the ways in which students come to understand what is required by the assessment process is far from straightforward. Having positioned text-based artefacts at the hub of the process, it is then necessary to explore the ways in which they are used. Or, to put it another way, if literacy is a social practice, then the ways in which the *literacy artefacts of assessment* are used (by which I mean written, read, annotated, and so on) need to be understood. Thus, to explore the artefacts, I also need to explore both the *literacy practices of assessment* (how people use them), and the *literacy events of assessment* (where and when people use them).

Once again, boundaries need to be established. For example: students often work on their PGCE/CertEd assignments at home, sometimes in a spare bedroom that has been turned into a study space, or by spreading their books all over the dining table and excluding other family members from the room. A detailed exploration of the homework practices of students, of the ways that they organise their time and their space for work, would provide much that is of interest to any analysis of assessment. This might relate to the broader social impact of the studying that is being undertaken, and the impact that it has on family life. Or it might relate to the physical space available for reading and writing, and the ways in which the different kinds

of homes that students lived in affected the kind or quality of private study that they were able to complete (Bernstein, 1990; Schuller et al., 2002; Tett, 2004). This also falls outside the scope of my thesis, in order to prevent the field of my research from becoming too large. Instead, in order to maintain the theoretical coherence of this thesis, my focus will remain on students whilst they are in class, at their further education college.

To answer this question, I shall draw primarily on *communities of practice* theories (as explored in chapter two) in order to create boundaries both for my analysis, and for the conceptualisations of learning, teaching and assessment on which my thesis rests. Mindful of critiques of this approach, I shall argue that to position a PGCE/CertEd group as a community of practice provides an appropriate and manageable framework for the analysis of the text-based artefacts of assessment and their practices. It also provides a framework to explore the ways in which people other than the students themselves, (specifically, their tutors), are involved in helping the students make sense of these artefacts and their associated practices so that they can complete their assignments.

Third question: how are these assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries?

With over one hundred tutors working in thirty institutions, teaching and marking work for nearly two thousand students, the difficulties of organising the PGCE/CertEd course become all-too-easily apparent. Ensuring that the ways in which the course is delivered at any one location is broadly comparable to the ways in which it is experienced at others, and is at the same time appropriate to both the aims and outcomes of the curriculum and the ethos of the university, is a massive and complex task. The PGCE/CertEd awards a license to practice, endorsed by a professional body. As such, it is vital that the university is able to ensure the quality of its provision across the network of colleges. A detailed analysis of all of those aspects of the PGCE/CertEd that have to be coordinated within and between colleges might cover a number of key themes: the recruitment of teacher-training staff; the interpretation of admissions policies; the ways in which course fees are collected; procedures for preparing for

Ofsted inspections (Holgate University does indeed provide both handbooks and staff training days to cover these, and other, systems and procedures). An analysis of any one of these would doubtless be interesting and worthwhile. But here, my focus is on assessment. As such, although my analysis needs to eschew these broader themes, I am still able to allude to them. By this I mean that the ways in which the assessment component is transmitted across the network of colleges, through handbooks, meetings and procedures, are analogous to the ways in which the course is transmitted as a whole.

I have already established that communities of practice theories provide some tools for thinking about how ideas, artefacts and people can travel across a constellation of such communities (Wenger, 1998). However, I have also argued that these tools are somewhat limited. Therefore, to answer this question, I shall also draw on *actor-network theory* (as explored in chapter three) to account for the ways in which assessment is ordered across the college network (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Latour, 2005; Law, 1994). In this way, I shall provide a detailed account of the ways in which assessment gets done at each college, within each community of practice, across considerable boundaries which are institutional (reflecting the fact that different FE colleges, as incorporated bodies, often possess very different organisational cultures), temporal (illustrating the fact that the pacing or sequencing of the PGCE/CertEd curriculum and by extension the assessment process varies across colleges) and spatial (reflecting the geographic distances between colleges).

Fourth question: what does a social practice account of assessment imply for how assessment is carried out: specifically, how does it inform debates about assessment validity and reliability?

In the preceding chapter, I outlined those dominant discourses that inform and underpin assessment practice in HE that position assessment as being rigorous, transparent, auditable, valid and reliable as a consequence of the use of complex quality assurance practices such as marking criteria, learning outcomes and such like. In answering this fourth research question, which pulls together insights from across my research as a whole, I am going to

argue that the conceptions and assumptions of validity and reliability in assessment that these dominant discourses sustain come under severe pressure when the practices of assessment are explored in depth using the social practice framework that I have outlined here.

This fourth question both emerges from and rests on the three that have preceded it. In answering my first research question (in chapter eight), I shall show that in order to 'do' assessment, students and tutors encounter and make use of a complex array of literacy artefacts that are employed in a similarly rich and complex array of literacy practices.

Answers to my second research question (in chapter nine) will highlight both the diverse ways in which students make meaning relating to assessment, and the correspondingly diverse meanings that tutors draw on. And in answering my third research question (in chapter ten), I will demonstrate the sheer technological complexity of managing or ordering such a complex and diverse set of assessment practices across the PGCE/CertEd network of colleges.

Therefore, when turning to this fourth question (in chapter eleven), the analyses that derive from these three questions provide the scaffolding for the challenge to assumptions of assessment validity and reliability within this PGCE/CertEd course that I will present. Put simply, once we acknowledge the richness, complexity and contingency of assessment on the course, the insufficiency of concepts such as 'validity' and 'reliability' becomes apparent. Therefore, I mean to stress that it is as a result of my research into how assessment gets done, how tutors and students use and respond to the text-based artefacts that reify assessment practice across this constellation of communities of PGCE/CertEd practice, that questions emerge as to how valid and reliable such assessment practices actually are.

Conclusions: assessment practice, social practice, and the originality of my research

This thesis is not the first place in which assessment practices (or, indeed, academic practices that impact on assessment more generally) have been analysed using theories that rest on social practice perspectives. Nor is this the first place where the validity and reliability of assessment have been unpacked or questioned (as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter). Arguably, there is more work being done and published about assessment than

ever before, not least due to the ever more central position that assessment holds within educational curricula of all levels. Nonetheless, in my thesis I am going to contribute original lines of inquiry in the following ways. Firstly, I am going to provide a rich, social practice account of assessment practices within a PCET teacher-training course. In doing so, I shall foreground an under-used element of Wenger's framework – *learning architecture* – in order to theorise the position of pedagogy within a community of practice. Secondly, I am going to argue that this social practice account of assessment leads to the inescapable conclusion that the validity and reliability of this assessment (and by extension, assessment on other HE courses as well) is problematic. Finally, I am going to use this social practice lens to contest the dominant, managerialist discourses of assessment practice on this PGCE/CertEd (and other) courses, and will argue that the maintenance of such assessment regimes is in fact quite fragile, and often sustained in spite of, rather than because of, the infrastructures of dominant actors such as awarding bodies, government inspectorates, and university departments.

Chapter Six

Frameworks for ethnographic inquiry

I have established that the PGCE/CertEd can be understood as being enfolded within a constellation of communities of practice, and that it is those specific aspects of practice concerned with assessment that underpin the research questions that I am going to answer in this thesis. I have also established that in order to conceptualise and explore these assessment practices, I draw on two other bodies of theory in addition to communities of practice: new literacy studies, and actor-network theory. In this chapter, I describe and evaluate the broader methodological frameworks that have informed my research practice. I begin by exploring the *ethnographic* framework within which my research rests, before moving on to consider the methodological debates that underpin the specific research methods that I have used (the analysis of text-based documents, interviews, observations and questionnaires) and the relations between these within an ethnographic framework. Next, I discuss a number of ethical issues that have impacted on my research. Finally, I consider issues of research quality as they impact on my research, with a specific focus on generalisability or transferability, and methodological triangulation.

Doing ethnographic research

My research sits within an ethnographic paradigm and possesses many of the characteristics that are attributed to ethnography within established research literature. These may be summarised in four ways. Firstly, my research has been field-based, conducted over a significant period of time within particular social and cultural settings: my fieldwork extended over a period of almost five years, and was conducted in four different further education colleges; in addition, interviews were carried out in other locations as well. Secondly, my research is inductive, resting on an accumulation of detail in order to generate explanatory themes and patterns, and on a positioning of specific events or encounters into a meaningful, holistic context. Thirdly, it has been immersive research, based in part on participant observation, and in part on my own position: from 2003 to 2009, I worked at three of the

colleges in the PGCE/CertEd network, two of which were sites of fieldwork. And fourthly, it rests on methodological triangulation that consists of three research methods that are common within ethnographic research: interviews, observations and the analysis of cultural artefacts (which in the case of my research predominantly consist of different kinds of texts).¹² These four elements are typical of ethnography, and it is within this framework that I site my own research (Angrosino, 2007; Angrosino and de Pérez, 2000; Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Crang and Cook, 2007; Tedlock, 2000). However, I also draw on two other methodologies or frameworks for inquiry that are somewhat distinct from traditional, anthropological ethnography: these are *institutional ethnography* (Campbell and Gregor, 2004; Smith 2005, 2006a), and *multi-sited ethnography* (Falzon, 2009; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995). I shall briefly discuss these in turn.

Institutional ethnography

There are important distinctions to be drawn between institutional ethnography (IE) and what might be termed traditional ethnographic approaches such as anthropological ethnography. Institutional ethnography is not simply ethnography of or within an institution, although the social practices of particular institutional settings or fields are of concern (Smith, 2005). Rather, IE concerns itself with what is beyond the locally and directly observable. It achieves this through the exploration of those *ruling relations* that coordinate peoples' *work* within particular social spaces or settings. In IE, work is understood in the sense of being those things that people do that require effort, that are intended and that involve some acquired competence (McCoy, 2006). In the case of my research, the work of the CertEd/PGCE is the focus: as such, this generous definition of work can be seen as synonymous with the concept of practice posited by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). In many social and institutional contexts, the coordination of work is carried out through the distribution and interpretation of *texts*, which have the capacity to coordinate work across distances and at different times. IE's definition of texts is thus closely aligned to the concepts of artefacts that are found within both communities of practice theory and the new literacy studies, and to the

¹² I also made marginal use of questionnaires and focus groups: refer to pp.96-8, below.

concept of non-human actors within actor-network theory. IE also focuses on the explication of discursively organised social settings and the social relations that are at work within them, rather than, as a 'traditional' ethnography would, on the participants as a population, and their understanding of the setting within which they find themselves (Campbell and Gregor, 2004). Put simply, an institutional ethnography places the exploration of texts at the centre of its methodology, in contrast to the immersive participant observations that are characteristic of anthropological ethnography.

I draw on three paradigmatic components of IE in my research methodology. The first is the *text-reader conversation*, the moment when institutional discourses (normally reified into a text-based artefact) regulate local work activities. A text-reader conversation takes place when, for example, students read their module handbooks, or tutors in the colleges receive written instructions in advance of an internal moderation meeting. A focus on these conversations throws a spotlight on the ways in which texts permit, legitimise or forbid particular forms of social action, such as how the assessment might be interpreted or presented by students. IE foregrounds the situated nature of texts, which should be analysed in the context of the sequences of action that they articulate and coordinate rather than be imbued with a fixed meaning (Smith, 2006). The second is *talking with people*. In IE, the ways that people talk about what they do and how they work are understood to be informed by their tacit knowledge about how their work is done and how their work relates to the work of others (Campbell and Gregor, 2004). Since so much of this work is bound up in those texts that embody institutional discourses, then it follows that as well as exploring these texts, the institutional ethnographer has to explore people as well, through talking with them, "encouraging informants to talk in ways that reflect the contours of their activity" (DeVault and McCoy, 2001: 757). The third is the *standpoint* occupied by the researcher. There are three elements to this: firstly, there is the standpoint of the participant observer who can watch the ways by which texts coordinate work (Diamond, 2006). Secondly, there is the standpoint of the interviewer and the asymmetrical power relationship between interviewer and interviewee. In IE, this imbalance is desensitised through the consideration of the interviewer's reliance on the interviewee "to make available what becomes material for further stages of the

researcher's work" (Smith, 2005: 138). And finally there is the standpoint of those people whose work and practices are being explored: in this sense, IE draws most directly on the feminist methodologies that underpin it, through a focus on the knowledge of everyday people or *just plain folks* (Lave, 1988), and through allowing them to talk about their work in ways that they are not usually able to do (Olesen, 2005: 243 ff.; Punch, 1994: 89-90).

Multi-sited ethnography

Multi-sited ethnography (MSE) is similarly distinct from traditional anthropological ethnography in a number of ways. The most conspicuous of these is reflected in the nomenclature: rather than remaining bounded within the single field site that traditional ethnographies rest in, MSE instead ranges across sites, in both a spatial and temporal sense, in order to explore cultural meanings, identities and artefacts. And it is in part through the study of how these things actually move across sites, that the argument of the ethnography emerges (Marcus, 1995). What MSE allows the researcher to do, therefore, is to explore social actions or projects that are established and sustained across different sites. But it is not only the different sites that are of importance: the relationships between these sites are important as well, and these need to be established and accounted for by the ethnographer (Hannerz, 2003). In a MSE we might follow people, things, metaphors, conflicts or stories, tracing the chains, paths, threads and conjunctions that link them together (Marcus, 1995). And rather than being circumscribed by the boundaries of the field in a manner akin to traditional ethnography, MSE (perhaps reflecting the postmodern milieu within which it has emerged) encompasses borders, making them part of the field of research so that comparisons can be made between what happens on either side (Cook et al., 2009; Nadai and Maeder, 2009). These concepts of boundaries between spaces and places, and the movement of artefacts or cultural meanings between and across them, are closely aligned both to Wenger's (1998) concepts of boundaries and border crossing between communities of practice, and also to the concepts of association across chains or networks consisting of both people and things that are posited by actor-network theory (ANT).¹³ Indeed, a number of MSE accounts align themselves with ANT,

¹³ Refer to chapter three.

particularly in relation to ANT's concern to link the global with the local, and to reject the necessity of overarching or holistic explanatory structures (Candea, 2009; Cook et al., 2009; Marcus, 1995).

There are two further aspects of MSE that I need to address: the selection and definition of sites, and the choice of research methods to be used. The selection and definition of sites is controversial, and represents the aspect of MSE that is most consistently critiqued by the anthropological ethnographic tradition. How can sufficient depth of study, or thickness of description, be accomplished if the researcher is moving from place to place (Schofield, 1993)? MSE responds to this by stressing that it is the very multi-sitedness of the research project that makes up for any perceived inadequacies in comparison to a single-sited ethnography. Indeed, rather than seeking holistic accounts, MSE instead proposes that the use of multiple sites affords the researcher multiple windows through which complexities might be observed and explored, but never artificially conflated to create a single field (Candea, 2009; Falzon, 2009). Indeed, it might not even be necessary for the researcher to explore each of her/his multiple fields to the same depth or degree: the differing natures of each field, or the differing levels of access permitted, or the different theoretical insights that each field might afford, all combine to vary the researcher's depth of focus as s/he travels from site to site (Nadai and Maeder, 2009). And finally, the choice of research methods creates a further distinction between MSE and traditional ethnography. Although MSE continues to place significant weight on the use of participant observation (Marcus, 1995), it is more dependent on interviews than traditional single-site studies (Hannerz, 2003). In part, this is a pragmatic response to the need to get to know a number of sites over varying periods of time. But it is also a reflection of the postmodern turn in ethnographic research that foregrounds the co-production of data between the researcher and those whom s/he is researching. If multiple sites can be based as much on cultural or spatial differences as on geographical ones, then the people who move and act within these sites can help the researcher to define them (Falzon, 2009), in a manner akin to the standpoint epistemology of institutional ethnography that I have already referred to.

The conceptual frameworks I described in chapters two and three all impact on the methodological discussion that I am undertaking here. Firstly, they all posit a social epistemology: that is, that knowledge is socially constructed and mediated. Secondly, they all posit a social ontology: that is, that understanding of what constitutes the world around us (rather elegantly referred to by Smith (2005) as the everyday/everynight world) is also socially constructed. Thirdly, they all stress the role of artefacts in the reification, mediation or negotiation of meaning and understanding. And fourthly, they all stress the role of people in relation to these artefacts: how the artefacts are created, understood, used or manipulated is contingent, dependent on the understanding, knowledge and biographies of the people involved. A discussion of positivist or interpretivist/constructivist paradigms is moot in the light of these approaches, therefore, as these social practice models all rest on the latter. And as I continue this methodological discussion, it is important to note that the methodology that I have used also rests on social epistemologies and ontologies. As such, it is *theoretically aligned* to the conceptual frameworks I have already explored.

Having explicated the overarching methodological framework of my research, I now turn to specific methodological issues relating to: the three methods of *data collection* that I have employed (content analysis of texts and documents; interviews; and observations); *researcher positionality*; and *research ethics, anonymity and confidentiality*. I shall now discuss each of these three areas in turn.

Data collection

(i) Texts and documents

I have established that texts need people. Without people to write or read them and then perhaps do something as a consequence, texts are of little use. So in order to investigate texts, I need to investigate people as well, to talk to them and find out what they say about how they use the texts in the ways that they do. I need methodological tools to analyse texts, and also to analyse interviews with the users of texts. Both research processes – the text

analysis and the interviews – exist in a condition of symbiosis: one cannot make sense without the other. To begin, it is important to clarify what I am talking about when I discuss texts and documents. 'Text' can refer to photographs, to sounds, to how teachers design their classrooms, and even to how people behave and present themselves: in some senses, these are all 'texts' that can be 'read' (Bernstein 1990; Kress, 2003; Rowsell and Rajaratnam, 2005; Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Here, I am using a definition of 'text' that refers to a reproducible and relatively durable representation on the page or screen, which can be found in many different genres of document that are produced by institutions, tutors and students within the PGCE/CertEd course. This might refer to an essay or reflective journal, a course outline or module specification, a piece of written feedback or written reports of an observation of teaching practice.

In keeping with the social practices framework that enfolds my research as a whole, I have analysed these texts in terms of the social and cultural contexts within which they are produced or reified, distributed, read and acted upon (Atkinson and Delamont, 2005; Campbell and Gregor, 2004; Silverman, 2005; Tight, 2003). As well as content analysis, I am also interested in the dominant, institutional discourses that they embody, and the ways in which these discourses act as rhetorical devices that render the text in question persuasive, thereby impelling or coordinating particular sequences of work on the part of tutors and/or students (DeVault and McCoy, 2001; Gee, 1996; Hodder, 2000; Rapley, 2007; Silverman, 2000; Smith, 2006). I am also interested in the relationships between different texts and documents, and the intertextual hierarchies that can be traced across them (Barton, 1994; Smith, 2006).

(ii) Interviews: talking about texts and practices

Within multi-sited ethnography, interviews are posited as a central method for the co-creation of data by the researcher and those s/he is researching. Within institutional ethnography, both the use of interviews to ask people about texts and the analysis of the interview data that is created, are coherently situated within the framework's broader project of uncovering and

tracing socially constructed and situated ruling relations. In both IE and MSE, therefore, interviews are seen as providing a way for someone to give their stories or accounts of the institutional field within which they are located (Hannerz, 2003; McCoy, 2006). Within the broader context of interview-based qualitative research, such an approach can be understood as positioning the interviewee as a narrator, the interview as a narrative, and the narratives that are generated as retrospective forms of meaning making on the part of the narrator (Kvale, 2007; Silverman, 2000, 2005). An interpretivist account such as this is in turn aligned to accounts of interviews as being acts that require negotiation within a socially situated context between the researcher and the respondent, within which meaning is constructed (Chase, 2005; Fontana and Frey, 2000). Through interviews, narratives can emerge that can help generate – alongside the other forms of data that I have collected/constructed – rich and thick descriptions of textually-mediated assessment practices within and around the work of the PGCE/CertEd.

(iii) Observations: watching texts being used

I have explained that within both institutional ethnography and multi-sited ethnography, participant observation plays a less central role in the research process than is the case in traditional anthropological ethnography: within both of these frameworks, participant observation is augmented by document analysis and interview. Nonetheless, from a methodological framework, using data derived from observations, and specifically from watching people (including respondents) using the text-based documents that I have been analysing, I can begin to explore what people do with these texts, as distinct from what they say that they do (Silverman, 2005; Tight, 2003). This focus on the ways in which people used texts in social settings is central to IE, which stresses the need to explore the ways in which people activate the meanings that texts can carry; to actor-network theory (ANT), which highlights the ways in which text-based documents carry meaning and intention across space and time (Law, 1994); and to the new literacy studies (NLS), which provides the concepts of *literacy practices*, the general ways that people use written language in all sorts of social contexts, whether at work or at home or elsewhere, and where different kinds of literacy are

used, and *literacy events* which are the actual occasions where literacy practices can be *observed* (Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

Researcher positionality

Multi-sited ethnography foregrounds researcher positionality as a methodological concern, stressing the ways in which the identity of the ethnographer changes, and therefore requires renegotiation, as s/he travels across different research sites (Marcus, 1995). In some sites, the differing level of access that the researcher will be able to acquire, as a consequence of their position within *that* site, explains the differing levels of focus that the researcher sustains: not all sites are, or can be, explored with equal depth (Naida and Maeder, 2009). How the researcher is perceived will vary according to the particular place that they occupy at any given moment. People, as social actors, do things differently in different settings, and present themselves in different ways; and research encounters, whether based on observations, interviews or anything else, are no exception (Ball, 1993).

The consideration of positionality in term of *reactivity effects* might at first look seem to be relatively unimportant in my research, as I only carried out a small number of participant observations. Indeed, it could be argued that further education colleges are particularly immune to the reactivity effects of observation. In FE, observations of teaching sessions happen on a quite regular basis. Staff who are working towards their PGCE/CertEd will be observed; all teaching staff will be observed as part of the quality assurance systems that are in place within FE colleges. Ofsted inspections now happen on a regular basis since the Ofsted remit was expanded to include the FE and adult learning sectors. The sessions that I observed were populated by both PGCE/CertEd tutors who, in turn, carry out observations themselves, and by students who, as teachers, have frequently been observed in the classroom. Put simply: there are a lot of observations, and I would argue that what I shall refer to as *observation fatigue* in the FE sector is such that my presence was 'relatively' unproblematic in terms of the naturalness of what I observed and recorded. Because the presence of all kinds of 'other people' associated with the performativity culture of FE is so

widespread, the presence of a researcher might, it could be argued, be seen as entirely unremarkable.

The interview process has been rather more complex. In part, this is arguably due to the *in situ* partiality of *any* interview, understood as being a socially situated performance (Chase, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2008). In part this is also due to the balance of power between researcher and respondent (Scott and Usher, 1999). Some respondents were peers and friends; others were people for whom I effectively worked and was responsible to. Some treated me more as a tutor on the PGCE/CertEd than a researcher, and engaged me in sometimes lengthy conversations about their progress on or aspects of the course ranging from educational theory to essay writing style, conversations which I felt obliged meaningfully to engage in: after all, these respondents were giving up their time to talk to me and the least I could do was answer questions about their individual learning plans. The power relationship between researcher and respondent is also problematised in terms of epistemology: specifically, the monopoly of interpretation enjoyed by the researcher (Kvale, 2007). Within institutional ethnography, this problem is analysed not in terms of attempts to democratise researcher-informant relations (*pace* the radical critique of interviews discussed by Hammersley (2008)), but in terms of producing accounts that in some ways are *in the interests of* those people about whom the knowledge is being constructed (Campbell and Gregor, 2004), that place value on how they as respondents – whether they are tutors or students – make meaning of the practices that I am asking them to talk with me about.

Researcher ethics, anonymity and confidentiality

Within qualitative research, the use of a code of ethics as a way of framing the moral precepts required for academic practice is well established, and is in itself relatively uncontroversial (BERA, 2004; Christians, 2005). Nonetheless, there are still concerns about the ways in which informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality are established within ethnographic research that require unpacking.

Informed consent is here understood as resting on a four-fold scaffold of competence, voluntarism, full disclosure and comprehension on the part of the putative research respondent, to be obtained prior to fieldwork (Cohen et al., 2000; Christians, 2005). At the same time, the imperfections of informed consent need to be acknowledged. These might relate to a partial understanding on the part of the respondent about some aspect of the research, or to the consequences of changes in the focus of the research itself as fieldwork proceeds. As such, although best efforts have been made to ensure all respondents were able to give fully informed consent, it must be seen as a necessarily imperfect process (Fisher and Anushko, 2008; Silverman, 2005).

Conventions surrounding anonymity and confidentiality are similarly problematic, although here I reject those critiques that posit anonymity and confidentiality as so prone to collapse that they are in some cases best discarded (Walford, 2005). Rather, I argue that anonymity and confidentiality are also imperfect processes. In part this may be because respondents may, more or less knowingly, reveal their participation to a third party; and this may also be because pseudonyms or disguised institutions or locations can be recognised by insiders (as illustrated in vignette 6.1, below), despite attempts to conceal them through anonymisation or aggregation of data (Christians, 2005). But despite these imperfections, anonymity and confidentiality must be attempted as a necessary response to the broader ethical concern to prevent harm or embarrassment coming to any or all of my research respondents, not least as in many instances I was researching in their own workplaces and/or places of study (Gibbs, 2007). As such, I argue that in spite of some of the ethical challenges that have been presented to me, both the necessity and desirability of anonymity and confidentiality, which need to be actively sustained rather than simply assumed, remain of the utmost importance (Kelly, 2009).

At the same time, it is important to recognise that despite thorough planning and processes, within the messy real-world of research unexpected incidents, “ethically important moments” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 265), can cause problems for the researcher, as illustrated in the

following vignette in which I provide an account of some of my experiences at a conference in 2007:

Vignette 6.1: an early-career researcher at a conference

In September 2007, I delivered a paper at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) annual conference, in London.¹⁴ In this paper (and in fact, in all of my preceding and subsequent conference papers and published articles, as well as this thesis) I had carefully used pseudonyms for both people and places and conflated some institutional and biographical details, in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as an aspect of sound ethical practice. I had done this notwithstanding my own agreement with those critiques of research anonymity and confidentiality that question the extent to which these can or should be promised and maintained in anything other than a partial form as a consequence of the nature of qualitative enquiry as a process that can change direction as the research work proceeds, uncovering hitherto unanticipated or unintended areas for inquiry (Christians, 2005; Kelly, 2009; Fisher and Anusko, 2008; Silverman, 2005). In the audience were sat three members of the PGCE/CertEd staff from Holgate University. In addition, one of the authors of one of the other papers in the session was, and still is, in the education department at Holgate University, and their co-author was in their third year as chief external examiner for the Holgate PGCE/CertEd course. Within moments of the question and answer session getting underway, any pretence at confidentiality and anonymity had gone, not least because one of the audience had prefaced their comment with words to the effect of: “well, I work at Holgate [although s/he used it’s real name] University and teach on this course, and I don’t agree with what you are saying here today”. And when the author who was acting as chief external examiner prefaced their own comments with words to the effect of “well, I’m the external examiner for this course, so I think I will need to exercise a great degree of reflexivity here”, I found myself questioning the ways in which these fellow academics and researchers had positioned themselves. At the time, my reading of and understanding of research ethics was at a

¹⁴ Later published as Tummons (2009). Some of the themes from this paper have been revised and expanded as Tummons (2010b).

relatively early stage of development, and I found the situation both surprising and stressful.

The reference to reflexivity by the chief external examiner here is problematic, not least since s/he preceded this reference with an acknowledgement of her/his role at Holgate in such a manner that any pretence at institutional anonymity - in that seminar room, at the very least – was dissipated. So how should reflexivity be understood? Here, in my research, I follow Ball's definition of researcher reflexivity as:

...the conscious and deliberate linking of the social process of engagement in the field with the technical processes of data collection and the decisions that that linking involves.

(Ball, 1993: 33)

As an insider researcher this has not always been straightforward. Nonetheless, throughout my research I have endeavoured to provide a distance between my identities as a researcher and as a tutor on the PGCE/CertEd.

Triangulation and generalisability: some thoughts on research quality

There is a well-established and broadly consensual understanding of quality in qualitative research reflected in extant literature. The use of multiple sources of data, and of multiple ways of collecting and then analysing that data, followed by the use of multiple theoretical lenses so that the data thus acquired can be thoroughly investigated, should lead to the production of research findings that can be said to be reliable, robust and valid, assuming that the comprehensive treatment of the data has been demonstrated to an appropriate degree (Atkinson and Delamont, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Stake, 2005). Put simply, the research has to be *triangulated*, and this is a process that can be composed of several elements. Flick (2007: 37 ff.), in drawing on a range of sources from the qualitative research tradition, discusses a number of kinds of triangulation, including: data triangulation; methodical

triangulation; perspective triangulation; theoretical triangulation; and investigator triangulation, which can be combined to form what he refers to as *comprehensive triangulation* (ibid: 51-2). It could be argued, however, that such accounts of triangulation assume, to a greater or lesser degree, a positivism that suggests that the validity and reliability of research are the 'product' of triangulation rather than of the meaning making and analysis of the researcher. From a constructivist perspective, by contrast, the triangulated research process will always generate multiple perspectives and thus multiple forms of validity and reliability. (Crang and Cook, 2007: 149; Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 205 ff.). Postmodernist critiques go further, and argue that the ascription of quality to qualitative research is a rhetorical act: it is through the ways in which research is written and presented that those qualities that are referred to as validity and reliability become ascribed to the research by the reader. At the same time, a postmodernist critique can be interpreted as being concerned to unpack or deconstruct any criteria (including quality) in the light of dominant political, social or other discourses (Richardson, 2000; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Scott and Usher, 1999: 146 ff.).

I suggest that the quality and rigour of my research rests on two main platforms. The first of these is the nature and scope of the data that I have gathered and analysed. Through collecting data across a number of sites, through speaking with a range of respondents in a number of different contexts and through collecting a variety of forms of documentary evidence (all of these are detailed in the following chapter), I am satisfied that I have collected and explored a body of data that is sufficient to justify the conclusions that I shall go on to posit in the latter stages of this thesis. The second platform of my research is theoretical or conceptual. In this I am drawn to the notion of "conceptual density" that is used in grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), as well as Flick's (op cit) notion of theoretical triangulation. It is through the *constructive alignment* of the different theoretical perspectives that I have employed that I can be satisfied that my meaning making is both coherent and consistent.

As with research quality, so debates over generalisability are polarised (Larsson, 2009). What might be termed a pragmatic position in some way equates triangulation with generalisability, for example through the suggestion that the use of multiple appropriate research sites can

provide research findings with wider applicability (Schofield, 1993). By contrast, Alasuutari argues that the process of generalisability is quite distinct from that of actually carrying out research, and that these two should not be conflated (1995). A more critical position, inhabited by Denzin, and Guba and Lincoln amongst others, is that 'generalisability' simply does not exist, and that qualitative research is by definition local and particular. Instead, this perspective posits the notion of *transferability*, a process or perspective positioned within the reader of the research, as opposed to the writer, who may choose to transfer what they have read to their studies or analyses of other research problems (Gobo, 2008). Moreover, the potential for generalisation and comparison between different research sites is posited as an epistemological consequence of a multi-sited approach to ethnography (Nadai and Maeder, 2009). Therefore I argue that it is through the contribution that my research makes to what might be termed a *social practice critique of assessment*, that the broader applicability or transferability of my research can be understood. I position the generalisability of my research in terms of the accumulation of this and other research that is informed by similar and mutually reconcilable theoretical, epistemological and ontological perspectives. In this way, my research can find an applicability beyond the immediate context or confines of its reification through the creation of sets of ideas that can be used, discussed and critiqued in other places and times, when talking about other teacher-training courses or other assessment portfolios (Gobo, 2008; Larsson, 2009).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the systematic methodological frameworks that my research rests on. I have drawn on frameworks that are coherent, the different elements of which share compatible ontological and epistemological foundations. I have carried out my research carefully, thoughtfully and reflexively. This is not to say that contingency did not have a part to play, because it did: how the unexpected impacted on my work and how I accommodated it will be discussed in the following chapter. What I have done is carry out research that is important (to me, to some of my colleagues, and to many of my students at the very least), that has been carefully thought through and carefully written up. Although I subscribe to the

local and the situated, I am confident that my research, when read in conjunction with other published work does indeed indicate a broader applicability, an applicability that I believe is rooted not only in the published literature (including my own publications) but also in the rigorous methodology on which this thesis rests.

Chapter Seven

Doing research: processes, practicalities and pitfalls

In the previous chapter, I established the links between the conceptual models and the methodological approach that I have used in researching and writing this PhD. Having established a robust epistemological and ontological framework for my research, I now turn to the practical aspects of the research process. I begin this chapter by describing the different colleges at which I carried out my research. I then go on to discuss each of the data collection methods that I have used. Finally, I discuss my use of qualitative data analysis software for storing, managing and analysing the data that I gathered.



Figure 7.1 (above): a PGCE/CertEd training day at Holgate University. This image is typical of the various meetings that take place at the university throughout the academic year, which tutors from colleges across the network attend. I used such meetings to make initial approaches to tutors at other colleges regarding the possibility of helping me with my research.

As a tutor within the PGCE/CertEd network, I made monthly visits to Holgate University for cross-college tutor development events or administrative meetings. As an insider-researcher, these structures provided me with many routes to those people, places and printed materials that I needed to access in order to carry out my research. Holgate University itself was not in fact a site in which I conducted research (apart from two interviews that I conducted at the

main Holgate campus with the PGCE/CertEd course leader). But it was through meetings and events there that I was able to begin the process of gaining the access and permissions that I needed in order to conduct the main body of my research following an initial stage of research at Friargate College, where I was working at the time. And it is to the different FE colleges where I did carry out research that I now turn.

Sites of inquiry: four colleges of further education

The four FE colleges where I carried out my research (that is, from where I gathered documents, spoke with tutors and students, and observed classroom sessions) are all quite different in terms of location, overall size, overall curriculum provision and the size and constituency of the PGCE/CertEd cohort and teaching team. This is not to say that they straightforwardly constitute a *representative* sample of the colleges within the network, which exhibit considerable geographic and socio-economic diversity (Silverman, 2005).

Nonetheless, they were chosen because they are indicative of the diversity that exists across the network.

I worked at *Friargate College* from September 2004 until August 2008. It is a mixed college, on the outskirts of a small, prosperous city, formed by the merger a few years previously between an FE college and a sixth form college, and now offers various vocational and academic curricula and a small number of HE courses which are franchised from several different universities in addition to the PGCE/CertEd. The Friargate PGCE/CertEd cohort is quite large consisting of around 75 to 80 students. About half of these are internal students. That is, they are members of the teaching staff at Friargate and are completing their PGCE/CertEd awards as a contractual requirement. Other students tend to be drawn from other FE colleges that do not offer an in-house PGCE/CertEd, and from adult and community education.

From September 2008 until April 2009 I worked at *Scarcroft College*. Scarcroft is a mixed FE college, situated in a relatively deprived area of a large city. Although it offers a mixed

vocational curriculum, Scarcroft has for a long time been recognised across England as a centre of catering expertise, and runs many courses for the catering, hospitality and food industries. A second significant area of provision, reflecting the immediately local population, is in English for speakers of other languages and basic skills provision, delivered both on site and at a number of community centres in the vicinity. As at Friargate, there is also a small portfolio of HE courses. The PGCE/CertEd cohort is one of the largest within the network as a whole, numbering between 90 and 100. Less than half are internal students. The other sectors that are frequently represented within the student group include prison educators and tutors from young offenders' institutions; tutors from community education and family learning; HE lecturers; and work-based learning tutors from both the public and the private sectors.

Nunthorpe College is a mixed college on the edge of a small town, which over recent years has seen considerable industrial decline. It offers both vocational and academic curricula, and does so with great success, having been recognised as outstanding by Ofsted. The scale of Nunthorpe's HE provision has grown over recent years, and includes the provision of teacher training, including specialised qualifications for teachers of adult literacy and numeracy, which it now delivers on a contractual basis to a number of prisons in the wider geographic vicinity. The PGCE/CertEd cohort has stayed relatively small over recent years, numbering around 30, and the majority of students are internal with a small number drawn from other FE colleges and from adult education.

Millfield College operates across two different campuses: the larger, main site is comparable in size and provision to Nunthorpe and is situated in a large harbour town where the tourist industry is now the major employer. The smaller "satellite" campus is the legacy of a merger between two institutions that took place some time ago, and is situated in a small market town about thirty miles from the main site. At the satellite campus a predominantly vocational curriculum is offered, with a large ESOL provision targeted at migrant workers who overwhelmingly work in land-based industries. The PGCE/CertEd is offered at the satellite site on an in-house basis only (that is, all of the students are internal) and is the smallest cohort within the network, usually numbering between 15 and 20.

Practical issues surrounding data collection

The kinds of data gathered at each site varied somewhat. For example, gaining permission to carry out observations at all four FE colleges was a fairly straightforward process, but the practicalities involved in timing my visits so that they coincided with the kind of sessions that I wanted to observe were more complicated and in the end, I only carried out observations at three sites (although I was able to gather relevant documentation relating to the sessions from all four). At the same time, other data sources proved so plentiful that I had to be more selective of which to use than I had originally planned for. The range as well as number of documents that I gathered was considerable, far greater than I initially anticipated, and included student portfolios, course handbooks, schemes of work, tutors' resources, PowerPoint slides, web pages, external examiners' reports and internal moderation reports.

Throughout the research process, I was struck by the generosity shown by respondents when I asked them to either bring in or email documents (particularly in the case of students who allowed me to read their assignments). In some cases, these proved to be so rich and so numerous that I had to focus on a representative sample of the documentation that I collected (Silverman, 2005: 52 ff.). I also encountered some difficulties in planning interviews: at two of the colleges, a number of students who had initially indicated that they would be able to be interviewed either did not reply to follow-up messages or later declined to participate. In some cases it was simply impossible for me to travel to them at an appropriate time, or vice versa. Therefore I decided in these cases to hold focus group meetings in order to provide an alternative means of capturing students' voices.

	Analysis of documents	Tutor interviews	Student interviews	Observations	Questionnaires	Focus groups	Photography
Friargate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Scarcroft	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Millfield	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Nunthorpe	✓	✓	✓			✓	

Figure 7.2 (above): summary of data collection methods.

The range of data collection methods that I used during the period 2005-2009 (that is to say, during the data collection period as a whole) are summarised above (figure 7.2). I shall now briefly discuss each of these methods in turn.

Data collection: documents

I have already established the central role played by text-based documents in the establishment and ordering of the PGCE/CertEd. The process of creating, delivering, managing and auditing the PGCE/CertEd across thirty different sites requires a considerable number of systems, procedures and social relations that are invariably reified or crystallised in documents of one kind or another, which therefore form a central part of my research (Campbell and Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Many of the

1. Course handbooks
2. Module guides
3. Individual learning plans (ILPs)
4. Moderation reports
5. External examiners' reports
6. Module cover sheets
7. Feedback sheets
8. Academic essays
9. Reflective journals
10. Lesson plans
11. Schemes of work
12. Writing frames
13. PowerPoint slides
14. Worksheets
15. Class handouts

Figure 7.3 (above): a list of the different documents that I used for my research, collected between 2005 and 2009.

documents that I collected were available in electronic formats, predominantly as Microsoft word files or as Adobe pdf files. Many were available to me as a tutor on the PGCE/CertEd and so collecting them together for the purpose of my research was a straightforward task. Interview respondents supplied many other documents in both electronic and paper format; the latter were scanned and then converted to jpeg format. Thus, all such documents could be stored on my laptop (together with interview transcriptions, observation reports, focus group reports and photographs) for collation and coding within Atlas-Ti.

Data collection: interviews

Notwithstanding the practical difficulties that I sometimes faced when arranging interviews, I was able to speak with a good number of both tutors and students from the PGCE/CertEd programme, in addition to holding two interviews with the PGCE/CertEd course leader at Holgate University.

	Number of student interviewees (number of interviews per student conducted in brackets)	Number of tutor interviewees (number of interviews per tutor conducted in brackets)
Scarcroft College	5 (2 x 1 interview; 2 x 2 interviews; 1 x 3 interviews)	2 (2 x 2 interviews)
Millfield College	2 (1 x 3 interviews; 1 x 2 interviews)	1 (1 x 2 interviews)
Nunthorpe College	2 (2 x 2 interviews)	1 (1 x 1 interview)
Friargate College	4 (2 x 1 interview, 2 x 2 interviews)	1 (1 x 1 interview)

Figure 7.4 (above): breakdown of interviews. All of the first interviews were conducted during 2006/7. Follow-up interviews were conducted during 2007/8.

Throughout, I used semi-structured interviews with students: I wanted to be able to combine the consistent use of a core number of questions with the freedom to allow interviews to take me in unexpected directions. First interviews, at which respondents signed a clearance form to indicate their consensual participation in my research, all followed the same schedule of questions.¹⁸ All interviews were recorded directly onto my laptop hard drive using Audacity,¹⁹ and then transcribed, by myself, using Express Scribe.²⁰ Completed transcripts were then loaded into Atlas-Ti. During the coding process (discussed below), I was able to highlight ideas or issues expressed in particular sections of text as worth following up. I used the memo tool within Atlas-Ti to create a follow-up schedule as I worked through a transcript, and a report containing these memos could then be printed off and used as the basis for a subsequent interview.²¹ I followed the same procedures when interviewing tutors. I also took freehand field notes during all interviews. In one instance these notes served as an invaluable back up, after a corrupted data file on my laptop meant that an entire interview recording was lost. I was able to reconstruct the main themes of the interview before a follow-up was arranged. Most of the interviews lasted around ninety minutes, although a small number were longer.

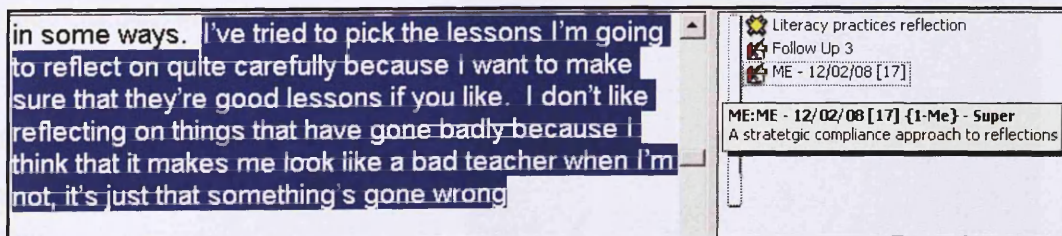


Figure 7.5 (above): a screen grab from Atlas-Ti, showing an extract from the transcript from my first interview with Louanna, a PGCE student at Nunthorpe College. This extract was coded as “literacy practices reflection” and was then flagged as an issue to follow up in the second interview (in fact, this was the third such follow up to this point in the transcript). The floating text box shows my memo, a tool which I used to note emerging theoretical themes: in this case, “a strategic compliance approach to reflections”. (A lengthier exposition of my use of Atlas-Ti appears below).

¹⁸ See appendix 7.1 for the consent form, and appendix 7.2 for the first interview schedule.

¹⁹ <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/> [date accessed: 28 April 2010].

²⁰ <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/> [date accessed: 28 April 2010].

²¹ See appendix 7.3 for examples of follow-up interview schedules created from Atlas-Ti memos.

Interviews with tutors were straightforward to arrange. There were ten tutors working across the four colleges during the time that I was gathering data; of these ten, five took part in the interview process. Four of the interviewees were female, reflecting the gender balance of the PCET teacher-training profession both within the Holgate network and across the lifelong learning sector as a whole (Noel, 2006; Simmons and Thompson, 2007), although I would not regard this sample as representative in a meaningful sense: over 100 tutors work across the network as a whole, and a 5% sample size is too statistically insignificant to constitute such a sample. There was a theoretical and purposive aspect to my sampling here, however: in addition to ensuring that I was interviewing both tutors and students from the same four colleges, I was mindful of wanting to speak with tutors who in themselves represented some of the diverse characteristics of the PGCE/CertEd tutor workforce. That is, I wanted to speak with tutors who had prior experiences of teaching HE, as well as tutors for whom teaching on the PGCE/CertEd was their only experience of teaching HE; I also wanted to speak with tutors who had come from vocational or professional, rather than academic, backgrounds.

Data collection: observations

When planning to carry out observations at the colleges, I chose to focus on a small number of what I refer to as *assignment sessions* (Tummons, 2010a). An assignment session is that session where the PGCE/CertEd tutor spends a significant amount of time going through the assignment for the module that the group are currently working through): the session where, for those with an instrumental perspective towards learning and assessment, the tutor explains to the students what they have to do to complete the module successfully.

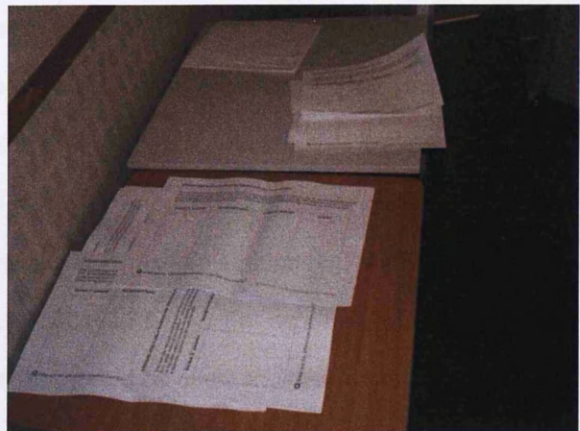


Figure 7.6 (above): handouts and worksheets prepared by Ruth (tutor, Scarcroft College) for an assignment session.

In a typical such session, tutors employ a small number of student-centred teaching and learning activities that are designed to help students in their understanding of the assignment requirements of the module that they are undertaking. Tutors might ask students to paraphrase the module packs and give peer feedback, evaluating what they have read. Tutors might hold question and answer sessions, inviting students to comment on or ask questions about the assignment brief that is in front of them. Or tutors might ask students to read the assignment brief and then explain it to each other or create a poster or PowerPoint presentation to deliver to the rest of the group. Such sessions invariably revolve around the use of a range of literacy artefacts, all of which are intended to help students negotiate the assignment process, and it was the *use* of these artefacts that I wanted to see.

I observed one such session at three colleges during 2007/8: Friargate, Scarcroft and Millfield (I was unable to obtain permission to carry out an observation at Nunthorpe). Each session lasted three hours (with a short break halfway through: a typical length for a PGCE/CertEd session across the network as a whole). Tutors had informed their student groups that I would be coming, and I introduced myself briefly at the start of each session before taking my seat. I carried out the observations in a relatively unstructured manner. Rather than use a schedule or checklist, my approach to the observations focussed on the ways in which both students and tutors made use of or responded to the different literacy artefacts that were employed. In a sense, the literacy practices that the students and tutors drew on became the *critical incidents* that provided insight into particular aspects of behaviour or activity and that therefore became the focus for more detailed recording and subsequent analysis (Angrosino, 2007: 60; Cohen et al., 2000: 306 ff.; Newby, 2010: 369 ff.). For two of the observations, I already knew about some of the materials that would be used and the activities that had been planned, and I could focus my observation accordingly. On the other occasion, I did not know exactly what the tutors and students would be doing that day and as a result I had to write more *wide-ranging* notes, marking down anything that I did not understand fully for following up at a subsequent interview with the tutor, whilst at the same time reading through the handouts, PowerPoint slides or worksheets that the students had been given. Following each observation, raw notes were then rewritten using a framework derived from Hamilton (2000)

that provided me with a conceptual framework for the analysis of the data, centred around the participants, the settings, the artefacts and the activities employed (Hamilton, 2000). Once written up, the observation reports were then loaded into Atlas-Ti for coding and further analysis.³⁰

I had not considered the use of photography when initially planning my research.³¹

Subsequently, two possible uses for photography presented themselves to me. Firstly, I thought that they might help in the construction of rich, ethnographic detail: through taking photographs of the classrooms where I carried out observations, I would be able to explore more fully the meanings of, for example, the notices or posters that tutors displayed in their classrooms (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Secondly, I thought that photographs (as well as other images or texts) would stimulate interview discussions through photo-elicitation, providing a focus or hook for conversation (Banks, 2007; Hamilton, 2000). However, I was only able to gain permission to take photographs at one of the locations where I carried out an observation, Scarcroft, and only with the proviso that I was able to take photographs of anything in the room (wall displays, furniture layout, work or documents on students' desks) but without showing any people, reflecting the ethical complexities of deriving visual data from public spaces where children and vulnerable adults are sometimes present (Banks, 2007: 85-87). I used a small digital camera for the photographs, which were then stored on my laptop before being loaded into Atlas-Ti for coding.

Data collection: focus groups

When it became apparent that the number of students who were willing or able to be interviewed was less than I had originally anticipated, I decided to ask for permission to carry out focus group meetings. Planning for focus groups was a sensitive issue: contact time between tutors and students on the PGCE/CertEd course is a precious commodity, and asking to "steal" some time from a weekly session was difficult for me to consider. But I did

³⁰ An example of raw observation notes appears in appendix 7.4. An example of analysed observation notes (*pace* Hamilton, 2000) as loaded into Atlas-Ti appear in appendix 7.5.

³¹ In this regard (as in several others, in fact), the enthusiasm of my supervisor proved to be infectious.

not feel that I would be able to generate sufficient interest from the students to hold a focus group outside formal class time. In fact, I was reluctant to do so: the students have busy working lives, with family and other commitments as well. I decided that coming along to a regular weekly session, rather than organising an alternative meeting, was the most worthwhile action. I received permission from both Scarcroft and Nunthorpe to hold focus groups, which were held during 2007/8. After further conversations with course team members (that is, with both tutors whom I had already interviewed, and tutors with whom I had not previously spoken about my research) two focus groups were held at Scarcroft, and one at Nunthorpe (the two colleges that granted me appropriate permission). In both colleges, I was kindly allowed to 'take over' the first ninety minutes of a timetabled PGCE/CertEd session. At Scarcroft, I conducted focus groups with eleven students from the first year group, and eight students from the second year group. At Nunthorpe, I met with twelve students from the first year group. At the time I conducted the focus group at Nunthorpe, the second years were finalising their portfolios and I felt that it would be inappropriate to intrude on their study time.

From the start, I was mindful of the fact that a focus group would be difficult to structure and to manage. I was aware of the need to manage the debate, and allow the interests and concerns of all of the group members to be heard, as well as any differing points of view that might emerge, in order to obtain as balanced an account as possible of the group's perceptions of the course assessment process without letting particular voices or individuals dominate (Barbour, 2007; Litosseliti, 2003). At the start of each focus group, I read out the same statement of research interest that I had provided to individual interviewees and followed the same student first interview schedule that I had already distributed. The focus groups were then recorded and the recordings were transcribed for loading into Atlas-Ti. I took two recordings of each group, using my laptop at one side of the room and a small cassette recorder with a uni-directional external microphone attached, at the other. This allowed me to obtain recordings of sufficient quality that I was able to hear all the students' voices as I transcribed. In addition, I took field notes in order to capture any other contextual data that might merit further analysis.

Data collection: questionnaires

Questionnaires are a relatively straightforward and inexpensive way of gathering data quickly, straightforward to distribute and collect, and they are commonly used in education research (Cohen et al., 2000; Tight, 2003). I set very narrow criteria for questionnaire use, which I employed only at an early stage of my research, in 2005/6. It was designed to do just two things: to elicit volunteers for interview, and to elicit responses or comments relating to my research interests I would then be able to both follow up in interview and also consider for inclusion in my research design should new or unanticipated issues emerge. I designed a short questionnaire, with both open and closed questions so that further comments might be elicited (Wellington, 2000). Respondents who were willing to be interviewed were asked to provide an email address. The questionnaire sets, which went out to the whole PGCE/CertEd cohort at each of the four colleges, were distributed and collected by colleagues at Scarcroft; I distributed and collected all of the others. I wrote a short statement outlining the purpose of my research and of the questionnaire, which was read out to students before they were asked to complete it. I was given permission to use the questionnaire at three of the four research sites. The final return rate was 30% (n=62). The results of the questionnaires helped me to refine my research questions to a small degree, but their more meaningful impact was to enable me to effect introductions to colleges where I had not been to before, and to gather contact details for potential interview respondents.

Data collection: using Atlas-Ti

I chose to use Atlas-Ti for my own research, primarily because it offered the facility to work with a wider range of file types, including photographs, than other software packages available. It was a straightforward task for me to install a PC emulator on my Mac (Atlas-Ti, in common with the majority of CAQDAS applications, is only available for Windows) and then start using the software, learning how to use it through a combination of trial-and-error,

reference to the manual, and formal training.³⁸ I have used a relatively small number of the functions available within Atlas-Ti, predominantly tools for the coding and retrieving of different genres of texts. I have also made extensive use of memo tools, both to mark up emerging themes and ideas (Lewins and Silver, 2007: 167 ff.), and to act as practical reminders or markers of my progress. I have also used Atlas-Ti as a way of organising and managing the different file types that I have generated during my research (Gibbs, 2007). As coding

progressed it was a straightforward task gradually to include more files (interview transcripts, observation reports, student assignments and so on, referred to as *primary documents* (PD)) within Atlas, creating a bundle of documents, which is referred to as a *hermeneutic unit* (HU) (García-Horta, J. and

Guerra-Ramos, M., 2009). In order to keep my work easily navigable I created separate hermeneutic

units (HUs) for observation reports, interview transcripts and interview supporting documents. By exporting my code lists from one HU to the other, I could maintain reliable and thorough coding across all of these HUs (Gibbs, 2007). After coding and analysing the primary

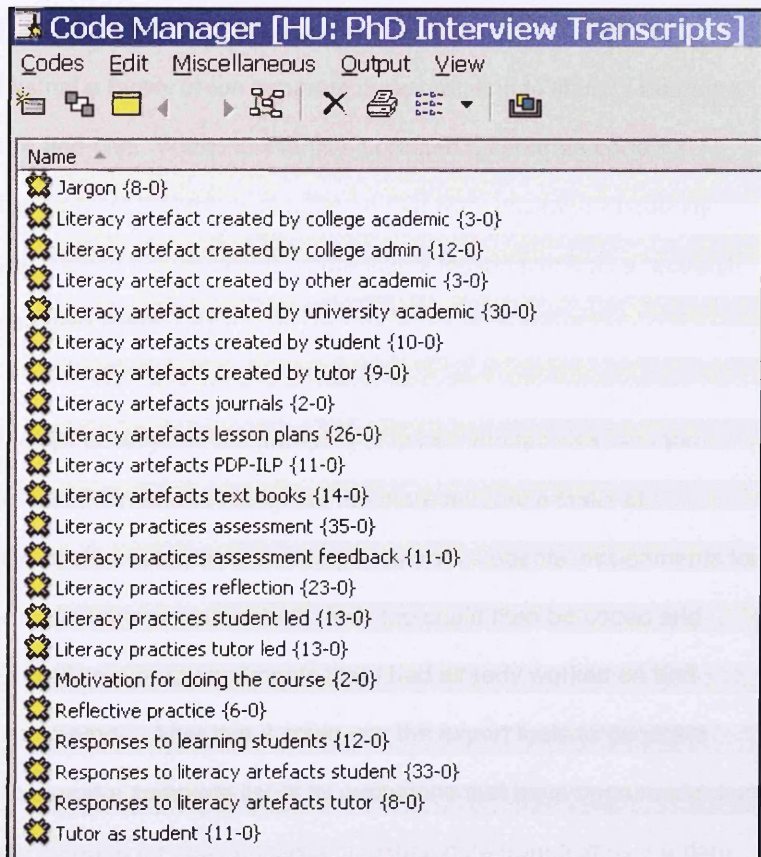


Figure 7.7 (above): codes used within Atlas-Ti for analysis of my data: in this example, from the HU containing transcripts from interviews. The code group represented here is the final iteration of my coding: as I read and re-read my primary documents, I found myself both creating new in vivo codes, and returning to old codes and revising or deleting them. Within Atlas-Ti, it is a simple process to search and replace existing codes within the hermeneutic unit.

³⁸ I attended an intensive two-day Atlas-Ti training session at the Centre for Applied Statistics, Lancaster University, in December 2006.

documents within each single HU, the HUs were then merged for final searching of particular themes or issues.

I began the process of analysing the interview transcripts with only a very small number of pre-established codes. The codes that I used grew in number as my research evolved. As themes and issues emerged during my research, I found myself generating new codes to accommodate them. For example: having begun coding with a *single* code for literacy artefacts, I eventually established a *family* of ten separate codes relating to literacy artefacts, reflecting differences in genre and use. Within this family, I created a separate code for lesson plans once it became apparent that this was a theme that was occurring frequently during interviews. In this way, I could fully realise the potential of lesson plans as a research object (Tummons, 2010a; see also figure 7.8).

The selection of quotations, open coding and the grouping of codes into families, and the writing of memos were tasks that I carried out alongside the more mundane tasks of transcribing interviews, taking photographs, or scanning pages from students' assignments for loading into Atlas-Ti. As more documents were added, they too could then be coded and commented on, and in turn I could return to documents that I had already worked on and revise my coding or add to my memos. After this, I could use the export tools to generate *reports*. It is a simple task to export a complete list of all quotations that have been marked up with particular codes, thereby allowing for easy analysis of textual data from across the data set. Reports such as these also contain contextual data (such as the name of the file from where the quotation comes, or the number of times a code has been used, or whether a memo is linked to a particular quotation). In this way, the use of Atlas-Ti undoubtedly helped in the organisation of the data analysis process (Lewins and Silver, 2007; Richards and Richards, 1994; Seale, 2005; Seidel and Kelle, 1995).³⁹

³⁹ An example of the Atlas-Ti report relating to lesson plans can be found at appendix 7.6.

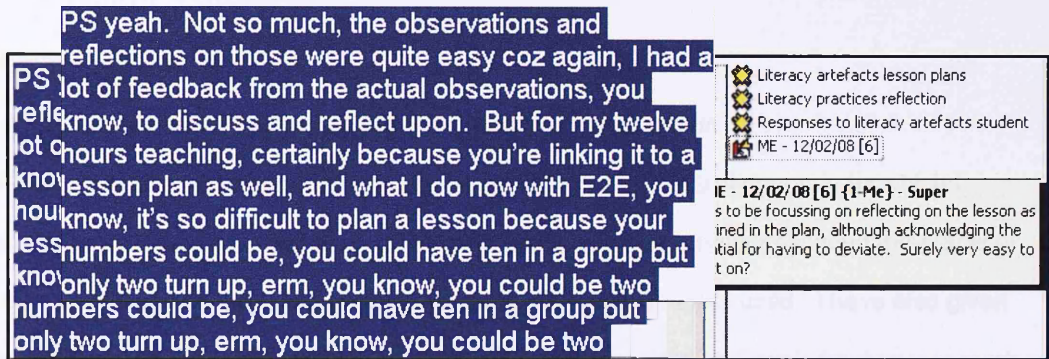


Figure 7.8 (above): a screen grab from Atlas-Ti. This image depicts three interesting issues. Firstly, the use of a code that I had established prior to the coding process (responses to literacy artefacts student); secondly, the use of two later codes that illustrate the emergence of initially unanticipated themes in my research (literacy artefacts lesson plans, literacy practices reflection); thirdly, the use of the memo tool to make a first note of an emerging line of exploration (the assessment of lesson plans) that would go on to become a substantive part of my research findings (Tummons, 2010a).

Debates about the methodological implications of using CAQDAS, and the exact role played by CAQDAS in theory building, continue to be represented in literature, although current debates seem to focus more on the practical uses for software for project management or the fast and thorough retrieval of text (or of anything else that has been coded), rather than whether or not CAQDAS privileges some forms of methodology (often cited in this context as Grounded Theory) or prevents the researcher from getting 'close' to her/his data (Gibbs, 2007; Kelle, 1997; Lewins and Silver, 2007; Seale, 2005). Two main methodical and methodological issues do persist, nonetheless. The first lies within the coding architectures used by different software applications: some create *hierarchical* codes by default; others, including Atlas-Ti do not (Weitzman, 2000). The second revolves around technological or data fetishism: the concern that the use of software in some way encourages the researcher to be more liberal and less critical when coding because it is such a simple process (García-Horta, J. and Guerra-Ramos, M., 2009). Again, these issues are straightforward to answer: Atlas-Ti is simply a tool to help the researcher do her or his work, not to do the work for them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of the different methods by which I gathered my research data during the period 2005 to 2009. I have described the practical issues that surrounded each of the data collection methods that I used. I have also given salient contextual details regarding the four FE colleges at which I carried out my research, including accounting for the differences between methods employed at each site. Together with the preceding chapter, in which I explored the ethnographic frameworks that my research rests on, I have provided a critical and detailed account of both the research methodologies and methods that underpin this thesis and the research presented within it. I am now in a position to begin my account of my research findings. In the next chapter, therefore, I will address the first of my research questions (as discussed in chapter five): *what are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?*

Chapter Eight

Assessment literacies: artefacts, events and practices

In this, the first chapter to foreground my empirical data, I address my first research question: *what are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?* In this chapter, I explain how the social practice of assessment within PGCE/CertEd communities of practice is captured or enfolded within and mediated by an array of literacy artefacts. These artefacts are reified, sponsored and employed by a number of different agents. They are distributed in a variety of ways. Some artefacts are more or less closely related to others. These artefacts are used in a variety of literacy events, and participants within these events employ a variety of literacy practices. During my analysis, I will be focussing on: the places where artefacts are created, and the practices that they require; and the events where they are used, and the practice that their use enfold.

Vignette 8.1: two module packs on the go

It's a pleasant, autumnal evening in September at Friargate College. Carol, a long-standing member of the PGCE/CertEd teaching team, is talking to her students about the second of the four modules that they will complete during this, their first year on the course. We are only three weeks into the new academic year, and although some things still feel a little unfamiliar, the group is starting to gel, and there is lots of good-natured chat as they settle down to work at a few minutes after six o'clock.

It's a rather small classroom for a group of twenty-four students, and this adds to the atmosphere of busyness and bustle. But it is a dedicated PGCE/CertEd base room, a facility that not all of the colleges in the network provide, and this ownership of the room is attested to by the posters and pictures that cover two of the walls: some are about psychological theories of learning, or about differentiation and inclusion, and others, more businesslike, are essentially advertisements for Holgate University's education and training provision and serve to mark out the room as a venue for HE in FE. The tables

and chairs are arranged in a cabaret style, with students seated in three groups of eight. Even at this very early stage in the course, there are lots of books and papers to see on the tables: individual learning plan files (ILP), module guides, handbooks, photocopies of journal articles, refill pads or notebooks, and some textbooks as well.

In the previous week's session, Carol had talked the group through the requirements for the *Professional Practice and Assessment* module. This week, as she hands out the relevant module pack, she tells the group that she is going to talk them through the *Designing and Planning for Learning* module. So there are two module packs now, and some confusion amongst some students, who talk with each other as the handouts work their way around the group:

“This is *another* module, in addition to what we got last week?”

“This is the assignment that we're working on next.”

“*This* is the one that we've got to hand in first.”

Literacy artefacts from the university

Students across the network of colleges receive a large number of text-based documents or literacy artefacts, which have been created and distributed by the university, and I shall refer to these as *university artefacts*. Some of these are relatively generic in scope. Many of these are more or less indirectly linked to the assessment process. Some literacy artefacts are so central to the social practice of assessment that it cannot be negotiated without them. Others are more peripheral to assessment practice: these do indeed reify aspects of assessment practice, but they are not central to assessment and therefore it is quite possible to negotiate assessment practice without recourse to them.

The *student e-learning guide* is an example of a university artefact that is only indirectly or peripherally linked to the assessment process (such artefacts are referred to hereafter as *peripheral artefacts*). It does not in itself reify any aspect of assessment practice. It provides information as to how to access resources that may be used by students when completing

assignments. It consists of instructions as to how students can use the on-line passwords that they receive at the start of the academic year to access a range of web-based resources to help them with their studies, such as e-journals (via the university library's website), or electronic versions of all the course documents which are stored on the university's virtual learning environment (VLE). The *student handbook of regulations* is another peripheral artefact. This document contains, amongst other things, a copy of the university's policy on plagiarism and a copy of the university's appeals procedure should a student wish to appeal against an assessment decision or raise a grievance. Again, these policies may have an impact on the assessment process, but only after the assignments have been written, marked, internally moderated and externally examined. Other peripheral artefacts created by the university include the *guide for off-campus students* and the *guide to library resources*.

These peripheral documents are only occasionally used by students, and only seldom referred to by tutors. After dispatch from the university at the start of the academic year, they are distributed to students as part of a beginning-of-term 'flood' of paperwork: a phenomenon that is common across both other areas of FE college provision in addition to HE in FE, and also across other forms of HE provision (Edwards and Smith, 2005). Peripheral handbooks and documents such as these have multiplied over the last twenty years or so, and perhaps the most convincing explanation for this is the impact of the dominant audit cultures of HE and the concurrent need to be able to document – for auditing purposes – all of the practices that HE performs (Barnett, 2003; Scott, 1995; Shore and Wright, 1999, 2000; Tight, 2003). But this is not to say that such documents are entirely unnecessary. Although as text-based documents they are not frequently read or otherwise manipulated, they nonetheless capture or reify certain aspects of some of the practices of Holgate University in general, that impact on the practices of the PGCE/CertEd in particular, such as regulations regarding the handing-in of assignments, or the use of the university's virtual learning environment. Thus, although such documents will only rarely be explicitly referred to, they can be conceptualised as 'running in the background', rather like an operating system on a computer which the user needs to interact with only very occasionally, and normally to perform a quite specific task.

At the same time, there are those literacy artefacts that can be seen as fundamental to assessment practice. The degree of use will depend on a number of factors including the transparency of the documents and the extent to which they are successfully sponsored (Wenger, 1998; Brandt and Clinton, 2002). These will be referred to as *central* artefacts and there are three to consider. More correctly, there are two single artefacts, and a collection of similar artefacts that can be treated for analytical purposes as a single unit. Firstly, there is the *course handbook*; secondly, the *individual learning plan* (ILP); thirdly, there are the *module packs*.

The *course handbook* is normally given out to students at the start of their first year. It is also downloadable from the university's VLE. It includes general instructional and pedagogical material relating to the course (for example, a section on reflection; a section on plagiarism; and a section on Harvard referencing with several examples) and regulatory and administrative information (for example, attendance requirements; a calendar of dates; and notes relating to e-resources). It is a substantial document (normally a hundred pages or so), and is perhaps best understood as a reference document, rather than one that students are expected to read from cover to cover.

The *individual learning plan* is the second central artefact in the assessment process. It serves as a locus for self or ipsative assessment, predominantly through a variety of reflective writing activities (Ball, 2000; Brew, 1999; Brown and Knight, 1994; Klenowski, 2003; Smith and Tillemma, 2003; Tummons, 2008). The ILP consists of a series of five numbered forms. Four of these are writing frames, designed to elicit particular responses relating to the learning and development of the student. The fifth takes the form of a log, where students record a minimum number of the hours that they teach during the course. Students compile the ILP throughout their two years on the course, effectively completing one 'set' of forms each year, and the entire process is characterised as being owned by, and as being the responsibility of, the students themselves, although progress is monitored through termly tutorials. This document has been slightly revised over time: some of the forms have been renamed and renumbered; others have had their layout amended. But the overall form and professed

function of the ILP has stayed the same. It is (perhaps inevitably) accompanied by the *ILP Guidance* document, a 4,327 word, 11 page document which offers advice on how to fill in the different pages, with examples.

A. Initial Assessment (Complete this section within the first FOUR weeks of the course – then show overleaf in Section B how you have developed your knowledge and skills)		
TEACHING SKILLS		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:
KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:
LANGUAGE, LITERACY, NUMERACY & ICT		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:

Figure 8.1 (above). Page one of ILP3: initial assessment.

Initial Assessment		Date:
TEACHING SKILLS		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:
<p>You might write about aspects of your practical teaching that you feel confident about e.g. your relationship with learners, your subject knowledge, your design of learning materials etc.</p> <p>Note any skills you would be happy to share with your peers e.g. you might have experience in mentoring or coaching.</p>	<p>Write about how you would like to develop your teaching skills – what are your priorities right now? Include strengths you would like to develop further and areas where you feel less confident and would like to improve.</p> <p>As well as using your own ideas you could talk to your mentor about areas for development or use information you have gained from other sources e.g. your colleagues, learners etc.</p>	<p>Identify specific things you plan to do to help you develop, e.g. trying new teaching approaches, observing more experienced colleagues, attending training days etc.</p> <p>When can you do them – near future, longer term?</p>
KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:
<p>What do you already know about teaching and learning? You may have prior learning from courses such as C&G or the assessor awards.</p> <p>You could also highlight knowledge gained from reading, course attendance, staff development etc.</p>	<p>Write about any particular areas of knowledge that would be useful to you e.g. you might need to know more about the 14-16 age group or about ideas such as widening participation.</p> <p>Again, it would be useful to talk to your mentor and other colleagues about this. Does your subject knowledge need to be updated?</p>	<p>How might you develop your knowledge along the lines you've identified, apart from the natural process of the Cert Ed/PGCE course?</p> <p>E.g. private study, conferences, work with your mentor etc.</p>
LANGUAGE, LITERACY, NUMERACY & ICT		
Strengths:	Areas for Development:	Action:
<p>Write about your level of personal skill in these areas. You may have undertaken an initial assessment in literacy or numeracy, or you may have relevant qualifications.</p> <p>Write about ICT skills you have especially where they are relevant to your teaching.</p>	<p>Highlight where you need to improve your personal skills in language, literacy, numeracy & ICT. If you have had an initial assessment in literacy or numeracy, you could record any development needs if identified.</p> <p>You should also think about how effectively you can support your own learners when they use these skills in the context of your teaching sessions – do you need to develop your ability to give support?</p>	<p>You might decide to achieve level 2 qualifications (or higher) in one or more of these skills.</p> <p>You might also decide to work on ways of supporting your own learners in these areas.</p>

Figure 8.2 (above). Page one of ILP3 as it appears in the ILP guidance document: the extensive prompts within each section effectively work as a writing frame for the ILP as a whole.

As a literacy artefact, the ILP can be seen as operating at more than one level:

Jonathan: one of the [issues] which again relates back to issues of ownership but also of autonomy is the perceived self-direction...from the perspective of the student and the need to take some responsibility.

Richard (PGCE/CertEd course leader, Holgate university): yeah. I mean I think this is where you run into difficulties with things like an individual learning plan because just the very existence of a document with that title – it isn't necessarily enabling because it's saying, you know, the course team have done all the thinking for you and this is the way you need to conceptualise your learner needs. It's so woolly that you'd never get away with it, but you'd almost be better off giving a blank piece of paper to people and saying, "plan your learning and development over the next two years."

A number of tensions are present here. On the one hand, there is the academic goal of self or ipsative assessment accompanied by reflective practice, characteristic of teacher education courses in HE (Campbell and Norton, 2007; Hoadley-Maidment, 2000; Moon, 1999). At the same time, there is a clear understanding amongst both tutors and students of the role played by the ILP as a document to be audited for quality assurance purposes, characteristic of broader managerial discourses in HE, and a subsequent ambiguity over the academic or developmental value of the process (Hamilton, 2009; Lawson et. al., 2004; Lawson and Harrison, 1999, Thompson et al., 2009):

Mary (student, Millfield College): how many of these bits of paper actually get looked at, once you've produced them?

Jonathan: well in theory, all of them. All those ILP forms form part of your file. Your professional reflections and progress.

Mary: well, indeed, but from outside experience of audit processes, yes it's, they are produced because they need to be produced as evidence that you've done it. You can't just take your word for it, which is understandable, I suppose, but it's a personal bugbear, I think.

Jonathan: I think it's interesting that you use the word audit to describe that. It's supposed to be you, the student, taking ownership of the ILP, but you don't think it's about you as a student taking ownership?

Mary: No. I think it's things that you need to do. It's getting everybody to conform to the same format.

Jonathan: Do you like the ILP?

Julie (course leader, Nunthorpe College): I think the idea that students are having tutorials with us to help them with their development is good. I'm just not a person that's into all this evidence, this paper based evidence, and I think it drives us all mad really, this obsession with having to have some paper-based evidence all the time.

Jonathan: So why do you think that obsession is there?

Julie: I think it's for monitoring purposes, to make sure that we are doing it. [...] And (it's) very repetitious, and the students find it a burden...it's almost "just put something in the box."

The *module packs* are the final body of university artefacts to be considered as central to the assessment process. Students receive a standalone pack for each module. For all of the packs, a few common themes emerge. They are divided into clear sections such as: module specifications; assignment details; indicative reading. A number of textual features, including italics, bold type, numbered or bulleted lists and underlining, are used to highlight key points. A small amount of what might be called specialist language or jargon is used, such as "inclusive practice", "differentiation", and "formative and summative assessment". Some of the pages are for students to complete (cover sheets and learning contracts, for example); one is for tutors to complete: the feedback pro forma which contains comments boxes for formative and summative assessment, referenced to module criteria.

All of these university artefacts, both peripheral and central, are distributed electronically to the network colleges, who are then responsible for reproduction and distribution. Colleges exercise a certain amount of discretion regarding the exact timing of distribution. Generally, the course handbook and ILP is given out at the start of the year (invariably accompanied by a rush of other literacy artefacts such as enrolment forms, application for funding forms and the like), and the module handbooks are given out as each module is taught, with different

colleges starting each module at slightly different times. However, the proliferation of paperwork does not end here: college-based tutors also prepare and distribute their own guides, handbooks, help sheets and other materials. And so it is to these *college artefacts*, and their relationship to the university artefacts, that I shall now turn.

Vignette 8.2: going through the assignment brief

It is a bright cold day in January, and the clock is just striking one. I am sitting in a classroom at Millfield College, waiting for the last arriving students to settle down for the PGCE/CertEd class. It's only a small group: eight students are here today. Absences in this group are quite common. If, for example, a tutor elsewhere in the college is off sick or otherwise called away, someone might be pulled out from their PGCE/CertEd class to cover, even though this practice is 'officially' frowned upon. It is rare for the full class of twelve to meet. We are in a general-purpose classroom, seated around a seminar-style block of tables in the centre, with PCs on tables along two of the other walls. Tony, the course leader for the PGCE/CertEd, is putting piles of A4 papers on the table in front of him: a huge pile – multiple copies of a journal article by Black and Wiliam about assessment for learning, and another article by Ellington called *How to Become an Excellent Tertiary-level Teacher*, module packs, posters, an article from the Times Educational Supplement, and some other handouts as well. It doesn't take long for the session to settle down, after a few minutes of general chat, some administrative notices and some reminders for students to book their lesson observations by half-term at the latest please. And then the first substantive component of the session gets underway: a talk-through the assessment requirements for the *Professional Practice and Assessment* module.

Tony has passed round copies of the module pack (A4, white paper, about twenty pages). Now, he is passing round a second handout, only four pages of A4 this time, and in colour (see figure, 8.3, below). "I've done a writing frame for you. Do you like writing frames?" he asks the students. There is no direct answer, but one student, who is reading ahead in the module pack, asks: "what do formative and summative mean?" Three of the students offer more-or-less accurate definitions.

Tony talks the group through the different sections of the assignment: the lesson observations, the 2,000-word essay (which is about how the students, as tutors, assess their own students in turn), the reflective learning journal (where students write reflections on a chosen number of sessions that they have taught), and the reflections on learning (a short self-assessment exercise). These different tasks, together with materials generated by the students in their professional practice such as handouts, resources or assessment tasks, all have to be compiled in a single portfolio. There's a lot of rustling of pages – back and forth through the pack and the writing frame. Some students talk about timing, and specifically whether or not they will be able to get their lesson observations booked in time for the assignment deadline. One student is asking about the paperwork needed for the lesson observation. Tony reminds the group that the lesson observation form comes in three sections: the first is filled in prior to the observation by the student; the second is completed by the observer; and the third is completed by the student after the observation, to reflect on how the session went and to record what they have learned from the observation process. “It’s a funny old form, isn’t it?” Tony admits. Two students voice confusion, not having realised that the first part of the form had to be completed prior to the observation – even though it says so on the form itself [the exact words are: “please complete before the session”]. “It’s confusing, isn’t it” Tony says, but the instructions on the form itself appear to be unambiguous. Another voice pipes up: “is that a form I’ve already got?” It is.

Literacy artefacts from the colleges: local responses to network pressures

As well as using university artefacts, the PGCE/CertEd staff in the colleges create other literacy artefacts of their own in order to, amongst other things, carry out the practice of assessment. All of these *college artefacts* are designed to be used in addition to, not instead of, the university artefacts that I have already discussed. They can in their turn be classified as being more or less *central* or *peripheral* to the assessment process. Some of the artefacts created by a tutor, such as a class handout that summarises a number of different theories of learning or a PowerPoint presentation that summarises the impact of the Disability

Discrimination Act part four on the Learning and Skills Sector, might be used by one or more students when preparing an assignment, but they are not strictly necessary to the process. The facts, opinions and information within them might be accessed elsewhere: in a book chapter, website or journal article, for example. Similarly, a handout might contain a reference to a chapter in a textbook that the student can then refer to when writing their essay. Other artefacts, by contrast, perform roles that make them more immediately relevant, and hence central to the assessment process. Tasks designed for formative assessment and feedback or writing frames, for example, tend to occupy this position, as they are invariably very closely aligned to module criteria and outcomes. Typically, college artefacts follow a pattern in terms of style, design, genre and use that is replicated across the PGCE/CertEd course as a whole within that institution, on a module-by-module basis. That is to say, the kinds or styles of artefacts created for one module tend to be copied in form, genre and register, for the other modules that make up the course. At Nunthorpe College, for example, writing frames are used by both PGCE/CertEd tutors across all of the modules on the programme, and the example that I draw one here (see below) provides a representative sample. The PowerPoint presentations used at Scarcroft College (see below) similarly follow a particular 'house style' in terms of design and delivery.

I have already referred to the fact that the use of locally produced artefacts and materials does not exclude the use of university artefacts. Indeed, the demands of quality assurance require that all college tutors use all appropriate university documentation relating to assessment. The correct use of such centrally produced documentation is a typical feature of HE in FE provision (Hilborne, 1996; Parry et al., 2003; Parry and Thompson, 2002), and in the specific case of the Holgate PGCE/CertEd network, is a conspicuous feature of quality assurance and monitoring processes. Thus we find two 'sets' of artefacts working alongside one another. Moreover, in designing their own artefacts, college-based PGCE/CertEd tutors invariably make more or less close use of the documents provided by the university: what might be termed a form of institutional intertextuality (Barton, 1994: 62). And so it is to a number of such college artefacts that I shall now turn. At the same time, it is important to stress that these documents are used *in addition to* the university's course documentation.

Artefacts at Scarcroft College

At Scarcroft College there are two relevant college artefacts to consider. More correctly, there are two types of additional artefact to consider that are replicated with minor variations across modules but can be thought of as single units for the purpose of this analysis. I shall label these as: a *formative feedback pro forma*; and *PowerPoint presentations*. It is important to note that these artefacts are used by all three of the tutors on the PGCE/CertEd programme.

The *formative feedback pro-forma*⁴² has been designed to supplement the formative assessment section of the Holgate university feedback pro forma (which college tutors are obliged to use). Whilst the university encourages formative feedback, the nature of the feedback given and the mode by which it is delivered is invariably a more local affair. The university form leaves only a small space to record formative assessment or feedback, and so at many colleges additional processes have been established. At Scarcroft College Helen, who is the PGCE/CertEd course leader, has designed a formative feedback pro forma which is returned to students when they submit drafts of their assignments: she allows them to submit a full draft once prior to formal submission. The pro forma, which covers two sides of A4 paper, reproduces the appropriate module outcomes so that progress against each outcome can be made explicit. As such, each pro forma is slightly different for each module, to reflect differences in how learning outcomes are worded. In addition, a number of more general headings drawn from the criteria for the course as a whole (such as 'relates theory to practice' and 'demonstrates equal opportunities and inclusive learning') are used to categorise relevant feedback. These criteria are the same across different pro forma. As with any form filling in the workplace, however, there is some level of ambivalence, if not resistance (Belfiore et al., 2004):

⁴² An example can be found at appendix 8.1.

Ruth (tutor, Scarcroft College): I have this horrendous form to fill in which has been developed. I don't like that, because it's got boxes and all that. I don't care for it but I feel we've got to have a consistent approach.

Jonathan: This is a form that's used in Scarcroft College for formative feedback? [...] Who designed the form?

Ruth: My line manager... So I've asked her about it, but I just feel that there's too many boxes. But because she's very organised and structured I'm having to follow these through, even though I don't understand some of them [laughs]. (They) seem a bit repetitive.

PowerPoint presentations are frequently used by the PGCE/CertEd teaching staff to supplement and/or reinforce lectures and seminars, but they are also used at induction at the beginning of each module. Whenever a new module is introduced, the distribution of the module pack is accompanied by class-based discussion and a presentation where the outcomes, content and assessment of the module are discussed, illustrated by a PowerPoint presentation. In fact, with only minor variations, these PowerPoints replicate the content of the module packs on a word for word basis. The slides are subsequently uploaded onto the college virtual learning environment, and are in fact invariably used as the first point of call by students who have questions about the module that they are currently working on:

...we spend the first evening or the first session, and I do a step by step overview presentation of the learning outcomes, of the knowledge and understanding and ability outcomes and go through them step by step. And we use, they all get a hard copy of the assignment brief, and we have a PowerPoint presentation working through what the assignment is, the criteria that they have to meet, and then we go through, if the assignment brief or the module pack has a page in it that has section one in it, section two, whatever, we go through that step by step and I make suggestions as to what they could put in there or the wider picture in terms of meeting the outcomes of the assignment.

(Helen, course leader, Scarcroft College).

Artefacts at Millfield College

Assessment practice at Millfield College is explicated through two different literacy artefacts or, more correctly, two types of artefact that are replicated across modules but can be considered as single units for the purpose of analysis. These artefacts are *essay plans* and *PowerPoint presentations* and are used by both of the members of the teacher-training team.

An *essay plan* created (and referred to as such) by Tony, the course leader at the college (and who is in fact the member of staff who does the majority of teaching on the course), is handed out to each student for each module. Typically covering four or five pages of A4, the essay plan is in fact a handout that replicates much of the information in the module pack. The differences between these two are mainly in presentation. The assignment criteria from the module pack are copied in the essay plan, with key words and expressions highlighted in colour and bold type for emphasis. The general assessment criteria are also reproduced in different colours. The assignment criteria are then repeated, with other instructions added at appropriate times, frequently in the form of imperatives such as “add some references”, “give examples of use with your students”, and “read the course handbook re Reflection”. Finally, the learning outcomes for the module are reproduced, again with colour highlighting and bold type for emphasis. This document forms the basis of a class discussion where the assignment requirements for a module can be talked over and explained (see figure 8.3, below).

	<p>feedback and recording achievement. Reviewing and action planning. Practical experience of assessing. Analysis of assessment using statistical concepts and techniques.</p> <p>Give examples of use with your students!!!!!!!</p> <p>You should include copies of assessment tasks, assessed student work and your feedback to students!!!!!!!</p> <p>You should also carry out appropriate statistical analysis where possible.</p> <p>Add some references. Include Black and William, Ellington and use the course reader....All are excellent source of material for this module</p>
Conclusion SECTION 4	<p>Reflection on your learning in this module. This will include</p> <p>Your own learning & development</p> <p>Your own teaching</p> <p>Processes, policies and theories of education and training</p> <p>Read the course handbook re Reflection</p> <p>Add some references</p>
Bibliography	<p>Ensure plenty of evidence of research and ensure all entries in the main body of the essay appear in the bibliography</p> <p>Add some references</p>
Study Skills and Harvard Referencing	<p>Ensure you use and follow the - Harvard referencing guide Signposting words Assignment guidance</p>

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

- Understands** key principles in selecting **effective teaching and learning methods**.
- Understands** key concepts in **assessment**.
- Understands** a range of **assessment methods**.

Ability:

- Develops** effective **teaching/training** skills.
- Prepares** and **uses** appropriate **teaching and learning materials**.
- Develops** **assessment** skills.
- Supports** own learners' **needs in language, literacy and numeracy**, within the context of the teaching subject.
- Develops** inclusive practice in own teaching and assessment.
- Reflects** on own teaching and learning within the module.

Figure 8.3 (above): page four of the essay plan produced by Tony for the *Professional Practice and Assessment* module (as discussed in vignette 8.2). In the text box, type in black font is copied from the module pack. Tony adds all other coloured text. The learning outcomes are also copied from the module pack, with colour highlighting and bold emphasis added by Tony.

PowerPoint presentations,⁴³ also designed by Tony, are used at the start of each module. They are designed to help students navigate their way around the paperwork for the course. As such, as well as having slides of text content copied from course documents, they also

⁴³ Samples of one of Tony's induction PowerPoints appear in appendix 8.2.

contain hyperlinks that allow the tutor to move from the PowerPoint to any of the course documents in electronic format. So, for example, two slides about the Individual learning plan contain both general information about the ILP process and hyperlinks to different ILP forms, which can be viewed in word format by the students. These electronic documents can then be distributed to students for future reference.

Tony's approach rests in part on an attempt to mitigate the swamping effects of course paperwork generally:

And I say: "look I've given you lots of information, buy a book with a divider." I actually hold it up, an arch lever file, "file it, but don't get over rode with it, you'll come back to it but if I give it to you now you've got it. I send it electronically and I'll also show you how you can get the information later." So that's how that works. [...] It's like, if you calm your students it's like gardening: good start, good finish. And that's why I project it visually, using my PowerPoints. And they've got it as well. So they've all got it at home as well as here. So they get everything on a memory stick.

Artefacts at Nunthorpe College

Assessment practice at Nunthorpe College is explicated through the use of two different college artefacts or, more correctly, two types of artefact that are replicated across modules but can be considered as single units for the purpose of analysis. These artefacts are *formative feedback pro forma* and *writing frames*, and are used by both members of the teacher-training team.

The *feedback pro forma*,⁴⁴ designed by Julie who is course leader at Nunthorpe College, is used for formative feedback on draft assignment submissions, in a manner very similar to that employed at Scarcroft College. The pro forma for each module reproduces the outcomes for that module, together with space for comments so that student progress against each

⁴⁴ An Example can be found at appendix 8.3.

outcome can be specifically addressed. Unlike the Scarcroft pro forma, no reference is made to the general assessment criteria for the course. And unlike the Scarcroft pro forma, there is no ambiguity over the value or use of the form, with Julie's fellow tutor using them without demur.

The analysis of the *writing frames* raises some rather more complex issues, however. Partly this is due to how they are actually *created*, and partly this is due to how they are *perceived* by both tutors and students. The majority of the writing frames are created by Julie, and follow a pattern: a single side of A4 paper, with a series of comments or suggestions and questions provided for each of the module assignment criteria. These are detailed documents, offering suggestions for essay content, pointers as to which readings or theories/theorists should be referred to, reminders about the importance of using the Harvard referencing style correctly and even, in one case, a possible opening sentence for the essay in question.⁴⁵

The exception to this is the writing frame used for the first module taken by students in year one (below, figure 8.4). This writing frame has been borrowed from another college within the PGCE/CertEd(PCET) network and, with only very slight alterations, put into use at Nunthorpe College. It is a detailed and densely worded document, covering three sides of A4. Under a series of subheadings, possible suggestions for essay content are suggested in varying levels of detail, under headings such as "what you should cover" and "points for consideration." Other imperatives such as "explain how you have addressed individual needs" and "discuss some of the theories of learning" guide academic content. And imperatives such as "keep this quite brief" and "summarise your key points here" guide structure.

⁴⁵ An example can be found at appendix 8.4.

Section		Possible contents
Introduction <i>The introduction should be about 10% of total word count.</i>	Introduction <i>The Introduction should set the scene for your assignment.</i>	You need to make clear to the reader why you are writing the assignment and what aspects you will be covering in it.
Main Body <i>This should be written in sentences and divided into paragraphs.</i>	The Context <i>This should be kept <u>very brief</u>. You do not really have many words to use here.</i>	The subject you teach and your qualifications to teach it. The setting and sector in which you teach The length of time you have been teaching
<i>The main body should be about 80% of your total word count.</i>	The Group <i>Keep this quite brief.</i>	The subject they are studying The level of the course Are they new to education or have been in education some time?
	Factors influencing the group's learning <i>Compare and contrast the factors influencing your learners. References to learners should be anonymous.</i>	Their motivations for learning Their ages The time they have for study Is the course full time or part time? Are there any barriers to their learning? E.g. Learning difficulties, social, language, literacy & numeracy issues.
	Theories of Learning <i>Discuss some of the theories of learning, especially those that are relevant to your learners.</i> <i>Main part of the assignment.</i>	Describe the main points of a couple of theories which you feel are relevant to the way you teach ie your approach Which parts do you agree and/or disagree with? (Adv & disadvantages) How does learning about the theory enable you to support learning?
Conclusion <i>This should be about 10% of your word total</i>	Conclusion <i>A summary of your key points.</i> <i>N.B. Do not introduce any new points here.</i>	What are the key points you have said? Which do you especially want to emphasise?
References <i>Use Harvard System in main body and in this section.</i>	References <i>Include at least 3 references, incl. one journal article.</i>	References will go in Section 3, but it is important to reference correctly as you write.

Introduction = 100 - 150 words
Main body = 1,200 - 1,600 words
Conclusion = 150 - 250 words

Figure 8.4 (above). Page one (of three) of the writing frame that Julie uses for the first year one module.

For Julie, the use of writing frames is in fact quite a fraught process:

There are times when I wonder if I'm being, not too prescriptive, but giving them too much assistance. When I first started to be a tutor on the course, some of my students would complain about another tutor who's no longer here, who used to put "not evaluative enough", "not analytical enough" "you need a bit more of this, but not a lot." And then they used to come to me and say "Julie, we don't know what we've got to do,"

and I say “well it’s not really my module, ask the tutor” [...] So that’s when I started to suggest what they needed to write [...] But I didn’t know whether I was giving them too much assistance. It was a university level course. And they said “oh no, Julie, this is great, please just talk us through what we’ve got to do for the assignment.” And then when I saw that other places were using them, we tended to formalise it a bit.

For her students, however, there is little such equivocation:

Louanna (student, Nunthorpe college): We get very, very good writing frames which have helped immensely. I think, as someone described the task last night, this is a bit woolly. They can, different people could interpret them in very different ways and I think the writing frames have helped, certainly helped me think, ‘well that’s the basics of what I need’.

Jonathan: Would you have found it significantly different...without those writing frames?

Louanna: Definitely [...] Personally, I would have gone off on completely the wrong track in many ways, because I think, in many ways the writing frame helped me keep the theories that I’m writing about focussed on the teaching that I was actually doing, so it helped me connect the two ideas all the way through. Whereas I might have spoken about theories and then spoken about what I actually do, and not really integrated them, and I think the writing frame really helped integrate the two ideas.

Literacy artefacts from outside

The PCET teacher-training curriculum in higher education as a whole constitutes an arena of not only teaching practice and scholarly research, but also of audit, inspection and quality assurance. Such an array of practices necessarily generates, requires and is reified by a range of literacy artefacts that, in common with the kind of documentary artefacts already discussed in this chapter, have a more or less direct impact on the assessment practice of this PGCE/CertEd course. Arguably, these artefacts are reified products of other constellations of communities of practice that sit beyond the colleges, although overlaps and boundary

crossings can be readily identified (the arrival of a team of Ofsted inspectors provides a readily identifiable example of a boundary crossing by members of different communities which results in, amongst other things, the creation of a number of significant and politically powerful literacy artefacts). Although attempting to establish clear lines of demarcation between 'academic' and 'managerial' practices within HE can be misleading, nonetheless I shall categorise these 'literacy artefacts from outside' as being either academic (that is to say, as coming from those practices where teaching, learning, research and scholarship constitute the prime activity) or managerial (that is to say, as coming from those practices where audit, inspection and quality assurance constitute the prime activity). It is also important to note that here I am being deliberately restricted in scope: an exploration of the relationship between an Ofsted inspection, the QTLS framework and the PCET curriculum could quite conceivably fill an entire thesis. For the purposes of this discussion, I simply wish to acknowledge the kinds of text-based documents that tend to exist outside a PGCE/CertEd community of practice in an FE college, but which nonetheless impact on the practice of assessment (as distinct from the *policy* of assessment).

Academic artefacts

The most conspicuous *outside academic artefacts* used within assessment practice are textbooks and journal articles, although use of the former is more common. Textbooks and journal articles are recommended throughout the various stages of the course, with the official, indicative reading lists from the university supplemented by recommendations made by college-based tutors. College libraries are well stocked: the provision of all of the books on the indicative reading lists is a discrete component of the franchising process. And many students buy or borrow textbooks from colleagues who have already completed the course. Although indicative reading lists are quite extensive, the number of texts referred to by student interviewees is relatively small and tends to centre around a small number of "tried and trusted" books. At Scarcroft College, for example, all of the student interviewees cited *The Teachers' Toolkit* and *Accelerated Learning in the Classroom* as key textbooks, based on the

recommendations of the tutors. Neither appears on the indicative reading lists, however.⁴⁶

And whilst tutors invariably favour some textbooks over others, the students do not, of course, always agree with their choices.

...the Armitage book, I read some of those chapters and I found that a lot easier to read. It was a lot, maybe it's more concise because I'm from a scientific background. I like concise writing and I found Armitage a lot easier to read than Hillier, I have to say.⁴⁷
(Susannah, student, Friargate College)

Jo (student, Friargate College): I bought Armitage and I read Armitage and I read about five pages and I put it down and said I don't understand it, it did not make sense.

Jonathan what didn't you understand about it?

Jo: I think it was the use of jargon, and terminology that wasn't actually explained. And I can't remember what chapter it was now, it was for the first lot of reading that we had to do. And there were just so many words, terms I didn't understand I didn't know what they were, that I actually gave up on it. I'd already ordered another textbook. I'd ordered Nicholls.⁴⁸ I spoke to Carol [my tutor] who said it will make sense, it will start to make sense. But Nicholls I find absolutely fine, no problem at all with Nicholls.

The use of journal articles is also encouraged, and in some assignments their use is compulsory: some module specifications require a minimum number of references, including a specified number of recent journal articles. Colleges are required to subscribe to two academic journals as a condition of running the course, although the utility of these hard copies is difficult to fathom: certainly, student interviewees made no reference to their use. Indeed, as students receive library accounts at Holgate university, they are all able –

⁴⁶ When the PGCE/CertEd curriculum was revised, for the academic year that followed on from the time that I spent collecting data, both of these books were included on the reading lists for the new modules.

⁴⁷ Armitage, A., Bryant, R., Dunnill, R., Renwick, M., Hayes, D., Hudson, A., Kent, J. and Lawes, S. (2003) *Teaching and Training in Post-Compulsory Education*. Second edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
Hillier, Y. (2005) *Reflective Teaching in Further and Adult Education*. Second edition. London: Continuum.

⁴⁸ Nicholls, G. (2001) *Developing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

irrespective of their geographic distance from the Holgate campus – to access online journals via the library website, arguably rendering the locally available hard-copies somewhat otiose. Another common practice is the use of journal articles that have been provided by tutors in either print and/or pdf format. As with textbooks, so it is with journal articles that tutors have particular favourites that they like to draw on in class.

Margaret (student, Millfield College): he [Tony] likes his seven golden rules [laughs].⁴⁹

Jonathan: [laughs] the Ellington [article]. They've taken that out [of the reading list] now.

Margaret: yes, he was disappointed that this year it wasn't in, but he'd still like to add that one on to our reading list.

Some tutors and students also make use of other academic or scholarly publications such as research reports from organisations such as the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), or the Higher Education Academy (HEA). There is a growing use of online resources as well. Here, online resources are taken as meaning those internet-based resources that originated online, as distinct from (for example) journal articles or PowerPoint presentations that have been uploaded but which are used offline. A very small number of these online resources are cited in module indicative reading lists.

Managerial artefacts

An exploration of those communities of practice in which the politics, management or quality assurance of assessment in teacher-training for the post-compulsory sector were enacted would require an entirely separate PhD thesis to the one that I present here. Clearly, in many ways these particular constellations of communities of practice work in ways that are invariably beyond the lived experience of students – and many of the tutors – within the college network. Some of these practices, however, are significant and conspicuous and can

⁴⁹ Ellington, H. (2000) How to become an excellent tertiary-level teacher. Seven golden rules for university and college lecturers. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 24(3) 311-321.

be seen as having an impact in some way (although the trajectory of such impacts is far from direct) on assessment within the PGCE/CertEd.

There are three significant political/managerial sets of practices that in turn generate *outside managerial artefacts* that impact, albeit obliquely, on assessment practices within colleges. Two of these relate to the professional standards that have been established through Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK).⁵⁰ The first of these is the *Standards for Teachers, Tutors and Trainers in the Lifelong Learning Sector*; the second is the *Minimum Core of Teachers' Understanding of Language, Literacy And Numeracy*.⁵¹ These documents (as well as their predecessors under the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO)) have an impact on assessment practice in two ways. Firstly, there is an impact in terms of the initial reification of the assessment process: all PCET courses are expected to map on to the relevant QTLS standards in order to receive endorsement. Secondly, there is an impact in terms of its practice: students are expected to work towards and refer to the standards in their assessment, as a reflection of working towards them in their teaching practice. Many PCET teacher-training textbooks make direct reference to the standards, in order to facilitate this process, usually through specifying which standards relate to particular bodies of content. Thus, whilst the politics of QTLS endorsement is not necessarily an issue for students, the QTLS framework is. As such, these are relevant artefacts, albeit tangential or *opaque* ones (although not *peripheral*, as they reify politically important discourses). Tutors rarely make reference to them, and students in turn make little or no reference to the professional standards in their assignments.

⁵⁰ LLUK was the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the lifelong learning sector. In common with other SSCs, LLUK was responsible for setting appropriate national occupational standards: in this case, for all those working in post-16 education and training. In 2011, responsibility for the standards – and their anticipated revision – was transferred to the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). At the time of writing, however, the LLUK framework remains in place.

⁵¹ The QTLS framework is at:

http://www.lluk.org/documents/professional_standards_for_itts_020107.pdf [date accessed: 26 October 2010]. The Minimum Core framework is at:

http://www.lluk.org/documents/minimum_core_may_2007_3rd.pdf [date accessed: 26 October 2010].

The third significant set of practices that impacts on assessment are those that enfold the inspection process by Ofsted. In April 2007, Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) merged to create one inspectorate. Ofsted is now responsible for the inspection of all provision in the post-compulsory sector (colleges, work-based provision, community education, prison education) and for the inspection of teacher training for the lifelong learning sector. The provision of mentoring for trainee teachers in the sector provides a useful example of the ways in which Ofsted can and does impact on assessment practice. In the first overarching report to be written regarding teacher training for the further education sector, Ofsted highlighted the paucity of provision of subject specialist pedagogies as a significant weakness across the sector as a whole (Ofsted, 2003). The response, sector wide, was to introduce mentoring into the PCET teacher-training curriculum (although it must be noted that the Holgate curriculum already included a 10-credit subject specialist module). In turn, the mentoring process was 'absorbed' into ILP/ILP modes of assessment. Students' ILPs are now expected to include records of their developmental meetings with mentors, and records of teaching observations carried out by mentors.

Both LLUK and Ofsted, therefore, can be seen as significant and politically powerful communities of practice within PCET teacher training as a whole. In terms of assessment, however, their impact is somewhat indirect, and the mode of their operation is perhaps best described in a manner akin to those artefacts generated by Holgate that I earlier described as 'running in the background'. LLUK and Ofsted are always present and always 'working', but their impact on assessment practice is refracted through other lenses: the university, the people who write the curriculum and who manage its endorsement and the tutors who teach it.

Conclusion: what are the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed?

Even before students start actually doing their assessments, the process involves a panoply of literacy artefacts (figure 8.5, below), all of which impact on assessment practice in differing

ways. Some are so *central* to assessment practice that it cannot be negotiated without them. Others are more peripheral, and although they do also reify important aspects of the process, their use by students is more variable, dependent on their personal preference and the predilections of tutors. At the same time, it is important to note that these qualities of peripherality and centrality are not fixed or permanent. Rather, they are relational and changeable. As I shall go on to explore in the following chapter, it is as students come to know more about how assessment works on the PGCE/CertEd and what they have to do, that their use of these – and other – artefacts changes, becoming more confident, competent and fluent. That is to say, it is as the students travel along their trajectories within the community of practice, so their use of the repertoire of the community – including text-based artefacts such as these – changes. Just as students do not occupy fixed, determined points within the community, so it is with tutors who occupy differential positions within both PGCE/CertEd communities of practice, and other communities of practice as well (Avis et al., 2009; Tummons, 2008). Consequently, their use and creation of such artefacts is also similarly differential. I shall return to this discussion also, in the next chapter.

For the present, and in order to provide an answer to my first research question, reiterated at the beginning of this final section, the point I wish to make is that when considering the literacy artefacts that are used, created or acquired for assessment and in what kinds of literacy events are they employed, it is important to acknowledge the variety and number of artefacts that are in use within a PGCE/CertEd community of practice. The list of artefacts that I have discussed in this chapter by no means comprehensively captures the range of artefacts used across the network of colleges as a whole, but it does capture them *representatively*.

university artefacts	
peripheral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> student e-learning guide student handbook of regulations guide for off-campus students guide to library resources
central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> course handbook individual learning plan module packs
college artefacts	
peripheral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> class handouts powerpoint presentations
central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formative feedback pro forma powerpoint exercises essay plans writing frames
outside artefacts	
academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> textbooks academic journals research publications websites
managerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SVUK/LLUK standards Ofsted inspection reports

Figure 8.5 (above): literacy artefacts for assessment

Students on the course readily recognise the role that such paperwork plays within educational contexts. This is hardly surprising: they are all teachers, after all. Nonetheless, as *students*, they still encounter confusion or disorientation when swamped by such documents (Edwards and Smith, 2005):

It's probably trying to tick all the boxes, I don't know, but I think realistically it's more detail than what you need at first, and it's going to put off more people than it's going to encourage them to continue with the course.

(Margaret, student, Millfield College).

...I remember being overwhelmed by the amount of information that there was, and I'm sure that's a common problem...

(Lawrence, student, Scarcroft College).

At the same time, the tutors are aware of the potential impact:

They're overwhelmed. I mean, I was laughing when the external examiners were talking about sustainable curriculum in terms of environmental impact because they get a lot of paper off me [laughs].

(Helen, tutor, Scarcroft College).

It's the paperwork isn't it, it's typical of any course. You know, they come in, "smile and get your photograph taken, this is your handbook, this is your first module, this is your second module, enrol as an HE student, get your grants and loans". And I swamp them, I'm guilty of making sure they get all the information.

(Tony, tutor, Millfield College).

And it is how the tutors help the students make sense of 'all the information' that I shall explore in the next chapter.

Chapter Nine

Artefacts, events, practices and communities

In this, the second chapter to foreground my empirical data, I address my second research question: *how are the meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment facilitated?* I describe how the social practice of assessment within a PGCE/CertEd (PCET) community of practice is mediated by a complex array of literacy artefacts, drawn from a range of places and occupying a range of forms. Students are expected to read, interact with and write on a number of different artefacts in order to negotiate successfully the *paradigmatic trajectory* of assessment (Wenger, 1998). Having identified these artefacts in the preceding chapter, it is now necessary to focus on both the practices within which they are employed, and the practices that they enfold and in turn are enfolded within. In this PGCE/CertEd community, the kinds of artefacts that I discussed in the preceding chapter are handed out, discussed, occasionally complained about, not infrequently lost sight of, but almost always – in the end – satisfactorily and appropriately used, employed or completed. In this chapter, I foreground how it is that students come to know what to do with all of these artefacts or, to put it another way, come to know about the assessment process.

There are two main aspects to the argument that I present here. One of these relates to what might be termed the *practicalities of the actual process of doing an assignment*. By this I mean to refer to some of the ways in which students get help in putting together their assignments and in turn receive feedback on them from their tutors. This provides a way of exploring how students come to understand what it is that they are being asked to do, *whilst actually engaged in the doing of it*. That is to say, it is in part through the doing of assessment (writing drafts, receiving feedback on paper and in tutorials, writing final submissions, receiving summative feedback and then moving on to the next module) that students can come to know about the process. These practices are found in a variety of places and times: in tutorials, in informal meetings in staffrooms or classrooms, or in the time at the end of a plenary session when the students asks their tutor if they could just stay back for a few

minutes to answer some questions. And they are captured or *reified* in tutorial record forms, annotations on students' assignments, feedback sheets and emails. These practices are more or less formal, contingent on a number of factors such as the preferred method of the tutor for giving feedback, the time available, and so on. But they all share a common focus, which is the negotiation and completion of a particular assignment task for whichever module the student is engaged in at that moment. I refer to these practices collectively as *multi-method feedback*, and I will return to them later in this chapter.

But there are also more highly structured pedagogic episodes through which students come to know about assessment on the PGCE/CertEd. I refer to these as *assignment sessions*. And it is to these sessions, and their place within the joint enterprise of the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, that I shall first turn.

Moments of engagement: assignment sessions in the PGCE/CertEd

An attempt to explore all of those classroom activities or practices that in some way have something to do with assessment would be a massive task. Mindful of arguments about 'teaching to the test' and 'curriculum creep' (Mansell, 2007), it nonetheless seems right to say that students and tutors talk about assessment on a frequent basis: in seminars, in tutorials, via email and even when passing each other in the corridor. The centrality of assessment to processes of learning and teaching is an area of scholarly dispute. Nevertheless, to attempt to track all of those learning and teaching interactions mediated by the kinds of literacy artefacts already discussed that might have a bearing on student assessment, would be a considerable task. Nonetheless, being able to see, to *observe*, tutor and student behaviour and activity in the classroom that is related to assessment is undeniably important for my research. When designing my research, I decided that such an observation would be most useful, as well as practicable, if it was conducted in a small number of sessions where the

explication of an assignment is a substantive component. By this I mean that the assignment, and the module pack where it rests, is the topic of the observed session.⁵²

I refer to such a class as an *assignment session* (Tummons, 2010a). Such sessions are a common feature of the delivery of the PGCE/CertEd course across colleges. Assignment sessions vary in form, but have a uniform purpose. They aim to explicate the assignment processes for the module currently being undertaken. That is to say, the scheme of work for each of the modules that make up the course as a whole always includes a session where the substantive focus is on explaining the assignment and making sure that students understand what is required. In a typical such session, the PGCE/CertEd tutor employs a small number of student-centred teaching and learning activities that will allow students to gain an understanding of the assignment requirements of the module that they are undertaking. Tutors might ask students to paraphrase the module packs and give peer feedback, evaluating what they have read. Tutors might hold question and answer sessions, inviting students to comment on or question the assignment brief that is in front of them. And tutors might ask students to read the assignment brief and then explain it to each other or create a poster or PowerPoint presentation to deliver to the rest of the group. Assignment sessions such as these can therefore be seen as being important events within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice: events where the meaning and practice of the paradigmatic trajectory of assessment is negotiated.

So how are these assignment sessions constructed and conducted? What, exactly, happens when 'tutors go through the assignment with the students'? Or, to rephrase such questions so that they are aligned with the theoretical frameworks that I have established for my research, what kinds of practices allow students to make meaning relating to assessment within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice? What kinds of reified artefacts are created and used within the community? How does the tutor mediate these understandings? In order to answer these questions, I first provide some rich, descriptive examples of how such sessions

⁵² Refer also to chapters six and seven for more extensive methodological discussions of these observations.

are conducted, before looking at them again through a theoretical lens in order to unpack what is happening.

Assignment sessions: three case studies

Case study one: Friargate College

Designing and Planning for Learning is normally the first module to be taken by students on the PGCE/CertEd. In several ways, it serves as an introductory module for the course as a whole. It introduces students to the theoretical study that underpins the PGCE/CertEd curriculum (in the case of this module, through such content as models of learning, or motivation theory). It introduces reflective practice to the curriculum. And, finally, the complete portfolio for this module also requires the inclusion of samples of teaching documentation that students have produced in the workplace, as tutors. Thus, this first assignment neatly encapsulates all of the different modes of assessment that students will encounter throughout the course as a whole. The assignment asks for two essays, each of 1500-2000 words in length, titled “understanding the learning process”, and “managing the learning process”. In addition, students are asked to design a scheme of work, covering a minimum of five sessions, and two lesson plans. “Appropriate learning materials” for these two sessions also need to be produced. Students are also asked to complete a piece of reflective writing, where they are encouraged to reflect on what they have learned during the module. Although no indicative word count is given for this, tutors tend to suggest that an approximate word count of 250 words is appropriate.

At *Friargate College*, Carol uses a discovery learning exercise to facilitate an interactive assignment session.⁵³ This is a guided reading activity, designed to allow the students to work through the module pack using the questions and prompts on an additional handout (figure 9.1, below) to help them to understand for themselves what is in the pack, what the module is about, and what the assessment requirements for the module are. Students can

⁵³ See vignette 8.1, (chapter 8) for an account of the opening part of this PGCE/CertEd session.

work in pairs or on their own, reading through the module pack and comparing their readings with the rest of the group, and highlighting any points that at this stage seem problematic, significant or otherwise noteworthy. Through making the explication of the module pack an active, 'hands-on' process, Carol hopes that students will understand and remember what is required to a greater degree than if she simply tells the students what to do in using a more didactic, 'teacher-centred' approach. During the exercise, students take notes, annotate their module packs, ask questions and generally endeavour to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the module.

Vignette 9.1: working through the paperwork

It takes about twenty minutes for all of the students to get their module packs and worksheets for the activity that Carol has planned. As the papers have been passed around the class, Carol has been explaining the activity to the group: "I would talk you through it, but you'd rapidly lose the will to live", she tells them, adding that they "would be passive" rather than active if she simply reeled off a list of what needed to be done, and by when. As students turn to the activity sheet, she tells them: "I've provided you this year with a little set of guidelines. If at any point you have a burning question, jot it down." One student, holding the worksheet in front of him, asks, *sotto voce*: "question one: do I have to read it?"

The students get to work, and Carol walks around the room, taking part in conversations as she does so, reminding the group that through doing the exercise "hopefully you'll have engaged with the text [of the module pack] to try to make sense of it." There is another aside from one of the students: "you're using teacher talk again." But then again, why shouldn't she? After all, not only is she a teacher, but all of the students are as well. People are quite busy now, underlining words and phrases, using highlighter pens, and bantering as well:

"Who'd like to swap papers with me? I'm done."

"It's going to be a long evening on this table."

One student, reading from the module pack, puns to good effect: “fourteen to nineteen students’. Where are we going to get that many?”

Carol calls the plenary back together after three quarters of an hour to ask how the exercise has gone. Some students are stuck. Context seems to be the issue: for some, their workplace training or teaching practice does not seem reconcilable with the outcomes of the module. Carol reassures them that once the module is properly underway, things will become clearer. She is very supportive. Then she turns to answering some more specific questions, such as explaining what SENDA stands for, and, particularly, what “being critical” means in the context of academic writing: “you need to analyse it...you need to look at wider issues...it’s constructive criticism, if you like...[you could say] ‘a critique of’ as a replacement... *why* is this happening, *why* is this the way it is...*who* says it should be this way?”

There’s very little eye contact between Carol and the group at this point. They are nearly all looking down, not necessarily at the module pack, or around the room. Some students are visibly tired, and the last ten minutes are in fact mostly filled by Carol. As a final substantive point, she asks the group: “formative and summative – what do you think they mean?” But she ends up having to answer the question herself. And she finishes with three final, evaluative questions.

“Would you have found a glossary useful?”

A few answer “yes”; most remain silent.

“On the whole, did that actually work for you?”

Same response.

“Was it better than having me talk you through it?”

Same response. And then time for coffee or tea. It’s now half past seven in the evening.

The following activities are designed to enable you to:

- **Understand the module requirements**
- **Understand how these requirements can be met**

You will need a copy of the Module Pack to complete these activities
Activities can be completed **individually** or in **pairs**

Understand the module requirements

- Read through the Sections headed **Module Aims and Module Synopsis** (p5)
- Agree, and underline or highlight, the key terms/ phrases in each section
- Compare your results with another individual or pair of trainees and discuss any differences in your choices
- Use the information in the **Outline Syllabus** section (p5) to create a mind map which shows the main areas of study for this module
- Obtain a printed mind map from your tutor and compare your mind map with this one.
- Identify and discuss any differences between the two
- Read the **Learning Outcomes** (p5/6) and establish the two broad categories of learning that will be assessed
- Identify the two assessment options given in the **Assessment Strategy** (p6) section
- Tick any texts in the **Indicative Reading** section (p6) that you have already bought or borrowed
- Identify others that you feel would be appropriate for your own context
- Establish where you can find information on wider reading relating to this course

Understand how these requirements can be met

- Read through the assignment brief (p7)
- Summarise the range of the documents and supporting evidence required for this assignment by drawing up a brief list
- Add the word count requirements
- Read through the **Assessment Criteria** sections (p8) and underline / highlight any you think could be problematical for you. (It will be important to discuss any concerns you may have in your Initial Assessment tutorial so that appropriate action can be taken if necessary)

List overleaf any burning questions you may still have about this module
These will form the basis of a class discussion after these activities have been completed

Figure 9.1: Carol's instruction sheet for the assignment session. Phrases in bold type within the bullet points refer to the appropriate sections of the module pack, from where the text has been copied.

Figure 9.2: Jo's module pack. This is the assignment brief page in Jo's module pack as it looked after the assignment session run by Carol (as described above in vignette 9.1).

Understanding and Managing the Learning Process

Select a number of learners that you are currently teaching or training (this may be a 'group' of students or several individual learners)

SECTION 1 (Understanding the Learning Process) *analyse, put in factors affecting it, wider context*

Write a **critical account (of 1500-2000 words) containing:**

- A brief outline of the context (i.e. the course or other education/training provision, aims of the provision etc).
- Relevant information about the learners.
- An examination of some factors influencing their learning (talk to your students about their perceptions of what helps or hinders their learning). Give examples drawn from individual learners and include cultural and linguistic factors.
- A critical account of some aspects of learning theory, which are relevant to your work with these learners. Discuss the practical implications for your work with these learners.

A critique of why it is the way it is, who says it is this way

Do you understand the process? - motivation - differentiation - individuality (bring evidence)

SECTION 2 (Managing the Learning Process)

Taking into account the theoretical issues identified in Section One.

- Design a **Scheme of Work** and two detailed **Lesson Plans** for these learners. The scheme of work should cover a minimum of 6 learning sessions.
- Following your lesson plans for the two sessions, design and produce appropriate learning materials for those sessions.

will be doing background reading

Write a **critical review (of 1500-2000 words)** of your scheme of work, lesson plans and learning materials. This review should explain how you:

- Addressed the learning needs of your students
- Identified appropriate subject content and learning outcomes
- Designed appropriate learning activities and materials
- Identified issues of language, literacy and numeracy that would arise in the learning sessions
- Reflected on the effectiveness of your planning and learning materials and how they might be improved.

discuss in tutorial

time which the course allows

The review must show an awareness of learning theory and should draw on the issues you identified in Section One

SECTION 3 (Conclusion) *do one everything in place*

- Reflection on your learning in this module *- what did I know by now for have I moved?*
- References

Your reading for this assignment must include significant engagement with at least three texts, including at least one recent (post 2000) journal article. This engagement must be clear from the content of your work as well as from your references

Case study two: Millfield College

The second of the three modules that students take in year one of the PGCE/CertEd is called *Assessment and Professional Practice*. In form, it is something of a composite, consisting of two different genres of writing as well as the individual learning plan (ILP), which is embedded within this module.⁵⁴ Students are asked to write an academic essay on the subject of assessment. In addition, they are asked to write a reflective commentary relating to a number of sessions that they have taught, as well as a shorter reflective commentary on their learning throughout the module. The ILP, the essay and the commentaries are collected in a portfolio together with materials generated by the students during their teaching practice, which is submitted for formal assessment towards the end of the academic year, although tutors may mark sections of the file at an earlier stage if students wish. Because lesson observations are placed within the ILP, some students will begin to compile their portfolios at a relatively early point in the academic year. Normally, however, the essay component is not begun until after the completion of the earlier module *Designing and Planning for Learning*.

At Millfield College, Tony employs a class discussion format in order to unpack this assignment.⁵⁵ With only a small student group, this format seems entirely appropriate as a teaching strategy. Two literacy artefacts are at the centre of this session: the *module pack*, and the *essay plan* that he has devised.⁵⁶ Tony asks the students to read through the module pack and ask any questions that they have. After this, he hands out the essay plan and talks the group through the requirements of both the essay, in some depth, and the portfolio, in more general terms. He uses specific questions to introduce the subject matter of the next essay (“what do formative and summative mean?” and “what do norm referencing and criterion referencing mean?”), receiving generally well-informed answers, and also spends time raising issues and answering questions relating to the different forms that have to be filled in for both the ILP and the lesson observations: a process which he acknowledges can be confusing at first look, but which, he reassures the group, will all become clear.

⁵⁴ See chapter eight, figures 8.1 and 8.2.

⁵⁵ See chapter eight, vignette 8.2.

⁵⁶ See chapter eight, figure 8.3.

Case study three: Scarcroft College

Advanced Professional Practice is a year two module, which replicates several aspects of the year one module *Assessment and Professional Practice*. It asks students to write reflective commentaries on their teaching and continue to complete the ILP, following formats that are identical to the earlier module. Similarly, the first year module's requirements for teaching observations and the collection of appropriate resources that the students – as tutors – have been using are also mirrored by the latter module. The substantive difference between the two modules is in the essay component. For this year two module, students complete a small-scale action research project. This project aims to encourage creative approaches to teaching and learning in the classroom, by asking students to apply creative methods to an aspect of their teaching and then evaluating the results. This essay component is normally introduced in the second term of the academic year, although students will have already begun compiling their ILPs for the year, by which time students will have completed assignments for four modules in total.

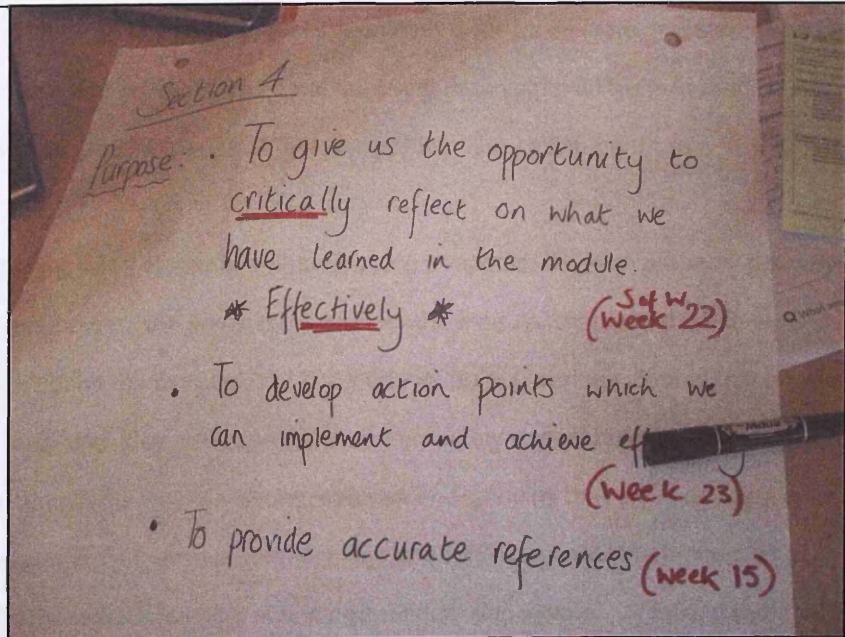
At *Scarcroft College*, Ruth positions a peer-group discovery learning exercise at the centre of her assignment session for the *Advanced Professional Practice* module. She splits the seminar group into four small groups, and each group is allocated one section of the module assignment to look at and discuss (there are four sections in total). As they discuss their allocated section, one member from each group makes notes, using a template that Ruth has provided (figure 9.3, below). As well as the template, Ruth also distributes the module pack and the scheme of work (which is printed on green paper to help distinguish it from the module pack). For the last part of the exercise, each group gives feedback to the whole class, using a flip chart to summarise their discussions, as well as raising any questions that they require answering.

This exercise requires small groups to focus on one section (there are 4 in total) in order to discuss the tasks and so forth, which make up the module. Once you have discussed the section you have been asked to look at, write out on flip chart paper a simple and precise guide which one of you will feedback to the whole group. Don't forget to answer the question underneath the table.

Section 3: purpose	Assignment tasks	Evidence required	Queries

Figure 9.3 (above): Ruth's template for the assignment session. When creating the templates, Ruth ensured that each was labelled appropriately: so, this example shows the template used by group three when discussing section 3 of the assignment brief.

Figure 9.4: page one of a flip chart prepared by one of the small groups during Ruth's assignment session – in this case, in discussing section 4 of the assignment brief. In red pen, the group have written in links to the course scheme of work (the green document which is visible in the top right hand corner of the photograph).



Making sense of assignment briefs: some theoretically informed considerations

The assignment briefs, around which all of the activities discussed above revolve, are written in fairly straightforward English, using a few – but not too many – examples of jargon, and are written for a student body who are also teachers and trainers, and who themselves, one can assume, have to deliver assessment advice and guidance to their own students. It might be assumed that what the students know, as teachers, can be straightforwardly transferred to their role of being students, thereby allowing the students to help themselves: after all, in their roles as teachers, they will often have to interpret and explain assignment requirements to their own students. Such a hypothesis would support the dominant discourses of *key, transferable and generic skills*, neatly summarised as a *skills-based approach* (Baynham, 2000), that underpin not only the PGCE/CertEd course and explanations but also broader approaches to student learning in HE more generally and conceptualisations of the transferability of skills that underpin debates about graduate employability (Burns and Sinfield, 2003; Cottrell, 2003; Greetham, 2001; Murphy, 2001). This skills based approach to student reading and writing, the kind of approach that views study skills as discrete, transferable and generic, would suggest that students would not have any meaningful difficulty in reading and understanding their assignment brief, and then completing their assignment.

It seems obvious to say that if students are undertaking a module, they are probably not very likely to be able to understand the assignment brief for the module, simply and precisely because they haven't done the module yet. The students do not (perhaps cannot) know what they are going to study until they have done it. And they surely cannot be expected to understand in any meaningful way the issues, debates and opinions that they are being asked to explore and evaluate in their essays, learning logs and reflections until the processes of working through the module, of reading, attending seminars and lectures, of talking with their tutor and each other, are well underway. But if students are less than likely to understand the assignment brief – and perhaps, by extension, other course documents – why does the university insist on its distribution and why do college tutors feel so compelled to spend so much time *at the beginning* of the period of study of the module going through it?

I feel that most years I take on the role of interpreter. I feel that it's my responsibility, to some point, to try to act as that sort of bridge between what they do know [and] what they need to know to be successful in completing the assignment. [...] I think they don't have the background knowledge, the underpinning knowledge, to be able to make sense of what the assignment is asking of them.

(Carol, tutor, Friargate College)

Myself and many other people actually run the sessions within the [course] where a group activity is to look at the module assignment: "do you understand what's in the module?"

(Richard, course leader, university)

According to accounts such as these, the assignment session is more than just an opportunity for tutors to give students tips about what to put in their files. It also becomes a problem-solving session, a session where learning happens because what is in the module assignment is problematic for the students, because it is more or less new to them.

I think if people are going to be learning about technical terms I don't see any reason in [not] saying "what you will learn in this module includes things like constructivism and behaviourism," and if you're talking about assessment, "reliability and validity." and so on. There's no reason why we need to stop the students scratching their heads and thinking.

(Richard, course leader, university)

For many (but by no means all) students, these sessions are invaluable:

Some of the wording, how they put it across [...] I thought it could have been simplified.

(Tom, student, Scarcroft College)

...I looked at it and I, one of my biggest criticisms is language. And I think there's an interesting thing with academia and language that a lot of institutions feel that they need

to speak a different language to be acknowledged as an academic institution. Because if you put it into day to day...speak it wouldn't have the kudos.

(Beth, student, Scarcroft College)

It is not just the unfamiliarity of some of the language within the module pack that is of issue, however. Broader issues of readability, of the design of the document, also play a part:

Ruth (tutor, Scarcroft College): the graphology isn't good. [...] Well, erm, we're looking at the visual aspect of it now. Font size, font style, no white space. These are all things that do not support literacy. And I think that supporting literacy isn't just about teaching somebody how to put full stops in. It's actually about supporting the whole reading, and if you make reading accessible, then that is what is necessary.

Jonathan: do you think this is something that is noticed by your own students?

Ruth: ...they've all said they look at these and they don't like them, they don't like reading them. And I also think that they are rather confusing because they have the assessment there on one page, then they have the assessment on another page. Which bit is the student supposed to refer to? Which bit is the tutor supposed to refer to? It's cluttered. And clutter does not make for good reading, and it doesn't invite anybody to read.

The transparency, and hence the usability, of the module pack can be seen as related to two factors. Firstly, there is the way that it is worded and the unfamiliarity of some of the language; secondly there is the layout and the structure, the physical appearance of the text. Ruth's insightful analysis rests on her multimembership of communities of practice: as well as working as a PGCE/CertEd tutor, she also works as a tutor for literacy subject specialist awards. Her professional expertise provides her with a powerful insight into this, an insight that is relatively uncommon amongst other tutors who, subscribing to a skills-based approach, feel that the students, as tutors, should indeed be able to help themselves:

I often feel like I'm reassuring them that they will be able to do it. Because when they look at all the documentation it's very daunting for a lot of the students. And yet it

shouldn't be, because they're all teaching and they should be familiar with outcomes and criteria [and] specifications.

(Julie, tutor, Nunthorpe College)

Julie explains this mismatch thus:

Julie: I sometimes wonder if students go into **student syndrome** [my emphasis] and

Jonathan: what's student syndrome?

Julie: they don't always read everything, or they get bored, "not got the time". The only worry is, there is one worry. If we're giving them so much assistance and help but they don't read, the fact they might not read it, but sometimes I wonder if we're helping them too much and then they think, "oh well if I haven't put it in Julie will just point out what we need to do".

Student syndrome is a term I shall appropriate here. And other tutors and students also identify this phenomenon:

I sometimes wonder whether professionals, when they walk into a classroom setting, revert to a less than professional stance in terms of "I'm now a student" [laughs]. And I sometimes wonder, because some of the behaviours exhibited are very 'studenty' and not professional.

(Helen, tutor, Scarcroft College)

The...role reversal is fantastic. [...] I can go into the room, I can sit down. I don't have to be all energetic and enthusiastic about what I'm going to do. I can just sit there and soak it all in. And if I feel like I need to converse, I can. But I'm not under any pressure to converse with anybody within the group, other than when we're asked.

(Beth, student, Scarcroft College)

I do turn back into a student when I go back into [college], definitely. ...My mobile comes out and I start texting under the table [laughs]. [...] And you can see that across the class. For a few of us it's sort of a bit of a time to sit back and relax and think, "well, I've got to sit here for three hours". And there's a few of us of a similar age, and we just sort of lark about a bit really, and don't take it very seriously.

(Louanna, student, Nunthorpe College)

There are a few things to unpack here. On the one hand, there is the expectation of tutors, working within a discourse of transferable skill or cognition, that students can and should be 'helping themselves' to make sense of the course requirements: after all, they are all teachers. At the same time, tutors recognise the ways in which their students take on aspects of 'student behaviour or identity' when entering the seminar room. Tutors use this concept of student syndrome to explain why an unproblematic, skills-based approach does not seem to work. Students are perceived as becoming more dependent, as needing to be spoon-fed, as lacking 'learner autonomy'. But the implications of this approach need to be considered. According to a deficit model such as this, all that is required is for the individual student to 'learn how to do assignments' (whatever this might mean), and then this particular aspect of student syndrome will have been successfully managed. And the best way to do this is through the provision of assignment sessions.

But what is actually happening in these sessions? Explaining them as simply involving 'teaching students how to do assignments' seems insufficient, not least as the sessions do not seem to be achieving this aim: otherwise, why would more such sessions be needed for each subsequent assignment, not to mention the support given in tutorials, or in written feedback (a subject to which I shall return later). Why do module packs and assignment briefs continue to cause difficulties for the students?⁵⁷

Remembering that the PGCE/CertEd constitutes a community of practice, students can be seen as tracing a paradigmatic trajectory within this community as they engage in increasingly

⁵⁷ For what follows, see also Tummons (2008).

meaningful participation within the PGCE/CertEd community. If assessment, as reified in the kinds of text-based artefacts that have already been explored, is one of the *key markers* along this trajectory, then an engagement with these texts, which constitute part of the shared repertoire of the community, is necessary for meaning making and learning to take place. Therefore, an understanding of how these artefacts for assessment work provides an insight into student learning as participation in the repertoire of the community. If the module pack, containing the assignment brief, is posited as being central to this process, then the assignment brief is more than 'just' an assignment brief: it can be conceptualised as operating in two distinct modes that impact on student meaning making and participation.

Firstly, the module pack can be conceptualised as a literacy artefact that reifies aspects of the practice of the PGCE/CertEd community. In this mode, the process of interpreting the assignment brief is an activity by which students participate in the work of the community. They begin to learn something about the practice of the PGCE/CertEd community and also something about some of the other communities within the constellation of which the PGCE/CertEd community is a member: that is to say, they learn about teaching and learning in the PCET sector, about "constructivism and behaviourism" and "formative and summative assessment", and so on.

In addition to this, the module pack can be conceptualised as a literacy artefact that reifies a milestone along the community's paradigmatic trajectory, which has to be negotiated by the student (Wenger 1998: 156). In this mode, an assignment brief enfolds a particular activity (that is, assessment), the successful negotiation of which will demonstrate the student's fuller competence and experience in the practice of the community (Wenger 1998: 216). That is to say, they learn about what to do for the assignment, about how to 'be students' for the purposes of accreditation. They acquire or enhance a *performative identity* within their community of practice. Nor does this performative identity go unchecked. Indeed, if we accept that the phenomenon of *student syndrome* is authentic, this performative identity about 'how to be a student' extends beyond simply 'larking about a bit', and encompasses a more-or-less learned helplessness which means that when tutors become students, they

'automatically' expect to receive the kind of assignment support that they give to their students in turn, at the same time that their PGCE tutors are expecting them to draw on their experiences as tutors in order to make sense of the assignment without such intervention:

It would have been helpful I think for somebody to sit down and say, because we were given these sort of module packs, for somebody to actually sit down and maybe this is what I know my students expect from me and I say no we don't teach like that, you take responsibility, but actually ideally having someone sitting and saying to me, right, okay, designing and planning for learning, what you need to do is this, this, this and this, and I'm going to talk you through the pack. But I appreciate that actually, you know, that's not the best way of learning and, you know, my students expect me to do that. And I don't do it.

(Jo, student, Friargate College)

These processes of *negotiation of meaning* are enfolded in literacy events that are mediated by the kinds of literacy artefacts that I have already discussed.⁵⁸ These literacy activities are in fact quite complex. Firstly, there are those literacy events that surround the assignment brief. These include several literacy practices: talk around the text in the form of tutor-led dialogue to explain the assignment brief to the students followed by question and answer, or peer-led workshops. Secondly, there are literacy events where the text around which talk takes place is different. Rather than talking around the assignment brief, talk takes place around a newly-reified artefact: an additional artefact such as a writing frame, an essay plan or a PowerPoint presentation. And finally, students may themselves create texts in order to help them in their meaning making processes, by making their own notes during any one or all of the talking-around-the-text events already described. They may annotate existing texts, highlighting key words and phrases. And they may create or add to other texts in a format prescribed by their tutor during the assignment session, as part of the assignment session exercise, such as a poster or a gapped handout.

⁵⁸ Refer to chapter eight.

However, to describe the module pack simply as a document that students find 'hard to understand' would be to ignore the complex qualities of the pack as an artefact within a community of practice, not least as all of the members of that community stand in slightly different positions to it. Some students understand them perfectly well; others require lots of help. Moreover, it is not unusual for tutors to check their understanding of assignment requirements with their colleagues and to express confusion as to the conduct of assignment when attending internal moderation meetings. Therefore, in order to understand fully how the assignment brief, and by extension the module pack, 'works', it is necessary to understand the complexities that surround it in terms of how it is used, read and responded to. A *transferable skills* discourse would assume that if a student can read one assignment brief, then s/he could read them all. But this discourse fails to acknowledge the different relationships that a student as reader might have with a particular artefact within a community of practice. These relationships can be understood as being experienced or enacted in three modes.

Firstly, we can conceptualise the student as a reader who understands what the assignment brief is asking them to do even though they have not done the module yet. In this sense, the assignment brief is not yet fully *transparent* but will become so as the student progresses with their studies and thereby engages more fully within the community of practice. Secondly, we can conceptualise the student as a reader who does not understand what the assignment brief is asking them to do because it has been written in a discursive style (that is, using particular discourses) that is unfamiliar and/or because they have not done the module yet. Again, in this sense, the assignment brief is not yet fully transparent but will become so as the student progresses with their studies and thereby engages more fully within the community. And thirdly, we can conceptualise the student as a reader who does not understand what the assignment brief is asking them to do because it has been written as an artefact that requires a pedagogic accompaniment as part of a process of meaning making. In this sense, the assignment brief is not intended to be fully transparent and the student will have to rely on interpretation, through the pedagogic activity of the tutor, for the transparency that will allow meaning making.

And, finally, it is important to make sense of these student-text relationships in terms of the communities of practice framework that I have already established. The first two relational modes posited above assume (*pace* Wenger, 1998) a link between increasing participation, the transparency of artefacts, and the use of those artefacts in the negotiation of meaning within the community. The unfamiliarity of the discursive style of the artefact can be negotiated by the student as they travel along a trajectory of fuller participation. The third position foregrounds an important issue that Wenger's work leaves relatively untouched: pedagogy. According to this position, the student's meaning making is reliant on some pedagogic activity that must be mediated by the tutor. Indeed, there is an imbalance of power surrounding the literacy practices that enfold the assignment brief. The only way that the student can make sense of the assignment brief is through successful participation in some kind of pedagogic activity: some kind of instruction. And it is important to note that this power imbalance operates irrespective of whether or not such an imbalance was a conscious part of the design of the artefact at the time of its reification.

Learning by doing: getting to know the assignment process

Assignment sessions, therefore, constitute a *conspicuous moment of engagement* between tutors and students, as the latter begin to negotiate their trajectories through the PGCE/CertEd community of practice. They occur regularly throughout the academic cycle: indeed, assignment sessions for the very last module of the course are as carefully planned by tutors and willingly attended by students, as are the sessions for the first. But there is more to learning about the assignments than simply having them described during a plenary session. If we accept that one of the fundamental aspects of a community of practice (or, indeed, of other theories of learning as socially situated) is that people learn by actually doing things, not simply by being told about them, then it follows that in some sense students must be learning about doing assignments by actually doing assignments.

When I write about 'doing assignments', I mean to draw attention to a process that actually contains several elements. Firstly, students produce a 'draft' assignment, which is handed in

for initial scrutiny by the tutor: a process that tends to be referred to within the PGCE/CertEd constellation as formative assessment (although the applicability of that term to this process is somewhat debateable – an argument that I shall return to later). Secondly, there is the process of feedback, always written and sometimes accompanied by a tutorial. And then, students hand in a 'final' submission, which goes to be formally assessed. These final submissions can be referred if something is lacking and students do therefore have a further opportunity to pass the module in question. Final assignments for all modules only receive a 'pass', a 'refer' or a 'fail' – they are ungraded. Final submissions also receive written feedback, for which tutors have to use an official *tutor feedback form*, which may then help students as they approach the next assignment in the course.

To summarise, students are able to take part in a range of practices by which they can learn about doing assignments, at various stages of which they receive guidance and feedback, and which affords them, through the opportunity to submit draft submissions, a space to 'practice' doing them. At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to these collected practices as opportunities for *multi-method feedback*, and it is to a critical appreciation of these that I shall now turn.

Moments of engagement: multi-method feedback

Essays and feedback at Millfield College

Jonathan: what do you do with that written feedback once you get it? He gives you your file

Margaret (student, Millfield College): ...I did read it, because he sort of numbers it, so you can actually find it in your assignment, have a look, and see where you could have done better. But he's also pointed out things that you probably put in that were additional to what he expected as well, which was good. It's the pass, it's the pass or [laughs]...it would be nice to know where you got in that pass, whether you just scraped it through or whether there's different levels of, it's either pass or fail isn't it?

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT	
<p>Note to tutors: As well as commenting on the overall quality of work and its relation to module outcomes, please draw attention to issues relating to key transferable skills and make recommendations for further development.</p> <p>If tutor re-assessment or referral applies, please make clear the further work necessary. When the required work has been completed satisfactorily, make further comments supporting the final result, which should be recorded at the end of the form.</p>	
<p>Module Outcomes Achieved (please circle one): YES</p>	
<p>Integration of theory and practice (Tick to indicate acceptable for level of module) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>Fine. This is a very good assignment, and a variety of themes have been discussed thoughtfully and critically, with appropriate references to reading and research materials</p> <p>You have made good use of theory in backing up the main themes of your assignment, and demonstrated a solid, developing awareness of the theoretical issues as they relate to your professional practice.</p>	

Figure 9.5 (above): an extract from page one of Tony's feedback for Margaret. Tony uses a number of stock phrases when completing his feedback forms, which he can drop into a word document as he completes the paperwork. Although some tutors do not use this technique, it is an approach to facilitating the writing of feedback that has in the past been endorsed by the quality manager for the PGCE/CertEd at network meetings. The two sentences that Tony writes here are examples of such phrases. The 'note to tutors' – effectively a series of reminders or instructions regarding the ways in which Holgate University wants feedback to be provided – is another important feature of the form.

Tony, the PGCE/CertEd course leader at Millfield College, takes the first year students for their first module, *Designing and Planning for Learning*.⁵⁹ As is typical across the college network, he encourages students to submit a rough draft of their assignment for feedback prior to the final deadline for the module. Feedback on these rough drafts tends to consist of annotations on the script, and invariably focuses on highlighting things that students might have missed, or only partially covered, that would prevent the assignment from being awarded a pass. Feedback on final submissions, by contrast, is more developmental. When marking final work, Tony numbers the script and then writes corresponding notes on the *tutor feedback form*. The tutor feedback form, in common with other course documentation, is distributed electronically to colleges, and contains several sections. There is a section for recording formative feedback, a section for comment on the integration of theory and practice, a section for comment on the use of reflection, and a section for comment on the application of key

⁵⁹ See above, and also chapter eight, vignette 8.2.

skills within the assignment. A 'general comments' box, which tutors use to varying degrees, follows these boxes: it is in this section that Tony puts his comments.

General Comments:

A good first term, and a good first assignment.

The module outcomes have all been met here. You write with fluency and intelligence, and your commitment to, and enthusiasm for, your work shines through.

You have studied hard and read around the subject, and this comes through in your writing

The module outcomes have all been met here.

- 1 Include a signed module cover sheet please [redacted]. Contents page included. Well presented. Good practice here. What is your opinion re a Glossary page [redacted]. You could have listed FENTO, APEL, APLA, CACHE, etc
- 2 Good intro where you say what the assignment will cover, however the way to improve your intro is to review what the assignment is asking for and also include some aspects of the theory you are going to consider within the assignment
- 3 You have researched the motivations and future goals in a meaningful way here [redacted]. Your research and analysis for the initial assessment processes is also a joy to read.
- 4 You have a good idea of what barriers your students are experiencing and what strategies you use to overcome them. I thought this section on factors influencing learning was full of insight far beyond a new teacher's experience. Well done
- 5 An example of good practice here and clear evidence of what a sustained system of support can achieve

Figure 9.6 (above): an extract from page two of Margaret's feedback from Tony. In comparison to other sections of the form, the general comments are more personal and specific, although predominantly evaluative rather than developmental.

The majority of tutors, however, continue to hand write feedback forms, although the university is keen to encourage the electronic completion of course documentation wherever possible, not least to act as an exemplar for the students on the course.

albeit by varying degrees. R & M worked through this task well, M obviously is most comfortable with his use of spoken English at work.

Good! since you observe your learners effectively as part of formative assessment

Normanton Session 10: delivered 11th December 2006

The lack of T and P for the last few sessions is concerning – they have been having difficulties with outside pressures (car problems before driving to Poland for Christmas). However, we continued with the prepared session, working on the past tense. I hope to have some discussion on different Christmas customs, and what they have done over the holiday break, when the classes resume in the New Year.

The listening task (Appendix 5 – Track 7.8) was simple for M, but V did struggle. The workbook gave a feedback/checking option that stretched everyone. The discussions about 'What did Simon do? / When did it happen?' opened up into personal recollections over the last ten years and important historical dates for Polish people, back to the fourteenth century! This was good practice for using the past tenses, whilst V did struggle to keep up, he did contribute. He was correcting himself 'do/did' during the session.

Can you plan for this difference in ability in future?

Cranswick Sessions: W14 delivered 23rd January 2007

This observed session went well: the learners engaged with the tasks and did not find the extra body attending a distraction. The observer noted the limited facilities available within the small training room, but made several positive

Our 12 hours should be additional to 20 planned sessions

Figure 9.7 (above): an extract from a reflection on teaching written by Mary, a student at Millfield College, and annotated by Lesley, the second member of the teacher-training team there. The three comments on this script represent three kinds of feedback response (*pace Ivanic et al., 2000: 55*). Firstly, there is a positive comment to engage in dialogue with the student. Secondly, there is a developmental question for Mary to consider during a future teaching session. Thirdly, there is specific guidance about the mechanics of constructing the assignment: in this case, a reminder as to how the teaching log should be constructed, and which sessions should be logged there.

Essays and feedback at Scarcroft College

At Scarcroft College, the facility for students to submit draft assignments prior to a 'final' submission is managed more actively than at Millfield, where the process can fairly be described as somewhat *ad hoc*. Here, students are given suggested hand-in dates for draft assignments, which are then returned with feedback that has been given using a standard formative feedback pro-forma that has been designed by Helen, the course leader. This is a

form that not all members of the teaching team actively prefer to use,⁶⁰ but which for Helen has naturally become a standard aspect of a broader repertoire of feedback practice:

Helen (course leader, Scarcroft College): I'll show you an example. I annotate the brief, and I also have a formative feedback form with the learning outcomes on, and also wider headings like FEnto, LLUK, transferable skills... I do all that, and just to give them triggers really, things to think about, reflections, evaluation, presentation.

Jonathan: and when it comes to summative feedback, the final submission [...]

Helen: I still give written annotations on the brief but I use the university pro-forma.

And if they want to sit down and discuss, person to person, concerning the assignments, I'm happy to do that.

Jonathan: and in terms of the feedback that you write on the brief...what kinds of things do you find yourself putting?

Helen: I might sort of give encouraging feedback such as 'well researched' or 'could you develop this further'. I have a thing about spelling and punctuation and grammar so I do correct that and hopefully the trainees will take that on board. If something is referenced incorrectly or not referenced at all I'll put an arrow next to it and 'source'. If they've referenced something incorrectly I'll give an example underneath in the margin at the bottom. And if they get something totally wrong, I would say 'I think you'll find this isn't correct, perhaps you would like to read further'.

At Millfield, Tony and Lesley encourage their students to come for one-to-one tutorials, whether to discuss a 'draft' or a 'final' submission. The same facility is available at Scarcroft, but is approached more circumspectly by the teacher-training team there, simply because the large size of the student cohort makes the provision of tutorials very difficult. At Millfield, there

⁶⁰ The rather ambivalent evaluation of this formative feedback form by Ruth, another PGCE/CertEd tutor at Scarcroft College, can be found in the preceding chapter (p.114). I also feel obliged, taking a reflexive turn in my writing, to note that during the two terms that I spent working at Scarcroft College, I did not use these formative feedback forms at all when marking the two PGCE/CertEd assignments that I was responsible for. Instead, when students handed in a draft assignment (a practice I sometimes discouraged when I previously worked at my other two colleges, preferring instead to hold tutorials where students would present their ideas for assignments), I asked for them to email me a word document, which I marked up using the track changes feature. Examples of the formative feedback pro-forma can be found at appendix 8.3.

are rarely more than ten students in a year group. At Scarcroft, there are usually twenty-five and sometimes more. But the allocation of staffing to each year group is the same at each college. As such, the Scarcroft team – and the students – frequently need to rely on the provision of written feedback that invariably has to stand on its own, rather than be accompanied by a face-to-face conversation in a tutorial, simply due to pressures of time.

Not present.
Presentation, Grammar/Spelling: Fine. Remember to include a contents page and page number each page. You should consider sub headings for different parts of the essay.
Evidence of Reading: Bibliography/referencing: You need to include a reference list in alphabetical order of author. For direct quotes remember to include the page number. Please date every theorist mentioned in brackets after their name. For example : Bloom (1954) states... Check in text citations against the Harvard convention.
Learning Outcomes met? Yes
Suggestions for Amendment: See annotated brief. Remember to submitted formative feedback with annotated brief in final submission.
Demonstrates Equal Opportunities and Inclusive Learning Yes, very inclusive environment. Contextualised well.
Adequate Analysis of Concepts and Principles: Yes.
Fento/SVUK Standards & transferable key skills Not considered. See email attachments.
Reference to minimum core where appropriate? Not present.

Figure 9.8: page two of the formative feedback for the *professional practice* assignment provided by Helen for Tom, a first year student at Scarcroft College. In writing this feedback, Helen demonstrates the intertextual nature of the feedback process. There is a reference to the citation of primary sources. In addition, Tom is directed both to annotations that Helen has made on his script, and to pdf files relating to the LLUK professional standards that Helen emailed to the whole group so that they could use them in their assignments. In addition, more structural advice relating to assignment layout (page numbering, the provision of a contents page and so on) is given.

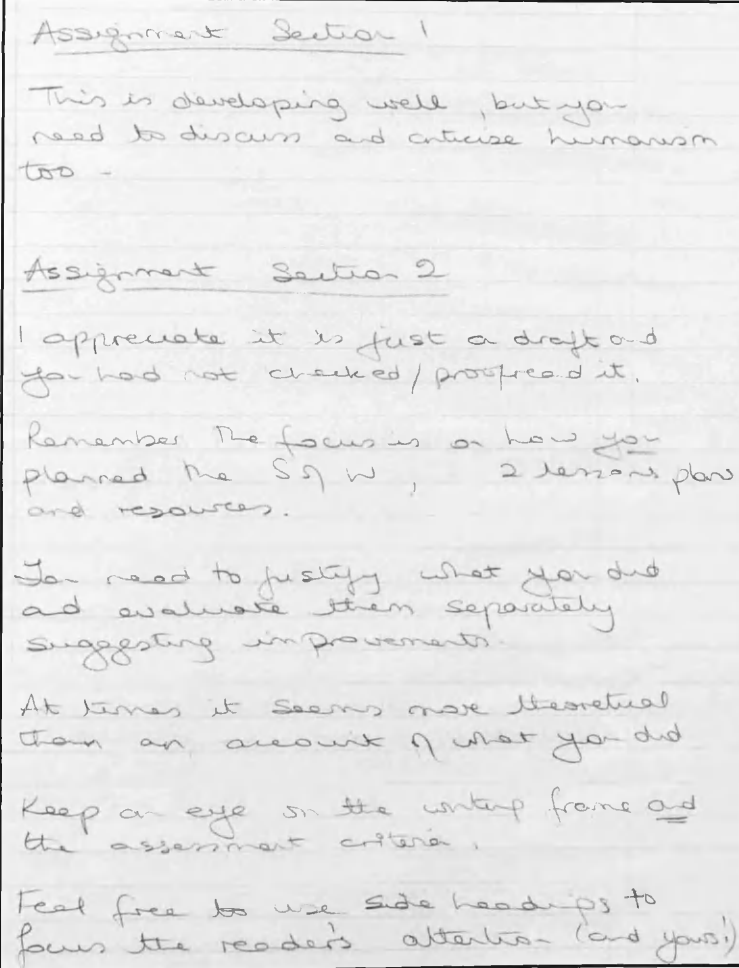
Essays and feedback at Nunthorpe College

Even on the feedback sheet I'm giving them examples of what they should include...which, I wonder if I'm being too prescriptive...part of it is trying to make my life easy, to ensure that they've got the right kind of information in the first place. But I am always in a dilemma because I always think that someone like **you** [emphasis added] will say, "Julie, you're spoon feeding them. You're giving them too much."

(Julie, course leader, Nunthorpe College)

At Nunthorpe College, a very intricate system of feedback pro forma and deadlines has been established by Julie, the course tutor. The different module assignments are broken up into

their constituent parts, and a separate draft feedback process is then applied to each. So, for example, when giving feedback relating to the first module of the course, *Designing and Planning for Learning*, Louanna, a PGCE student, received separate feedback for each of the two essay components, and then also for the 'practical' part of the assignment where she is required to create and collate a series of lesson plans, resources and schemes of work:



Assignment Section 1
This is developing well, but you need to discuss and critique humanism too -

Assignment Section 2
I appreciate it is just a draft and you had not checked / proofread it.
Remember the focus is on how you planned the S of W, 2 lessons plans and resources.
You need to justify what you did and evaluate them separately suggesting improvements.
At times it seems more theoretical than an account of what you did
Keep an eye on the writing frame and the assessment criteria.
Feel free to use side headings to focus the reader's attention (and yours!)

Figure 9.9: first draft feedback written by Julie for Louanna. Louanna received this in February.

Julie typically handwrites feedback on A4 paper for first draft submissions. In the example given here, the feedback once again includes those key feedback objectives that other tutors in other colleges provide. There is guidance as to required content, advice about how to develop the line of argument, and advice on essay style and structure. There is also reference to two other documents that Julie wants Louanna to refer to as she completes her

assignments: the writing frame⁶¹ and the assessment criteria (which appear in the module pack). Again, assessment is conspicuously shown to be a highly intertextual practice. When what might be termed the second draft is submitted, Julie then uses a more formal formative feedback pro forma. At this stage, she also offers students a one-to-one tutorial to talk through the second draft feedback. With a relatively small student cohort (normally around fifteen per group), tutorial provision can be, and often is, comprehensive.

	Outcomes	✓	Comments
K1	Demonstrates a basic understanding of theories and models of learning	✓	Thorough review.
K2	Understands the relationship between learning outcomes, the needs of different learners and the design of teaching/learning activities	✓	
A1	Plans effectively to achieve identified learning outcomes	✓	
A2	Prepares teaching and learning materials	✓	
A3	Analyses the use of language, literacy and numeracy skills within teaching and learning	✓	A little more - but almost there
A4	Evaluates learning and teaching	✓	Just a little more evaluation. A tendency to describe 'justifying strategies'.
	Scheme of Work	✓	
	2 Lesson Plans	✓	
	Resources	✓	
	Further Comments	✓	Reflection on learning on the whole module

Figure 9.10 (above and below): second draft feedback, using the Nunthorpe formative feedback pro forma (above). As is the case here, it is common for the tutors at Nunthorpe to write additional comments on the other side of the page (below). Louanna received this feedback in May. She received her 'final' summative feedback for the module in June.

* For each, you should summarise to what extent they were successful and what improvements you could/would make next time.

Re-read your assignment. There are a few sections where the meaning is unclear, and I suggest you reword the sentences.

* See my comment re cogitation at the end

* Take care with apostrophes

⁶¹ Refer to chapter eight, p.118.

After this, students then hand in their 'final' submission, although it is important to remember that if this final submission is only graded as a 'refer' rather than a 'pass', the student is allowed to have the work back and then resubmit:

Louanna (student, Nunthorpe College): we have draft deadlines, but obviously when you hand your draft in, sometimes its not finished. So once we had the finished thing [...] and you have to hand in the draft on the deadline, and I regularly, my hand in of my draft is just the first, the introduction, some of the middle bit, and some of the, it's never fully complete. So you hand in the draft and that basically shows that you're on the right lines and you've started, I guess. [...] That gets feedback on and you get it back. You hand in a finished copy, if you like, and hopefully that comes back with a, and I guess that's the real hand in if you like. That comes back with comments on.

Jonathan: pass or refer?

Louanna: well no, it comes back with 'please do this or please do that'.

Jonathan: so that finished copy doesn't come back as either a pass or a refer?

Louanna: it's not really a finished, the first time we hand it in, it's just a rough draft. The second time we hand it in would be classed as the draft hand in, I guess. And that will come back with a lot of comments on. And then the next time you hand it in, it will come back with a lot less comments on, but it normally comes back with some comments on.

Making sense of drafts, feedback and tutorials: some theoretically informed considerations

In the first part of this chapter, I explained how an *assignment session* could be understood as one example of a formally structured pedagogic activity within the learning architecture of the PGCE/CertEd community of practice. The practice of writing draft assignments and receiving written feedback on these, sometimes accompanied by tutorials, is, I argue, another. As such, writing draft assignments can be understood as a process by which students can receive feedback as to their ongoing progress as they seek to create an assignment that will

meet the assignment criteria and learning outcomes for the module in question. Seen in this way, writing draft assignments, as well as writing final submissions, can be understood as being practices through which students learn and hence deepen their engagement within the community of practice. By this I mean that it is in part through completing assignments that students learn about learning theory, how best to structure a scheme of work, how to sequence a lesson, assessment theory, how to construct a marking scheme and such like. But writing assignments can also be understood as enabling another kind of learning, which is to do not with the course content as such, but with how the course is done, how it is enacted, or practiced. Students learn about how to do assignments within the PGCE/CertEd, through doing assignments on the PGCE/CertEd. When describing the assignment sessions, I argued that the module packs, activities, handouts and other text-based artefacts that are employed during such sessions needed to be understood as working in several different ways, as not only enabling meaning making relating to the content of the course (that is to say, the teacher-training curriculum), but also relating to the students' identity within the PGCE/CertEd community: their *performative identities* as students. Similar practices can be found enfolded within the draft/final assignment submission and tutorial processes, and these also need to be carefully unpacked.

Students receive written feedback on pro formas, on pages of A4 paper and in the margins of assignments. Students are told to look at textbooks, policy documents and journal articles, which are distributed in class, at tutorials, via a virtual learning environment or via email. Students are asked to refer to assignment criteria and writing frames when organizing and then writing their own assignments. Put simply, students receive significant amounts of guidance, of feedback, regarding their assignments. What is significant, however, is the nature of the advice that tutors give, which is disproportionately biased in favour of what Ivanic et al. refer to as feedback that corrects and evaluates student work, as distinct from feedback that engages in a dialogue with the student (2000: 55-61). Those assignments that I was given permission to read contained feedback that predominantly fell within these categories. Moreover, this bias would appear to be reflected across the network as a whole. In 2006, I was given limited access to all of the student work that had been submitted for external

examination,⁶² and I read through all of the files for the *Designing and Planning for Assessment* module. In total, 85 files were submitted for external examination from across the college network for the module. When reading feedback, I evaluated how it had been given (whether on feedback pro forma or on the scripts themselves) according to a slightly simplified version of the feedback taxonomy proposed by Ivanič et al. (op cit.). I looked at the feedback from four perspectives: whether the feedback provided *corrections* to the work; whether the feedback *evaluated* the work against model answers or expected answers; whether the feedback *engaged* in dialogue with the student, through raising discussion points derived from an issue that the student had written about, for example; and whether the feedback gave advice regarding essay and/or assignment construction *skills* more generally. Of the 85 files, all of them provided corrections and all of them evaluated the work against model or expected answers. 78 provided feedback regarding assignment skills. But only 16 gave feedback that engaged in developmental dialogue with the student, equally distributed between developmental feedback that was written on scripts, and feedback that was given on the standard pro forma. Admittedly, this data represents an analysis of feedback practice on just one module in just one academic year and as such needs to be treated in a circumspect manner, but is to some extent reinforced not only by my own reading of students' assignments from the 2007/8 and 2008/9 academic years, but also by comments made by the chief external examiner in their report from 2007:

The range of summative assessment feedback offered might be summarised as including:

- Confirmation that criteria were met
- Encouragement and praise
- Supportive comments related to difficulties and workload
- Specific critical comments where students needed to improve their work
- Engagement with students' work, including commentary and discussion and specific suggestions for avenues to pursue further
- List of areas for future development in summary form.

⁶² All of the files were put in storage boxes in a secure unused classroom, where they were kept for two days after the external examiners' meeting, before being put into storage and later returned to colleges. I was able to spend one full day in this classroom.

These different forms of assessment feedback **varied across the work seen, and it might be worth tutors considering the extent to which they individually offer these different forms of feedback** [my emphasis].

(Chief external examiner's report, 2007).

Therefore it can be concluded that the *variety* that is found within written feedback practice has a number of important implications for students within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, which impact on the students, as newcomers or apprentices, in a number of ways. For those students who receive corrective and evaluative feedback only, participation and therefore learning is in some ways impeded or restricted. This is not to say that they are not learning in many other ways, not least thanks to the considerable efforts that tutors go to when teaching the PGCE/CertEd curriculum. Nor do I wish to deny the learning that accrues as a part of the process of corrective or evaluative feedback. What I simply mean to say is that for these students, one opportunity for meaningful conversation, for *mutual engagement* in the practice of the community through developmental feedback (or, to use a more appropriate term, *feedforward* (Knight, 2002, 2006b)), is lost sight of. By contrast, those students who do receive feedback that includes developmental dialogue also thereby receive a further opportunity for mutual engagement and hence meaning making within the community of practice, in much the same way that those students who attend tutorials are afforded a form of engagement that those students who are unable to attend, or who do not get invited to attend tutorials, cannot access.

What I am suggesting therefore is that the kind of feedback that a student receives (as a reified aspect of the community's *shared repertoire* (Wenger, 1998: 83 ff.)) necessarily and always mediates the kind of learning that the student is participating in as a consequence of that feedback practice. And in a way, it is immaterial whether this feedback is received in a tutorial, via email or on the written page. Feedback that is about how best to complete the assignment in question will foreground learning 'about how to complete the assignment',

which is not the same thing, from the perspective of the practice, history or enterprise of the community, as learning about being a teacher in the post-compulsory sector. The former foregrounds what I have already referred to as the *performative identity* of the learner, as a student who is being directed or steered towards the successful completion of a specific action or goal – that is, the completion of a particular assignment that will be graded as a ‘pass’. The latter foregrounds the learner as an apprentice, as a newcomer within the PGCE/CertEd community that is itself part of a broader constellation of communities of practice in the PCET sector, who, as a result of the time that s/he has spent within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice, will in some ways be made more expert and knowledgeable in the practices of that wider constellation. Put simply, different kinds of feedback engender and promote different kinds of learning.

Varied practices, varied trajectories

Practice resides in a community of people and the relations of mutual engagement by which they can do whatever they do. [...] Whatever it takes to make mutual engagement possible is an essential component of any practice... Being included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice.

(Wenger, 1998: 73-74).

What does a communities of practice approach have to say about how students receive help, guidance and feedback relating to their assignments? How do these aspects of the community's repertoire help – or hinder – the meaning making of students, as newcomers, as they begin and continue along their peripheral trajectories as students? What kinds of practice are being discussed, reified and learned about?

In this chapter, I have suggested that there are two dominant pedagogic modes through which students learn about how to do their assignments within the PGCE/CertEd community of practice: assignment sessions, and multi-method feedback. These two modes of practice are

so all pervasive within the PGCE/CertEd constellation that they can be described as *paradigmatic* of the meaning-making work of the community. But I want to conclude this chapter by saying two further things about meaning making. Firstly, I want to stress that the two pedagogic modes described here are not the only ways through which students make sense of assessment. There are other ways as well that lie outside the scope of my research: for example, the ways in which students do their reading, note-taking and writing outside the seminar room. (It is of interest to note that throughout the interview process, only one student spoke about meeting with a peer in order to provide mutual support when an assignment was due, although many tutors, anecdotally, believe such peer support to be common). But it is the ubiquity of these two modes of facilitating meaning making that renders them important. Put simply, they happen so often within the colleges, that they deserve to be explored and understood.

Which leads me to the second point that I wish to raise, namely: *what* is it that is being learned, that is being *made sense of*, during and as a consequence of these modes of pedagogic activity? For assessment to be valid and reliable, we must assume that the assessment process helps students learn about and make sense of those particular aspects of the PCET teacher-training curriculum that the module in question is actually about (although in chapter eleven, I am going to challenge this assumption). But for assessment to be valid and reliable, we must also assume that students know what to do in order to perform the tasks, actions and activities that are being required of them. This explains, in part, the focus on explicating assignments through activities, plenary sessions and feedback on both draft and final submissions. And it is this *how to do the assignment* discourse that is being privileged within such pedagogic activities, and which is now so central to the practice of this PGCE/CertEd constellation, notwithstanding the variety that is evident across different colleges (to which I shall return momentarily), that it is enacted by tutors at all points within the course, from the first module to the last, and which is looked for and even relied upon by some students throughout their studies. And, arguably, it is through these practices that the phenomenon which is variously referred to as 'teaching to the test', 'curriculum creep' or 'surface learning' is enacted.

The resilience of assignment sessions and feedback practices

With so much attention and time given to the explication of assessment within the PGCE/CertEd, it is at first glance hardly surprising that the practices that I have explored in this chapter are highly resilient aspects of a community's repertoire. From the first module to the last, tutors provide detailed assignment sessions, copious amounts of corrective and evaluative feedback, writing frames, and opportunities to submit, resubmit and then resubmit once again. I have already argued that a *transferable skills* discourse fails to explain why students – who are also tutors – are incapable of 'helping themselves' to complete their assignments even though they have to spend so much time helping their own students in turn (Tummons, 2008). In addition, I would argue that another assumption of the same transferable skills ethos – that students 'should' need less such pedagogic support as the course proceeds because they can 'transfer' what they have learned about 'doing assignments' from one module to the next, is similarly undermined. Yes, for many students the process will become clearer, more *transparent*, as they journey through the PGCE/CertEd community of practice. But this is not an automatic process that is a consequence of simply doing one module, unpacking one module pack and then moving on to unpack the next one. Such an explanation rests on a false premise, namely that module packs are all 'the same', are all of a genre that means that one module pack is much like the next one. However, if we accept that each module pack reifies quite different aspects of the practice of the PGCE/CertEd community, then it follows that each pack is a distinct, discrete reification, that similarities between module packs are stylistic or cosmetic and that to gather them together and treat them as a single genre is spurious. Thus, each module pack is a different artefact, with its own unique qualities of transparency and also therefore of negotiability. As a result of this, the ways by which people – students, and also tutors – make meaning about each module pack are necessarily unique to those practices relating to that module pack, and no other. Some students and tutors will become more adept at reading, unpacking and exploring module packs than others as they travel through and across the community of practice, but this greater expertise is aligned to their own changing identities as they participate and learn in not just this PGCE/CertEd community, but all the other communities of which they are

members. But just because some students can unpack assignment specifications in one community – the one in which they teach – it does not follow that they can do the same thing within a community where they occupy a more peripheral position, a novitiate position from which the artefacts and practices of the community appear opaque rather than transparent. And so, to varying degrees, these artefacts and practices, including but not restricted to module packs, need to be explained. It is the differences in multimembership and the participation and learning that accrue from it, that allow some students to make meaning of module packs more quickly, more fluently, than others. Put simply, the assumption that ‘if you can read one module pack, you can read them all’ fails (indeed, magnificently fails) to account for the complexities of meaning making, participation and use of artefacts that a communities of practice perspective allows us to inhabit.

Conclusion: how are the meaning making processes of the textually mediated practice of assessment facilitated?

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how assessment for the PGCE/CertEd is a practice that is mediated by and enfolded within a variety of text-based artefacts. In this chapter, I have argued that student meaning making relating to assessment is facilitated through two significant kinds of practice which in themselves rest on and draw on the text-based artefacts already discussed. The first kind of practice that I have explored is referred to here as the assignment session, and involves students working with a number of different text-based artefacts as they are guided or perhaps steered along the paradigmatic trajectory of assessment by their tutors. The second kind of practice is referred to here as multi-method feedback, and revolves around the provision of tutor feedback on both draft and final assignment submissions, where once again, facilitated by tutors, there is talk around a number of texts that reify assessment practice. These two kinds of practice are so common, so all pervasive across the PGCE/CertEd constellation, that it seems right to define or describe them as paradigmatic aspects of the constellation’s practice, located within the community’s learning architecture, notwithstanding the debatable position occupied by ‘pedagogy’ within communities of practice theory.

To conclude this chapter, I wish to refer once more to the *variety* of ways in which assignment sessions and feedback are experienced. Such variety of experience across a constellation of communities of practice need not pose a significant theoretical problem for a conceptual framework that rests on the work of Lave and Wenger, and Wenger. Differences within and across communities can and are made sense of. What is of greater importance and relevance to my analysis, however, is the ways by which these differences in practice relating to assessment can be coordinated and aligned so that the work of the constellation as a whole can be portrayed as coherent, even harmonious, and so that assessment across the constellation of communities of practice, the network of colleges, can be judged to be robust, sufficient and appropriate, valid and reliable. And so, in the following chapter, it is to the coordination of work and activity across this network that I shall turn.

Chapter Ten

Ordering assessment

This is the third of four chapters to foreground the empirical data that I have collected whilst carrying out my research into the Holgate University PGCE/CertEd programme. In chapter eight, my focus was on providing rich descriptions of the variety of text-based artefacts that are used by students and tutors during teacher-training classes in order to negotiate the process of assessment on the PGCE/CertEd course. In chapter nine, I focussed on the pedagogic strategies used by tutors in order to facilitate students' meaning making in relation to these assessments. Thus far, my analysis has been at the level of single institutions, single colleges. And although I have hinted at aspects of the relationships that occur across and between colleges, across and between different PGCE/CertEd communities of practice, I have yet to *problematise* these relationships as they impact on those same assessment processes that I have begun to unpack (Smith, 2005). What I shall now do is turn the focus of my analysis away from a single college-based PGCE/CertEd community, and instead explore some of the ways in which the entire constellation of PGCE/CertEd communities (that is, within the Holgate University network) goes about the practice of assessment.

During the previous two chapters, I provided detailed examples of the ways by which individual tutors help their students to make sense of the assessment requirements of the course, drawing on two main kinds of pedagogic activity (assignment sessions, and multi-method feedback) and also making use of a rich variety of text-based literacy artefacts, some generated locally, others created by Holgate university and then employed locally. And I have placed all of this within a communities of practice framework. To be precise, I have placed all of these things within a *constellation* of PGCE/CertEd communities, with one community at each college where the PGCE/CertEd is delivered. But thus far, I have not considered how the different elements of this constellation might – or might not – talk with each other, share aspects of their practices, their discourses or their repertoire. I have talked about the fact that some of the literacy artefacts used in the practice of assessment come from the university and are distributed across the colleges, but I have not problematised this distribution process in

any way. That is, I have not as yet asked questions about how the university 'gets' colleges to 'do' assessment in particular, specified ways, other than through passing references to the generation and distribution of module packs, course handbooks, staff meetings and the like. And so without wishing to pre-empt the analysis that I am going to present here, what I want to stress is that the ways through which the university manages to get thirty different FE colleges, over a hundred tutors and nearly two thousand students, all working in different places, under different local conditions and at slightly different times to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' when it comes to how assessment needs to be done – by both students and tutors – must not be taken for granted, notwithstanding those dominant discourses of quality assurance (QA) that equate the creation and maintenance of rigorous QA processes and procedures (meetings, handbooks, inspections and the like) with some sense of guarantee or surety as to the quality of the HE provision that such processes encompass.

In this chapter, therefore, I am going to provide an answer to my third research question: *how are these assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries?* To begin, I unpack the quality assurance processes that I have already referred to above, before moving on to consider a number of examples of the kind of central practices within the PGCE/CertEd constellation that I have already defined as *paradigmatic*, in order to provide insights into the workings of this constellation of communities of practice. But as well as continuing to draw on communities of practice theories, I shall also draw on *actor-network theory*⁶³ in order to unpack and make sense of those relationships between and amongst both Holgate university and the colleges, that have something to do with assessment practice.

Some initial thoughts about quality assurance

The demands of quality assurance (QA) in the HE sector raise particular concerns when considering the systems involved in HE in FE provision such as the Holgate PGCE/CertEd (Parry and Thompson, 2002; Parry et al., 2003). Benchmarking, external verification, audit and evaluation: these are the ways in which the work of an HE in FE network tends to be

⁶³ See chapter three.

evaluated for the purposes of quality assurance within the managerialist culture that arguably characterises and dominates provision within the further and higher education sectors (Avis, 2005; Barnett, 2003; Gleeson et. al., 2005). Quality assurance and audit processes need to satisfy all interested parties that HE provision, as it is delivered in an FE context, has a sufficient level of equivalence to what might be found within a university, to be considered of appropriate rigour and quality. This might be in terms of resources, of accommodation, of learning and teaching processes and of assessment practice (Hilborne, 1996). The tools by which the demands of audit are satisfied include: people, such as tutors, line managers, inspectors and managerial professionals; processes, such as inspections and audit; and outputs, such as inspection reports, all of which are commonly found within *audit cultures* (Shore and Wright, 1999, 2000).

The Holgate teacher-training network draws on many such QA processes and tools in order to satisfy relevant stakeholders (funding agencies, professional bodies and government inspectorates) as to the quality of the provision across the different colleges. This is not to say that there is an expectation, whether on the part of the university, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) or Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), that each college would deliver the PGCE/CertEd in exactly the same way. But there is an expectation that, variances in delivery notwithstanding (although such variances are, as we shall see, constrained), the different components of the PGCE/CertEd are understood, managed and experienced in ways that, although mindful of local factors (for example, class size, the nature of the student body or student catchment area), are nonetheless not paradigmatically conflicting. It would be unrealistic to expect assessment practices to be synchronised perfectly across so many temporal, institutional and organisational boundaries. But it is more reasonable to assume that assessment practices are sufficiently closely aligned to ensure parity of provision. Put another way, there is an expectation, a sense or an understanding relating to the work of the PGCE/CertEd that is shared by all of the people involved in delivery, assessment and management, as an aspect of the repertoire of the constellation of communities of practice as a whole.

All aspects of the PGCE/CertEd are in fact enmeshed in quality assurance processes. One example is the admissions system. An admissions handbook, written by the course quality manager at Holgate, is sent out to each college. It contains details as to those prior qualifications and other pre-requisites that an applicant to the course has to have if her/his application is to proceed. Once completed by the applicant, the admissions form (again, designed by Holgate and mailed out to colleges in time for the start of the academic year) is returned to the college where s/he wishes to study. Each college then sends all of its forms back to the university, which samples them to ensure that they have been completed correctly. A second example is the appointment of staff to teach the PGCE/CertEd within the colleges. Staff are interviewed and employed by colleges, but in order to teach on the PGCE/CertEd they also have to be approved by the university. This process involves the submission of a curriculum vitae (written according to a standard format designed by the university) and attendance at a mandatory training day for new tutors. Attendance at further development events such as moderation meetings is also a condition of approval. Actions such as these, which take place across all of the different communities of practice which make up the PGCE/CertEd constellation, are facilitated through the *brokerage* process by which members of one community (in this case, at Holgate University) use particular types of artefacts called *boundary objects* (in these cases, admissions forms and curriculum vitae) which can travel across the communities within a constellation and coordinate particular kinds of activities within and across them (in these cases, admissions procedures, and the appointment of new tutors in colleges) (Wenger, 1998).⁶⁴ It is therefore not surprising to find that assessment processes within this constellation are similarly subject to considerable managerialist scrutiny: internally, through assessment moderation and course committees; and externally through external examination, inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), and accreditation by LLUK. These and other activities and procedures are all geared towards making sure that the assessment process is carried out correctly, from a quality assurance perspective.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Wenger's theory of the uses of boundary objects by brokers is discussed in chapter two.

⁶⁵ The 'correct' provision of assessment has implications for, amongst other things, the validity and reliability of the process. I return to these issues in the following chapter.

These QA systems are complex, involving the coordination of work that has been done across institutional, geographic and temporal boundaries. Internal moderation provides a good example. Over the course of a single academic year, internal moderation, within this teacher-training network, consists of two day-long meetings in twelve different locations, with all of the tutors on the programme poring over a total of approximately 200 different student portfolios. Tutors talk with each other, discuss the work that they are reading, occasionally argue over the interpretation of learning outcomes, or whether a student's work is of an acceptable standard. However, by the time of the writing of the internal moderation report, as required by the QA systems of the franchising university, all of these processes are distilled within a report that summarises, and necessarily simplifies, the process onto just a few sides of A4 paper. Arguably, audit culture both values and generates unambiguity and simplicity. But within such discourses, all the complexity and ambiguity – the messiness – of the internal moderation process is absent (Law, 2004).

The point that I wish to make here has something to do with the need to acknowledge the inherent complexity and messiness of not only internal moderation, but other aspects of assessment practice as well. I do not in this thesis mean to atomise the practice of assessment across this constellation of communities. But I do want to foreground the complexities and exigencies that characterise assessment. Up to this point I have argued that assessment practices within individual PGCE/CertEd communities of practice are rich, multi-faceted and textually mediated, where different students and tutors can and do occupy quite different positions along community trajectories. These different trajectories in turn imply different student and tutor positions relating to the repertoire of the community, the practices and artefacts of the community – all of which impact on meaning making, on learning. Put simply, I have argued that for students, getting to know what to do for their assignments is not 'just' or 'simply' about being given or emailed a module pack and then asking their tutor some questions about it. The practices that students and tutors engage in as the latter facilitate the meaning making of the former are diverse, local, complex, contingent and mutable. Similarly, internal moderation meetings are not 'only' about agreeing on what constitutes a pass, a refer or a fail. As I shall go on to argue, the practices that tutors go through *before* internal

moderation are similarly complex, even fraught. And yet notwithstanding all of this, Holgate University is able to get assessment done, from the moment the module pack is sent out to the moment that the assignments are all collected together. The question is: how?

Asking 'how' assessment practice is mediated and managed across this network of colleges, having just made mention of the extensive quality assurance systems that are in place, might seem somewhat unnecessary. Reports from Ofsted and the QAA, as well as the reports produced each year by the six external examiners (the number of whom reflects the size of the provision) invariably comment favourably on the management and quality systems that are in place. There would seem at first glance to be little that is problematic or messy here. So, when I talk about mess, (Law, 2004), what I am referring to is all of the forms, handbooks, templates, meetings and conversations: those activities and procedures that are performed by all of the people who are involved in the management of, the *ordering* of, the PGCE/CertEd as it is delivered across a network of colleges. QA discourses talk about a number of aspects of the assessment process that are in fact common features of quality management in HE more generally, such as 'moderation meetings', 'quality handbooks' and 'standardisation events', but they do not problematise them. By contrast, what is of interest here to me is: exactly how is it that moderation meetings work? What do tutors actually do in these meetings, in preparing for them? Which student work do they choose to take and why and which student work do they choose *not* to take, and why? Similarly, how do quality handbooks actually work? Who reads them and who doesn't read them even though they should? Or, how can the university be sure that the outcomes of standardisation events have been correctly understood by those tutors who attend, or in some way acted upon by those who do not?

In the preceding two chapters, I looked in detail at some particular kinds of activity, and the artefacts, documents and practice associated with them, as they presented themselves in some of the colleges that make up this network, in order to illustrate the kinds of practices that are to be found across the network as a whole. In this chapter, I again sample specific components of the assessment practices of the PGCE/CertEd network. Specifically, I explore a number of *moments* that are of paradigmatic importance to the *ordering* of assessment. I

shall focus on three moments of practice, some aspects of which I have already discussed: assignment sessions, individual learning plans and internal moderation. Each of these three moments of practice will be analysed in turn through the lenses of actor-network theory and communities of practice theory in order to problematise and then explain the nature of those relationships that exist between and across colleges, that impact on assessment practice.

First moment of practice: the assignment session

In the preceding chapter, I described an assignment session as a *moment of engagement* within a PGCE/CertEd community of practice.⁶⁶ In this way, I meant to foreground the role played by assignment sessions in allowing students (as newcomers) the opportunities and facilities to engage with specific aspects of the community's practice that are related to assessment. And because assessment is so central to the work of the community, I described this moment of engagement as *paradigmatic*. The assignment session, briefly summarised, is a moment where pedagogic strategies are employed by tutors in order to help students understand their assignments. But, as I illustrated during my earlier account, these sessions are richly complex, characterised by multiple, complex practices surrounding similarly numerous and complex texts and artefacts.

The questions that we ask about the assignment sessions can go further, however. We can not only problematise how such assignment sessions are done, but also *why* they are done in the first place. It seems obvious to say that if students are undertaking a module, they are probably not very likely to be able to understand the assignment brief for the module, simply and precisely because they haven't done the module yet. The students do not (perhaps cannot) know what they are going to study until they have done it. And they surely cannot be expected to understand in any meaningful way the issues, debates and opinions that they are being asked to explore and evaluate in their essays, learning logs and reflections until the processes of working through the module, of reading, attending seminars and lectures, of talking with their tutor and each other, are well underway. If students are less than likely,

⁶⁶ See chapter nine, p.130.

therefore, to understand the assignment briefs – and perhaps, by extension, other course documents as well – why does the university *insist* on their early distribution and why do college tutors feel so *compelled* to spend so much time at the beginning of the period of study of the module going through it?

A comprehensive answer to these questions would undoubtedly involve those dominant discourses of quality assurance and audit that I have already referred to in this chapter, which serve to promulgate the creation and distribution of such materials across the college network as being characteristic of 'good practice'. Dominant (although also problematic) discourses of 'student-centred learning' and 'learner autonomy' also help shape these practices, promoting as they do the sense that students 'need' to have the assessment process presented to them in such a way so that it can be turned into a 'problem-based learning' episode, which will be an effective way for them to learn. Unpacking these 'good practice' discourses is beyond the scope of this thesis, although I would suggest that the latter might be somewhat challenged by the accounts of what does actually happen in assignment sessions that I have already presented. And although this thesis has not set out to unravel quality assurance discourses, it is hoped that they too can be unsettled by the account that follows.

So what is happening in these sessions? We need to consider not just how the university makes tutors and students in colleges do particular things, but more precisely how the university makes the tutors and students do things *only in particular ways that the institution is capable of approving of*. We would not expect the university to try to control the exact ways in which students do their assignments: what is important is that the ways in which the assignments do get done are sufficiently aligned with the aims of the module in question and the course as a whole, that any certification or accreditation based on that work can be represented as being *sufficient, valid and reliable* to anyone else from outside who may be interested to know. This might be government (from whence the funding for all this comes), future employers of the students on the course, or representatives of the professional bodies that endorse it. So from the point of view of the university, an important aspect of the assessment process (above and beyond any 'academic' issue) is in making it fit within a

genre defined very broadly here as “pieces of student work that look like work from a PGCE/CertEd course delivered by a university in the UK”. And this is what the module packs, and the assignment briefs within them, actually do: they set out and *order* what is appropriate, what is allowed, and what is not. They make students and tutors do assignments in particular ways, excluding others.

Module packs achieve this through a number of textual devices, which operate as a series of instructions for both tutors and students. Some of these are straightforward and explicit: for example, many of the assignment briefs include bullet point lists of substantive content that students are asked to include in their assignments. The same information is often repeated, differently worded, in the *indicative content* and *learning outcomes* sections of module packs. And although both students and tutors sometimes complain that they are never too sure exactly where to look in the module pack (the repetition of information sometimes causing confusion, particularly for students who do not always know or appreciate the relationship between a module’s indicative content, its learning outcomes and its assessment), such content does not contain any problems or dilemmas in themselves as far as this thesis is concerned.⁶⁷

Other textual features of the module pack raise additional interesting questions. The reference in each module pack to the QTLS professional standards framework is one example of an aspect of the module pack that not only demands a particular kind of *intertextuality* on the part of the reader who will need to make use of the QTLS framework document (LLUK, 2007) but also, at the same time, therefore serves a coordinating or ordering function. This ordering achieves two important things: firstly, it promulgates and sustains the professional standards themselves. By this I mean that through inclusion within the module pack, the professional standards can make themselves known in a highly efficient manner: arguably, more students will encounter the standards through their course documents than through recourse to the actual standards as they are published on the lifelong learning UK website. Secondly, their use allows the Holgate curriculum to demonstrate conspicuously that it is

⁶⁷ In my thesis, I am seeking to problematise the ways in which the PCET teacher-training curriculum is assessed within the Holgate PGCE/CertEd, not the curriculum itself.

mapped onto the professional standards, thereby providing surety to stakeholders that the curriculum is both current and relevant to the profession.

Your reading for this assignment must include significant engagement with **at least three texts**, including at least one recent (post-2000) journal article. This engagement must be clear from the content of your work as well as from your reference.

Figure 10.1 (above): extract from the *Designing and Planning for Learning* module pack.

A second example of a textual feature that enfolds a number of different strands can be found in the requirement, stated in several of the assignment briefs, that a requisite minimum number of recent references needs to be used within different assignment components, whether these are reflective journals or traditional academic essays (see example 10.1, above):

Jonathan: do you think [a requisite number of references] has been a good thing for the module as a whole?

Richard (course leader, Holgate university): yes. We were sceptical about it originally and it's another thing that illustrates what we've been talking about. The suggestion actually came from the external examiners... [it was] the year before when it first came in. "Why don't you give them a bottom line to make it absolutely clear?", and we were quite sceptical. We thought "well, yeah, ok, you give them a bottom line, you ensure that they don't come above that line". [...] But we thought, "okay they've asked us to do it so we'll do it and see what happens", and we asked them again specifically at the end of last year, after the external examiners had looked at the files, "is there any evidence that people are using that as a minimum?" And they did feel that people had actually gone beyond that, because there's been that impetus. You've got to look at a post 2000 [academic journal article], [but] how are you going to look at [just] one post-2000 article? You, inevitably, you've got to look at two or three. You might not be engaging with them equally, but you'll come across more than one. And we did raise it in one of the network

meetings as well last year. There did seem to be a feeling that people weren't using it as a minimum, it was helping to go beyond that.

This small extract from an assignment specification enfolds and conceals a number of themes that are important in two distinct ways. In pedagogic terms, the importance of this criterion rests in the perceived value of requiring students to make use of a *variety* of different secondary sources, as a necessary aspect of academic practice, just as the use of Harvard referencing (another criterion for students to follow and tutors to provide feedback on) is. But there is a second area of interest here as well. The fact of this criterion being established in response to comments made by the external examiners, allows the PGCE/CertEd team at Holgate to demonstrate conspicuous alignment to the broader aims of the external examining process and thus to wider quality assurance discourses within HE. And once the requirement for a minimum number of references has travelled, through a text-based form, to all of the colleges within the network, all of the other tutors and students on the course are similarly enrolled within this process.

Thus, the moment when a tutor hands out the module handbooks to students at the start of the assignment session can therefore be understood as the culmination of a number of different actions and processes, carried out by people working within and amongst a series of systems and regimes, that all lead up to this simple act of distributing some handouts. The module packs have been written in such a way that they frame or shape what will be taught, when, and how it will be assessed. The timing of their distribution has been established so that all of the colleges will distribute them to students within a relatively narrow period. These are all actions designed to allow the university to place the maximum affordable 'trust' in the tutors, that they will carry out the acts of explicating the assessment, teaching the course and then marking the assignments, 'correctly' – by which I mean in sufficiently close alignment to what the university wants to happen so that the assessment process is seen to be performed in a comparable fashion across the network of colleges. At the same time, the directions and prompts provided within the module pack serve both to reify the curriculum, but also to direct the effort, the *work*, of both tutors and students in what have been defined as 'correct'

directions. And finally, all of these actions are framed in such a way that relevant interested stakeholders can monitor and endorse the practices or operations that unfold.

Second moment of practice: individual learning plans

Individual learning plans provide another example of the ways by which Holgate University is able to direct the activity of a large number of people across the different colleges within the PGCE/CertEd constellation or network. Once again, the use of ILPs is an aspect of activity within PGCE/CertEd communities of practice that I have already written about in this thesis. Here, I intend briefly to reiterate and then to expand this analysis, in order to provide a second example of another way by which the university can make things to do with assessment happen, and make both tutors and students do these things in particular ways.

In chapter three, I used the example of the ILP to explore Wenger's related concepts of transparency and communicative ability in artefacts, where I suggested that the ways in which ILPs are written (in terms not only of the vocabulary that they use, but also their layout and the actions they ask of students) render them opaque and therefore requiring the mediation of tutors to help students come to know how to use them.⁶⁸ In the same chapter, I also used the ILP as a way to introduce my use of actor-network theory within this thesis, describing it, from an ANT perspective, as *an object that manages to create particular kinds of coordinated actions across institutional and geographic boundaries*.⁶⁹ In chapter eight, I provided a description of the textual form of the ILP.⁷⁰ I also foregrounded some of the different ways that tutors and students on the PGCE/CertEd responded to it, both as a vehicle for initial and diagnostic assessment and useful tool for encouraging tutorial provision, and as an exercise in form-filling, as 'putting something in the box', with an overt role as a tool for audit. The module packs that have already been described in this chapter work in a similar manner, insofar as they too travel across boundaries and carry meaning and intention, relating to what

⁶⁸ Refer to chapter three, p.33.

⁶⁹ Refer to chapter three, pp.47-8.

⁷⁰ Refer to chapter eight, figures 8.1 and 8.2 for, respectively, a sample blank ILP page and a writing frame containing suggestions as to what students might include within it.

students should include in their assessment, how they should do that assessment, what kinds of features that assessment should include and how tutors should provide feedback.

ILPs perform their ordering work in a different manner to module packs and, arguably, in more complex ways. This greater level of complexity is due to the fact that the ILP is a text-based artefact that students are expected to manipulate, to write on as well as read, make or take meaning from and act on, and supplement with documentation such as schemes of work or lesson plans drawn from their teaching practice. Students are exposed to a series of module packs throughout their time on the PGCE/CertEd which, although containing many shared features (learning outcomes, specified reading lists, assignment criteria and the like), are also unique (that is, there is one module pack for each module). By contrast, the ILP is a document that accompanies students throughout their time on the PGCE, drawing on the work done in all of the other modules as well as the learning that takes place in the workplace (that is, where the students, as teachers, teach).

For many students, the ILP is a worthwhile, practicable document, straightforward to make sense of and able to be slotted around other work or family commitments:

I find [the ILP] probably the easiest to do, because you can spend five minutes on it, and you can see an improvement in your assessment, if that makes sense. You can see you've moved a step forward to the end deadline. Even five or ten minutes, and you can get somewhere. Whereas with essays, if you only spent ten minutes, you'd have written a sentence, it would have been useless. But for your ILP file you can go and you can think, "oh ten minutes, oh I'll just put that scheme of work in", or, "there's a lesson plan, I haven't got time to do the reflections but at least I know what my reflection's going to be on and I've got it all together". So I think that for me was quite useful because it does fit in well with my day at work, if you like.

(Louanna, student, Nunthorpe College)

Please explain the nature of your teaching/training experience and your current teaching role. Also give brief details of any teacher training you have already undertaken.

I have not undertaken any type of training prior to the PGCE which relates to teaching. I am a qualified NVQ Assessor and Verifier and I devise and deliver ~~training~~^{training} + development activities for candidates and assessors at NVQ level 2 + 3. I have specialist knowledge of the NVQ in Health and Social Care, and I also verify Learning Disability Award framework units. Much of my training delivery is carried out in various workshops, from one-to-one assessor training to larger group training of candidates and assessors. I have to ensure candidates and assessors understand the different aspects of the award, from underpinning knowledge + theory, to the practical requirements of the award.

Figure 10.2 (above): an extract from ILP1, written by Vivienne, a student at Scarcroft College. Students commonly handwrite earlier sections of the ILP, beginning to use a word processor as the year goes on. At some colleges, this submission would have been returned to the student with a request for it to be either word-processed or rewritten so that crossings out would be absent.

The ongoing diagnostic and formative assessment elements of the ILP are also beneficial for many students:

It was fine actually, because it was all to do with where, how you've got to this point, what you need to do, and where you'd like to see yourself going. And I love that kind of thought process, so I found it quite, I found it quite interesting and fairly straightforward to do.

(Kate, student, Nunthorpe College)

For some students, perhaps unsurprisingly, the bureaucratic nature of the ILP constitutes a barrier to meaningful participation in the process:

I then went on to do, I can't remember which form it is, the ILP something or other, which I had to transcribe the strengths and weaknesses of my observations onto another

piece of paper. And again I sort of sat there and I thought, “what am I doing this for, really?” Filling out a record of your teaching, your teaching log: I’ve got timetables which say what group I’m doing, I’m teaching, what I’m teaching them and how long I taught them for. Yet I had to sit and type that into a form which again for, to get the sixty hours, took me I’d say about an hour on Monday night. And I sort of, I thought, I’ve spent now about four or five hours doing stuff that actually doesn’t even get you into the meat of the assignment, and just all felt a little like paper filling for the sake of paper filling.

(Jo, student, Friargate College)

But it is perhaps the ambivalence of tutors that is most striking:

Julie (tutor, Nunthorpe College): ...now we’ve got the individual learning plan documentation as well, and that has just added to the complexity of the whole portfolio building.

Jonathan: do you like the ILP?

Julie: I think the idea that students are having tutorials with us to help them with their development is good. I’m just not a person that’s into all this evidence, this paper based evidence, and I think, it drives us all mad really, this obsession with having to have some paper based evidence all the time.

Ruth (tutor, Scarcroft College): If a document causes so much sort of confusion, “well what do I have to do here?” “But I did that on that piece of paper.” “Why do I have to do this?”, then it’s useless and it’s paying lip service to ILPs. Do you know we used to do ILPs twenty years ago in basic skills, it was called a record card. We sat down with a student. It had become a political gesture to individual, lifelong learning. [pause] I don’t know. [pause] They [the students] hate them.

Jonathan: and what do you think about them?

Ruth: I think it’s a ghastly document.

Therefore, for many tutors and some students, the bureaucratic and audit functions of the ILP would appear to overwhelm its diagnostic and formative assessment role (Thompson et al.,

2009). But the impact of these bureaucratic and audit functions goes beyond 'simply' clouding any potential that the ILP might have as an assessment tool. Rather, it is only through an appreciation of the *permissive guidance* that these audit functions permit, that the functions of the ILP as a method for shaping or ordering particular kinds of activity so that they can be rendered acceptable to the university, become apparent. By permissive guidance, I mean to focus attention on the ways by which the requirements of the ILP (what to write and when to write it, what additional documentary evidence is required and so forth) manage to simultaneously provide a regime or structure that is sufficiently tightly ordered so that ILP practice is sufficiently aligned to the goals for the process that have been established by the university, and also provide a regime or structure that is sufficiently flexible to accommodate and somehow co-opt deviance in practice that might, if left unchecked, jeopardise the perceived rigour of the process (Hamilton, 2009: 232-5).

Let me provide an example of this permissive guidance in practice, in order to illustrate the ways by which the ILP can reconcile the diverse experiences of students in an individual college with the requirements of the ILP system. Each PGCE/CertEd student is expected to have a mentor, whose minimal duties include carrying out an observation of the student's (the mentee's) teaching. Different HEIs evidence this mentoring process in different ways, but evidence it they must, as this mentoring provision falls within Ofsted's remit for the inspection of PCET teacher training. Across the Holgate network, as well as completing a *mentor observation of teaching* form, students and mentors are also encouraged to meet on a regular basis. These meetings are then captured on ILP5, the *record of meeting with mentor* form. Mindful of the busy lives of college tutors and the pressures that the PGCE/CertEd course can generate, it is perhaps not surprising that such meetings with mentors are often difficult to organise. Indeed, for some students, mentor meetings are only conducted on a cursory or an *ad-hoc* basis. And yet with a little ingenuity, the process can still be satisfactorily documented: in the case of Louanna, a PGCE student at Nunthorpe College, through providing additional commentary to explain why the 'official' paperwork might seem scanty, and through the provision of *other* paperwork that can be used to evidence the kind of developmental relationship that the mentoring process seeks to promote.

Mentor Meetings

Although this section does not include many records of meetings with my mentor this is not a true reflection of the events as I am in daily contact with my mentor and ask questions in a less formal environment than in a specific meeting.

John is both my line manager and the section leader for Food and Farming, his support over my first year if teaching has been immense and without it I am sure I would have drowned under the pressure of my teaching load. He has both encouraged me and stretched me through the projects that a small group of the Food and Farming section have developed over the last year for example the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Environmental Technologies and teaching outside my remit at science days and for Yorkshire Forward. I will also be visiting Sweden in August with John to set up a student exchange programme with a college specialising in agriculture.

Figure 10.3 (above): page 1 of ILP5 as written by Louanna. During my research, I read the ILPs that had been written by all of my interview respondents. Some were very detailed, others less so. What is noteworthy in Louanna's case is that she clearly wanted to foreground the very positive working relationship that she had with her mentor/line manager, to the extent that she decided to write this brief commentary, which the official mentor paperwork had not been able to capture due to the improvised nature of their mentor-mentee relationship.

When students collect their ILPs together, therefore, it can be seen that what might at first look be described as the 'simple' act of creating the necessary paperwork for inclusion within the portfolio is in fact anything but. For some students, it is indeed the case that the mentoring process runs smoothly, and that this can be captured relatively straightforwardly. **And for other students, finding a mentor in the first instance can be difficult:**

Tom (student, Scarcroft College): I was quite worried when I started the course because I was really struggling to get a mentor while I was at [my previous employer]

Jonathan: did you have to wait until you were at [your new employer] then?

Tom: yeah, yeah. I was trying to get the tutor that I worked with from [my previous employer] to mentor me, but she was so busy, you know, she just couldn't manage it. [...] I was the only person [there] actually studying Cert Ed. And there was only one person fully qualified at that stage. It's like "oh, what am I going to do," you know?

Jonathan: so how did you get round it in the end, then?

Tom: well I was totally stumped until I moved to [my current employer] and then our curriculum manager there is [qualified to] BEd honours [level] , very knowledgeable fellow, has been excellent, and he mentored me then since January.

<p>Review of Action Points from last meeting:</p> <p>Final meeting</p>
<p>Issues discussed at this meeting:</p> <p>Probationary interview → see attached sheets</p>
<p>Note: A key topic for discussion with your mentor should be issues relating to the teaching of your specialist subject</p> <p>Action Points agreed:</p> <p>Probationary interview → see attached sheets</p>
<p>Date of next meeting:</p>
<p>Signed: Signed on next page</p>

<p>Review of Action Points from last meeting:</p> <p>Christine devised a scheme of work and lesson plans for the NVQ training events in January. We have taken into account the different learning styles of the candidates and have allowed for differentiation. We revised the first plan to encourage more group participation, and received positive feedback from candidates after the sessions.</p> <p>Building her knowledge of the holistic assessment model in relation to her role as verifier</p>
<p>Issues discussed at this meeting:</p> <p>Carrying out research for assignments and we discussed her work for the module and developing personal skills. I gave her feedback as to her numeracy test results at Level 2, and I explained the term "spiky profile". I gave guidance on how to interpret her test results in relation to the Numeracy Core Curriculum and she will look at this further.</p> <p>We discussed the assignment which covers reflection on teaching and assessment methods. Working well on these areas, as a large part of her work role involves assessment and we have reflected informally at times on her development in relation to teaching skills. It has been a good learning experience: the assignments and marking scheme which we use to cover knowledge requirements, continuing to research and analyse the effectiveness of different assessment methods against validity and reliability.</p> <p>Learning to focus on setting objectives before focusing too early on the lesson plans and specific tasks, and also we have looked at assessing learning while delivering courses (reflection in action)</p>
<p>Note: A key topic for discussion with your mentor should be issues relating to the teaching of your specialist subject</p> <p>Action Points agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To analyse the results of the numeracy test against the National Core Curriculum to identify areas to work on To continue to plan fully for sessions, to allow for any changes in delivery ("reflection in action") and to
<p>Signed:</p>

Figure 10.4 (above): two ILP5s. On the left, the first ILP5 from Louanna: in lieu of recording a formal mentor meeting, she instead attached the complete record of her probationary interview as an alternative. Some students when completing ILP5s despite not having had 'proper' mentor meetings, simply fabricate meetings or conflate a number of less formal encounters, turning them into a narrative that represents a single meeting. In this context, Louanna's honest account of the nature of her relationship with her mentor is uncommon. At the same time, although not strictly speaking meeting the criteria required for the mentor-mentee relationship, it is clearly a professional relationship that she values and wishes to record. The ILP5 from Vivienne, on the right, provides an excellent exemplar of mentor-mentee practice. She met her mentor formally on a twice-termly basis, each time recorded on an ILP5 such as the one depicted here. Vivienne's ILP neatly captures, or reifies, the kind of formal mentor-mentee relationship that the official or planned curriculum of the PGCE/CertEd anticipates. But it seems to me, from both reading the interview transcripts and the ILPs themselves that both of the relationships captured here are constructive, developmental and valued by all of those involved. But for Louanna, how to render that relationship in such a way that it can be endorsed – through assessment – by the university, is problematic.

Instances such as these, where the mentoring process is not established until after a significant period of time has elapsed (the expectation is that students have identified a mentor as soon as the course begins in September), raise legitimate concerns about mentoring provision. PCET mentoring is voluntary: nor do mentors receive remission from

their other teaching or administrative duties in order to carry out the role. But within the ILP, there is no place or space for such difficulties or ambiguities to emerge. And yet, with such pressures on mentors occurring all too frequently, can the developmental relationship that the curriculum demands, and that all of the ILP files compiled by hundreds of students, in fact be assumed to be working correctly, or even partially? At the same time, other more idiosyncratic relationships, such as the relationship that Louanna has with her mentor, stretch the ILP paperwork to breaking point. And yet all of these divergent mentoring practices can still be captured, coped with, by the ILP process as a whole, which is powerful enough to turn all of these relationships into auditable documents that satisfy the assessment process.

But this satisfaction, this 'smooth running', requires more than just the multi-faceted aspects of pedagogic practice that surround the distribution of module packs, or the permissive paperwork of the ILP system. All of the assignments eventually created by students within these systems have to be marked and, in some way, quality assured. But with such large numbers of assignments involved (there are nearly 2,000 students on the programme), it is impossible to internally moderate all of the assignments that are produced. Therefore, internal moderation is carried out on a sampling basis: and it is within this process that we can find a third observable moment of practice of the ordering, or alignment, of assessment within the college network.

Third moment of practice: getting ready for internal moderation

Internal moderation has to be organised across significant physical and institutional boundaries: across thirty different FE colleges where nearly one hundred tutors are involved in the delivery of the programme to nearly two thousand students, who each produce three portfolio-based assignments each academic year. As such, it is necessary for the university to create a series of written documents that carry the rules and regulations surrounding the process to the different colleges where the course is delivered. These rules, located in a series of handbooks and reinforced at cross-college meetings, govern details such as the timing of internal moderation, the amount of work to be sampled and the location for the

meetings. In this way, uniformity can be applied to the process with each college doing the same things at approximately the same times. The first stage of the internal moderation process is the selection of assignment to be examined. The course leader at each college is responsible for selecting a sample of student work. As well as bringing along all assignments that are marked as having failed, course leaders select a representative sample of work, some excellent, some borderline (although the award is not actually classified.) The sample size is set at 5%. Because there are so many colleges in the network they are divided into internal moderation groups along geographical lines. These groups (of about five or six colleges) then come to a meeting where work is distributed and moderated. Normally, one other tutor reads an assignment, and a brief moderation feedback sheet is completed for each. A representative from Millthorpe University also attends these meetings, and takes a chief examiner role, with any disputes referred to them, although the internal examination meeting does not have the power to reverse an assessment decision. There are two such regional meetings each academic year. At the end of the meeting, an internal moderation report is completed, following a pro forma supplied by the university, with headings such as “quality of links between theory and practice” and “demonstration of differentiated and inclusive practice.” Eventually, a single internal moderation report, effectively a compilation of the dozen or so produced during the two rounds of regional meetings, is produced by the department’s examinations tutor at the university. All of the student work is then returned to the university for external examination.

Julie (course leader, Nunthorpe College): we only take five per cent, we select [the assignments] ourselves. Now although we’re encouraged to select the borderline, the middle of the road and the high flyers, you have to be quite brave to take along the borderline ones, and I, I’ve tried to be brave sometimes and taken [borderline] ones, and then we get into academic discussions about whether it was good enough or not. But I’m being brave because I’m opening myself up to why I passed them, when I might be having an internal debate as to whether I should have passed them or not, and what the cut off point is between not quite good enough, and good enough. I think we should have more debates about this, perhaps [...]

Jonathan: and do you think we should take more than five per cent to the moderation event?

Julie: it's the sheer practicalities of getting through the amount of work. Is it better to look at the work and take our time and do a thorough read through? I'm very slow at reading, other people are very quick. I could take a cursory look but that's not, may not be good enough. So five per cent is probably okay but what I do wonder about, and this is really contentious, is whether we should be given some names of who we should take, because it depends on how I'm feeling, as to whether I think "let me just take some standard, you know, some good work. If we've got some excellent work I'll take that along." I know no-ones going to quibble with me about the level but if there are some who are on the borderline, I may think "no, I won't take that piece of work."

Julie is an experienced and dedicated CertEd/PGCE tutor. Her commitment to the course and to the academic rigour that she believes that it should enfold is matched by her commitment to her students. She understands the moderation systems that she works within, sympathises with their aims and values their effects in terms of maintaining academic standards. But at the same time, she feels uncomfortable when her own professional practice or judgement puts her into a potentially vulnerable position. She talks about bravery when submitting work for moderation, of opening herself up to scrutiny by another. Is she unsure of the pass or refer criteria, even after several years of teaching on the programme? Does she doubt the reliability of some of her assessment decisions? On an in-service teacher-training course such as this, failure might have significant consequences for the student: the loss of employment, or a bar to a pay rise. Non-academic pressures such as these may play a part. Many of the students on such a course are new to higher education study, and often have not engaged in 'academic' study for considerable time. Another pressure that clearly plays a part is the student as practitioner: whether or not they are a good teacher:

Julie: if you want to know where I tend to be more lenient, if I know they are excellent practitioners in the classroom, particularly in a vocational, yeah vocational area, I do feel that it's part of my job to really help them. Because they're good practitioners.

Selecting assignments for moderation is not just a 'simple' process of selecting a 5% sample. It becomes a fraught discussion about academic standards and their maintenance, about professional integrity and identity, and about the potentially disempowering effects of scrutiny by audit processes and the exercise of autonomy and professional judgement, tempered by concerns over the politics of which assignments to take. And Julie is not alone. I spoke to the course leaders at five other colleges, all of whom perform similar actions when selecting work for moderation.

So what is happening here? Simply saying that Julie is following the procedures for internal moderation as laid out by university documentation is not sufficient. She has selected a 5% sample of work and has selected a range of work from 'excellent' to 'borderline': in one sense, certainly from the point of view of the institutional discourse of quality assurance, the 'internal moderation' component of assessment practice is being sustained. But Julie's negotiation of the quality assurance process and the texts within which it is reified is more complicated. Decisions about assessment validity and reliability, about what constitutes a pass and what constitutes a fail when reading work that is on the borderline, are mediated by a number of factors here: the fact that students (who are also working lecturers, studying on a part-time basis) have a contractual obligation to complete the award. In addition, there are the pressures brought by students who may be relying on success in the course for a pay rise or a permanent contract, and the pressures brought to bear by the students' line managers who (understandably) need their teaching staff to be appropriately qualified. Put simply, there are many factors, beyond the actual quality of the assessments completed by students, that are also impacting on Julie's actions. Nevertheless she is comfortable working within these institutional discourses, to the extent that she can – in effect – subvert them. She talks about her experiences of choosing work for internal moderation by using institutional discourses which she has appropriated and can therefore move through with ease (McCoy, 2006). And at the same time, the institutional discourses of internal moderation and quality assurance are sufficiently permissive to accommodate her actions.

Accommodating dissonant practice: an actor-network perspective

Course assessment regulations and systems, moderation meetings and examination boards combine with the dominant *audit culture* within UK higher education to create a powerful narrative of procedural rigour and reliability (Shore and Wright, 2000). And this is a narrative that can simultaneously withstand and enfold what might be termed dissonant or discordant assessment practices.

The three examples that I have detailed above can all be classified as moments of practice where dissonant or discordant action can be found. When discussing the distribution of module packs, I explained how, notwithstanding the very different ways in which module packs are actually treated, received, read or manipulated by tutors and students, they are nonetheless able to direct or shape action to the extent that tutors and students approach the process of assessment in broadly homogeneous terms. When discussing the ways in which students complete their ILP forms, drawing on the mentoring component as an example, I highlighted the ways by which the ILP process simultaneously accommodated and suppressed the contingencies and exigencies that characterise mentoring provision within the PGCE/CertEd. And finally, when discussing internal moderation, I showed how tutors, whilst working within and mindful of dominant discourses of audit and quality assurance, were nonetheless able to subvert them, at the same time as these same discourses were able to conceal these subversions, or render them invisible. This is not to say that these practices – or indeed, other analogous practices that are also carried out across the college network such as admissions, the recruitment and endorsement of new tutors, or lesson observations – are dominant. Rather, it is simply the case that the kinds of practices are actually found, in the ‘real world of assessment’, are complex, contingent, improvised and then made good: they are messy.

At this moment, there are two points that I wish to make in order to now foreground my actor-network analysis. Firstly, I wish to highlight the fact that many aspects of assessment practice are uncertain and attempts to simplify or categorise them – as a quality assurance discourse

does – will always be insufficient. Secondly, I wish to foreground the fact that all of these assessment practices involve a constant movement of both things (text-based artefacts such as module packs or handbooks, procedures, forms and such like) and people (tutors, students, internal moderators). I shall discuss each of these in turn, before returning to the research question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter.

First point of analysis: uncertainty, and the inadequacy of overarching explanations

To some extent, actor-network theory (ANT) defies simple definition or categorisation. But if ANT can be said to be about anything, it is about uncertainty, complexity and controversy – a refusal to accept overarching, conflating simplifying explanations that serve to provide answers to questions regarding how actions are enacted within a social world. Indeed, this is arguably a necessary condition for the social researcher to encounter:

Every single interview, narrative and commentary, no matter how trivial it may appear, will provide the analyst with a bewildering array of entities to account for the hows and whys of any course of action.

(Latour, 2005: 47)

There is no social order. Rather, there are endless attempts at ordering
[emphasis in original].

(Law, 1994: 101)

ANT is not to be equated with a postmodernist deconstructionism. ANT does not seek to refute the possibility of explanation or causation. But what it does do is seek to sustain the possibility of multiple causes or explanations with a robust empiricism. And matters of causation or agency are never presented as matters of fact, but as matters of *concern*, to be pulled apart and put back together again.

What, therefore, does this mean for the ordering of assessment, and for this account of the ways by which assessment happens, gets done or is accomplished across the network of colleges? Put simply, it means that those explanations of how assessment gets done which are wrapped up in discourses of quality assurance are insufficient. Once causality is reduced to 'quality assurance', interesting things happen. Because 'quality assurance' is a dominant discourse (Gee, 1996),⁷¹ it serves, amongst other effects, to make people assume that the procedures being so described or labelled are, for example, rigorous, well managed, consistent and thorough. By contrast, an ANT analysis serves to show us that such systems and procedures are far from uniform, and are in fact enacted by actors (to whom I shall return momentarily) who do things differently, wrestle with the regulations under which they have to work and find ways to sustain their own pedagogical or philosophical perspectives notwithstanding the quality assurance demands of the curriculum within which they are having to work.

So who are these actors? It is in consideration of this question that ANT provides a second significant epistemological and ontological point for consideration: and it is to this point that I shall now turn.

Second point of analysis: the mutual symbiosis of people and things

Within ANT, what has been termed the *principle of symmetry* (Edwards and Fenwick, 2010) posits, perhaps requires, that we consider both humans and non-humans (that is, objects, artefacts, devices) as having agency, as being able to achieve social projects and get things done. Moreover, when considering how social projects are accomplished, the interplay or relationship between human actors (tutors, students and moderators) and non-human actors (handbooks, procedures and routines) is characterised as a relationship between equals. Humans and non-humans are equally useful, equally important and equally necessary in

⁷¹ The accomplishment of the dominant discourse of quality assurance is in itself the result of processes of social ordering that ANT could usefully unpack. There is insufficient space here to pursue this analysis, but I do want to acknowledge that I am sensitive to the contingent nature of 'quality assurance' and the methods by which this discourse has been constructed and then held together.

order for social projects, such as assessment, to be performed. And it can be difficult, if not impossible, to untangle these different threads, to decide exactly where it is along a chain of accomplishments and actions – a network – that human elements stop and non-human elements start, and vice versa. People can be actors, and so can things, and the ways that they act are ontologically and epistemologically indistinguishable. Both humans and non-humans make things happen, get things done.

I don't think that actors or agents necessarily have to be people [emphasis in original]. I'm uncertain, but perhaps any network of bits and pieces tends to count as an agent if it embodies a set of ordering processes which allows it (or others) to say 'it is an agent, an actor'.

(Law, 1994: 34)

...the continuity of any course of action will rarely consist of human-to-human connections...or of object-to-object connections, but will probably zigzag from one to the other.

(Latour, 2005: 75)

So, in order to understand how the social is arranged, ordered or accomplished (and this might be a consideration of the social practice of assessment, the subject of this thesis), the ways in which both people and things come together have to be considered. In a way, this might seem obvious, almost prosaic: it seems right to say that social ordering requires things as well as people, because things or artefacts (such as module packs or student handbooks) can travel further than voices: they are both mobile and durable. But this *materiality* has limits:

Texts order only if they are not destroyed en route [emphasis in original], and there is someone at the other end who will read them and order her conduct accordingly.

(Law, 1994: 102)

Whereas voices and bodies:

...can only reach so far – and once they are out of your sight you can't be sure that they will do what you have told them.

(ibid.)

Nonetheless, despite their relative drawbacks or limitations, these human and non-human actors are all that we have to accomplish social projects, and it is in the ways that these are enfolded or combined that we can trace the ways in which projects such as assessment are accomplished across networks that consist of these actors. Such networks are not 'perfect': they are made up of artefacts that might be lost or misinterpreted, and people who can only travel in a certain way or across a certain distance. And so it is in how they manage to bind together that we can begin to think about how well, how successfully or how carefully the network manages to accomplish what it sets out to do. With these considerations in mind, I can now return to the research question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion: how are these assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries?

Within what we can now call the PGCE/CertEd 'actor-network', there are many social projects to be ordered. One of these is the project of assessment. The desirability and importance of the project is not questioned or challenged in any sense thanks to the emergence of broadly shared practices on assessment on part-time courses for professionals which are run on an HE in FE basis (Brown, 1999a; Brown, 1999b; Taylor, 1997; Young, 1999). In order for the project to be accomplished, Holgate University needs to gain the *commitment* and then *cooperation* of other actors within the network. This is achieved through a number of means. To some extent the college-based actors are self-selecting: tutors have often chosen to work as teacher educators, or have been encouraged to do so (Noel, 2006). To some extent the historical background of the network serves to normalise the processes of commitment and cooperation: the vast majority of colleges within the network have been in it for fifteen years,

and some have been working with the university for much longer. For colleges as institutions, the capital, financial and political, generated by HE in FE provision is a powerful incentive for participation and cooperation. Moreover, the dominant discourses of quality assurance have created a culture within FE that is receptive in turn to the audit demands of HE in FE provision (Parry and Thompson, 2002; Parry et. al., 2003). And so the university is able to *mobilise* the actors within this network. By this I mean that tutors, students and colleges are made to do things: to explain assessment briefs; to mark assessments; to take a sample of assessments to internal moderation. Firstly, this is achieved through the mobilisation of a variety of text-based objects that carry instructions ranging from which books should be read, to how feedback should be written, to when the results of assessment need to be returned to the university. These objects also perpetuate and reinforce the practices of the network: meetings, whether for bureaucratic or for moderation purposes, are captured in text-based artefacts so that those things that happen in them, that are important for the work of the actor-network, can be perpetuated, although it is important to remember that such reifications can lead to a loss of complexity (Wenger, 1998). *Mobilisation* is also achieved through people: internal moderators, university and college liaison tutors, all the other people in the big monthly meetings who tell the college-based tutors what is coming next, or what procedures are now due, or what the new look syllabus might be like.

Ordering the social project of assessment is a technologically complex task, therefore, consisting of a chain made up of links that are both human and non-human. But, as has already been established, these links are more-or-less strong or secure. The university can create a complex infrastructure made up of a variety of text-based artefacts and procedures, forms and meetings that go with these, but it cannot make too many assumptions about how different people will interpret and/or operate within such frameworks, which are rendered permissive, open to greater or lesser divergent interpretation and action as a consequence of their very materiality. By this I mean that it is a consequence of their materiality that these non-human actors are not able to guarantee uniformity of action or reaction. And this is a characteristic of non-human actors, such as texts, that can be conceptualised through all of the theoretical frameworks that I have drawn on within this research. The new literacy studies

informs us that any text-based artefact is subject to a variety of interpretations because different readers will always bring their own understanding with them, and this prior understanding mediates the meaning that can be made from the artefact. Communities of practice theory informs us that any attempt to turn a conceptual or metaphysical expression or idea into a physical form generates an artefact that is more durable and transportable than a purely abstract concept, but at the expense of some of the subtleties or nuances that the idea may have contained or enshrined – the *double edge of reification* (Wenger, 1998). Finally, actor-network theory informs us that the materiality of any such artefact is relational at best, and may be damaged or misinterpreted at any point along its journey. But it is not only things that can cause vagaries, contradictions or divergent actions. People can do these as well. People who are members of multiple communities of practice (as the tutors, students, moderators and managers enrolled within this PGCE/CertEd network are) all occupy multiple trajectories, multiple positions within them. Put simply, they all know different things and act and behave in different ways. This is why, as I showed in the preceding two chapters, different tutors plan their assignment sessions in different ways, design their resources in different ways or deliver their feedback in different ways.

At first look, the possibility of so much variance in practice seems problematic. From the point of view of the dominant discourses of quality assurance and managerialism, it is. But a more subtle and nuanced account of the kinds of assessment practice that I have been writing about, informed by actor-network theory, tells a different story that is not so much about saying that such variance is problematic, but that such variance is a natural, organic consequence of the establishment and maintenance of such a chain of human and non-human actors within a network. Rather than positing the variability of practice that such a permissive framework allows as problematic, an ANT account simply acknowledges this variability, because it is there, it is natural and in some senses, both unsurprising, because such variability can be seen as quite common once the exigencies that impact on actors are taken into consideration, and surprising, because notwithstanding so much difference, so many ways of doing things, the social project is still ordered in such a way that those actors

for whom this project is important and meaningful can be satisfied with how this ordering has taken place.

So, how are PGCE/CertEd assessment processes ordered across institutional, temporal and spatial boundaries? They are ordered through the actions of things and people, through routines, habits and customs, through conversations, emails and forms, all of which combine in such a way to make all of the people involved do particular things at particular times. This might be writing an essay, writing some feedback, moderating a sample of scripts or compiling an external examiner's report. This network is sometimes vague, sometimes precise, sometimes permissive and sometimes highly procedurally scripted. It is also impressive, perhaps even astonishing. The coordinating efforts that take place within this network are considerable: a quality that gets lost amidst the discourses of quality assurance.

Chapter Eleven

The validity and reliability of assessment: a social practice perspective

This is the last of four chapters that foreground the empirical data that I have collected whilst carrying out my research. In this chapter, I draw on the analyses presented in the previous three chapters in proposing that claims to the validity and reliability of assessment practices within the Holgate University PGCE/CertEd are *problematic* (Smith, 2005). I argue that it is as a result of my research into how assessment gets done and how tutors and students use and respond to the text-based artefacts that reify assessment practice across this constellation of communities of PGCE/CertEd practice, that questions emerge as to how valid and reliable these assessment practices actually are. In this chapter, therefore, the problematic resides in the ways in which assessment on the PGCE/CertEd can be described as valid and reliable. The challenge to the attribution of these qualities to the PGCE/CertEd assessment process rests on the social practice perspective that I have adopted. The question that I am going to answer is: *what does a social practice account of assessment imply for how assessment is carried out: specifically, how does it inform debates about assessment validity and reliability?*

I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the key concepts of assessment validity and reliability, contextualised within a description of the relationship between the data that has been presented and analysed in the previous three chapters. I then explore two of the modes of assessment that are used within the PGCE/CertEd (namely, the assessment of lesson plans and the assessment of reflective practice) in order to show how claims to assessment validity and reliability are difficult to sustain.

Problematising validity and reliability

Two fundamental aspects of the dominant discourse of quality assurance that surrounds assessment in higher education are the concepts of assessment validity and reliability. Definitions of assessment *validity* can sometimes appear to be excessively numerous. Examples of different aspects to validity include face validity, content validity, construct

validity, predictive validity and concurrent validity; definitions of reliability are more uniform, however (Baume and Yorke, 2002; Knight, 2001; Ramsden, 2003; Yorke, 2001). In order to avoid what might be seen as an excessive balkanisation of assessment terminology, I shall for the purposes of this discussion assume that definitions of the *validity* of any assessment process rest on two dimensions: firstly, that the way in which the assessment task is understood and theorised by students and assessors is in alignment; and secondly, that the evidence that is gathered from the assessment process is adequate and appropriate for assessors to make their inferences regarding the learning and future performance of the student (Messick, 1989). And I shall assume that definitions of the *reliability* of assessment rest on three dimensions: firstly, that the way in which the assessment task is assessed or graded is objective and unbiased; secondly, that the grading or marking of an assessment task is accurate; and thirdly that the implementation and grading of any assessment task is repeatable (Knight, 2001).

Thus far, this thesis has addressed a number of important questions relating to the multiple types of literacy artefacts that tutors and students need to make sense of in order to practice assessment within the PGCE/CertEd course, the ways in which this meaning making is both facilitated and hindered, and the ways in which broader understandings about assessment practice are written, shared and understood across the PGCE/CertEd network of colleges. What has emerged from this analysis is a series of rich descriptions of the ways in which students, tutors, moderators and external examiners go about the work of assessment within this PGCE/CertEd. I have written about the ways in which tutors explain assessment to students and the ways in which students make their own meaning regarding what is needed to complete the assignments for the modules. I have written about the different tools, artefacts and processes that the assessment process requires, creates and draws on. I have written about the tensions, debates and ambiguities that run through the process of assessment – that are an inextricable and unavoidable aspect of assessment. And it is within these complexities and ambiguities that claims to assessment validity and reliability begin to come under stress.

At the outset, it is important to foreground the limits of this chapter. Not all of the assessment tasks – that is, the actual things that students have to do – on the PGCE/CertEd are unpacked within my research. For a number of reasons, I decided not to explore at any serious level the academic essay writing that students do during the course. Partly this was due to reasons of practicality: I simply did not have the time to look at everything that I collected or had access to. And partly this was due to the fact that other research focused on the essay writing practices of non-traditional undergraduate students seemed to me to be so compelling and to work so well in explaining the difficulties that I encountered with my own students and that were reported to me during my research, that any detailed analysis on my part seemed to be unnecessary (Ivanić, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Similarly, I did not focus on the ways in which students collected together in their portfolios the learning and teaching resources that they create and then use in their teaching practice. Partly, this was also in recognition of the fact that the sheer volume of such materials was considerable. But it was also due to a more theoretical concern. Such was the sheer variety of such materials, generated by teachers who all worked in very different curricular areas, that it seemed difficult to find a coherent conceptual framework within which I could subject them to a close analysis that could be carried out within the confines of my existing research plan. My threefold theoretical framework (communities of practice, new literacy students and actor-network theory) could be used to subject these resources to considerable scrutiny, but would take so much time and so much space, that my research project would become simply too large.

However, I have explored other assessment processes in depth. The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is one of these. In chapter three, I used the example of the ILP to examine Wenger's concepts of transparency and communicative ability of artefacts. In chapter eight, I drew attention to the different elements of the ILP, including the guidance that Holgate University gives to students regarding its completion. In chapter ten, I investigated the tensions that can be found within the ILP process, specifically those that lie between the ipsative assessment function of the ILP, its role as an auditable document within a quality assurance regime, and the permissive nature of the guidance that it reifies. ILPs, in common with other portfolio-based assessments in higher education practice, consist of several

different elements or components (Klenowski, 2003; Taylor, 1997; Young, 1999). Different students compile their ILPs in slightly different ways; nonetheless, there are two assessment tasks or practices that all PGCE/CertEd students include in their ILPs: *lesson plans*, and *reflective practice*. And it is my investigation of these two practices, refracted through the lens of social practice theories that I have already established, that forms the vehicle for my argument regarding assessment validity and reliability and thus the central focus of this chapter.

The assessment of lesson plans: assumptions of validity and reliability⁷²

Portfolio-based assessment is generally perceived as being both an accurate and an authentic way of assessing professional courses, and this is attested to by its ubiquity in the HE sector as a whole (Baume, 2001). Such approaches to the validity and reliability of the assessment process rest on an uncritical approach to the reading of the contents of a student's portfolio, however. They assume that each document placed within the portfolio is indeed a document that reflects authentic workplace practices. Such approaches also rest on an uncritical approach to the meanings that the assessor, as reader, takes from the portfolio. It assumes that the assessor has a sufficiently sound understanding and awareness of the student's workplace practices to make a sound assessment decision regarding the documents that have been submitted, in terms of the extent to which they authentically reflect aspects of that student's work.

Lesson plans are included by all PGCE/CertEd students within their ILPs, reflecting their ubiquity in the workplace. It is common practice for further education colleges, and increasingly for adult education providers (due to the introduction of RARPA (Recognition and Reward of Progress and Achievement) a quality assurance regime for non-accredited adult education provision in the lifelong learning sector) to produce a lesson plan template, which can then be distributed to staff. These templates vary in form, but tend to share key features such as: a focus on measurable learning outcomes; details about the student group;

⁷² For what follows, refer also to Tummons (2010a).

differentiation; resources; assessment; and key skills. For those PGCE/CertEd students who teach at the same college where they are studying, access to such templates is quite straightforward. Other students, who work at different institutions to the one where they study, will bring their own templates with them. A minority of students on the course will work in areas where lesson planning is a much less heavily regulated activity, such as adult continuing education or HE. In these cases, students tend to do one of two things: either they use the templates provided by the college where they are studying; or they design their own lesson plans, drawing on examples given by both their college of study and/or the textbooks that they refer to (Hillier, 2005; Nicholls, 2002). But all students use them in their portfolios. As such, the lesson plan provides a practicable as well as meaningful object of analysis.

Tracing the trajectory of a lesson plan

At first glance, it might seem that the journey that a lesson plan makes is a straightforward one. The PGCE/CertEd student writes up the lesson plan and places it inside her portfolio. The PGCE/CertEd tutor reads the lesson plan, provides feedback and makes an assessment decision. Sometimes, the lesson plan is accompanied by other documents. For example, a PGCE/CertEd student may have designed a sequence of sessions and activities for the purpose of an assignment. In this situation a number of lesson plans may have been created, together with handouts, quizzes or other materials, for submission in a portfolio. At other times, the lesson plan is accompanied by a piece of reflective writing, perhaps as part of a reflective journal. And at other times, the lesson plan may accompany an observation of teaching practice, with the PGCE/CertEd tutor watching the lesson whilst referring to the lesson plan. Lesson plans, therefore, can work in several different contexts, across several different *boundaries*. But a social practice approach also demands a critical appreciation of the *authorship* of the lesson plan, and this is similarly multifaceted. Some PGCE/CertEd students find writing them useful; others do not. Some students write lesson plans specifically for the purpose of assessment; others submit lesson plans that they were using anyway. Some students actively welcome the developmental feedback that the lesson plans will attract; others do not. These different responses to writing lesson plans can be categorised in

two ways. Firstly, there are those students who exhibit a *meaningful acceptance* of the practice; secondly, there are those who exhibit a *strategic compliance* of the practice. I shall discuss each of these in turn.

Meaningful acceptance of lesson plans

Students who display *meaningful acceptance* of lesson planning tend to be drawn from two cohorts: firstly, there are those students who are new to teaching in FE colleges; secondly, there are those students who work outside the FE sector, in HE or in private training, for example. For these students, lesson planning, and the detailed plan writing that accompanies it, can be worthwhile, useful and challenging:

The concept of writing a lesson plan is completely alien to me. That idea of having to clearly define objectives and think about environment and whatever, I found very useful.

I actually found it quite difficult to write lesson plans. One thing that I've found is teaching nomenclature, and I find that very difficult.

(Lawrence, student, Scarcroft College)

They're very detailed. I get my leg pulled about it.

(Margaret, student, Millfield College)

I've learned loads from my CertEd, about how to do my lesson plans, how to do my schemes of work. So for your job it does actually benefit you.

(Rachel, student, Scarcroft College)

This process goes beyond spending time creating detailed lesson plans that use the correct specialist terminology. Meaningful accepters also value the formative assessment potential of the lesson planning process. That is to say, the lesson planning process and the way those plans are written up are perceived by these students as being a worthwhile learning experience, a worthwhile professional development activity.

This is more than a simple, willing acceptance of the lesson plan as an aspect of audit culture (Shore and Wright, 2000). Rather, this is the acceptance of the process of lesson planning as a learning process within the PGCE/CertEd:

I delayed actually doing my scheme of work and my lesson plans [for the first module] slightly, because we were just changing the whole of our NVQ training. So rather than just do a paper exercise, my [tutor] encouraged me to make it a meaningful way of changing things.

(Vivienne, student, Scarcroft College)

Strategic compliance with lesson plans

Other PGCE/CertEd students are more ambivalent about the process. This is not to say that they do not spend time and effort preparing for the sessions that they teach; rather, they resist the paper exercise of lesson planning, preferring either to work without a written plan, because such a plan would be inadequate, or to work from their own more idiosyncratic notes.

We were talking about lesson plans and working with lesson plans. And I don't. I do myself a brief outline. I have a notebook which I take everywhere with me, that I do an outline [in]. But I don't always fill in my lesson plan for each session, which I know I should. But I don't.

(Beth, student, Scarcroft College)

Since working for Nunthorpe, I have to completely confess I've probably written lesson plans for times that I've been observed. The rest of my lesson plans come in the form of, I have a notebook, come in the form of a notebook. I don't spend hours writing lesson plans because I don't get paid to do that.

(Kate, student, Nunthorpe College)

It's so difficult to plan a lesson because your numbers could be, you could have 10 in a group and only two turn up. You know, you could be two minutes into the lesson and

two kids start fighting so you know, you think 'oh, right!' So your whole plan just goes straight out the window. So to reflect on [that], what you would put with a lesson plan would be, like 'well, yes, the lesson plan was just screwed up and thrown into the bin because it didn't mean anything'. I don't do anywhere near as many as I should, probably. Certainly, when I know it's coming up to audit time, I'll get back into the habit of starting to do them again.

(Tom, student, Scarcroft College)

For Beth and Kate, the dominant literacy practice of lesson planning is resisted in favour of their own vernacular literacy practices, using their notebooks: the kind of unofficial paperwork that is not valued or even understood by quality systems such as those found within the managerialist cultures of FE and certainly looks quite different to a standardised lesson plan, a dominant literacy practice, of the kind required for PGCE/CertEd assignments (Belfiore et al., 2004: 232). For Tom, the complexity or fluidity of the teaching environment within which he works makes the writing of lesson plans seem meaningless, except as a procedure within a quality assurance framework.

Other students extend their strategic compliance to the assessment process that requires the creation and submission of lesson plans and the like. In contrast to those meaningful accepters of lesson planning who create their lesson plans with the intention of seeking and responding to feedback, strategic compliers employ a more instrumental approach to this aspect of assessment practice.

I thought, 'kill two birds with one stone'. The college observation needed to be done [anyway]. And then I looked at what I was going to include within the assignment [for the first module] so I thought if I've done that, I might as well use it.

(Mary, student, Millfield College)

Problematizing the validity and reliability of lesson plans as objects of assessment

What might be termed a positivist assessment paradigm would assume that the relationship between the PGCE/CertEd student, the lesson plan and the portfolio is unproblematic: the lesson plan is seen as an authentic representation of the student's working practices (as a tutor) and as such becomes a legitimate, valid object of assessment within the portfolio (Johnston, 2004). A social practice perspective offers a more complex reading, however. The student can occupy a number of different positions as the author of the lesson plan. In turn, the lesson plan, as a literacy artefact, can be seen to be speaking to a variety of different audiences, with quite different intentions: as a meaningful locus of learning; as an acceptance of particular workplace practices; and as an instrumental act of strategic compliance to institutional demands, course demands or both. For some tutors, writing lesson plans is more of an administrative burden, a form-filling exercise, than a worthwhile teaching exercise and as such becomes something to be resisted (Belfiore et al., 2004; Fawns and Ivaniç, 2001).

The authorship and meaning of lesson plans are not fixed, but are mutable, varying across contexts and boundaries. If the meanings that are to be attached to a lesson plan are so variable, can the validity of an assessment decision be assumed to be constant? Or, to put it another way, if some students are including their lesson plans in their portfolios with scant regard for any feedback that may accrue, are any of the other portfolio elements, the literacy artefacts drawn from the students professional lives, included in a similar spirit? By which I mean: are students compiling their portfolios as a meaningful assessment exercise, or do they see the portfolio merely as an instrumental exercise in collecting paper and form-filling (Smith and Tillema, 2003), in much the same way as they refuse or fail or are otherwise unwilling to internalise the dominant discourses of lesson planning and audit that are found within their workplaces? If the PGCE/CertEd assessment process is indeed valid, then it follows that any and all of the practices that it enfolds carry (amongst other characteristics) construct validity and authenticity. But how authentic and valid can the assessment be of a lesson plan that has been put together specifically to please assessment requirements, not to be a meaningful reflection of professional, workplace practice?

There is a further difficulty, which lies in the fact that there is a distinction to be drawn between the assessment of a lesson plan, and the assessment of a student's lesson planning. Lesson planning is a complex process that draws on professional knowledge and expertise relating to the needs of the student group, the demands of the curriculum and the resources that are available. Attempting to capture this process in a lesson plan simply serves to highlight what Wenger calls "the double edge of reification, frozen into a text that does not capture the richness of lived experience" (1998: 61). That is to say, lesson planning is too complex, too rich a task to be adequately or successfully captured in the lesson plan. This lesson plan, like any literacy artefact, will have meaning attributed to it that depends in part on who is reading it, and what they already know (Barton, 1994). Does a PGCE/CertEd tutor always know enough about the context within which a PGCE/CertEd student works, or about the pedagogical content and curricula knowledge that the student draws on (Shulman, 1986), to make a sound assessment decision?

I sometimes found it quite strange to get feedback on the scheme of work and the lesson plans when the person wasn't there watching the lesson, because how do they know how it went? This was an agriculture module about livestock, and no offence to either of my teachers, but they know nothing about livestock and they knew nothing about the health and safety issues of trying to take profoundly deaf students onto the farm to work with livestock.

(Louanna, student, Nunthorpe College)

A lesson plan can cross boundaries, moving from a community of practice of teaching to a community of practice of teacher-training, but the rich and complex practices that it rests on cannot. People within the domain where the lesson plan was reified may have an understanding of some or all of these practices; people outside this domain probably do not (Knight, 2006). Thus, the focus shifts from assessment validity to assessment reliability. For an assessment decision to be reliable, it must be consistent, repeatable and unaffected by contingency. If the PGCE/CertEd tutor who is making an assessment decision about the lesson plan of a particular student is highly knowledgeable about the context in which that

student teaches, is their decision more or less reliable than that of a PGCE/CertEd tutor who knows nothing or little about that context? Or, to put it another way, do the student and the tutor share sufficient inter-subjectivity to the extent that a reliable assessment decision can be reached?

The assessment of reflective practice⁷³

Reflective practice is as ubiquitous in the lives of PGCE/CertEd students – and tutors – as is lesson planning. Indeed, as much of the reflective writing that students complete revolves around their teaching practice, the two can be seen as closely intertwined. Reflective practice occupies a central position within the teacher-training curriculum for teachers working in the UK learning and skills sector, which includes the provision of vocational education and training within further education colleges (which predominantly cater for students aged 16–19 who are following technical or vocational programmes of study), and adult and community education settings (which include a wide variety of curricula, from adult literacy or numeracy courses to recreational language courses). That is to say, the importance and necessity of reflective practice, as one element of that body of knowledge required by those organisations that shape this curriculum, remains relatively unchallenged. Whilst there is a considerable debate around approaches to or the politics of reflective practice, and the kinds of knowledge (professional, experiential, propositional or otherwise) that they might or might not encourage (Pickering, 2000; Scott, 2000; Thomas, 2007), the argument that reflective practice should not be undertaken by both new and established members of the teaching workforce in the learning and skills sector remains relatively unexplored. Put simply, it is the norm, not the exception that both student teachers and experienced teachers in the learning and skills sector engage in reflective practice as a component of professional behaviour and development. Consequently, reflective practice needs to be included **within the teacher-training curriculum**. Typically, such courses require students to write a number of reflective commentaries, of varying length, relating to particular aspects of their teaching practice.

⁷³ For what follows, refer also to Tummons (2011b).

One assessment task characteristic of many other teacher-training courses as well as the Holgate PGCE/CertEd involves the selection, by the student, of a number of sessions that they have taught which are then analysed through a reflective practice lens. They may be encouraged to use particular approaches in order to facilitate this, such as Dewey's reflective thinking model, or Brookfield's critical lenses for reflection (Brookfield, 1995; Dewey, 1933). Another common assessment task is the reflection on teaching sessions that have been observed by a mentor or teacher-educator, where the student will both respond to the developmental feedback made by the observer as well as offer her or his own analysis of the session that was observed. Students also frequently write reflections relating to their own progress and learning during their teacher-training course, either through completing their ILP, or through writing a learning journal (Thompson et al., 2009). In addition, more formal 'academic' essay writing can often include reflective elements (MacLellan, 2004). Finally, all of the texts produced are assembled within a portfolio (Klenowski, 2003). In this way, through the production of different reflective texts, the reflective practice of the student teacher becomes an object that can be assessed. Once captured in text form, what might now be termed reflective writing or reflective commentary is subject to the same criteria for assessment that are applied to any other piece of work submitted by the student, such as essays and portfolios.

The assessment of reflective practice: assumptions of validity

If we are to assume that the assessment of reflective practice is valid, then we have to assume that assessors are able to infer, from the assessment process, that what students are doing is indeed 'reflective practice'. That is to say, *pace* Messick (1989), we have to assume that both tutors and students share a broadly common understanding of what reflective practice is, how it's done and what the process means as one aspect of the professional repertoire of the practitioner. The course itself proffers a clear statement as to what reflective practice entails:

Reflective Practice is the systematic analysis and evaluation of what, how and why you are teaching or training. It questions and seeks to improve your professional practice by means of the approach outlined above; however, this course requires you to go beyond constructing 'personal theories' and relate your analysis of practice to the knowledge and understanding you are gaining through the modules you study. Reflective practice will always include critical reflection and may lead to elements of transformative learning. *The assignments and your written evaluations ... will be the main ways in which you demonstrate reflective practice.*

(CertEd/PGCE Course Handbook 2007, 45–46, emphasis added)

But the lived experiences of both tutors and students on the course would seem to belie this. An exploration of the ways in which students firstly understand and then actually go about writing reflections, and the ways in which tutors read and then assess these reflections, demonstrates that the assessment of reflective practice is far from straightforward and is not unproblematically valid.

Unpacking understandings of reflective practice

The role of reflective practice, in providing what might be termed an epistemological bridge between learning in a classroom (as a teacher-training student) and learning as a practitioner (when teaching), is defined as being central to the teacher-training profession and, by extension, to the curriculum. Reflective practice is posited as a framework for inquiry, a way of exploring the norms and assumptions of professional practice. It is a way for practitioners to form or accrete professional knowledge, in ways that professional courses of training are unable to achieve; moreover, this knowledge is as legitimate, as powerful, as the knowledge that accrues from research and scholarship. In addition, as a tool for self-analysis and self-assessment, it offers the practitioner ways of thinking that can be critical, reflexive and even emancipatory:

I find reflective writing easier because I feel that it comes from yourself. Yeah, it has to be backed up with theories, but I think that, I think for me I feel that that's quite natural ... I

believe that reflective writing is all about your own development, and it doesn't have to be reflective about your teaching practice, it's reflective about your own personal development and about, I've never thought of it, I see reflection as very, is it right, philosophical? I don't know if that's right? I feel it's to do with how you perceive things and how you can make changes and how you can learn from them.

(Kate, student, Nunthorpe College)

By contrast, other PGCE/CertEd students tend to express understandings of reflective practice using a relatively narrow, technicist discourse of evaluation and improvement, eschewing those broader issues such as emancipatory professionalism or personal knowledge that are to be found in reflective practice literature:

It's looking at what you have done, how you have done it, and did it work? Did you think it worked well? Is there places where you could actually improve, looking at, taking a detached view of what you've done?

(Susannah, student, Friargate College)

Whenever you've done a piece of work or whenever you've done some teaching, you know. You know yourself whether it's gone well or not so well. [Reflective practice] is actually writing it down.

(Sharon, student, Friargate College)

At one level, such responses to reflective practice are understandable. The majority of the students on the PGCE/CertEd work in FE colleges, within a workplace culture characterised by managerialism and performativity. In such workplaces there is little space for discourses of emancipatory professionalism, not least as the workplace in question has witnessed a gradual erosion of many aspects of professional autonomy (Bathmaker and Avis, 2005; Gleeson, Davies, and Wheeler, 2005; Lea, 2003). And so, as students attempt to juggle a requirement to obtain a compulsory professional qualification with the pressing demands of the workplace, a surface or instrumental approach to assessment, as a deliberate strategy on the part of

students, emerges. In these cases, reflective practice is reduced to a simple form of self-assessment or evaluation: straightforward and unproblematic actually to write.

PGCE/CertEd tutors do not always extol the professional, reflexive and emancipatory forms of reflection that such 'instrumental' students similarly reject: amongst tutors, conversations about reflective practice are, not unexpectedly, as diverse as the debate that is found within books and journals. The variety of positions adopted by tutors is matched by the various ways in which tutors engage with reflective practice as a pedagogic activity. Two methods of 'teaching' reflective practice predominate: classroom activities, and marking and responding to summative assignments.

Classroom activities typically revolve around the discussion of different models of reflective practice, and how they might be used to reflect on teaching practice:

Yesterday we did the first year's reflective practitioner models, so we started off very loosely, saying ... 'give me a definition of reflective practice', and they worked in groups. And then, 'give me personal characteristics of what qualities you think a reflective practitioner should have' ... And what I tried to do with them was tie in appropriate theories, and then tie that in to reflecting upon lesson plans and a scheme of work and their materials, and giving them links to the current assignment they're working on, and future assignments ... So [I was] trying to make links to where this [or that] reflective practice model would be appropriate.

(Helen, tutor, Scarcroft College)

And some tutors also use written feedback to engage in debate:

Reflective learning shows personal insight and increasing awareness. Reflective practice has some critical engagement but, occasionally, opportunities for the development of this were not fully exploited. For instance, an interesting debate to consider would be whether someone who chooses to study on a programme that is not presented in his or

her first language should be offered extra learning support, as would someone whose first language is BSL [British Sign Language].

(Written feedback by Carol, tutor, Friargate College)

What is important to note in the light of this discussion is that understandings of reflective practice are both emergent and contingent. They are emergent in the sense that they unfold and expand over time as a consequence of learning on the PGCE/CertEd, and the negotiations that take place between students and tutors. And they are contingent in the sense that the nature of these negotiations of meaning will depend on the identity of the participants (Wenger, 1998). That is to say, different tutors will 'teach' reflective practice in a number of ways; and students will in turn respond to these differently. In a sense this is hardly surprising when we consider the multiplicity of reflective practice paradigms and theories, and the differing perspectives that such theories offer relating to the relationship between reflective practice, professional learning and development, and the development of professional knowledge or expertise.

Writing reflective practice

For some students, however, writing up reflections that are restricted in scope (that is, that remain at a technical, evaluative level) represents a different kind of deliberative action. In this sense, students are not working at a surface level primarily in order to reduce the amount of time and effort they spend on their work. Nor are they mediating their reflective writing in response to a preference for one kind of reflective practice over another. Rather, they are seeking to avoid writing in a more critical, expansive manner as a means of preserving and perhaps protecting their own sense of professional identity or reputation: they do not wish to write down honestly, to reify in a concrete form, events or actions that may have negative repercussions or connotations. Put another way, these students are resisting the dominant discourses of reflective practice (Gee, 1996):

Louanna (student, Nunthorpe College): [Writing reflections is] unbelievably difficult. Writing it on the page. It makes it permanent somehow. I don't know. I find it really, really difficult. And we have actually discussed at PGCE whether oral reflections would be allowed as part of our coursework because they would be so much easier to do.

Jonathan: I'm interested in this notion of making it permanent. Tell me about that.

Louanna: Well, if you reflect on a lesson that's gone really badly, by putting it on paper there's a record of it. It's saved on my disk, saved on the computer, and my mentor, who just happens to be my boss as well, could look at it and go, 'Oh God, that didn't really happen did it?' And I just think it's like emails rather than having a telephone conversation with someone. [As with] email, it's written down and it's a piece of written evidence I suppose.

For other students, the discomfort of reflective writing lies not only in what is written down, but how it is written. In this sense, it is the way in which reflections are written, using the first person and drawing on personal experience, that causes discomfort on the part of the writer to varying degrees. Put simply, some students are not used to writing about themselves in this way, in the knowledge that what they write is going to be assessed, or judged, by someone else. And it is quite understandable for these student writers to feel nervous or at least unsure about expressing themselves in such an unfamiliar way. Such students are resisting the *genre* of reflective writing:

I guess it's easier to talk about it than write it, write it out ...it's the style of writing, isn't it, and it's a style of writing that I've never really done. I didn't do as an undergraduate, you don't do it as an undergraduate, you know, I never did it in [professional] practice, and it's just, maybe it's that, it's just sort of a little bit, it's an alien thing to do still, to actually write something like that down, and so it sort of feels uncomfortable. I guess maybe it's, you know, you don't, committing sort of personal thoughts to a bit of paper and getting someone else to read it, it's a different style of writing to what I'm used to and to what I'm comfortable with.

(Jo, student, Friargate College)

In general, [in my work] I write factual pieces that are carefully researched. I write nothing which cannot be substantiated by a piece of evidence, as that's the way I've been taught. Occasionally you put in your own bit of opinion and you think yourself a bit naughty.

(Laurence, student, Scarcroft College)

Therefore, there are two issues to consider when assessing the truthfulness of the accounts written by these students. Firstly, there is the extent to which their reflective writing is constructed in such a way so as to avoid producing a more reflexive, critical or honest account of a particular moment or event so that they do not position themselves as vulnerable. Secondly, there is the extent to which the genre of reflective writing is an unfamiliar and uncomfortable one, in some senses contradicting the requirements of more 'traditional' forms of essay writing in higher education, which has the effect of limiting the scope or criticality of what students who are more used to abstract, impersonal, third-person narratives feel able to write.

The assessment of reflective practice: assumptions of reliability

Discourses of quality assurance within UK universities would nonetheless seem to suggest that the formation of some kind of consensus regarding the assessment of students' reflective writing is possible. Reflective practice is a core component of the PGCE/CertEd curriculum. Benchmarks are provided through module learning outcomes and assignment criteria. Textbooks about reflective practice appear on indicative reading lists. The module feedback pro forma includes a space for the assessor to comment on 'quality of reflection', accompanied by a tick box to indicate that an 'acceptable' level of reflection has been reached. Internal moderation and external examination events allow for the development and discussion of shared understandings of reflective writing. Such documents and procedures are designed, amongst other things, to ensure a standardised approach to the assessment of reflective practice, to ensure it's *reliability*:

The course aims to provide students with the opportunity to ... develop the ability to evaluate and apply models of reflective practice to their professional and learning activities.

(CertEd/PGCE Course Handbook 2007, 11)

Nonetheless, despite these efforts, differences in practice do come through. These might appear to be relatively trivial and need not lead to difficulties within the assessment process. But on some occasions, they can have disorienting effects on students:

It was marked, and yes that's absolutely fine, for one tutor. And then I wrote another one for a different tutor and she absolutely slated it. And she had a comment on the bottom, well she had several comments all the way through it, and one of the comments was there was no evidence of teaching taking place, or learning taking place. And that absolutely gutted me.

(Kate, student, Nunthorpe College)

It is perhaps not surprising to find that, from time to time, assessors disagree. The proliferation of module specifications, learning outcomes and moderation meetings cannot realistically be expected to ensure absolute uniformity within a course that is delivered across a large number of institutions and by a large number of tutors (Price, 2005). But when a student is directly exposed to these differences of professional judgement (for that is what they are), then she is entitled to be concerned. At the same time, if the consistency of assessment decision between markers is one element that contributes to reliability, then the use of a single marker for a single piece of work is another:

Margaret (student, Millfield College): One of my comments from one of the observations was that I didn't stick strictly to the times on my lesson plan. Now to me, a lesson plan is a guide ... I had no chance to then discuss why I had done that.

Jonathan: Did you not have ... a discussion time after the observation?

Margaret: Very little, a very little discussion. But then that discussion wasn't recorded, so it's all very well for an observer to put their comments down, but I didn't have a chance to respond.

Jonathan: And did you put that in your [reflections on observation form] then?

Margaret: Yes, but I wanted the observer to know my side of the story. I wanted to discuss it.

Jonathan: But the observer didn't mark the file, [a different tutor] marked the file, so the observer won't have read what you wrote.

There are a few things to think about here. Firstly, this single assessment component (an observation of a teaching session) will be assessed on this occasion by two people (a not uncommon practice): the observing tutor, and the tutor who will actually mark the file within which the observation report and Margaret's reflections thereon are compiled. Consequently, issues relating to consistency of decision between assessors re-emerge. In addition, there is a question regarding the assessment of Margaret's reflections on the observed session. Can someone who did not perform the observation make a sound assessment decision relating to the reflections that arose from it? Would such a marker know enough about the observation to make sense of the reflections?

Problematising the validity and reliability of assessing reflective practice

Thus far, I have delineated three areas of concern that impact on the validity of the assessment of reflective practice on this course. The first relates to what students – and tutors – think reflective practice actually is. This impacts on what students write and how tutors read it. The second relates to the writing of reflective practice, and the reluctance of students to position themselves in certain ways. This also impacts on what they write. The third relates to how assessment decisions are made by tutors who are reading reflective practice. This impacts on how reflections are read and particularly on how assessors make meaning from what they read.

These three concerns share a common provenance: they are all rooted in the creation and use of textual artefacts, in the writing and reading of texts. By this I mean that the ways in which the validity of the assessment of reflective practice is problematised in this account are all somehow bound up with these assessments having to be written down by some people (the students) and then read by others (the teacher-educators or assessors). And it is because of particular characteristics of these writing and reading interactions and processes that validity and reliability are rendered problematic. To put it another way, something to do with how students go about writing their reflections (that is to say, what they put in and what they leave out, how they express themselves and how honest or open they choose to be), and how tutors go about reading and assessing them (that is to say, what meaning tutors take from the reflections written by students, and how they make assessment decisions about them), impacts on the validity of the process as a whole.

So, in order to make sense of all this, we need to consider not only the actual reflective practice texts produced by the students, but also the broader social practices within which these texts are produced. These might include the ways in which students approach the task in the first place and the preconceptions that they bring with them. These might also include the students' previous experiences of study, and whether they have used the first person when writing assignments before, or whether they have been schooled in writing in an impersonal, third person voice. We need to think critically about the authorship and readership of reflective texts, and how authors and readers approach them, and this can be done using a social practice perspective, which foregrounds two themes. The first theme is the shared understanding of writing reflective practice, and this relates to the first and third issues that were discussed above (understanding reflective practice, and reading reflective practice). The second theme is the discursual construction of identity through writing reflective practice, and this relates to the second issue discussed (writing reflective practice).

Definitions of reflective practice remain contested. Tutors and students on this teacher-training course construct their own meanings about reflective practice, and writing reflective practice, through reading a range of texts that exist in a range of genres: textbooks, academic

journals, course handbooks, module specifications, professional standards. With so many people involved, reading a multiplicity of texts in a variety of social contexts (that is, PGCE/CertEd classes in different colleges, all reading and talking about different models of and approaches to reflective practice), it is unsurprising that meaning making should be so diffuse. This is not to say that the opposite is desirable: it would be objectionable from the point of view of the academic curriculum for a single, uncontested meaning of reflective practice to be enforced. But it is important to recognise that *creating a shared meaning for reflective practice, and hence how it should be assessed, is far from straightforward*. Therefore, rather than view the reflective writing of PGCE/CertEd students as somehow able to be assessed through recourse or reference to a set of outcomes or benchmarks, we need to accept the multiplicity of meanings that students (and tutors) will make regarding reflective practice. Consequently, we must also accept that these meanings are negotiated in any number of different contexts, mediated by both varieties of texts and the prior understandings of different tutors. That is, rather than there being one broadly agreed meaning of reflective practice, and how it should be written for the purposes of assessment, there are many meanings, created in a variety of localities, and learned in specific ways (Street, 2005).

It is through writing that reflective practice is reified within the PGCE/CertEd assessment process. The practice of writing more generally serves both to consolidate student understanding and to produce a means by which tutors can learn about the extent of that understanding for the purposes of assessment and certification (Lillis, 2001). However, the *genres* of writing that students are expected to use vary according to the method of assessment being employed: for example, formal academic essays require a particular form of essayist literacy that privileges third person, masculinist discourses (Gee, 1996). All such assessment literacies are *dominant* literacies, imposed in this case by a conflation of requirements and expectations drawn from the academic community, the curriculum and government sponsored professional standards. And, just as some students exhibit resistance to essayist literacy practices, for reasons related to identity and positionality (Ivanić, 1998; Lillis, 2001), so other students exhibit resistance to *reflective literacy practices*. This is not to say that such students reject the wider process of reflective practice, or its position within the

teaching profession; rather, such students are rejecting the practice of writing reflections, and then offering up what has been written for someone else to read. This may be because they are not used to writing reflectively (that is, using an unfamiliar genre) for making meaning. Or it may be because they are unwilling to write reflectively because the use of the first person, and the subjective position that the writer necessarily occupies leaves them open to a level of scrutiny with which they are not comfortable.

Conclusion: what does a social practice account of assessment imply for how assessment is carried out: specifically, how does it inform debates about assessment validity and reliability?

If the tasks that students are performing are sometimes being carried out with scant concern for the learning that might accrue from them, if they are performed solely to either fulfil or attempt to fulfil the perceived wishes of whomsoever might read and/or mark them, or if they are completed with a lack of openness or honesty that has been engendered by the student's own misgivings, difficulties or fears regarding the task at hand, then how can such assessments be valid or reliable? If a student submits lesson plans for assessment with little or no intention of reading the feedback but simply because they were conveniently to hand when compiling the file, or submits lesson plans that bear little or no relation to the processes of lesson planning that they do actually do, then what has the student actually learned, above and beyond the mechanistic need to file a piece of paper in a particular place? If a student feels that they cannot write in an honest, critical manner when writing reflections, or feels that the ways in which they are asked to write reflections position them in an uncomfortable or compromising manner, then what value does the exercise hold? And if different tutors cannot agree on how to mark such writing, then what value can be attached to the grades and feedback that they provide?

The validity of the assessment of lesson plans (and, by extension, other text-based artefacts that are derived from students' workplace practice, such as teaching resources or handouts) within portfolio-based assignments assumes two things: firstly, that the contents of a portfolio

are an authentic reflection of the professional working practices of the student; secondly, that the portfolio represents a meaningful engagement with learning within the course in question. The reliability of portfolio-based assessment assumes that the assessor is qualified (in all senses of the word) to make a legitimate assessment decision. These assumptions are not always justified. For some students, the compilation of a portfolio is an exercise in creating paperwork to fulfil assessment criteria, not in submitting documentation that provides an authentic representation of their professional practice. For other students, the submission of a portfolio is an exercise in filing, not learning. And for some students, the process is a mechanistic one that does not generate meaningful feedback.

The ways in which reflective practice is currently assessed within the teacher training curriculum for the learning and skills sector are similarly problematic, and fail to acknowledge the contingencies and complexities that surround reflective practice as an aspect of professional repertoire (Schön, 1983). Dominant contemporary assessment paradigms, as they relate to the assessment of reflective practice, use technologies such as written outcomes and criteria, moderation and standardised assessment tasks, resting on a positivist approach that assumes that such technologies can thereby render assessment decisions valid and reliable (Johnston, 2004). The account of the literacy practices that are involved in the reading and writing of reflective practice assignments that I have presented here illuminates a number of difficulties when trying to maintain such a positivist stance. Competing and sometimes conflicting understandings of what reflective practice actually is impact on both student and tutor meaning making, and these meanings in turn inform how students write reflections, once again problematising the authenticity of what is written by students. And at the same time, different tutors bring different meanings to the reading, and marking, of reflective practice.

The attribution of validity and reliability to any assessment process rests on certain assumptions: that the task does indeed assess what it is intended to assess; that the course content is appropriately assessed; that the ways in which the assessment tasks are constructed are appropriate to the curriculum being followed; that the assessment of the

student can predict future performance; and that the assessment is conducted and marked or graded in a consistent manner. Having foregrounded the textual nature of assessment throughout this thesis, it seems only right to explore assessment at least in part through an exploration of those texts that constitute the process and the practices that enfold them. In earlier chapters, I have analysed the texts and practices that embody assessment, that reify assessment processes and set out how assessment should be accomplished, when it should be accomplished, and who needs to be involved in each part of the process. In this chapter, I have analysed two central literacy practices that are found within the actual doing of assessment – the compiling of portfolios and the writing of reflections. And I have demonstrated that through such an analysis, problems or difficulties relating to the doing of assessment that might otherwise remain concealed or unreported, are foregrounded and problematised. Put simply, the ways in which lesson planning is assessed within this PGCE/CertEd are not valid; nor are they reliable; the ways in which reflective practice is assessed similarly lack validity and reliability.

This is not to say that they *always* lack rigour or authenticity. Indeed, for many students, writing reflections or reading feedback on lesson planning are constructive and meaningful learning processes. But for many other students, they are not. Despite the rigours of quality assurance, internal moderation and external examination claims to **validity and reliability** in these – and perhaps other – modes of assessment within this PGCE/CertEd – and perhaps other similar courses as well – would appear to rest on foundations that are uncertain at best.

Chapter Twelve

The assessment of trainee teachers: conclusions

The Holgate University PGCE/CertEd network is a complex and impressive entity. It is one of the largest providers of teacher education for the post-compulsory education and training sector in England or Wales. Indeed, it is one of the largest HEI providers of any kind of Higher Education in Further Education provision in England or Wales. The Holgate PGCE/CertEd is delivered across thirty further education colleges, involving a hundred teacher-educators and nearly two thousand students. This is achieved through the mobilisation of a rich and complex array of academic and administrative staff, procedures and systems, handbooks and websites, meetings and emails. Ofsted reports, QAA reports and external examiners' reports regularly commend the ways by which the network is run, commenting favourably on the quality of the teaching, the scope of available resources and the quality of assessment and feedback.

This thesis does not seek to diminish the excellent work done within and across the network. From professional experience as well as from my research I am all too aware of the hard work done by both tutors and students, many of whom invariably do their PGCE/CertEd work alongside significant other professional and/or family commitments. What this thesis does seek to do, however, is to look a little more deeply and in a more patient and painstaking way at *how* all of this work gets done: specifically, how the work of *assessment*, as a proxy for the work of the network as a whole, gets done. By this I mean to stress that although the ethnographic account that I have written here relates to and revolves around assessment, many of the themes and concepts that I have explored – complexity, textually mediated practice, artefacts, learning – may well relate to other practices within the PGCE/CertEd network as well. But it is assessment that has been the focus here, a choice based on my own research and professional interests.

In this final chapter, I offer a series of conclusions relating to assessment: specifically, to the assessment of trainee teachers, although I argue that elements of my research findings also

have implications for other HE provision. I conclude that assessment is a textually rich and complex practice, mediated by a variety of pedagogic strategies that position students within particular performative identities. I go on to conclude that assessment across institutional and organisational boundaries is inherently complex in ways that quality assurance discourses are incapable of acknowledging. I also conclude that the assessment of trainee teachers within this university network cannot in any robust sense be described as valid or reliable. Finally, I offer a series of recommendations for HE assessment practice. This thesis also seeks to contribute to broader theoretical discussions about communities of practice theory, and it is to this theoretical element of my research that I shall now turn.

Communities of practice

The Holgate PGCE/CertEd can be understood as a constellation of communities of practice within which different kinds of learning take place (learning being characteristic of all communities of practice). Some of the things that students – and tutors – learn within this constellation of communities are incidental to this thesis, but there are three aspects of learning that are central to it. Firstly, students are learning how to be teachers in the PCET sector. Secondly, students are learning how to be PGCE/CertEd students. Thirdly, students are learning how to complete assessments for this PGCE/CertEd course. All three of these kinds of learning can be seen in how the students do their assessments, how tutors give feedback on them and how both students and tutors talk about assessment. As the PGCE/CertEd is found within formal educational institutions, *pedagogy* must be present. The language of formal instruction is problematic for early iterations of communities of practice theory – or, more properly, theories of learning as socially situated, from which communities of practice theory emerges (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In order to position pedagogy within communities of practice theory in a conceptually coherent way, I suggest that pedagogy – in this constellation at least but perhaps in others as well – can be understood as being an aspect of the *repertoire* of the constellation of communities, *reified* within a *learning architecture* of seminar rooms, handbooks, textbooks, class-based activities, PowerPoint presentations and ILPs (Wenger, 1998). This architecture is impressive and richly detailed,

thoroughly planned and carefully evaluated through staff meetings, cross-centre moderation meetings, trial marking sessions, external examiners' meetings and such like. Nonetheless, nobody can *predict* the scope of learning that may happen within and across the constellation, because learning is by definition contingent and emergent, mediated by people, places and things (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

My use of communities of practice theory stems from my own understanding of learning as socially situated practice. That is to say, it is because I subscribe to an understanding of learning as socially situated that I therefore draw on communities of practice theory in order to explore the places and ways by which this learning is mediated. Specifically, the tools or concepts that the theory offers – repertoire, learning architecture, brokerage, boundary, multimembership, trajectory – allow me to describe and explore learning – and, consequently, assessment – across this constellation of communities. At the same time, I have foregrounded my use of two other bodies of theory that also rest on social epistemological and ontological foundations: new literacy studies and actor-network theory. These two frameworks help me in ways that communities of practice theory cannot. New literacy studies provides me with concepts with which to explore the text-based artefacts that reify assessment practice. Actor-network theory provides concepts that allow me to problematise and interrogate how these artefacts move from the university to the colleges, across multiple organisational boundaries. But I feel it is important to reiterate that my use of these two frameworks is simply because my research has required particular conceptual tools that communities of practice theory does not offer. I am not saying that communities of practice theory is flawed. Rather, it is a theory that has limits and that can therefore be usefully complemented with other theoretically-aligned approaches, as I have done here. I feel that it is important also to reiterate that communities of practice theory is, in essence, a theory of learning: new literacy studies and actor-network theory are not. Consequently, as this thesis is in many ways about learning and since I understand learning to be a socially situated practice, it follows that communities of practice theory rests at the centre of my analysis.

In concluding this discussion, I argue that this thesis contributes to other literature about communities of practice through the use of additional theoretical frameworks that are positioned here as complementary to, not contradictory of, the frameworks established by Lave and Wenger, and Wenger. As well as foregrounding learning within communities of practice, I therefore propose that this thesis also demonstrates how a comprehensive as well as critical use of the paradigmatic elements of the theory, with a particular focus on Wenger's (1998) relatively underused concept of *learning architecture* (Brosnan and Burgess, 2003), can allow the researcher to create rich and insightful analyses of the social practices that surround learning and assessment. And it is the significant findings of this research that I shall now address.

The assessment of trainee teachers within communities of practice

The research that I have carried out in order to write this thesis, resting on what might be termed a *composite social practice framework* which also includes a methodology that is in epistemological and ontological alignment with this framework as a whole,⁷⁴ has generated four main conclusions, reflecting my four research questions.⁷⁵ I shall briefly summarise the answers to these questions here before moving on to consider the extent to which these research findings are transferable or generalisable.

Firstly, it is evident from my research that assessment is a textually rich and complex social practice, bound up in and mediated by all kinds of texts that are used in different ways by different people at different times, and that exhibit particular intertextual hierarchies and relationships. Indeed, the number of genres of texts that students and tutors use is impressive, ranging from textbooks and refereed journal articles to handbooks, PowerPoint slides, wikis and handouts. Many students and tutors find using all of these different texts to be a straightforward process: many others do not. It is here, in amongst the handbooks, pdf files and slides, before students even start writing an essay or a reflective journal, that the first barriers to participation begin to make themselves felt.

⁷⁴ Refer to chapter six.

⁷⁵ Refer to chapter five.

Secondly, my research reveals that the ways that students learn 'how to do' assessment are similarly multi-faceted and complex. In the first instance, the ways by which students come to know about assessment are mediated through pedagogic strategies designed and facilitated by tutors. But these strategies rest on paradoxical foundations. Tutors bemoan the lack of 'independent study skills' amongst their students, rendered all the more remarkable when taking into consideration the fact that all of these students are also tutors and so should be in a position to help themselves. But they continue to provide the kinds of activities that are dismissed by critics as 'spoon-feeding': writing frames that all but answer the question and leave little room for metacognition or the ever-elusive 'skills' of 'critical thinking'; marking rough draft after rough draft and providing corrections and feedback that steer students towards the desired answers or actions; and coaching students through their assignments during class contact time. At the same time, tutors describe some their students as suffering from 'student syndrome', a performative identity that is in turn recognised and adopted by some of the students, who in turn see these identities in the behaviour of their own students in their FE colleges.

Thirdly, my research demonstrates the sheer complexity – and the concomitant fragility – of assessment practices as they are enacted across the Holgate PGCE/CertEd network. The coordination of the work of assessment between and across the colleges requires a number of technologies, as well as people to accompany and use them: internal moderation processes; standardised feedback pro forma; training days; boards of studies; module handbooks. However, whilst these and other procedures and systems provide a veneer of standardisation and systemisation that sustains discourses of audit and quality assurance, a patient and closely-focussed exploration of them reveals that there are in fact many points of stress or weakness within and across this chain of events, people and processes. As the network gets larger and crosses more complex temporal, geographic and institutional boundaries, so the different actors within the network find themselves enmeshed in more and more complex work practices. At the same time, it becomes harder for the network to coordinate activities across its links or chains as they grow and as the distances between the actors expand. As a result, divergent patterns of behaviour emerge, which can be seen and

then made sense of at particular moments of practice where the capacity of the ordering work of the network is stretched by other, often local, concerns.

Fourthly, my research demonstrates that claims to the validity and reliability of assessment within this PGCE/CertEd are far from certain, notwithstanding audit trails, inspections and quality assurance. As the social practices of assessment have emerged – or, better, have been uncovered – during the course of this ethnography, so a rich array of dispositions, feelings, practices and responses to and about assessment have come forward that serve to question the ways in which established definitions of assessment validity and reliability are attributed to this course. Tutors teach to the test; students demur from studying any course content that is not directly related to the assignment. Tutors sometimes have to make assessment decisions about aspects of teaching practice about which they know very little in terms of propositional or practical knowledge; students compile their portfolios with scant regard for the feedback that they might encourage or the intersubjective dialogues that might be engendered. This is not to say that assessment practices are hollow or worthless: for many students and tutors, the process is rich, constructive and vibrant. But for many others, it is bureaucratic, cumbersome, lacking in relevance or opportunity for meaningful learning.

Assessment in higher education: broader implications

What might these findings mean for assessment not only within this single PGCE/CertEd programme, but within other HE programmes? To what extent might the practices of other programmes that share some or all of the characteristics of this one be similarly explored, and might similar questions regarding validity and reliability emerge? Or, to put these questions another way, to what extent is this research *transferable* or *generalisable* across the HE sector?

I have already explored concepts of research generalisability and transferability as I have applied them to my thesis.⁷⁶ These can be briefly reiterated as situating my thesis within a

⁷⁶ Refer to chapter six.

broader body of study which is in turn positioned within a body of research and scholarship that rests on social practice perspectives (in terms of both conceptualisation and theorisation, and research methodology) relating to assessment in higher education and, specifically, the portfolio-based assessment of professional courses.⁷⁷ With these issues in mind, though sensitive to the *situated* nature of my research, I suggest that the four conclusions (above) I have drawn from my research findings can be seen as potentially transferable not only to other part-time teacher-training courses, but also to other HE programmes that use similar assessment modes and patterns. I further suggest that these should be seen as *problematic* (pace Smith, 2005), thereby warranting continuing research and analysis.

The *complexity of social and textual practices* that envelop and inhabit assessment processes and procedures is the first problematic to emerge. There is at this time a significant extant body of literature relating to the social and textual practices of assessment, although part-time and HE in FE provision is relatively under-represented. As part-time and HE in FE provision is predicted to grow in the near future, (at the present time, 10% of HE provision is delivered in FE colleges, 30% of FE college students follow degree-level programmes and 70% of colleges deliver HE in FE provision) it would seem that research in this area would be worthwhile (Parry et al., 2003). There are two aspects to this potential area of research that I would wish to foreground. Firstly, there is the place of the student in and amongst these assessment practices: the ways in which students write and compile their assignments can and do impact on the authenticity of the assessment process, with consequent effects for assessment validity and reliability, and as such need to be further explored. Secondly, there is the place of the tutor: the knowledge that tutors bring to assessment and feedback, and the meanings that they take from students' work, are also complex, and also impact on validity and reliability.

The second problematic concerns *how students come to know how to do assessment*. Here, I suggest that what Lillis (2001) has described as the *institutional mystery of assessment* needs to be expanded beyond the nature of assessment tasks themselves, to include all

⁷⁷ Refer to chapter four.

those artefacts, processes and methods by which assessment tasks are explicated. That is to say, it is within the proliferation of writing frames, 'how to' sessions, formative feedback pro forma and multiple draft submissions that some aspect of what is problematic in assessment practice resides. For some students, the methods by which they receive advice and guidance regarding assessment ironically serve only to add a further layer of complexity to the process. Anecdotally, this does not seem to be a phenomenon restricted to the Holgate provision. At the university where I now work, and at the two universities where I serve as an external examiner for PCET teacher-training programmes, similar practices are evident and are deserving of further research and inquiry.

Quality assurance and audit within higher education constitutes the third problematic.

Critiques of quality assurance in higher education practice – the ways by which managerial culture impact on academic practice, on workplace cultures, on audit systems and such like – are well established, and I do not intend to rehearse them here. The point that I wish to foreground relates quite specifically to what might be termed the *masking effects* of quality assurance and audit processes. I have argued in this thesis that these processes have the effect of suppressing the complexities and ambiguities that are always present within assessment systems, portraying such systems as straightforwardly rigorous and robust when such judgements are not necessarily well founded.⁷⁸ In this way important conversations about assessment, about the judgements made by assessors and the reasons why they make them, are lost sight of. In contrast to this, I suggest that such conversations need to be foregrounded, and that complexity and ambiguity need to be acknowledged rather than simply ignored.

In many ways, these three problematics can be seen as conflating to create a fourth and final area of discussion and inquiry: *assessment validity and reliability*. This is a theme that emerged during my research but that has in many ways come to dominate the conclusions that I draw from it. All of my prior conclusions – the complexity of social and textual practices, coming to know about assessment and the complexity and ambiguity of the ordering of

⁷⁸ Refer to chapter ten.

assessment – come together at this point.⁷⁹ I have argued in this thesis that claims to the validity and reliability of assessment on the Holgate PGCE/CertEd rest on uncertain foundations. It follows therefore that further research into other assessment systems at other institutions, based on the first three problematics that I have outlined here, might lead to similar conclusions regarding assertions of assessment validity and reliability.

Assessment in higher education: an uncertain future for validity and reliability

If, as I have suggested, the first three problematic areas that I have outlined above all conflate to create a fourth, then it seems right to propose ways by which this fourth problematic – assessment validity and reliability – might be addressed. This is not to say that the first three are in themselves not worthy of consideration and possible action. Certainly, my research highlights the *curriculum creep* that leads to an excessive focus on assessment – perhaps at the expense of wider learning – that in turn serves to generate a whole host of handbooks, worksheets, writing frames and so forth that for some students may be doing more harm than good. Similarly, my research suggests that aspects of current quality assurance procedures have distorting effects on assessment, feedback and moderation practice. But the questions that are raised in my thesis regarding validity and reliability run through and across all of this thesis and as such constitute a more significant area for possible changes to practice. By this I mean to stress that it is through addressing validity and reliability that implications for the other three problematics emerge.

Firstly, a greater emphasis is needed regarding the development of assessor-assessee intersubjectivity (Baume and Yorke, 2002). Within the PCET teacher-training curriculum, subject-specific pedagogy still occupies only a marginal role, predominantly enfolded within mentoring practices, which are themselves highly variable. Teacher-trainers more often than not do not share subject specialisms with the majority of their students. If the link between assessor-assessee intersubjectivity and assessment reliability is accepted, then it follows that the processes of introducing subject specialist input across the PCET curriculum and of

⁷⁹ Refer to chapter eleven.

transferring assessment decision-making to subject specialist teacher trainers need to be encouraged.

Secondly, a challenge is needed to the dominant discourses of managerialism and performativity within the PCET sector (Avis, 2005; Crook et al., 2006; Lea, 2003). If tutors' literacy practices, such as lesson planning, can be redefined as a meaningful aspect of a professional repertoire rather than a bureaucratic procedure to be grudgingly complied with or sometimes resisted, then the literacy artefacts thus generated become a more authentic and hence more valid object of assessment. As such, the use of more personalised, idiosyncratic styles of planning and working should be encouraged by both institutions and awarding bodies in order to facilitate the creation of authentic artefacts for both practice and assessment. This in turn would help engender a process of learning relevant to the broader developmental needs of trainee teachers beyond their initial period of formal study (Boud and Falchikov, 2006).

Thirdly, a consideration of the complexity of assessment decisions is needed (Knight, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Knight and Yorke, 2008; Shay, 2005, 2008; Tillema and Smith, 2007). Such an approach recognises that the locality and partiality of assessment decisions are a necessary consequence of their being made in highly context-specific settings. Such is the richness and complexity of provision of this PGCE/CertEd, that it could be argued that across the network of colleges, the course is not in fact 'the same', once the differing trajectories, biographies and experiences of the different tutors and students are taken into consideration. Therefore, I would suggest that assessment decisions might only be made once specific local or contextual factors that will inform or shape students' work are taken into consideration. These might be local quality assurance policies, institutional preferences, the preferences of particular teacher educators or even the preferences of individual students for presenting their work in particular ways. Rather than a 'one size fits all' approach to portfolio-based assessment where for many students it can be difficult to find a task or activity to 'fit' the required criteria, portfolios could instead be positioned as being highly specific to the "context, time and cultural environment" of the student (Tigelaar et al., 2005: 606). It may be difficult to

write outcomes or criteria for the assessment of such portfolios: such criteria would undoubtedly be fuzzy and complex at best. Nor is it likely that such criteria would easily align with dominant discourses of quality assurance within UK higher education assessment practice. But they might allow for a more authentic, even honest, approach to assessment.

Some final thoughts

As I write these words, it has been six and a half years since I began my studies towards a PhD. The ideas, issues and themes that underscore this thesis have been part of my life for a considerable length of time: indeed, I find it difficult to think of any other comparable intellectual project that I have been involved with, or may be involved with in the future. I have spent so much time thinking about the PGCE/CertEd course, about assessment, about communities of practice, about the new literacy studies and actor-network theory, that it seems somehow inadequate or inappropriate to distil what I have been doing into a series of 'recommendations' or 'conclusions'. My hesitation stems in part from my understanding of assessment on this PGCE/CertEd course as being so rich, so complex, wrapped up as it is in the actions, practices and efforts of so many people and things, that to provide a list of 'ways to make it better' seems to be an ill-fitting response to the complex world of practices that I have been researching and writing about. At the same time, I am aware of the need to provide some sense of the overall direction that my research (including the writing of this thesis) would appear to point towards in terms of assessment practice on not only the Holgate PGCE/CertEd but also, by extension, other professional courses in HE that draw on similar models of portfolio-based assessment.

In sum, I suggest that my research points to a number of factors that have consequences for how assessment is carried out, how it is assumed to be valid and reliable, and how it is quality assured. To a considerable degree, these three factors overlap, not least as they all stem from an understanding of assessment as being a *rich, textual, multi-faceted social practice*. I have demonstrated that assessment is a complex assemblage of practices that can be described as highly local, contested, academically challenging, contingent, variable,

complicated, improvised, rigorous, and mechanistic. Certainly, assessment, understood as being a social practice, would appear to be made of stuff that is fluid, complicated and mutable. When considering how assessment is carried out, therefore, a starting definition would seem to require the acknowledgement of all of those practices that are sometimes scripted, sometimes improvised, sometimes procedural and sometimes surprising, notwithstanding all of the procedures, processes, rules, regulations, learning outcomes and module specifications that have been so painstakingly written, put through committees, rewritten, distributed, discussed and argued over.

The problem is that the audit cultures within which tutors and students find themselves working cannot really cope with mess such as this. Within the dominant paradigm or discourse of assessment, 'good' assessment practice is assumed to be uniform, homogenous and stable. Validity and reliability are concepts that are understood as being *transferable* concepts that can be used unproblematically by different tutors as they assess different students in different places. But if, as I have argued in this thesis, ideas about transferable skills are problematic, then what might this imply for 'transferable' concepts such as validity and reliability? By this I mean, if my argument is that a PGCE/CertEd student cannot transfer the skills that they use to help their own students with their assignments into their PGCE/CertEd practice and therefore help themselves when completing their portfolios, is it also the case that any other assemblage of ideas or practices that is reputed to be transferable might, in fact, not be so?

The point I wish to raise is this: in my thesis, and in many other published works that draw on social practice theories, skill-based or cognitive transferability has been thoroughly repudiated in favour of understandings or meanings about skills, about knowledge, about practices, that are *local*. By extension, I therefore suggest that if assessment is also a local, social practice, then this local understanding needs to encompass not only, for example, how assessment is explicated or mediated by a tutor during a seminar session, but also how the qualities of validity and reliability are attributed to it. Put simply, the ways in which validity and reliability can be ascribed to an assessment practice are mediated by the local practices of

assessment. For assessment to be valid and reliable, the concepts of validity and reliability need to be stretched or refracted in such a way that they can embrace and accommodate locality and contingency. Unfortunately, this locality and contingency is characteristic of the very kind of rich, nuanced assessment practices that dominant audit cultures are incapable of understanding or talking about. I am not adopting a nihilistic or even iconoclastic stance here. I do not think that the concepts of validity and reliability of assessment should be discounted from accounts of assessment research and practice. What I do wish to argue is that understandings of validity and reliability need to take into account the local and the contingent, even though it is difficult for them to do so without in some way impacting on the dominant status that these concepts enjoy.

So perhaps, therefore, a different paradigm for the quality and trustworthiness of assessment – and by extension of the qualifications and warrants of achievement that assessment leads to – is required? I would suggest that such a paradigm needs to leave behind the practices of outcomes, criteria and audit which, in this thesis, I have demonstrated to be incapable of describing or explaining the rich social practices of assessment. Instead, I propose a new paradigm of assessment based on a greater understanding of the specific worlds within which students move, work and write. In this context, learning and practice could be captured in a variety of assessment modes that could be negotiated between tutors and students so as to ameliorate some of the difficulties that accrue when students find themselves writing in ways that are uncomfortable or dangerous. This is not to say that students should not be encouraged to write essays or reflections, to stretch themselves and try new things. But if such new things could be done in a low-stakes rather than high-stakes environment, an environment which encouraged and accredited 'trying things out' rather than simply requiring students to attempt the same assessment tasks over and over again until deemed satisfactory, there may be more time and space both for meaningful, critical and honest writing by students, for more negotiable, intersubjective reading by tutors, and for more constructive conversations between the two.

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Appendix 7.1

Consent forms and participant information sheets

- 1. Consent form**
- 2. Outline of research interests (used during pilot study)**
- 3. Information sheet used during main study**

Consent form: research into the assessment of trainee teachers

I agree to take part in research being conducted by Jonathan Tummons, a graduate student at Lancaster University. I have been given a copy of the research brief.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in a number of interviews over a period of one or two years, that asks about aspects of my work as a tutor on the in-service Certificate in Education/Postgraduate Certificate in Education (post-compulsory education and training): an award of the university of Huddersfield. These may take place between myself and Jonathan, or may involve other teacher training students at my place of work.

I understand that all the interviews will be recorded and transcribed by Jonathan, and that I can read these transcripts. I understand that excerpts from these transcripts may be used by Jonathan in a thesis, and that this thesis may be stored at Lancaster University library. I understand that excerpts may be used in conference papers and presentations. I understand that I will be able to access any conference papers or presentations involving the research, irrespective of whether or not my words have been used.

I understand that Jonathan may wish to access specific teaching and learning resources that I use. I understand that Jonathan may wish to observe one or more lessons that I teach. These activities will only be carried out following prior consultation with myself, and with my consent.

I understand that all reasonable steps will be taken to maintain anonymity, and that personal details may be changed by Jonathan during the research period, to preserve confidentiality as far as possible.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research project at any time. If I choose to do so, I shall inform Jonathan.

Signed: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Outline of research interests: Jonathan Tummons

j.tummons@lancaster.ac.uk

Since 2004, I have worked as a lecturer in the FE sector, firstly at Marton and then at Friargate. At both colleges, I taught on the same franchised HE programme: the University of Holgate in-service Certificate in Education/Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Post-compulsory education and training). This teacher-training award is accredited by both LLUK and by the HE Academy. Students are all part-time, and all work, either full or part-time, as teachers or trainers in the PCET sector (Further, Adult, Community and Higher Education, and Work-Based Learning).

Students on the PGCE/Cert Ed course can be classed as 'non-traditional undergraduates':

- For non-graduate students, their Cert Ed is a first experience of higher education. Some students will not have studied at level 4 (NQF) before.
- For graduates, their PGCE represents study in a new academic discipline.
- All students are part-time.
- The course is delivered on a franchise basis within a network of thirty FE colleges.

Research Questions

My research rests on ideas of learning as socially situated within communities of practice, and on ideas of literacy as social practice (the 'New Literacy Studies'). I see the PGCE/CertEd course as one community of practice, within a broader constellation of communities relating to teacher training, and to higher education more generally. The project seeks to explore the experiences of non-traditional undergraduates, in the context of initial teacher education (ITE) for the post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector. Specifically, the aims of my project are to explore the acquisition of academic literacies by non-traditional undergraduates. The focus of the research will be on the processes of assessment that will be encountered and participated in by students on the course.

Research carried out by Jonathan Tummons

j.tummons@lancaster.ac.uk

Thank you for agreeing to help me with my research. Please take a few minutes to read through these guidelines.

- What is it all about?

I am studying for a part-time research degree with the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University, researching the experiences of part-time HE students on teacher-training courses. One of my main themes is assessment, and how students make sense of the assessments that they have to do during their course, what study strategies they employ, and what they find easy – and difficult – about the assessment process. If you wish to talk to me about what my research is about in detail, please feel free to ask.

- Confidentiality

All of the interviews that are carried out will be transcribed by myself. Tape recordings will be stored in my study room at home, and will not be played to anyone else, nor reproduced. If you fill in a questionnaire at any time, I will keep these at home as well. I am the only person who will read these and they will not be reproduced.

- Anonymity

As I know who you are, anonymity is not absolutely complete. However, when disseminating any data that I gather (for example, when writing up research either for my degree or for a conference) I will change your name and personal/professional circumstances. For example, I would change the name of the place or institution where you work, or your job title. This helps to prevent identification.

- Transcripts

I will transcribe our interviews myself. I am not sure at this time how much of each interview will be used as data – it will probably vary between cases.

- Use of data

I anticipate two main uses of this data. Both of these are related to my research, and not to my job role or to the place where I work. Firstly, this data will be used, in whole or in part, as part of my research degree. Secondly, I may use some or all of the data for conference papers, seminar talks and suchlike, within the context of my research. Such talks might be accompanied by written versions, or handouts, that would use data. Published papers might also use some or all of the data gathered. Here, the same guidelines about anonymity and confidentiality of course apply. You will receive copies of any papers that include data drawn from your participation.

- You, the volunteer

If you ever feel uncomfortable taking part, or with any question that I ask, just say so. If you don't want to carry on with the research at any point, then just say so and you can withdraw.

Thank you again for helping. I honestly think that this research will be a benefit, both for you – as taking part in this way gives you an opportunity to talk through the processes of assessment that you have to take part in – and for the course as a whole.

Appendix 7.2

First interview schedule

Participant	Topic	Duration	Location	Date
1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
3	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
4	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1
5	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1
6	6.1	6.1	6.1	6.1
7	7.1	7.1	7.1	7.1
8	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.1
9	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1
10	10.1	10.1	10.1	10.1
11	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1
12	12.1	12.1	12.1	12.1
13	13.1	13.1	13.1	13.1
14	14.1	14.1	14.1	14.1
15	15.1	15.1	15.1	15.1
16	16.1	16.1	16.1	16.1
17	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1
18	18.1	18.1	18.1	18.1
19	19.1	19.1	19.1	19.1
20	20.1	20.1	20.1	20.1
21	21.1	21.1	21.1	21.1
22	22.1	22.1	22.1	22.1
23	23.1	23.1	23.1	23.1
24	24.1	24.1	24.1	24.1
25	25.1	25.1	25.1	25.1
26	26.1	26.1	26.1	26.1
27	27.1	27.1	27.1	27.1
28	28.1	28.1	28.1	28.1
29	29.1	29.1	29.1	29.1
30	30.1	30.1	30.1	30.1
31	31.1	31.1	31.1	31.1
32	32.1	32.1	32.1	32.1
33	33.1	33.1	33.1	33.1
34	34.1	34.1	34.1	34.1
35	35.1	35.1	35.1	35.1
36	36.1	36.1	36.1	36.1
37	37.1	37.1	37.1	37.1
38	38.1	38.1	38.1	38.1
39	39.1	39.1	39.1	39.1
40	40.1	40.1	40.1	40.1
41	41.1	41.1	41.1	41.1
42	42.1	42.1	42.1	42.1
43	43.1	43.1	43.1	43.1
44	44.1	44.1	44.1	44.1
45	45.1	45.1	45.1	45.1
46	46.1	46.1	46.1	46.1
47	47.1	47.1	47.1	47.1
48	48.1	48.1	48.1	48.1
49	49.1	49.1	49.1	49.1
50	50.1	50.1	50.1	50.1
51	51.1	51.1	51.1	51.1
52	52.1	52.1	52.1	52.1
53	53.1	53.1	53.1	53.1
54	54.1	54.1	54.1	54.1
55	55.1	55.1	55.1	55.1
56	56.1	56.1	56.1	56.1
57	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.1
58	58.1	58.1	58.1	58.1
59	59.1	59.1	59.1	59.1
60	60.1	60.1	60.1	60.1
61	61.1	61.1	61.1	61.1
62	62.1	62.1	62.1	62.1
63	63.1	63.1	63.1	63.1
64	64.1	64.1	64.1	64.1
65	65.1	65.1	65.1	65.1
66	66.1	66.1	66.1	66.1
67	67.1	67.1	67.1	67.1
68	68.1	68.1	68.1	68.1
69	69.1	69.1	69.1	69.1
70	70.1	70.1	70.1	70.1
71	71.1	71.1	71.1	71.1
72	72.1	72.1	72.1	72.1
73	73.1	73.1	73.1	73.1
74	74.1	74.1	74.1	74.1
75	75.1	75.1	75.1	75.1
76	76.1	76.1	76.1	76.1
77	77.1	77.1	77.1	77.1
78	78.1	78.1	78.1	78.1
79	79.1	79.1	79.1	79.1
80	80.1	80.1	80.1	80.1
81	81.1	81.1	81.1	81.1
82	82.1	82.1	82.1	82.1
83	83.1	83.1	83.1	83.1
84	84.1	84.1	84.1	84.1
85	85.1	85.1	85.1	85.1
86	86.1	86.1	86.1	86.1
87	87.1	87.1	87.1	87.1
88	88.1	88.1	88.1	88.1
89	89.1	89.1	89.1	89.1
90	90.1	90.1	90.1	90.1
91	91.1	91.1	91.1	91.1
92	92.1	92.1	92.1	92.1
93	93.1	93.1	93.1	93.1
94	94.1	94.1	94.1	94.1
95	95.1	95.1	95.1	95.1
96	96.1	96.1	96.1	96.1
97	97.1	97.1	97.1	97.1
98	98.1	98.1	98.1	98.1
99	99.1	99.1	99.1	99.1
100	100.1	100.1	100.1	100.1

Student interview schedule (first round)

Focus for this interview is the first assignment of the academic year.

For year one students – Designing and Planning for Learning

For year two students – Curriculum Studies

Housekeeping

- Consent: reminders. Check signatures.
- Practical issues (recordings, transcripts, pseudonyms etc.)

Preparing for assessment

- Getting to grips with the assignment brief, as part of
 - The module handbook
 - The course handbook
 - ♣ Easy/hard to read/unpack?
- Learning and teaching strategies employed by tutor
 - Plenary
 - Tutorial
 - Other (email support, telephone etc)
- Prior experience (as tutor or student)
 - APLA/APEL?

Completing the assessment

- Draft work and formative feedback
- Academic writing
 - Guidance from tutors (eg writing frames, workshops)
 - Levels of tolerance (eg on spelling, the minimum core)
 - Harvard referencing
- Prior experience (as tutor or student)
- Transfer of knowledge/understanding/artefacts from professional life
 - Eg lesson plans: use existing plans or written specifically for the assignment?
 - Eg resources: extent to which chosen on basis of applicability to module assignment brief or to elicit developmental feedback?

After the assignment

- Feedback
 - Use of feedback in reviewing assignment
 - Looking forward to next assignment
- Consent to view work

Appendix 7.3

Examples of follow-up interview schedules generated from Atlas-Ti memos

- 1. Second interview with Kate (student, Nunthorpe College) – Atlas-Ti report created showing both memos (points noted during analysis of first interview transcripts for follow-up, highlighted) and quotes to which the memos pertain.**
- 2. Second interview with Vivienne (student, Scarcroft College) – Atlas-Ti report created showing both memos (points noted during analysis of first interview transcripts for follow-up, highlighted) and quotes to which the memos pertain.**
- 3. Second interview with Louanna (student, Nunthorpe College) – Atlas-Ti report created showing memos for follow-up only (highlighted). See also figure 7.5 for a screen grab of Atlas-Ti showing an example of how Louanna's transcript was marked up. [A second example appears in figure 7.8].**

Memos and Quotes

HU: PhD Interview Transcripts
File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Jonathan Tummons\My Documents\Scientific S...\PhD Interview Transcripts.hpr5]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 06/05/08 15:49:56

MEMO: K follow up 1 (1 Quotation) (Super, 12/02/08 16:12:39)

P17: student Kate interview one.doc:
83-83

No codes
No memos
Type: Memo

Excellent DDA example here.
Further use of technology in year two?

P17: student Kate interview one.doc - 17:1 [EB ...I got the read write softw..] (83:83) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy practices student led]
Memos: [K follow up 1]

K ...I got the read write software and the inspiration software. And when I went for the assessment of course needs, they offered me a Dictaphone then, and I said 'no way' because of my memories of having a Dictaphone when I did my degree, no way. And then when they came to do the training for the read write software, and erm, I was extremely excitable about the fact that I could scan in text from books and then listed to it [...] it's a flat bed scanner, it scans it straight into word, and then you can, it'll read it back to you. So I was very excitable about that [...] and while the training officer was here we talked about Dictaphones. And he explained to me that...you don't need to transcribe it. You can download it onto a disk. [...]

MEMO: K follow up 2 (1 Quotation) (Super, 06/05/08 15:48:15)

P17: student Kate interview one.doc:
157-157

No codes
No memos
Type: Memo

Vernacular literacies.
Lesson planning. Still working this way? Something else?
Strategic approach to formal procedure still?

P17: student Kate interview one.doc - 17:10 [Since working for [college emp..] (157:157) (Super)

No codes
Memos: [K follow up 2]

Since working for [college employer] I have to completely confess that I did a scheme of work for the NCFE and I've probably written lesson plans for times that I've been observed. The rest of my lesson plans come in the form of, I have a notebook, come in the form of a notebook.

Memos and Quotes

HU: PhD Interview Transcripts
File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Jonathan Tummons\My Documents\Scientific S...\PhD Interview Transcripts.hpr5]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 06/05/08 15:44:23

MEMO: V follow up 1 (1 Quotation) (Super, 06/05/08 15:34:45)

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc:
39-39

No codes
No memos
Type: Memo

Place of lesson planning within the course. Still feeling this way? Has it become more overt? Peer viewpoint?

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc - 18:5 [Because I feel that it was sor..] (39:39) (Super)

No codes
Memos: [V follow up 1]

Because I feel that it was sort of taken for granted that we knew how to do a lesson plan

MEMO: V follow up 2 (1 Quotation) (Super, 06/05/08 15:36:25)

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc:
47-47

No codes
No memos
Type: Memo

Meaningful use of assignments. Did this continue in year two?

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc - 18:6 [so rather than just do a paper..] (47:47) (Super)

No codes
Memos: [V follow up 2]

so rather than just do a paper exercise, my mentor encouraged me to make it a meaningful way of changing things

MEMO: V follow up 3 (1 Quotation) (Super, 12/02/08 16:21:06)

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc:
89-91

No codes
No memos
Type: Memo

Strategic compliance. Here, judging what's a 'failable' offence.

Follow up. Second year assignments.

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc - 18:2 [JT [some Harvard talk about ci..] (89:91) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy practices assessment]
Memos: [V follow up 3]

JT [some Harvard talk about citing web-based resources]

V I just tried, and I suppose I should have really checked that out before I handed it in, the essay in. But I was a little bit tactical because I thought, I hand it in near the hand in date, and there's a minor issue like that, I'm more likely to get it passed. Whereas if its formative feedback then there might be other things that might be questioned [laugh]. So maybe I'm wrong to do that but, you know, I think it's less likely to get referred for a minor thing like that

MEMO: V follow up 4 (1 Quotation) (Super, 06/05/08 15:40:53)

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc:

111-111

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Workplace dissonance.

Continued? Further examples?

**P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc - 18:7 [I mean, another example is, th..]
(111:111) (Super)**

Codes: [Literacy artefacts created by student] [Literacy practices student led] [Motivation for doing the course] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

Memos: [V follow up 4]

I mean, another example is, this week we've devised a scheme of work, lesson plans, and instead of two days training he's sort of said 'well I'll do one day's training for these people, this new group'. Keeps changing the goalpost. And we've said we've standardised this training you know. Yeah, there's some flexibility in how you deliver it but there's certain points that we should cover as a centre. We have an obligation to give new candidates certain amounts of information. So I went in the afternoon, and he'd not covered anything that was on the lesson plan and he hadn't the courtesy to discuss it with me. And he just doesn't see it as necessary or relevant, the fact that we've actually devised this to cover certain things and to check their understanding as you go along by questioning, by group work, by feedback, you know, those principles are there. So it's a case of somebody with a certain fixed idea about training and yeah, I do feel empowered.

Memos

HU: PhD Interview Transcripts

File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Jonathan Tummons\My Documents\Scientific S...\PhD Interview Transcripts.hpr5]

Edited by: Super

Date/Time: 16/04/08 16:25:41

MEMO: Follow Up 1 (1 Quotation) (Super, 16/04/08 16:15:12)

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc:

10-18

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Follow this up for second interview.

Deep/surface-authentic/instrumental.

MEMO: Follow Up 2 (1 Quotation) (Super, 16/04/08 16:17:19)

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc:

28-28

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Reflective writing: getting easier? Now well into year two modules.

MEMO: Follow Up 3 (1 Quotation) (Super, 16/04/08 16:19:22)

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc:

40-40

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Which sessions have been reflected on this time?

Change in approach to reflective writing?

MEMO: Follow Up 4 (1 Quotation) (Super, 16/04/08 16:20:24)

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc:

90-90

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Writing frames.

Still being used in year two?

Compare year one assignments with year one writing frames. Discuss and analyse.

MEMO: Follow Up 5 (1 Quotation) (Super, 16/04/08 16:23:02)

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc:

106-110

No codes

No memos

Type: Memo

Tutor feedback in year two.

Also tutor feedback on year one scripts to read and analyse.

Appendix 7.4

Raw observation notes [Scarcroft College]

Observation Thursday 4 January 2007
Ruth, Scarcroft College

Second year group. Should be 24 if full attendance, but Jane is not expecting a full house – first session after Christmas, not a 'proper' session, assignments due.

Good teaching accommodation. 4 seminar blocks, cabaret style. Large room. Lots of kit. Displays on back wall – usual pedagogical concerns (see photos).

9.20am 8 students.

What's on the tables? Laptops, assignments, PDP files, A4 folders, refill pads. No books.

At the start Ruth tells the group inter alia "I read your minutes with great interest". Reference to Centre Committee.

Lots of drafts of the curriculum assignment have already come in. Next thing: referencing. "It is very very tricky". Prior handout was referenced incorrectly – "too lazy to change it".

Next thing: forms "to slot in with your assignment". Module handbook and scheme of work given out. "I know that you're going to read these from cover to cover" (irony). Two module codes.

Students labelled a, b, c, d, then moved about. Two laptops per table. Student log on to blackboard (college network).

Reference to last years practice module "spiral curriculum", "revising, extending"

Reference to the work through of the first module. "Can you remember the exercises I gave you?" DARTs. Question to the class: "what theory am I trying to use via these exercises? [...] What is the purpose of this task? Because if you know the purpose of this task its more likely to be meaningful."

Peer teaching, one assignment task per group. Create "a very very simple and precise guide on your section". [assignment is in 4 sections]. Guided to bb where the ppt slides are to be found.

Students are looking at: exercise handout, module pack, ppt slides on laptops (though not all IT working smoothly).

Meantime, Ruth writes on the whiteboard "why labels? Why birthday?"

One table is discussing the Europass cv format required. Another making links to last year's module: "we've done all this"; "it's a continuation

10.05. Ruth gives a highlighter pen to each table for when they are going through the module pack. Some internet connections not working, so Jane uses a usb to install ppts locally.

Ruth going round tables. Asking things like: "what's the connection between that piece of paper [syllabus] and that piece of paper [evidence]?"

10.15. Some now looking through pdp forms. APLA student asks for help.

Time to fetch a flipchart page.

Jane: "as you're all tutors, you should all have a fistful of pens".

- "can I borrow a pen Ruth?"

- "yes, yes, but..." joking, wagging finger

- "it's my day off today!" joking, mock apologetic

Going through the ppt, Ruth distances herself from it, inviting feedback. "I'm not the author of

that”..

Break at 10.35. One student emailing pdp forms to another, but having some word cut and past problems. Back at 10.50.

Ruth reviews each flipchart on tables before the plenary.

Group 1. Flipchart: list

Content: can handwrite or type PDPs. Were ILPs last year. CV needed – link to ppt. “It’s a rubbish format but they want it on there”. “It’s irrelevant”.

Debate. Keep last years or not in the same folder? Jane doesn’t know. Students can’t agree.

Q: “do we have to do another skills assessment audit?”

A: yes – your skills should have improved, slots on scheme of work to update all these.

Ruth: need to find the purpose, valuable, to the PDP, otherwise it will be repetitive and mechanical.

Group 2. Mindmap.

Content: reflection. How to divide word counts? A really good one: 1000 words? A routine session: 100?

Group 3. List and picture.

Most confusing. Questions over links between reflective practice and case study. Lots of different conversations on the table. All back to module pack now. “This is where this [module pack] is really badly laid out”, students turning pages from module specifications to brief.

One student asks for examples. Ruth asks “are there any examples here?”

[how familiar is Ruth with the module pack generally?]

Lots of confusion. Word count. Links to reflections? Jane says yes.

Some confused faces now.

Can we use materials from previous assignments? Confusion here as well.

More consternation over the action plan and the critical review of it.

Ruth says that we are problem solving the assignment, helping us as a group to get to grips with it. “you’re going to go out thinking ‘rrr’ but it will become clear” just like last term.

Group 4. List.

References to scheme of work. Clear, succinct.

Two books referred to. Curzon (“heavy”). Ginnis recommended.

Appendix 7.5

Friargate College observation notes, analysed after Hamilton (2000) and for loading into Atlas-Ti

VISIBLE ELEMENTS

Participants

There are nineteen students, all in the first year of a two-year part-time PGCE/Cert Ed (PCET). The age range is quite varied, with the youngest member of the group in their early twenties, and the eldest member of the group in their fifties. Some of the group have prior experience of HE and already hold degrees, but all have, as a minimum, a prior qualification at NQF level three in the subject that they teach (which is a pre-requisite for entry to the course). The group is fairly evenly divided along gender lines. The tutor, Carol, is in her fifties, and has spent her entire career in education. She has been a tutor on the PGCE/CertEd programme for six years.

Settings

The seminar room being used is a base room for teacher training, and all of the PGCE/CertEd classes are held here. Normally, the table and chairs are arranged in a large horseshoe, with the open end of the horseshoe adjacent to the Activeboard at the front of the room, and this layout comfortably seats 18, 20 at a push. For this session, the furniture has been re-arranged "cabaret-style": there are three blocks of tables, each with six or seven chairs. The front wall is taken up by the Activeboard, and there is a PC and a printer at the front.

Going clockwise, the next wall is covered with posters of various kinds: there are fourteen A3 posters with pictures and notes relating to educational theory and theorists, each getting its or his own poster (for example: Bruner, Skinner, Dewey). These posters have been up and unchanged for two years, and it is interesting to note that the educationalists included are all men and all effectively reflect the "learning theory" section of the curriculum, as reflected in so many of the teacher-training books for the PCET sector (behaviourist, neo-behaviourist, cognitivist) and with other "old favourites" all present and correct: a poster on Honey and Mumford's learning styles, a poster on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. There are also posters for JISC, posters from the franchising university, posters for the Institute for Learning, a poster for the DfES Standards Unit. A shelf runs along this wall at waist height and holds a number of documents: back issues of course handbooks, spare copies of chapters from books and journal articles, library guides and such like.

The third wall is predominantly made up of windows. The fourth wall is taken up by the white board and by two filing cabinets which are rarely used.

Activities and artefacts

A number of distinct literacy events took place during the session. These will be considered under two categories: those events that were central to the session's main aim; and those events that were peripheral to the session's main aim, continuing events from the previous session(s).

Peripheral events and artefacts

These in fact were found at the beginning of the session. A number of activities from the previous two weeks continued to have a "rippling" effect in the first part of the observed session:

1. Students had been given the option of completing a small piece of reflective writing. Reflective writing is one of several different genres that students will work with during the course (Baynham, 2000). A small number of students had chosen to do this optional exercise, and received their work back at the start of the session, together with brief written feedback. [a good question here would be to explore who chose to complete this exercise and why, and who chose not to, and why]
2. For those students who chose to complete the paper-based version of the BKSB literacy diagnostic, work was also returned. [a question to follow up: what makes some people choose to complete paper-based versions as distinct from PC-based versions, and does this preference have any significance vis-à-vis the franchising university's desire to encourage "blended e-learning"? What will happen when numeracy and literacy assessment become compulsory for all QTLS PGCE/Cert Ed programmes?]
3. Carol reminded the group of the forthcoming tutorials, and of the need to bring the appropriate documentation. For tutorials, students need to bring the following documents with them: a copy of their timetable (to arrange lesson observations); their

Individual Learning Plan (ILP), and specifically forms ILP1 and ILP2. Form ILP4 will be completed by students before the tutorial and reviewed during the tutorial. Jo is aware of the confusion, saying “you’ve got to get your head around these acronyms”.

4. Carol reminded the group of the forthcoming BKSb numeracy assessment, again available as paper-based or PC-based activities.

There was a lot of good-natured chat as the reflective or BKSb work was handed out: it seems right to say that the room layout encouraged this. Lots of people were comparing marks for the BKSb (an example of typical student behaviour). One such aside stood out: “Did you pass, George?”

Already, a number of different literacy artefacts have been used and referred to:

- Pieces of reflective writing
- PC based literacy diagnostic assessment
- Paper based literacy diagnostic assessment
- PC based numeracy diagnostic assessment
- Paper based numeracy diagnostic assessment
- The Individual Learning Plan; specifically, three parts of that: ILP1, ILP2, ILP4. ILP documentation is contained within the *module pack* for the *Professional Practice* module, which was handed out last week.
- Teaching timetables

These peripheral events all take place within the first fifteen minutes of the evening’s session.

Primary events and artefacts

The *Designing and Planning* module is in fact the first one that the students will work on that is to say, it is the assignment for this module that will be submitted first. The *Professional Practice* module, although partially introduced last week, is not completed until later in the academic year, but the students need the module pack because it includes the documentation for the ILP. It is the *Designing and Planning* module that will be introduced during this observed session.

Two more **literacy artefacts** are now handed out: the *Planning and Designing Module Pack*, and an *activity sheet* that Carol has produced. [These documents need to be properly analysed.] Carol has designed an activity that will encourage students to explore the module in an active manner, rather than simply talking them through the module and assignment requirements in a passive manner. As she explains the task, she says “I’ve provided you this year with a little set of guidelines”. As the paperwork is handed round, one student says, *sotto voce*, “question one: do I have to read it?” There are other comments too: “this is *another* module, in addition to what we got last week?” (in reply) “this is the assignment that we’re working on next”; “*This* is the one we’ve got to hand in first”. Carol addresses the group once all the papers have been circulated, expressing her idea that by doing the exercise, they will “have engaged with the text” of the module pack to “try to make sense of it”, and there is another *sotto voce* aside: “you’re using teacher talk again”.

The *activity* required distinct literacy practices:

- Reading the activity sheet and making sense of it
- Reading through the module pack, marking “key terms/phrases” (Jo provided highlighter pens for those who wanted them, others underlined)
- Creating a “mind map” based on the module syllabus
- Noting text books on the indicative reading list
- Summarising the assignment requirements

As the different stages of the *activity* progress, some questions are asked and comments are made as students encounter domain-specific terminology within the *module pack*:

- “APEL is what?”
- “more big words”
- “can you tell me what social and situated theories of learning are please?”
- “can we have the answers now please?”
- “what is SENDA?”
- “...clear as mud”
- “(the word count) is ambiguous”

- (referring to the example schemes of work included in the *module pack*): “these are the sorts of schemes of work they are expecting?”
- “what are learning contracts?”
- “I don’t like the assignment”

Critical Incidents

It is worth noting at this point that although all of the students are also teachers or trainers (in a range of professional contexts), they quickly and effortlessly take on the characteristics of students, making jokes about the assignments, rueful comments to each other, immediately turning to the tutor for guidance and generally acting the part of the confused student. One exchange, in addition to those already alluded to, is worth noting. One male student looked at another, made eye-contact and rolled his eyes theatrically, saying “phew!”; in response, the other male student waved his hand over his head and said “gone over the head, that has”.

The second stage of the *activity*, the mind-mapping, proceeded at a variable pace. Some students had finished theirs, and were comparing what they had produced with a mind map pre-prepared by Carol (a **third literacy artefact**). One student asked “is this what it *should* look like?”, and Jo replied that this was simply her interpretation. This is an important incident, though, and such a quick answer from Jo risked forgetting the potential shaping force behind Jo’s model answer. It is worth noting that the student who asked “is this what it *should* look like” was a CertEd, not PGCE student, seeking reinforcement, or feedback, or a “right answer” to the mind mapping exercise. For some in the room, perhaps, Carol’s mind map was what they “should” model their own understanding on.

The mind-mapping exercise raised another tension, as this exchange between Carol and three of the students illustrates, when comparing their own maps with the “model” map provided by Carol:

Student 1: “yours was more structured. Mine was more bitty”

Carol: “why?”

Student 1: “because you know what you’re doing”

Student 2: “it might help if you knew how to mind map in the first place”

On a show of hands, eight of the group indicated that they did not know about mind mapping.

Student 3: “maybe we haven’t heard it called mind mapping”

Carol agrees and apologises, saying that “there was a slight breakdown in communication”.

She explained her assumption: that they will all have encountered the term, because they are all teachers or trainers. Such a belief neglects the possibility that different teaching and training communities will each have their own unique discourses: for some students, “spider graph” is a term that they have used; for other students, such an activity (whether called “mind map” or “spider graph”) may not constitute any part of their practice, either as teachers and trainers, or indeed as students in prior education/training contexts.

The final *literacy activity* was *talk around the text*, and Jo guided the students through the text of the assignment brief as it appears in the module pack. By this stage, the group as a whole was quite quiet, and both students and tutor were perhaps struggling. Carol asked some question, but received very few responses. Questions that were asked related to particular expressions or details that students had read in the module pack:

- “SENDA – what does this mean?”
- “Can you just expand on ‘critical?’”
- “Is there a description of what actually a scheme of work *is*?”
- “Is this assignment handed in all at one go?”
- “Will we know more about (reflective writing) later?”

Following this, Carol talked the students through the administrative paperwork that appears in the module pack: the cover sheet, the feedback pro-forma, etc., and then the sample schemes of work and lesson plans that appear at the back of the pack, illustrating as she says “the detail that might be on a scheme of work or a lesson plan...(but) you’re not being told you must do it this way”. This latter point is perhaps debatable, and will be returned to later.

NON-VISIBLE ELEMENTS

The Hidden Participants

There are a number of agencies working in this community during the observed session. Some are common to all members of the community:

- The University of Holgate
- The HE sector
- Ofsted
- QAA
- DfES

Some are common to some but not all members:

- LLUK (formerly Fento)
- IfL
- HE Academy

And for some students, their place of work may have a more or less direct influence. For example, lecturers in FE are contractually required to gain an approved teaching qualification; lecturers in HE or AE are not.

These hidden participants work in a number of ways to shape the session. A fuller analysis of this agency will follow in another document. For now, I wish only to highlight some of these influences:

The university, the HE sector, Ofsted and QAA all combine to shape the curriculum within which both tutor and students operate. These agencies work in different ways, of course, and some need to be broken down into more discrete components. For example, the influence of the HE sector as a whole can be seen in the role of the external examiner. It was in response to the external examiners' report for the (for the module being discussed during the observed session) was added; namely, that each assignment should include a minimum of three references, and that one of these references should be from a post-2000 academic journal. In contrast, the influence of Ofsted is yet to be felt, as the PGCE/CertEd programme was only recently inspected.

The different professional bodies work in different ways. LLUK is currently drawing up new standards for trainee teachers for the learning and skills sector, but the legacy of the old Fento standards is still felt: the course as a whole is mapped onto these in order to gain Fento accreditation. Each module explicitly addresses particular Fento standards, and this helps shape the curriculum. The HE Academy is still to produce equivalent standards and as such has a much lesser influence (if any) on the curriculum.

The Domain of Practice

Briefly, the domain of practice needs to consider the agencies of the invisible participants listed above, in terms of the need for the qualification, the organisation of the qualification and all those agencies that shape the qualification. That is to say, the discourses that surround "teacher training for the post-compulsory sector" (which is the domain of practice) need to be analysed.

All The Other Resources

Here I will consider the prior trajectories of participants that have crossed over from other communities of practice, for example, the experiences, attitudes and understandings derived from prior study or places of work.

Structured Routines and Pathways

There are clearly norms of behaviour at work within the classroom in addition to the stereotypical student identities that some of the group are exhibiting: pedagogic conventions must surely regulate behaviour in a classroom, for example. In terms of engagement with activity, I think that other observations will be needed in order to gather more data, so that I

can form some questions. Such questions might consider the dynamics and behaviour of the group and seek to relate this to the prior experiences of members in another community.

Appendix 7.6

Example of Atlas-Ti report [all quotes coded as pertaining to lesson plans, as used for Tummons (2010a)]

**25 quotation(s) for code:
Literacy artefacts lesson plans
Report mode: quotation content, memos and hyperlinks
Quotation-Filter: All**

HU: PhD Interview Transcripts
File: [C:\Documents and Settings\Jonathan Tummons\My Documents\Scientific S...\PhD Interview Transcripts.hpr5]
Edited by: Super
Date/Time: 11/06/08 12:06:40

P 2: Student Margaret 1.doc - 2:3 [JT because there won't be so m..] (77:87) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices student led]

No memos

JT because there won't be so much stuff in terms of prior learning. So, the assignment you've just done [DFA5120]... I'm guessing that [college] has its own standard lesson plan format

M they do, but they don't mind if you adapt it. I've learned a lot, I've brought in things that I used to do in the community and brought those in. I've also adapted some of [tutor's] tips to put student progress at the end of the lesson plans to keep track of what the students are doing

JT so when you did your first assignment for [tutor] did you use your adapted lesson plans for the assignment then

M yes [...] they're very detailed. I get my leg pulled about it

JT ...very detailed in what way?...

M very much what information I'm putting in, what it's being backed up with, powerpoints, your handouts, timings, what I want those students to achieve, when the support worker comes in, so I've had my leg pulled quite a few times

P 3: student Beth interview 1.doc - 3:3 [we were talking about lesson p..] (98:98) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

we were talking about lesson plans and working with lesson plans. And I don't, I do myself a brief outline, I have a notebook which I take everywhere with me, that I do an outline, or I do it on the computer, so I know what I'm doing. Or I lie in bed at night thinking about that, that, that and that, a few notes. But I don't always fill in my lesson plan for each lesson, which I know I should, but I don't.

P 3: student Beth interview 1.doc - 3:4 [CT because I don't need to. Ye..] (114:114)

(Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

B because I don't need to. Yes, because it's in my notebook. Whereas some people in the class were saying, 'I have to take it with me wherever I go, I have to work from that lesson plan', and I think that's about how you can, how confident you are in your creativity, and how confident you are in your ability to improvise in a situation. And I would put myself in the camp of being a string, confident improviser. But I don't like following 'this ten minutes I'll be doing that, this ten minutes', whereas other people in the class like that ten minutes, and they're the ones that don't have that creative facility.

P 3: student Beth interview 1.doc - 3:5 [JT you've followed the college..] (120:142)

(Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

No memos

JT you've followed the college template, you've put them in the file, and Jane has marked them, and all the while you're thinking 'but I'm never actually going to use them'

B yeah, or, I use the outline...although sometimes when I've done a lesson plan I think 'oh, actually what I'll do is I'll do this' and I actually write it into it because it's something, another stage which I'm unsure of

JT so it can become a working document

B yeah, that's what it always is, which is why it's never filled out signed, sealed and delivered, really. it's a working piece of documentation.

[some talk about lesson plan templates generally]

B ...within our college itself, Stuart who teaches in the cooking, catering department, they have to have all these Every Child Matters tick boxes at the back of theirs, which seems to me extremely stifling, because you have to work out what frame of mind your student is in, and how many students are in that frame of mind, well, they're teenagers, sometimes they're just arsey, because they want to be arsey, because they can be arsey, you know...but I love that, because if you can't kick out when you're that age, it's the only time in your life when you get that kind of freedom but you still don't have the responsibility. And you still have people who care enough about you

JT ...but you don't have to do the Every Child Matters thing on your lesson plan

B no, we don't

JT how come?

B we have to embed it into our scheme of work

JT right, it's in your scheme of work but it's not in your plans

B it's not tick boxes at the back of our plans. I don't know why that is. Communications, all key skills are embedded completely. Every Child Matters, we've all had, we had really good training sessions on it, and we do it as, par for the course, but we don't necessarily write about it

P 5: student Sharon 2.doc - 5:4 [FP well up at [college – place..] (185:185) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices reflection]

No memos

S well up at [college - place of work] we have to do erm, evaluation after, on the, you know, you do your lesson plan and then there's a section on the back about evaluation.

P 8: student Amanda.rtf - 8:8 [JB erm, no, lesson plans and y..] (393:397) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

A erm, no, lesson plans and you know, supporting material, I do all the time at work coz we are assessed very regularly by our superior. We've been accredited two times since I joined the company which ahs been massive

JT so you're used to the paperwork trail part of your work and that's helped you with the paperwork trail for you as a student?

A yes, I don't find lesson plans a problem.

P 9: Student Laurence interview One.doc - 9:3 [The concept of writing a lessa..] (51:55) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices student led]

No memos

The concept of writing a lesson plan is completely alien to me. We do not do that in a lesson. Some

people might do who have got teaching qualifications, of which there are relatively few, a minority. I've never seen anyone's lesson plan before [laugh]. So it makes absolute sense to do one, and one has to be, and again a lot of teaching medicine is off the hoof, you know, off the cuff perhaps, you know, perhaps not so well planned. It does depend on the, I'm probably portraying medicine as really bad, but I suspect that the vast majority of, you know, you'll have your slides, you gave the lecture three months ago or two months ago, you'll get your slides out again and do the same one again and there's no real feedback or assessment processing going on. So that idea of having to clearly define objectives and think about environment and whatever, I found very useful. I actually found it quite difficult to write lesson plans

JT why difficult? Because of what had to go in them

L yeah, one thing that I've found, as I've always said when I first started, is teaching nomenclature, and I find that terribly difficult. Maybe I'm a science person not an English-y person

P10: student Mary 1.doc - 10:3 [D no, I'd done them as lesson ..] (119:119) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

M no, I'd done them as lesson plans, just adapted from the one previously, but there was, the subject matter was the same so it was just tweaked to suit this particular group. So I did have a, I do get a lesson plan up and running before I do the lesson. I know older practitioners don't always have such practice in place, but with being relatively new to the profession altogether I do work that way round. That was one of the things that came from the CELTA course, get your plans sorted out. Even if its not ideal, you've got some structure to work through

P10: student Mary 1.doc - 10:4 [JT and do you, when you have a..] (129:143) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

JT and do you, when you have a lesson plan template, do you use a template you created yourself, or one the college gives you?

M we are obliged to use the one from the college

JT ...and is that a useful lesson plan template to use?

M this one is in portrait format. I prefer to work with the landscape format because you have more area to work in. I have limited experience, but I have found the landscape easier to use

JT so how long have you been doing ESOL at this place?

M ESOL at this place, since September realistically

JT so do you think its partly as a new member of staff that you feel, 'oh right, I'd better make sure the lesson plans are in place?'

M I'm not sure really. I hadn't thought about that. Possibly being new to teaching full stop [indistinguishable] just to fall in with the culture of the college

P10: student Mary 1.doc - 10:5 [LD I chose them, I chose the t..] (187:207) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices assessment]

Memos: [Follow Up lesson planning] [ME - 12/02/08 [3]]

M I chose them, I chose the two lessons, the first one I chose because it was the session I'd been observed on as well

JT who were you being observed by

M [name]

JT is that a college observation, not a Cert Ed observation

M a college observation, not a CertEd/PGCE observation... so I thought I might as well, I already had the paper bits in place

JT ...so you had the paperwork in place so

M, so I thought 'kill two birds with one stone'

JT so which one came first, the college observation or the need for the assignment

M the, I'm trying to think, the college observation was, needed to be done, and then I looked at, at that stage I had decided what I was going to include within the assignment as such, so I thought if I've done that, I might as well use it

JT [...] when you then decided to sue the same materials for your assignment, for [tutor], what were you thinking at the time? Were you thinking 'oh right, this is convenient', partly, fair enough, but also you'll get something out of the process, [indistinguishable] someone else to look at it

M well it was convenient and also fairly typical of the lesson format that I use as to how it's structured and what I use within the lesson, so it seemed to make sense to see, I hadn't been observed here previously to this observation, so I had no feedback on that, as to whether I am doing things the right way round or not

Memos:

MEMO: Follow Up lesson planning (Super, 22/04/08 20:45:04)

Type: Memo

Strategic compliance?
Frequency of lesson planning in general.
Use of institutional templates.

MEMO: ME - 12/02/08 [3] (Super, 12/02/08 14:40:47)

Type: Memo

A nice example of strategic compliance

P11: student Tom interview 1.doc - 11:2 [PS not quite as much for E2E. ..] (40:40) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

T not quite as much for E2E. I do for the level one, and while I was at [previous employer]. In fact to be totally honest I've actually slacked now. When I was at [previous] we got into quite a regime, every Monday morning you had to hand your lesson plan in for that week

P11: student Tom interview 1.doc - 11:3 [PS no, I must admit I don't do..] (56:56) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

T no, I must admit I don't do anywhere near as many as I should, probably, certainly when I know its coming up to audit time I'll get back into the habit of starting doing them again

P11: student Tom interview 1.doc - 11:4 [JT when you handed in that fir..] (62:64) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices assessment]

Memos: [ME - 12/02/08 [5]]

JT when you handed in that first assignment, did you have lesson plans already, or did you do them for that first assignment to give to [tutor]

T no I already had lesson plans...I mean, my first unit, I was still at [previous employer] so, you know, I

had everything there prepped, not a problem, scheme of work already done. It was really just a matter of doing the essays to back up what I'd already got

Memos:

MEMO: ME - 12/02/08 [5] (Super, 12/02/08 14:55:37)

Type: Memo

Strategic compliance - another nice example

P11: student Tom interview 1.doc - 11:7 [PS yeah. Not so much, the obse..] (218:218) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices reflection] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

Memos: [ME - 12/02/08 [6]]

T yeah. Not so much, the observations and reflections on those were quite easy coz again, I had a lot of feedback from the actual observations, you know, to discuss and reflect upon. But for my twelve hours teaching, certainly because you're linking it to a lesson plan as well, and what I do now with E2E, you know, it's so difficult to plan a lesson because your numbers could be, you could have ten in a group but only two turn up, erm, you know, you could be two minutes into the lesson and two kids started fighting so you know you think 'oh, right' so your whole plan just goes straight out the window, 'where do you go from here'? So to reflect on, what you would put with a lesson plan would be like, 'well yes, the lesson plan was just screwed up and thrown into the bin because it didn't mean anything!' [laugh] So I found that quite a struggle and as I say, because I hadn't kept any form of journal because I didn't realise about that, made it harder still.

Memos:

MEMO: ME - 12/02/08 [6] (Super, 12/02/08 14:58:45)

Type: Memo

Seems to be focussing on reflecting on the lesson as enshrined in the plan, although acknowledging the potential for having to deviate. Surely very easy to reflect on?

P11: student Tom interview 1.doc - 11:9 [PS no I found I had to do a lo..] (310:310) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices assessment] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

No memos

T no I found I had to do a lot of referencing, mainly to hit the word count, to be honest... as I say, simply because they're asking you...to reflect on twelve hours of teaching, but that's got to be backed up with lesson plan stuff and a lot, the kids that I'm working with now, the lesson plans are out the window. How can I honestly reflect on a lesson that didn't take place in view of the lesson plan, you know

P12: Student Rachel Interview One.doc - 12:2 [JT ...how did you find the curri..] (129:135) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts created by student] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices assessment] [Literacy practices student led]

Memos: [ME - 12/02/08 [8]]

JT ...how did you find the curriculum project, was that all right?

R yeah, coz I picked something that was particularly, I did E2E curriculum, so, and I've had to try and use it to match my job so I did, we hadn't got an induction programme so I did that. So I developed an induction programme and because I knew it, I was probably quite, fairly confident I would say

JT you knew your way round the E2E programme [...]

R it became not part of the Cert Ed, it became doing it for the E2E and it was what I like doing

Memos:

MEMO: ME - 12/02/08 [8] (Super, 12/02/08 15:38:51)

Type: Memo

Like other students with essay plans. Here, Sharon is very much putting the work first and the course second.

P12: Student Ruth Interview One.doc - 12:5 [SI it's helped me, I've learnt..] (255:255) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts created by student] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

R it's helped me, I've learnt loads from my Cert Ed, about how to do my lesson plans, how to do my schemes of work, so for your job it actually does benefit you

P15: tutor Ruth.doc - 15:7 [But I'm also going to look at ..] (203:207) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

But I'm also going to look at a lot of practical things like lesson plans because they're hopeless at it and they don't like doing them and they're not good at them

JT do you think when, either first years or second years, when they do their lesson plans, do you think they do their lesson plans especially for the assignments or do they just put in the lesson plans they're using anyway?

R er, they put in the ones that they use anyway. And in the vocational areas they are very good at producing lesson plans, although nobody can write SMART targets, which is another thing I hate but we have to have them. so I'm going to look at the whole target-y thing and also look at the whole process

P17: student Kate interview one.doc - 17:6 [EB I did lesson plans because ..] (157:157) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

K I did lesson plans because of the 7407, and the lesson plans I did were not as, because I designed my own lesson plan, and I actually completely altered that when I started PGCE, because they were the only lesson plans that I could refer to. Same with the scheme of work as well. Since working for [college employer] I have to completely confess that I did a scheme of work for the NCFE and I've probably written lesson plans for times that I've been observed. The rest of my lesson plans come in the form of, I have a notebook, come in the form of a notebook

P17: student Kate interview one.doc - 17:7 [JT ...in your first assignment, ..] (171:189) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

JT ...in your first assignment, of course, you've got to put some lesson plans in, haven't you. So did you just do them just because you needed them for the assignment?

K I used ones that I already had

JT that you had anyway from being observed, or just because you were being good

K from reflective, because you know with reflective you've got to have your lesson plans and any handouts with your reflective writing

JT ...so you wrote lesson plans to go with the reflective sessions

K yeah

JT did you have lesson plans before you wrote the reflections or did you write your reflection and then think 'ooh, I'd better do a lesson plan for that one'.

K a bit of both, a bit of both

JT so sometimes you've got them, and sometimes you're creating them for your assignment

K yeah

P17: student Kate interview one.doc - 17:8 [EB yes I do, yeah. Although [c..] (193:193) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts lesson plans]

No memos

K yes I do, yeah. Although [college] template is really in depth. It's two sheets, sometimes three sheets, and a lot of the first sheet is just, I think it's common sense, especially with my subject area. We have someone who is struggling with drawing, then you differentiate with the objects that they're going to be drawing. So a lot of it is sort of, roll on, and I feel a lot of it is common sense, and I don't spend hours writing lesson plans because I don't get paid to do that

P18: student Vivienne interview one.doc - 18:1 [EK yeah, I'd never done a less..] (35:47) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts created by student] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

No memos

V yeah, I'd never done a lesson plan before, schemes of work. I just, I could see the principles and ideas behind it and I like reading about all the psychological theories coz I've done aspects of that in my degree. But some of the practicalities of it, I mean, my lack of skills on the computer has held me back a bit, and just doing the practical, differentiating between the scheme of work and the lesson plan really was quite a big thing, but my mentor helped me with that. Because I'd focus on the detail too early on sometimes. I imagine myself in classroom with people rather than setting the general objectives

JT do you think your mentor helped you with that more than your tutor, your PGCE tutor?

V yeah I do, actually. Because I feel that it was sort of taken for granted that we knew how to do a lesson plan. There was time specifically set to look at lesson planning but I felt embarrassed to do that in front of other people to be honest. So some of it was my attitude to it

JT why did you feel embarrassed?

V because the people in my group, most of them can just rattle them off just like that. And I didn't understand the principles. Sometimes I have to put something in a context before I understand what, I need to understand why I'm doing it before I set out practically to do it. So that's about my learning style, I think. I sort of always ask why [laugh], you know, why are we doing that? So to see one example, yes it was helpful, but I need time to reflect and absorb that learning. Does that make sense? So its in a way, I'm more able to do that now, now that I've done the first year. But I can see the purpose of putting it at the beginning of the course, coz it's quite a step-by-step practical way of getting that right and then you go onto the bigger ideas and the development.

JT so it's a good idea to have it at the start of the course, but you didn't necessarily get much out of it

V no, not personally, no. Because I felt I was thrown in, not exactly at the deep end, but I didn't, I'd never seen a lesson plan, not in that sort of structure, and I felt I needed to know everything about it before I could construct the finished article. So I made it more than it actually was, but my mentor helped me with setting the objectives. One of the things I did as well, was, I delayed actually doing my scheme of work and my lesson plans slightly because we were just changing the whole of our NVQ training really, so rather than just do a paper exercise, my mentor encouraged me to make it a meaningful way of changing things. So it was a big deal in our centre. We were just going back to the drawing board and just completely restarting how we were presenting the NVQ. It was a new course that we were running.

P19: Tutor Julie interview one.doc - 19:2 [I often feel like I'm [...] reas..] (15:19) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices]

assessment] [Responses to literacy artefacts student] [Tutor as student]
No memos

I often feel like I'm [...] reassuring them that they will be able to do it, because when they look at all the documentation it's very daunting for a lot of the students. And yet it shouldn't be because they're all teaching and they should be familiar with outcomes and criteria, specifications

JT so why do you think there's that mismatch...?

J I'm not a hundred per cent certain. I think maybe that they're with peers all of a sudden and they don't want to let themselves down in front of other teachers. Some of them are still coming to terms with the fact that they are teachers, particularly if they've come from vocational areas, you know it's this dual professionalism, you know, and the beauty therapists, 'I enjoy imparting my knowledge but I'm struggling a bit with the theory side of how to do it'. What else could it be? I think we've all been in that situation where we're confident as a subject specialist, but they are going to have to do all the academic writing. Maybe it's something to do with the fact that they're studying within their own college as well, I don't know whether, I would have to ask them or you would have to ask them, is it that there is this feeling that it might get back to their line manager

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc - 20:3 [RW ...they've actually introduce..] (48:52) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefact created by college admin] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Responses to literacy artefacts student]

No memos

L ...they've actually introduced a new lesson plan at the college which has a built in reflection section which has been designed around the PGCE reflection process, and it's helped immensely

[as told to staff by the principal!]

L ...it always used to have an evaluation section but it was very difficult to use, so now it's split into maybe four or five sections that asks you a specific question [...] it fulfils the task perfectly and when they were introducing it they said this will help PGCE students and it has because I've used it and I've also forwarded it on the email round to all the other people on our group and everybody thinks its good [...] So I actually used it for the first time being quite cynical and thinking this won't work, and took it to PGCE and it did work well and it did speed up the process coz it focussed your mind and you thought oh I've only got that box to fill, I can do that [...] I have to hand in my lesson plan as part of your reflection don't you, so it just adds to it really

P20: student Louanna interview one.doc - 20:6 [I sometimes found it quite str..] (90:90) (Super)

Codes: [Literacy artefacts created by student] [Literacy artefacts lesson plans] [Literacy practices assessment] [Literacy practices assessment feedback]

No memos

I sometimes found it quite strange to get feedback on the scheme of work and the lesson plan when the person wasn't there watching the lesson because how do they know how it went? I especially find it a bit difficult on, when you get feedback on schemes of work, for example, this was an agriculture module about livestock, and no offence to either of my teachers, but they know nothing about livestock and they knew nothing about the health and safety issues of trying to take profoundly deaf students onto the farm to work with livestock. And my scheme of work, comments on it were, on the lesson plan you spend a lot of time looking at animals, can we not do something with them? I thought well [...] it was more, the beef in the bullpens all have horns and how do we communicate to the deaf students that there's one coming towards them and there's a sharp horn there when they literally can't hear you shout and they might not be looking at you

Appendix 8.1
Scarcroft College formative feedback pro forma

Area	Feedback
1. Introduction	1.1. Introduction to the course
2. Learning Objectives	2.1. Learning Objectives
3. Assessment	3.1. Assessment
4. Course Content	4.1. Course Content
5. Course Evaluation	5.1. Course Evaluation
6. Course Review	6.1. Course Review
7. Course Improvement	7.1. Course Improvement
8. Course Conclusion	8.1. Course Conclusion
9. Course Summary	9.1. Course Summary
10. Course Final	10.1. Course Final

Cert.Ed/PGCE

Formative Assessment Form

Candidate:	Unit:
Tutor:	Date:
Integration of Theory & practice: Demonstrates a basic understanding of theories and models of learning. Understands the relationship between learning outcomes, the needs of different learners and the design of teaching/learning activities. Plans effectively to achieve identified learning outcomes. Prepares teaching and learning materials. Analyses the use of language, literacy and numeracy skills within teaching and learning. Reflects on own learning within the module.	
Reflections & Evaluation	
Presentation, Grammar/Spelling:	
Evidence of Reading: Bibliography/referencing:	
Learning Outcomes met?	
Suggestions for Amendment:	
Demonstrates Equal Opportunities and Inclusive Learning:	
Adequate Analysis of Concepts and Principles:	
SVUK Standards & transferable key skills	

Reference to minimum core where appropriate?

Evidence of reflective and critical argument:

Contextualise Evidence:

Transferable/Key Skills:

Relates Theory to Practice:

Appendix 8.2
Induction PowerPoint from Millfield College [extract]

[The content of this section is extremely faint and illegible, appearing to be a large block of text or a list of points.]

Home Back Forward

- Welcome and Aims
- Terminology
- Qualifications structure
- Pathway structure
- Terms and Deadlines
- PDP and Forms
- Teaching observations 2
- Teaching/Learning
- E Learning
- How much work? + Ass
- Harvard Referencing
- FAQ
- Memories DFA7130
- Forms and Info

Certificate and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education PCET

Terminology

- Trainee** (that is you the trainee teacher)
- Your own students as **students or learners**
- Your teachers on the pathway as your **tutors**
- Your centre is Millfield College and **Tony Powell** is the tutor in overall charge and is known as the **Centre Manager**.

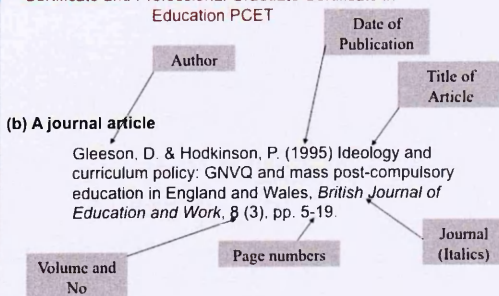
Pathway Aims. Aspirations of the pathway to provide you with certain learning or professional opportunities.

Pathway Outcome. Something you will be expected to know, to understand or to do by the end of the pathway.

Home Back Forward

- Welcome and Aims
- Terminology
- Qualifications structure
- Pathway structure
- Terms and Deadlines
- PDP and Forms
- Teaching observations 2
- Teaching/Learning
- E Learning
- How much work? + Ass
- Harvard Referencing
- FAQ
- Memones DFA7130
- Forms and Info

Certificate and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education PCET



Refer to this as you would to a book, thus: Gleeson & Hodkinson (1995). Note that the title of the article is in normal sentence case; it is the title of the journal that is given italic title case. Quotation marks may be used around the title of the article.

Home Back Forward

- Welcome and Aims
- Terminology
- Qualifications structure
- Pathway structure
- Terms and Deadlines
- PDP and Forms
- Teaching observations 2
- Teaching/Learning
- E Learning
- How much work? + Ass
- Harvard Referencing
- FAQ
- Memories DFA7130
- Forms and Info

Certificate and Professional Graduate Certificate in Education PCET

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The in service pathway will expose trainees to different models of teaching and learning. You will reflect critically on the different approaches. You are required to reflect critically on the relevance and validity of different approaches and to engage in what has come to be called 'meta-cognition'.

Meta-cognition-'thinking about knowing (or learning)', in which you reflect on the processes that help you to learn, or that provide barriers to learning.

You will
 Work in small groups and on your own
 Attend lectures and seminars

Assessment strategies

- Essays
- Projects
- Teaching Observations
- Peer assessment

Appendix 8.3
Nunthorpe College formative feedback pro forma

**CERT ED/PGCE [PCET]
DESIGNING AND PLANNING FOR LEARNING**

FEEDBACK SHEET

STUDENT NAME: **DATE:**

TUTOR NAME: **SIGNED:**

	Outcomes	✓	Comments
K1	Demonstrates a basic understanding of theories and models of learning		
K2	Understands the relationship between learning outcomes, the needs of different learners and the design of teaching/learning activities		
A1	Plans effectively to achieve identified learning outcomes		
A2	Prepares teaching and learning materials		
A3	Analyses the use of language, literacy and numeracy skills within teaching and learning		
A4	Evaluates learning and teaching		
	Scheme of Work		
	2 Lesson Plans		
	Resources		

Appendix 8.4
Nunthorpe College assignment writing frame

Professional in Education and Training - Suggested Writing Frame

Introduction

Explain why you are writing the assignment and briefly describe your role in your organisation.

Professionalism

Define professionalism (*Many different opinions! Is teaching in PCET a profession?*).

Discuss concepts/elements of professionalism and core professional values (*eg role of education and training in society, lifelong learning, widening participation, inclusive learning, differentiation, supporting literacy and numeracy equality and diversity*).

Discuss key issues in relation to professional conduct in PCET (*eg IfL's proposed Code of Practice, Ethics*).

Quality

Define and explain the concepts of quality and quality assurance.

Describe the internal and external quality assurance systems in your organisation *eg Ofsted/ALI, Observations, Course Review, SAR, External Verification*).

Discuss your role in the quality assurance system.

Discuss professional issues arising the QA system from in education and training. (*Can QA systems used in business be applied to education? Are the standards appropriate?*)

Reflective Practice

Describe models of reflective practice (*eg Gibbs, Boud, Schön's Reflection on action and in action, Brookfield's critical lenses, Mezirow's disorientating dilemmas*)

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of reflective practice.

Personal Professional Development

Briefly explain how you got into teaching/training including teacher training courses undertaken (*eg C&G 7307, 7302, OCR*).

Reflect on how you and your teaching have changed since starting teaching/training and especially on the Cert Ed/PGCE, including its impact on your own values and your views of professionalism.

Reflect on future career options.

Evaluate a range of opportunities for personal professional development and identify own development needs.

Conclusion

Sum up the key issues around professionalism. Summarise your learning experience on the course and suggest future professional development plans.

NB Remember to refer to literature throughout the assignment, including at least one journal article.

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