The literacy practices of developing vocational portfolios: Interacting activities, negotiating identities and enacting hybrid discourses

Zoi Nikolaidou

BA in Linguistics

(Aegean University, Greece)

MA in Language Studies

(Lancaster University, U.K.)

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Lancaster, March 2009

Abstract

This thesis reports on a study of the literacy practices drawn upon when developing portfolios for the purposes of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and the impact such practices have on the construction of NVQ candidates' identities. The portfolios are also regarded as elements of intense workplace textualisation and I examine the role they play in empowering or restricting the candidates for their (future) careers.

Data collection and analysis draws from both linguistic and ethnographic methods, placing this study within the methodological field of 'linguistic ethnography'. My data consists of fieldnotes, ethnographic interviews, focus groups and documents collected in the field. The data is interpreted by means of case studies and a socio-semantic approach in text analysis. The focus of the study lies upon the development of NVQ portfolios by two work-based and twelve college-based NVQ candidates.

The uses of literacy are studied here taking a sociocultural stance, understanding literacy as socially situated and approaching it from an Activity Theory lens by analysing the contexts wherein literacy practices are drawn upon as activity systems.

In the study of work-based portfolio building, I argue that the workplace and the study for an NVQ are interacting activities, whose contact results in the creation of a hybrid collection of texts, the portfolio, and a shift in the candidates' understanding of themselves and their work. On the other hand, the college-based NVQ candidates are caught up between two opposing discourses: that of education imposed by the college and that of professionalism which they adopt for themselves. As a result, they negotiate their positions as NVQ candidates and finally adopt hybrid identities, accommodating, in this way, the two discourses. These opposing discourses are also evident in the texts included in the portfolio, produced by both candidates and decision makers. Finally, I claim that such a portfolio does not empower NVQ candidates, since it addresses work practices as isolated from context and it does not take into account a large number of practices in which workers participate.

Acknowledgements

It is often said that the completion of a Ph.D. thesis is a lonely process. However, I have been fortunate enough to have had many people who accompanied me in this journey, in one or the other way. I am grateful to all of them and I would like to mention them here one by one.

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Professor David Barton. His experienced guidance, humour and encouragement supported me at many points throughout the course of this work. His work in the field of literacy, that first initiated my specific research interest, has been a continuous inspiration.

I am also deeply indebted to the research participants that made this study possible. They trusted me with their ideas, showed me the way into NVQs and guided my steps during the data collection stage.

I would also like to warmly thank Professor Roz Ivanič for her stimulating ideas throughout the research and in my upgrade panel and Dr. Karin Tusting for her constructive comments also during my upgrade panel. I also express my gratitude to the secretary of our department, Marjorie Wood, for her kindness, efficiency and help with practical matters.

Conversation with the members of the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre has been of great help at various stages during the course of this work and I would like to thank them all for their genuine encouragement and interest in my work.

I am thankful to the State Scholarships Foundation of Greece for funding the biggest part of my studies.

I am deeply grateful to two friends and colleagues, Eirini Gratsia-Orfanou and Spiros Papageorgiou, for their constructive comments when proof-reading part of my thesis and their continuous encouragement. I would also like to address a special thanks to my good friend Sofia Lampropoulou for her ongoing interest, support and guidance during this journey. But most importantly, I am grateful to her for sharing with me the most difficult year in Lancaster and making me see the funny side of it!

One of the persons that influenced this thesis to a great extent is Dr. Sue Jolliffe, who is no longer with us. Her presence in my life showed me the way to fight for the impossible, to laugh with the difficulties in life and to always come out stronger at the end.

My warmest thanks go to my partner, Christian Arnbom, the person who shared the Ph.D. journey with me from the very beginning till the end. I am grateful to him for understanding how important this work was for me and for making all possible efforts to ensure that I complete it. His love, patience and understanding gave me the strength I needed to walk this path and continue to enrich my life.

Finally, I feel I am very fortunate for having my family all this time by my side. I would like to thank my grandmother, Katina, for her ever lasting love and encouragement. I am grateful to my beloved sister, Dimitra, who kept reminding me that the real fights are not fought on paper, but on the streets. And last but not least, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my parents, Stathis and Rena. I cannot find the words to thank them enough for all they have done for me, for the agony they have suffered all these years I have been away, and for believing in me so truly and devotedly that they made me believe in myself. This thesis is devoted to them and I hope it makes them as much proud as they make me every day of my life.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

AT	Activity Theory
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
FE	Further Education
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SSC	Sector Skills Council

List of Appendices

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the chapter

This thesis is a result of my interest in the continuous changes that have been taking place in modern workplaces in the last decades, and the resulting new demands placed upon workers. Such changes have a large impact on the world of education and purpose of this thesis is to study one aspect of this new reality, the vocational qualifications introduced within the framework of Further Education (FE). National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are an important aspect of this new reality, as they reflect a new trend in education, where vocational competence is demonstrated by means of standardised assessment and approved qualifications. To this end, this thesis responds to the need to examine the effects of such qualifications within the new world of work and the way they are being experienced by qualification candidates in all possible settings.

In this chapter, I present a brief outline of the study. I start with the reasons that initiated my research interest in the portfolios developed for the purposes of NVQs and briefly describe the context within which this qualification has emerged. I then move on to spell out the research questions that this study seeks to answer and then I provide a short summary of the thesis, making reference to the research sites, the methods of data collection and interpretation and some of the basic findings resulting from the study. Finally, I present an outline of the thesis, describing the contents and the purpose of each one of the chapters.

1.2 Aim and context of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to study the construction of portfolios developed for the purpose of obtaining an NVQ. NVQs can be obtained either in FE colleges or in a workplace basis and this study will focus on both these contexts. More specifically, I am interested in examining the processes involved in developing such a portfolio, the links of the portfolio with the workplace, the literacy practices the NVQ candidates participate in and the ways such practices impact upon the candidates' identity construction.

The focus of the study lies on the NVQ portfolio as a purposeful collection of workplace texts. The overarching theoretical lens under which portfolios are examined is the New Literacy Studies. Within this discipline, literacy is not understood as a transferable skill which once acquired can be transferred to all contexts. Rather, it is understood as a series of socially constructed practices which are only meaningful within the context they are being enacted. The NVQ portfolios therefore, are not examined here as texts empty of their situated context. Instead, a holistic view of portfolios will be presented, including the social milieu within which the concept of NVQs and portfolios was developed, the social practices involved in their development and the identities of the people who engage with them.

The reason for studying NVQ portfolios and the social context that surrounds them is my initial interest in the changes brought about in vocational settings as a result of the introduction of new technologies and new ideologies within businesses. Within this new social reality, which Gee et al (1996) have described as the 'new capitalism', texts play a dominant role. Sociologist, Dorothy Smith (1999) has argued that we live in a textually mediated social world, with texts having a primary role in the relations of power that permeate social relations. New texts and new meanings give rise to new forms of literacy. Barton & Tusting (2006) claim that it is possible to interpret changes in literacy practices as an outcome of the 'new capitalism' and the resulting proliferation of texts, and they call for a thorough look at the complex social reality, the way it is represented in ethnographies of workplace literacies .

It is within this context that the intense need for vocational education and training has come about. Vocational education, training and accreditation are now based almost exclusively on the 'competence-based movement' and the National Vocational Qualifications with their focus on job-related portfolios, are a good example of vocationalism trends within the new capitalism. It is in this specific aspect of the new capitalism, NVQs and the portfolios created as part of them, that my research comes to add knowledge and understanding. Recent workplace ethnographies have shown the variety of literacy practices encountered in modern workplaces (inter alia: Hart-Landsberg & Reder, 1997; Hunter, 2004). This thesis aims to add to the insights offered by such studies, by focusing upon vocational qualifications and examining the literacy demands that such qualifications place upon employees at workplaces and students at FE colleges.

1.3 Research Questions

Having outlined the rationale for conducting this research and the general context within which my research interests lie, I will spell out here the main research questions that this thesis aims to answer.

1. What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios in the workplace? Are these practices newly acquired or do they relate to the candidates' work practices?
2. What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios at the college? Are these practices sustained and transferred to the candidates' future work practices?

3. How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed by the literacy practices in which they participate when developing a portfolio?
4. Is there a difference between the languages used in the logbooks and the texts created by the candidates for their portfolios? How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed discoursally, by the texts included in the portfolio?
5. Does the development of NVQ portfolios empower or constrain employees for their (future) careers?

1.4 Research settings and methods

The study of situated literacy calls for research methods that will allow the researcher to observe the uses of literacy in context (see chapter 4). Following this directive, this study has employed qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. More specifically, this thesis draws extensively upon ethnographic methods in order to examine the development of NVQ portfolios in an FE college and in a workplace. The decision to include in my study both settings where NVQs are offered was based on my wish to conduct a comprehensive research of NVQs and understand the ways candidates from various contexts work. Additionally, in this way I would be able to make comparisons between the two settings and examine whether it makes a difference to develop an NVQ portfolio in the college or in the workplace.

The workplace setting in this study is a warehouse in Morecambe, a town in northwest England (see chapter 5). The Human Resources department of the warehouse collaborates with a local college to provide work-based NVQs to employees who wish to obtain such a qualification. I was brought into the warehouse by one of the college tutors, James, who was at the time working with Derry, an employee at the administration department, studying for an NVQ in Business and Administration, and

Kevin, an employee at the manufacture floor who was working towards an NVQ in Warehousing. These three people became my main contacts in the warehouse and were all eager to become research participants in my study. In the FE college (see chapter 6) the situation was different. I was introduced to a tutor in the Beauty Therapy department and was given permission to attend one of her classes as an observer. There were 12 students in the course, all working towards the completion of NVQs on Beauty Therapy. From the very beginning, the differences between the two research fields became obvious and there were traces showing that different issues would come up in each setting as the research progressed.

An ethnographic approach to research meant the use of multiple methods of data collection (see chapter 4). I started with observing the meetings of the warehouse candidates with their tutors and the lessons of the beauty therapy candidates in the college. In the college, observation soon shifted into participant observation as I was offered the possibility of acting as one of the candidates' clients. Participant observation in the warehouse was not an easy process and initiatives were restricted within such an institution. In the college, I proceeded with two focus groups where I engaged the candidates in a discussion about the texts they included in the portfolio and their simultaneous use as work tools. Individual interviews were conducted with candidates in both research fields and valuable insights were gained as to the literacy practices involved while developing the portfolio, meaning their attitudes, opinions and beliefs about the texts and the portfolio as a whole, as well as additional issues such as the role of time and space in developing the portfolio and personal relations with their tutors and other stakeholders. Finally, documents were collected throughout the research process and some of them were later analysed in terms of the language used in them.

The principal theoretical lens of interpreting the data is a situated view of literacy (see section 3.2.2). I start from the literacy events put into play when developing an NVQ portfolio and I then move on to study people's attitudes, behaviours and beliefs, the relations between the event participants and other factors brought up by them, such as the time of portfolio completion and the space. All these elements constitute the candidates' literacy practices when developing their portfolio and, in the case of the warehouse, these are then compared to the literacy practices drawn upon in their workplace. In order to examine portfolio development as a situated practice and as a practice involving many different people working together towards the completion of a common goal, sociocultural theory has been employed in the form of Activity Theory (AT). Using AT both as an underpinning theory and as an analytic tool, I have been able to study the portfolio building practices as the result of people, mediating tools and their objects, as well as the result of many people forming communities which are underpinned by rules and within which each person has a different role. A theory of discourses is also introduced in order to capture the NVQ candidates' ways of seeing the world and the way they represent it in their portfolio writing. Finally, models of talking about identity are added to this analysis, in order to capture the way the candidates' identities are constructed as a result of the qualification process and their writing for the portfolio.

In order to interpret the rich data collected, I relied upon thematic analysis and case studies. This meant going through the fieldnotes and interview transcripts and looking for common patterns in the data. This of course does not mean that practices which were only encountered once or that are less represented in the data are not accounted for. On the contrary, throughout the thesis I make an effort to include all participants' voices, mainstream and deviant ones. This practice is in line with the nature of ethnography, as ethnographic studies do not aim to represent the majority, but rather include even the most isolated voices in the text. The analysis of my data was computer-assisted, using qualitative analysis software. This practice made my analysis faster and more reliable as it enabled me to look through the data more thoroughly. Finally, linguistic analysis of some of the portfolio texts was conducted, in order to examine the differences between the language used by decision makers and NVQ candidates and account for the construction of the latter's identity.

Analysis of the data showed that the NVQ candidates engage with multiple literacy events when developing their portfolios, a lot of which are new to them. In the warehouse, I focus upon one candidate, Derry, and I present the literacy practices he drew upon when being at work, and those practices that he participated in when developing his portfolio (see chapter 5). A comparative analysis indicates that when writing for the portfolio, Derry found it easy to write texts describing his job tasks but met difficulties when asked to explore new themes, not directly relevant to his post. Tackling these difficulties had an impact upon his sense of who he was as a person and as a worker. In the college setting, I present a case study on the whole class and describe the literacy events and practices drawn upon when developing portfolios (see chapter 6). There I show that the NVQ candidates were caught between two discourses and consequently two identities: they were being addressed as FE students but they identified more with practitioners and professionals. This clash of identity was evident throughout the course and was expressed in many different ways. But most importantly, it was expressed in the texts they included in their portfolios and the literacy practices accompanying them. Finally, a detailed analysis of the language used in the performance criteria as well as holistic consideration of the data (see chapter 7) has led to my final argument that NVQ portfolios do not empower candidates for the demands placed by modern workplaces as they do not take into account a large number of skills that the candidates demonstrate while at work and which are highly valued within their industry. These themes will be explored in three separate chapters and will be brought together in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters, including this introductory one. In chapter 2, I discuss the origins of competence-based assessment in the UK and the consequent creation and introduction of NVQs in the vocational sector. I outline briefly all the developmental stages of NVQs and spell out some of the difficulties encountered in the process. This leads me on to a discussion of the notion of 'competence' and the way this concept was used in the English vocational sector. Finally, I summarise some of the criticisms that NVQs have received, regarding the language used, their cost and the overall learning experience they provide and I pinpoint those of the aspects that will be revisited in this thesis.

In chapter 3, I review relevant literature underpinning the thesis by bringing together a situated view of literacy with a socio-cultural model of human relations, Activity Theory. The origins and underpinning principles of these two theories are thoroughly discussed and then I reflect on the way they are used in this thesis to frame my data. The significant role of texts is an ongoing issue in this chapter and texts are discussed as reifications of human experience, as mediators between local and extra-local settings and as dominating elements in modern workplaces. Finally, the concepts of discourses and identity construction are introduced as complementary analytic theories that will help answer the research questions.

In chapter 4, I outline the methodological path followed from the very beginning to the final stages of this research. I first discuss ethnography and linguistic ethnography as the main methodological choices underpinning this thesis. Then, I move on to introduce the research fields and the research participants. A short profile is created for each one of the NVQ candidates in the study, in order to give an idea of the past experiences, current circumstances and future aims of the research participants. What follows is a detailed description of the methodological tools I used to collect and interpret the data, the difficulties I encountered and the decisions I made. This chapter is a reflexive account of my research journey and plays an important role in the interpretation of the chapters that follow.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 include the data analysis. In chapter 5, I present the case of Derry, one of the warehouse employees, who was studying towards the completion of a level 2 NVQ on Business and Administration. My aim in this chapter is to examine Derry's workplace and the work he does for the NVQ as two distinct networks and find differences and connecting points between the two. In order to do this, I present each site as a distinct activity system and describe the elements included in it. After a thorough analysis of these two sites, I then proceed to a comparative study, where I identify texts as mediating elements and as the driving force of network relations between the two contexts. I also discuss how Derry acts as a participant in both networks and consequently how his identity is shaped through this participation.

Chapter 6 is about the NVQ portfolio as developed by the beauty therapy NVQ candidates in the college. Here, rather than focusing on one participant, I cast a focus upon the whole class and describe the portfolio development process as an activity system. In this way, I show who participates in the creation of the portfolio, what tools are being used, what difficulties are being encountered and what other factors play a role in its development. Here again, I discuss the NVQ candidates' identity construction as shaped throughout the development of the portfolio and their participation in the course.

Chapter 7 focuses on the texts compiling the portfolio, their mediating role and the nature of the language used in them. I first show how the portfolio texts mediate between the local sites of the college and the workplace and the extra-local site of awarding bodies and discuss the disempowering effects they have over the candidates. Then I proceed with a linguistic analysis of a sample of portfolio texts. This sample includes texts written both by candidates and by decision makers. A comparative study of the language reveals the different discourses employed by the awarding bodies and by the candidates. The texts produced by awarding bodies impose an institutional identity, which the candidates reject and instead project their own identities, originating from a sense of who they are both, in and out of their work.

Finally, in chapter 8 I bring all the chapters of analysis together, by comparing the findings and providing answers to the research questions of the thesis. Additionally, I have included some reflections on the limitations of the study and suggestions on further research. In the final section, I bring together all the major points discussed in the thesis and in this way, I spell out the contribution of my study.

2 The origins and implementation of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

2.1 Introduction

Before moving on any further in this thesis, it is important to discuss the content and the nature of NVQs. In this chapter, therefore, I present an overview of the competence-based assessment method, upon which construction and implementation of NVQs has been based. Additionally, I discuss the content and structure of NVQs and briefly present the debate over the notion of competence and competence-based education. In this way, the reader can have a more holistic view of the implementation of vocational qualifications in the UK and understand in a better light the analysis that follows.

More specifically, I begin by discussing the origins of the competence-based movement and, at the same time, I make a brief reference to the vocational education system in the UK, prior to the introduction of NVQs. I then move on to discuss the specific conditions that resulted in the introduction of the competence-based movement in the UK and thus in the construction of the NVQs. In order to do that, I make reference to some of the important points in the modern history of British vocational education, such as the New Training Initiative in 1981, the Review of Vocational Qualifications in 1986, the introduction of the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and its later replacement by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Additionally, I discuss the structure of NVQs and the additions that took place at later stages, as a result of criticism and consequent restructuring of the model. I then move on to a discussion of the concept of 'competence', as interpreted and implemented by the NVQ model, I discuss some of the criticisms such a model raised and refer to some interpretations of the confusion over the term 'competence'. Finally, I refer to further criticism raised by the NVQ model and focus on the issue of learning embedded in the qualification process, on the vague and complex language used for the performance indicators, on the alleged high cost of awarding NVQs and on the suitability of NVQs as an assessment method.

2.2 Competence-based education and assessment in the vocational sector

The National Vocational Qualifications in the UK are one of the most significant and large-scale attempts to make use of competence-based assessment. It is therefore important to discuss here briefly the origins of this movement and the ways as well as the reasons why it resulted in being one of the most influential assessment methods in the vocational sector of the UK.

The origins of competence-based assessment can be traced back to the American teacher education and certification debate during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Increasing worries about the quality of teacher education brought about a discussion of implementing a 'competence-based' or 'performance-based' method of assessment which would include an intensive needs assessment of candidates and most importantly precise and transparent objectives that would define competence. Even though the competence-based movement was initially accepted with enthusiasm and generous government funding, it turned out to have a limited impact on the vocational sector, as it was only taken up by very few institutions and it remained on an experimental level (Wolf, 1995).

The notion of competence-based assessment was first introduced in the UK during the late 1970s. Prior to this, the vocational sector was dominated by systems of apprenticeship, similar to those in existence in the rest of Europe throughout the 19th century. However, apprenticeships were linked to a restricted number of industries, addressed mainly young males and were not so much concerned with the quality of training provided as much as with the time served prior to becoming a qualified professional (Raggatt & Williams, 1999). At the beginning of the 20th century the system of apprenticeship was still in existence, even though its popularity was experiencing a notable decline. At the same time, a network of colleges had appeared that offered technical and vocational education at a local level.

In the early 1960s, discussions about the low skills of the workforce and the poor quality of vocational training and connection of these phenomena with the industrial and economic problems experienced at the time led to a common demand for improved training and education in the vocational sector. The increase of youth unemployment during the late 1970s and early 1980s made such requests more common than ever and everyone, including the government, was convinced that education was the only solution to the financial crisis experienced. At that point, competence-based education was a newly introduced concept and looked increasingly promising in the UK. Many officials and scholars became convinced that implementing this approach was the only way to remedy the long suffering vocational sector and boost the economy of the country. In 1984 the Further Education Unit was defining the 'competence-based system' as "the possession and development of sufficient skills, knowledge, appropriate attitudes and experience for successful performance in life roles" (FEU, 1984).

One of the earliest initiatives to address unemployment in young people was run by the Manpower Commission Services (MSC). This was the establishment of Youth Opportunities Programmes (YOP) in 1978. These were vocational schemes created for school leavers and which aimed to provide an "effective bridge to permanent employment" for young people (MSC 1977: 7) According to Raggatt and Williams (1999) these programmes were so popular that in 1983 there were more school leavers registered in YOP than in actual jobs. In 1983 these programmes were replaced by the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). These schemes played an important role in the early history of NVQs, as they purported to provide accreditation to the participants after a two-year vocational training. What they initiated therefore was an increasing concern about the kind of qualifications that would be awarded to those coming out of these schemes.

Up to that time, most vocational awards were delivered by independent bodies and individual industries. More specifically, there were three overarching awarding bodies: the City and Guilds, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and Business and the Technician Education Council (BTEC). Each one of them provided different awards to different kind of industries. The situation of vocational qualifications at that time was very confusing and there was therefore urgent need for systematization of the qualifications. It was up to the MSC to initiate this process in the early 1980s.

With a view to finding solutions for the large numbers of unemployed people as well as finding alternatives to the declining system of apprenticeships, the MSC commissioned the New Training Initiative in 1981. The resulting report 'A New Training Initiative: A Consultative Document' (MSC, 1981) included suggestions for a reformed system of vocational education, with a particular focus on reforming apprenticeships, abolishing time serving and relating qualifications to the demonstration of competence. The writers of the report stress that vocational education should reach non-traditional learners and that it should be disassociated from traditional educational establishments which they described as "overly academic and elitist". Overall, the report proposed three major policy objectives: modernization of skills training; structured provision for all 16-18 year olds not in full time education and increased skills training opportunities for adults (MSC, 1981). It also stated that "at the heart of the initiative lie standards of a new kind", putting in place the cornerstone for competence-based awards.

The pressure to enhance the vocational sector in education and to increase the status and quality of YTS led to the establishment of the 'Review of Vocational Qualifications in England and Wales' (RVQ) in 1985. This was jointly administered by the MSC and the Department of Employment and its aim was "to concentrate initially on improving the structure of qualifications to meet the needs of the extended Youth Training Scheme" (DE/DES, 1985: 9). However, it was felt by the members of that group that they were doing more than just improving qualifications for the YTS; they were creating a new basis for the whole model of vocational qualifications in England and Wales (Hargraves, 2000). The qualification proposed by the RVQ was named the National Vocational Qualification and was defined as:

...a statement of competence clearly relevant to work and intended to facilitate entry into, or progression in, employment, further education and training, issued by a recognised body to an individual. This statement should incorporate the assessment of:

- skills to specified standards

- relevant knowledge and understanding
- the ability to use skills and to apply knowledge and understanding to the performance of relevant tasks.

(MSC/DES, 1986: 17)

It is important to note here that the model, as presented by the RVQ, was not an actual qualification, but a framework within which existing qualifications would be embedded. Another significant point is that the report made clear reference to the importance of awards being based on standards of competence that would encompass applied knowledge and that a number of bodies should be nominated for setting these standards in association with industries. However, as Hargraves (2000) stresses, the RVQ did not associate the term 'competence' with certain curriculum models or assessment methods". Rather, they perceived competence as 'job related', "in the sense of the skills and knowledge required by a job" (ibid: 297). Finally, the RVQ assigned the responsibility of structuring and administering the NVQ to a new body, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and the standards-setting and awarding bodies who would work under its command. Despite the foundational nature of the RVQ for the creation of NVQs, it left a lot of unclear points regarding the structure of the new framework and thus it left a lot of unanswered questions to be later dealt with by the NCVQ (Raggatt & Williams, 1999).

2.3 The creation and implementation of NVQs

The National Council for Vocational Qualifications was set up in 1986 by the Department of Employment with the aim of bringing all vocational qualifications into a national system in order to make them more comprehensible, and to aid progression by clearly showing routes available to those seeking qualifications (FEU, 1988). The first thing that needs to be said is that the NCVQ did not restrict its actions to its original remit, that is to bring all existing qualifications under an umbrella framework. Rather, considering the ambiguity of the RVQ report, the members of the NCVQ set as their aim to create new qualifications that would have 'competence' in their core.

In 1985 the MSC was defining competence as "the ability to perform the activities within an occupation" and someone was described as competent when "performing at the standards expected of an employee doing the same job" (MSC, 1985). Based on this understanding of competence, the assessment model put forward by NCVQ involved a functional analysis of occupational roles that is, breaking them down into the activities constituting them and turning them into standards that denote competence. These standards of occupational competence are created by industry-lead bodies who then submit them to the NCVQ for approval. Once the standards were decided they passed into the hands of awarding bodies, who were responsible for administering them. The three major awarding bodies earlier mentioned that is, City and Guilds, RSA and BTEC, became the most prominent ones, expanded their business to larger sections of industry and competition between them increased.

Gilbert Jessup was appointed as the deputy director of NCVQ and is considered as the "architect of the approach" (Wolf, 1995). In his book 'Outcomes: NVQs and the emerging model of education and training' he described NVQs as:

A statement of competence clearly relevant to work and intended to facilitate entry into, or progression in, employment and further learning, issued to an individual by a recognised awarding body.

(Jessup, 1991: 15)

In his definition, he also adds that the statement of competence should incorporate "the ability to perform in a range of work related activities" and "the underpinning skills, knowledge and understanding required for performance in employment" (ibid). What is interesting to note is that he sees underpinning knowledge as incorporated in competence and thus as an element that is not assessed in its own right. It is this exact feature of NVQs that received heavy criticism and it will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

An NVQ is composed by a number of 'units of competence', each one referring to a specific occupational activity or else "the smallest unit worthy of separate accreditation" (Wolf, 1995: 19). Each unit of competence is broken down into smaller parts, the 'elements of competence', "a description of something which a person who works in a given occupational area should be able to do" (ibid). The smallest parts are the 'performance criteria', that is "statements by which an assessor judges whether the evidence provided by an individual is sufficient to demonstrate competent performance" (ibid: 21). According to Jessup (1990: 22) "the specifications of competence plus the performance criteria provide the operational realisation of the 'new kinds of standards'". The NVQ criteria state that the elements and performance criteria should be precise enough so as to avoid any false interpretations by users, but also not to be so detailed so that they will only relate to a specific task or occupation.

According to Jessup (1991), the most detailed descriptions within NVQs are the 'elements of competence' and they usually have the structure of an active verb, an object and conditions (e.g. maintain- standards of hygiene- in food preparation areas). Performance criteria also have their semantic structure as they always contain a critical outcome (something that has to be done for the function described to be successful) and an evaluative statement (it can be qualitative or quantitative).

As earlier stated, the statements of competence arise from an analysis of employment functions, which Jessup (1991: 36) describes as first stating the key purpose of the overall area of competence and then breaking down into the primary functions which need to be carried out in order for the key purpose to be achieved. The primary functions are divided into sub-functions, and so on. Finally, it is noteworthy that the NCVQ model does not specify how, where and when vocational competence is developed. "The more varied the ways to achieve NVQs the better if access to training and vocational qualifications is to be improved" (FEU, 1988).

A latest extension to the form of NVQ units was the inclusion of range statements. According to an NCVQ report:

Range statements elaborate the statement of competence, by making explicit the contexts to which the elements and performance criteria apply. Also they put limits on the specification to ensure a consistent interpretation.

(NCVQ, 1991: 14)

This addition has been described as "recontextualisation of competence" (Hyland, 1994), since it was initiated as a result of heavy criticism towards the NVQs for not explicitly assessing the candidates' knowledge and understanding. These elements were always assessed in the apprenticeship system and in vocational awards other than NVQs (Grugulis, 2003). However, the creators of NVQs saw knowledge and understanding as being embedded in competence and explicitly stated that knowledge can be inferred from the demonstration of competence. Additionally, NVQ proponents suggested that the focus on demonstrable performance is highly motivating for learners, in either a work-based or an education-based context (Burke, 1995; Jessup, 1991). However, there were many voices at that time (e.g. Smithers, 1993) that suggested that NVQs produce workers who demonstrate performance but do not understand what they are doing (Wolf, 1995). However, the NCVQ were convinced about their narrow methodology and added range statements as a way of broadening the scope of statements.

The first NVQs were accredited in 1987 and within the first ten years a total of more than 1.6 million qualifications were awarded (Raggatt & Williams, 1999). Also, by 1996 there were 180 lead bodies, supported by governmental funding in order to produce standards of competence (Wolf, 2002: 74). The large numbers of lead bodies was a drawback as they were uncoordinated and in many cases the standards they produced were overlapping. Additionally, NVQs were not the only qualifications available and even though they enjoyed official endorsement, their take up was always voluntary for awarding bodies and professional institutions. Initially, awarding bodies offered NVQs along with their own qualifications and in this way in 1996 NVQs accounted for only a 25% of the vocational awards made available (ibid: 76).

Initially, governmental funding was provided to the NCVQ with the precondition that it would become self-funded by the year 1991. However, it soon became obvious that this was not a realistic target and a new agreement was made that it should aim to cover 80% of the employed workforce by the end of 1992. This became possible after two significant developments: an agreement was reached with BTEC to include the majority of its awards in the NVQ framework and, at the same time, the NCVQ and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) came to an agreement to recognize each other's awards. Governmental endorsement did not cover only NVQs but more importantly Competence-Based Education and Training (CBET), especially since the qualifications' initial approval in the 1991 White Paper Education and Training for the 21st Century (DES, 1991). However, the NCVQ was also highly scrutinized by the government and this can be seen in the series of governmental reports that followed, whose aim was to examine the sustainability of the qualifications policy.

One of the most influential studies initiated by the government was the Beaumont Review of the top 100 NVQs (Beaumont, 1996), which took place in 1996. Its objectives were to "evaluate and report on the effectiveness of approximately 100 of the most used NVQs and SVQs in fulfilling the occupational competence requirements of employment" (ibid). The problems identified in the Beaumont review had mainly to do with the perceived lack of credibility of NVQs, their irrelevance to employers and the lack of access to NVQs for small firms (Franklin, 1997). Additionally, there was criticism about the cost of the system and the complex language in which occupational standards were written. Beaumont accepted the competence-based nature of the qualifications, but suggested that a firmer linkage was needed between competences and the underlying knowledge and skills. As a result he proposed the inclusion of knowledge statements that would make clear the knowledge that the candidates are required to possess in order to complete each unit. The suggestion found positive reactions and thus the NVQ statement of competence "must henceforth be accompanied by a knowledge specification" (NCVQ, 1995: 26). The report also suggested the inclusion of optional and mandatory units so as to give more breadth to the qualification. The Beaumont review concluded: "NVQs/SVQs are central to National and Scottish Education and Training targets. They are also crucial to the future prosperity of the UK. The changes now proposed should significantly increase the take-up of the qualifications" (1996: 33).

A second review initiated by the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE, 1996) concluded that the NCVQ "has not been able to establish a national framework for all, or even a majority, of vocational awards" and "despite all its achievements, there remains negative perception of the organisation from some quarters".

A major development that also took place at that time was the close collaboration of the NCVQ with the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) and their final merger in 1997 in what came to be the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The QCA set as a priority to bring all existing vocational qualifications under the same National Qualifications framework, something that was the initial target of the NCVQ but it had only started dealing with during the final years of its existence (Raggatt & Williams, 1999). The changes proposed by the Beaumont review were taken up and implemented by the QCA. By 2001 3.5 million NVQs and SVQs had been awarded and half of them were awarded to candidates in business services and in areas providing goods and services (National Statistics, 2003). However, some of the most severe criticisms of the NVQ model are still relevant and they will be discussed in detail in the following section.

2.4 The concept of 'competence' as implemented by the NVQ model

One of the main issues that NVQ officials as well as critics kept returning to was the concept of 'competence' as understood and implemented in the NVQ model. Competence-based assessment took many different meanings and the form and content of NVQs changed many times throughout the history of the qualification, based upon the different understandings of what competence is and how it should be assessed. This is an inherent problem with the concept of competence, which has been defined by many scholars in various ways but still is generally acknowledged to be a difficult concept to define. This can therefore be recognised as the most significant problem of the NVQ model, since it would be easier to stabilise the method of assessment if it was based on a robust theoretical framework.

In the late 1980s, competence was described by the NCVQ as: "essentially concerned with performance in employment" (NCVQ, 1988: v) and by the Further Education Unit as "performance capability needed by workers in a specified occupational area" (Hermann & Kenyon, 1987: 1). Such definitions were indicative of the perceived direct link between competence and the outcomes demonstrated in occupational areas. As earlier discussed, such a view of competence was later contested by a number of critics and was also dealt with in detail in the Beaumont review. One of the most prominent NVQ critics, Smithers, argued that the qualifications do not have "a reservoir of knowledge and understanding to enable people to cope with a changing world or provide a platform for progression" (1999: 146) and stressed that there is no guarantee that numerous individual competencies would amount to skilled overall performance. By the time the Beaumont review was out the NCVQ officials were already under pressure to include knowledge and understanding as elements separate from the competence-based standards (Raggatt & Williams, 1999). It is not surprising therefore that in the Beaumont review competence is defined as: "the ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment" (1996: 12) and that immediately afterwards the QCA decided to include knowledge statements in each NVQ unit.

Taking into account the confusion over the concept of competence, Ashworth and Saxton were arguing in 1990 that: "it is not clear whether a competence is a personal attribute, an act, or an outcome of behaviour" (1990). This confusion over the use and the meaning of the word has been attributed to the fact that 'competence' has not been differentiated as a concept from the notion of 'competency'. Hyland (1994) argues that in the literature of CBET, the two concepts are used interchangeably and a clear distinction between the two has never been made. He claims that competence can be discussed in terms of capacity and in terms of disposition. The capacity sense refers to the evaluation of people and is connected with 'competence', whereas the dispositional sense refers to activities and is more related with 'competency'. Hyland suggests that even though NVQs claim to evaluate competence (people), in reality they assess competency (activities), by breaking down occupational roles into work functions. However, he continues, competence has taken the place of an educational slogan and "has generated a massive influence, following any field of applicability within education and training" (1994: 26).

One significant drawback in the way 'competence' is used by the NCVQ is its disassociation from context. This thesis will argue that the performance criteria, emptied from the context where the occupational actions are performed, disempower the candidates and oversimplify their occupational roles. The same is argued by Hodkinson who claims that: "the performance of any worker is influenced by the life history and habitus of that professional, the context in which s/he works and his/her interactions with others" (1995: 60). He further believes that the NCVQ model underestimates the importance of collaborative versions of competence and ignores power inequalities and struggles in the workplace. This is also confirmed in the analysis found in this thesis where I will show that a large part of the work in the college field is done collectively and this is nowhere depicted in the candidates' portfolios. Additionally, the power inequalities between candidates and tutors and the micro-struggles between the candidates themselves have a large impact upon the demonstration of competence, but this is also an aspect totally ignored by the competence-based performance criteria. In this way, the NCVQ approach "deflects attention from problems of context and makes it easy to blame the individual professional for any shortcomings in the system" (ibid: 61).

Another study that stresses the importance of context when assessing competence is that of Fuller (1995). She argues that the NCVQ model has ignored the significance of sector knowledge and that creating qualifications without considering the main features of each industry is arbitrary and can result to disastrous results. She identifies purpose, value and context of qualification as the three main features that should be taken into account when creating a qualification. She finally claims that: "It is against this background of contextual variety that a national policy towards occupational qualifications has been formulated and its product the NVQ system is being implemented" (ibid: 66). Fuller's argument is further supported by another study that set out to prove the reasons why NVQs have been successfully implemented in parts of the health care sector. In this study, Cox (2007) argues that NVQs had positive influences in the health care sector because the context was the right one for such an assessment method to be implemented. Elements such as the alignment of individual and organisation goals and the organizational recognition and support for learners made it possible for workers to demonstrate their competence in a successful way and in alignment with the demands of competence-based assessment.

2.5 Additional criticism: Learning experience, language, cost and assessment

The confusion over the use of the concept of competence and competence-based assessment has, not surprisingly, brought about criticism of the learning process within the NCVQ model. More specifically, it is argued that cognitive and experiential learning strategies are ignored and that the NVQ focuses on "employers' immediate skills requirements at the expense of trainees' holistic personal development" (Hargraves, 2000: 286). Hyland pointed the finger at NVQs for not being "primarily concerned with learning, but with the collection of evidence to satisfy competence criteria" (1994: 14). He argued that it is possible that some useful learning takes place during the process of collecting evidence, but it is rather insignificant compared to the need to satisfy all the prerequisites for the certification. Hyland's argument is reinforced by Franklin who contrasted the focus of NVQs on the ability to undertake carefully designed tasks, with other learning programmes designed to "enable and encourage students to think about what they are doing and to develop and exercise critical judgement" (1997: 521). Smithers accused NVQs for not having "a reservoir of knowledge and understanding to enable people to cope with a changing world or provide a platform for progression" (1999: 146) and he stressed that there is no guarantee that numerous individual competencies would amount to skilled overall performance.

Another important issue that troubled NVQ officials and initiated numerous criticisms about the NVQ was the language used for the performance criteria. The process of developing standards was taken up by a small number of specialist consultants, while the lead bodies were supervising the process. The standards had to be written according to the "recommended grammatical structure" (Raggatt & Williams, 1999) and they had a tightly defined format. The terminology used was so specific that only a few people could actually produce them. According to Wolf: "ability to use the right language was more important than knowledge of the sector" (1995: 16). The Beaumont review recognised and stressed the problem of the complex language used in the qualifications and suggested its simplification so that it would be more easily accessible by the candidates (Beaumont, 1996). Smithers described the NVQ language as 'odd and abstract...which breaks the rules of grammar and therefore is very difficult to read' (1999: 145). Similarly, Hyland (1996) found quite serious defects and difficulties inherent in the CBET model of functional analysis and its behaviourist learning foundation and related them to the language problems mentioned by Beaumont.

Language problems are also immediately related to problems arising from the portfolio building process. Hillier (1999) argued that students struggle to understand both the nature of evidence and ways of relating it to standards and in Swailes & Roodhouse's survey on small business services and public sector employers, portfolios are described as 'isolating' and 'an administrative nightmare' (2003). In the same survey the authors explored barriers to the take-up of higher levels of NVQ and explain that "by September 2001, 3.5 million NVQ certificates had been awarded of which 95.1% were at levels 1-3 and well over half of these were at level 2" (ibid: 87). Their interviews revealed a number of reasons for the highly skewed results mentioned above: lack of learners' knowledge and experience of NVQs, problematic completion rates, funding problems, much paperwork and very mechanistic procedures, snobbery towards the competence movement, complex standards, mismatch of standards and jobs and difficulties in finding and providing evidence.

The high cost of the NCVQ model was another significant drawback in the implementation of the approach. Hyland and Matlay (1998) reported that the costs of work-based NVQs are high relative to other forms of training and this seems likely to create a barrier in small organisations. Indeed in a large number of studies the high cost of NVQs is mentioned as a problem by both employers and candidates. The Beaumont review highlighted the fact that employers and universities deal with several awarding bodies in order to offer a wide range of NVQs and suggested that this practice adds costs and confusion to NVQ programmes. Smithers (1993; 1999) and Hyland (1994) draw our attention to the worrying possibility that in the new system of outcome related funding, colleges were led to sell the NVQs or give them away, regardless of the demonstrated competence of the candidates. Smithers (1999: 147) compares the situation in colleges with a driving assessment by an assessor who will only get paid if the student gets his/her driving licence!

Finally, one of the most significant points of disagreement was the suitability of the NCVQ approach as an assessment method. NVQ advocates (Burke, 1995; Jessup,

1991) have suggested that traditional assessment practices, such as written examinations at the end of a course or programme, seem inappropriate for vocational qualifications. Jessup argued that 'norm-referencing' assessments have limited validity and they do not take into account "a wealth of evidence of the candidates' capabilities which must have been demonstrated throughout the course" (1991: 47). Instead, what the CBET model proposed is assessment based on clearly specified outcomes. This kind of assessment Jessup described as 'comprehensive' and 'valid' (ibid: 48). Thus, the processes involved in NVQ assessment are the collection of evidence by the candidates in order to prove their competence in the standards, and follow-up judgments on whether the evidence meets the standards. Hyland has suggested that this kind of assessment is nothing more than "the judgements of assessors working within the system", and has therefore questioned the objectivity of assessment since issues of possible bias and reliability are at stake (1994: 37). But the most significant issue that Hyland addresses in terms of the suitability of NVQs as an assessment method is that of validity. Jessup called for a sacrifice of reliability in the drive for validity. Hyland, on the other hand, stressed that a non-reliable form of assessment cannot be valid and thus, questioned the extent to which the NVQ assessment is valid.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the creation of NVQs as a result of economic instability, youth unemployment and a series of reformations taking place in the vocational sector in the UK in the last third of the 20th century. More specifically, I have discussed the competence-based rationale for the creation of vocational qualifications and how this materialised in the development of NVQs. Additionally, I have interpreted the many changes in the content and layout of the qualifications as the result of ongoing criticism coming from both governmental and academic circles. I have explored the concept of 'competence' the way it was used by the NVQ model, and have shown some of the problems arising when using such a conceptionally narrow method of assessment. Finally, I have concentrated on some further criticisms placed upon NVQs, such as their large cost, their suitability as a learning and assessment method and, more importantly, the complex language used in the performance indicators.

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a brief background to the original conceptualisation and later implementation of NVQs and, in this way, to frame the discussions that follow in this thesis. Knowledge of the origins of NVQs, the rationale behind their creation and the criticism they received is considered necessary in order to proceed to the analysis found in the following chapters. And more importantly, the criticisms of the language of the performance indicators are a first hint to the issues discussed by some of NVQ candidates in this study and to the discourse analysis of performance indicators that is conducted in chapter 7.

3 Theoretical issues underpinning the study

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is a purposeful collection of texts that people put together in order to construct an NVQ portfolio. These texts are not all homogeneous, they vary significantly, starting from the logbook which includes the performance criteria for which candidates have to provide evidence of prior knowledge and experience, to the actual texts that are used as evidence of professional competency and knowledge, such as story boards, personal statements, client forms and photographs. However, it is not only texts upon which this study focuses. The meaning and usage of texts cannot be fully examined without a good understanding of the context within which they are being used. In literacy studies there has been a persistent call (inter alia: Barton, 2001; Ivanič, 1998) for linking studies of texts with studies of social practices, in order to gain a holistic view of what is going on when people interact with texts. Therefore, my interest in this study moves away from the exclusive focus on texts, to a broader study of both texts and the social practices associated with their use. In this chapter therefore, I will introduce the main theoretical tools that will enable me to bring together texts and social practices.

I will begin, in section 3.2, by visiting the field of literacy studies and by briefly presenting popular models of literacy that have been prominent in the past and some of them whose influence persists until today. I will then move on to describe the approach to literacy taken in this study, by introducing the field of New Literacy Studies. After discussing the basic principles of the discipline, I will move on to present the main units of analysis and I will show how these will be used in the study of NVQ portfolios. Texts will be discussed here as shaping literacy practices and as mediating between local and global settings and reifying authors' experiences.

Section 3.3 is a brief review of studies reporting the significant role of texts within workplaces. Additionally, I discuss how the changes brought about in workplaces have impacts on the construction of employees' identities. In section 3.4, I introduce Activity Theory (AT) as a main theoretical model and analytical tool underpinning this study. More specifically, I will discuss the origins of the theory, its main principles and its application within a study of literacy. Section 3.5 is about the introduction of a theory of discourses within the study of activity systems and I discuss how the analysis of discourses in social settings can complement analysis based upon AT. In section 3.6, I follow up the discussion on discourses, by presenting a brief introduction of methods of critical discourse analysis and introduce the main analytical model of discourse analysis that will be used to analyse my data. Finally, in section 3.7 there is an extended discussion of the social construction of identities, as this is one of the main research questions sought to be answered in this thesis.

3.2 Studying portfolios under the lens of New Literacy Studies

3.2.1 Popular models of literacy

There are many ways of talking about literacy, which are all indicative of the ways people understand its meaning and its role in society. In this section, I will briefly discuss some of the popular models that have been suggested over time. In its most popular form, literacy is perceived as a collection of transferable skills, which people need to possess in order to demonstrate cognitive development and successful societal participation (inter alia: Goody & Watt, 1968). This functional form of literacy has been closely associated with employment and socioeconomic development and has resulted in deficit models of literacy, wherein large numbers of populations are considered illiterate and are, therefore, accountable for big economic losses.

At the opposite edge lies an ideology that perceives literacy as en empowering force for humans and as a means for setting oneself free from oppression. The model of critical literacy has been largely associated with the work of Paulo Freire during the 1970s and 1980s. Freire has called for a kind of literacy instruction where people learn how to 'read the world' before learning how to 'read the word' (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In this sense, becoming literate means gaining critical consciousness "both understanding one's social relations to the means of production and conceptualising actions that might change those relations and material conditions" (Luke, 1997). Within this model, literacy is attributed a socio-political role and is perceived as having the potential to empower people and change them into active participants in the society, both as individuals and as citizens.

Finally, literacy has been approached as a human and social right and emphasis is placed upon the importance of literacy in order to achieve personal development and individual goals (discussed in Papen, 2005). What is interesting to note here is that the different ways of talking about literacy are not unrelated. As Baynham states: "this range of models does not represent a set of discrete options and it is possible to have mixes and blends of a number of them" (1995).

3.2.2 New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) originated in the 1980s and emerged as a reaction to functional models of literacy. Research within the NLS framework challenged the theory of the Great Divide (Goody, 1977) which argued for fundamental cognitive differences between oral and written societies and between people who can or cannot read and write, and concentrated on an ideological model, approaching literacy as a set of situated practices which can only be examined in the context where it is being enacted. Street argues:

> I prefer to work from what I term the 'ideological' model of literacy, that recognises a multiplicity of literacies; that the meaning and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies.
>
> (1994: 139)

This new approach to literacy is seen by Barton and Tusting as part of a general shift in social sciences, a focus on the detail of social interaction, the use of qualitative rather than qualitative methods "in an attempt to capture the complexity of life as it is lived, rather than reducing it to some ostensibly simpler explanatory framework" (2005: 250).

This new way of looking at literacy gave rise to a new discipline of studies, wherein researchers make use of ethnographic methods of research to study literacy in context in a variety of communities. Some of the most influential works of this early period were conducted by Heath(1983), Scribner & Cole(1981) and Street (1984). Following this research paradigm, literacy research such as Barton and Hamilton's (1998), Baynham's (1995) Gee's (1992), Martin-Jones and Jones's (2000) and Barton's (1994) as well as more recent work found in the edited collections of Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (2000) Barton and Tusting (2005) and Pahl and Rowsell (2006), among others, have provided us with abundant evidence of the rich and diverse nature of literacy in various domains of people's lives and have contributed to shaping the well established framework of the 'New Literacy Studies'.

Drawing from their experience on studying the uses of literacy in a local community, Barton and Hamilton (2000: 8) have devised six propositions about the nature of literacy:

1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

The first thing to notice when reading the above statements is the interchangeable use of the terms 'literacy', 'literacies' and 'literacy practices'. In the following sections, I will account for this terminology and I will explain how my research is framed by some of the propositions described above.

3.2.3 Literacy events and literacy practices

In this section, I will define the main analytic units of this thesis, namely literacy events and literacy practices, and I will go on to discuss how they are being used in this research in order to describe the reading and writing practices the research participants draw upon when developing NVQ portfolios.

Literacy events is a term first introduced by Heath, who defined them as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (1982: 50). Barton also defined literacy events as "all sorts of occasions in everyday life where written word has a role" (2007: 35). Both authors describe literacy events as 'occasions', therefore as units which can easily be observed and described as they occur in specific times and places. In my study, the process of an NVQ candidate developing a portfolio is described as one broad literacy event. Within it, however, we can detect smaller literacy events such as filling in logbooks, writing personal statements, preparing and printing reports, etc. An aim of this study is to discover all the literacy events taking place when the NVQ candidates in my research develop portfolios. This process will lead me to the second analytic level of social activity, the identification of their literacy practices.

Locating and describing literacy events is not enough to understand what happens when people engage with literacy. In literacy studies researchers seek also to understand common patterns of events, similarities and differences as well as people's attitudes and values towards these events. All these factors are constitutive elements of **literacy practices** (Street, 1993). The concept of literacy practices offers researchers the means to reach generalisations and abstractions about the various uses of literacy and to locate "links between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Additionally, as different literacy events lead to a variety of literacy practices, it does not seem appropriate to talk about literacy in singular form. Instead, it is often replaced by the term **literacies**, which is used to denote either the different organization patterns of literacy practices or domains of activity where literacy plays a role, e.g. workplace literacies. The word is also used in its plural form when referring to a number of practices that involve literacy or other media, e.g. computer literacy, film literacy and music literacy, can all be referred to as a group of literacies.

Baynham and Baker (2002) argue that in literature the term 'literacy practices' has been invoked without any explicit signalling of its various meanings. In literacy studies the term is currently used referring to "both what people do and the ideas, attitudes, ideologies and values that inform what they do" (ibid: 2). This confusion over the use of the term 'literacy practices' is also observed by Tusting, Ivanič and Wilson (2000). They spell out the different ways in which the term tends to be used in contemporary studies and call for a more thoughtful usage of it. More specifically they argue that the term is used in two different ways:

> 1. To refer to observable, collectable and/or documentable specific ethnographic detail of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, tools and resources.
> 2. To refer to culturally recognisable patterns of behaviour, which can be generalised from the observation of specifics.
>
> (2000: 213)

In my view, the first usage of the concept is closer to the meaning of the term 'literacy events' since they refer to observable and documentable data. On the other hand, the second meaning seems more inclusive as it refers to patterns of behaviour which have emerged from the observation of specific events and the potential to generalise the findings. In this study, when I claim that purpose of the research is to detect the literacy practices generated when people develop NVQ portfolios, I use the term in its second meaning, attempting to reveal common actions, attitudes and ideologies shaping the process of building such a portfolio.

3.2.4 Mediating texts

Going back to Hamilton and Barton's (2000) first proposition, they argue that literacy events are mediated by written texts. Elsewhere, Barton (2001) has argued that a classic literacy event is 'talk around text'. In its traditional meaning as well as in literacy studies a text refers to written language and print-based material. A more recent approach (among others: Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) examines the multimodal aspect of texts, meaning the various modes of communication existing in texts and the way these are combined to create meaning. The NVQ portfolios are a compilation of various kinds of texts rich in semiotic and multimodal elements, such as statements, tables, charts, images, photos, lists, etc. All these different kinds of texts will be discussed here with an aim to discover the practices developed when engaging with them.

However, treating texts only as mere semiotic and multimodal carriers is not enough. In this study, I wish to understand the way texts interact with people, the roles they play both in their lives and in their attempts to obtain a qualification and finally the way they shape their identities. In order to do this, I treat texts as objects and at the same time as actors. Recent studies have acknowledged the significance of the materiality of texts. In this sense, texts are described as artefacts, products of technology, and they are studied as objects within the processes of reading and writing. Thus, researchers within the NLS have been interested in the physicality of texts, their construction, their emplacement and their use and meaning within various contexts (e.g. Omerod & Ivanič, 2000; Rowsell, 2006; Wilson, 2000).

Giving non-humans human attributes is part of a broader concept, that of reification. Wenger defines reification as "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" (1998: 58). Barton and Hamilton (2005) argue that a large majority of these objects, symbols, abstractions, stories, etc, that Wenger claims to reify experience, are literacy related artefacts and they are textually mediated. It is very useful to look at NVQ portfolios as reifying employees' professional experience and social interaction within the workplace or the vocational course. When developing a portfolio students enclose in it a large part of their professional knowledge, not only regarding job tasks but also about acceptable modes of behaviour and social interaction and most importantly they embed aspects of their identity, as it will be discussed in detail in chapter 7. However, one question that is worth asking and which will be answered later in the thesis is whether NVQ portfolios reify all aspects of one's vocational life.

Barton and Hamilton also state that reification "is seen as both a process and a product" (ibid: 26). When developing their portfolios, the NVQ candidates are reifying their knowledge and experience, by constantly adding input and putting their acquired knowledge and experience down to paper. At the same time the final product, the completed portfolio, is a reification of what took place throughout the academic year in the course. Wenger (1998) argues that reifications signify membership in a community. All those who were directly or indirectly involved with the portfolio were a member of the group, or in Wenger's words, of the community of practice (see section 3.7.1). When I initially entered the college as an observer I was not a full member of this community, as I did not participate in any way in the development of the portfolio. Later in the year, I became a beauty therapy candidate's client and she included my case study in her portfolio. I thus became a member of the community through my participation in the reification process and the reified product.

Finally, it should become clear, that even though texts are discussed here in a separate section than literacy practices and events, these three are inseparable in a study of literacy and will be discussed in this thesis in direct relation to each other. This interdependence of events, practices and texts is upheld by Barton and Hamilton in their argument:

> Texts are a crucial part of literacy events and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used. These three components, practices, events and texts, provide the first proposition of a social theory of literacy, that: literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts.
>
> (2000: 9)

3.2.5 Mediation between the local and the extra-local

One of the criticisms that the New Literacy Studies have received is that most studies privilege the local sites where literacy plays a role, while not acknowledging external influences. In a well-known article on the ways that literacy practices are constituted by and also constitute local as well as global contexts, Brandt and Clinton ask: "Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions while also seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places –

infiltrating, disjointing, and displacing local life?" (2002: 343). Brandt and Clinton do not reject the need to study literacy as situated in different contexts, but argue for taking such analyses a step further by linking it to events and influences originating from global sites.

The study of the NVQ portfolio calls for such an extended analysis, as the portfolio is a collection of texts that moves beyond the locality of colleges and workplaces. It is treated here therefore as a mediating object, bridging the local site of NVQ candidates, whether in the workplace or in the college, and the extra-local site of awarding bodies and lead bodies. In fact, Brandt and Clinton agree that objects, including texts, act as intermediates between the past and the present and between the local and the global, by stating that:

> Our objects are us but more than us, bigger than we are; as they accumulate human investments in them over time, they can and do push back at us as 'social facts' independent and to be reckoned with.
>
> (2002: 345)

The parallel functions of literacy, between local and global sites, and the use of objects, and more specifically texts, as mediating objects has been extensively studied in Pahl and Rowsell's edited volume (2006) where they cast a focus on multimodal communicative practices by engaging "with current thinking on how texts are shaped by practices which themselves are both locally based and globally shaped" (ibid: 11). Similarly, Hamilton's (2001) study of a language test showed how this test, seen as an object, translated and distributed humans' experience in a powerful way, privileging certain aspects of what counts as literacy and devaluing local and vernacular knowledge. Finally, Burgess (2008) has studied the individual learning plans, introduced by Skills for Life policy, as texts that mediate between the local site of a classroom and the global site of policy makers' decisions and actions.

In order to describe the interplay between local and global context, Brandt and Clinton have suggested the description of literacy events in terms of 'localizing moves' and 'globalizing connects'. Even though I find these terms potentially useful as a means of analyzing the social uses of literacy, in this thesis I align myself with Street's (1999) claim that using 'literacy practices' as an analytic unit embeds the relationship between the local and the global. He argues that a study of global literacies, without a focus on the contexts they are being applied and which they influence, would take us back to an autonomous view of literacy. Rather, he suggests that we study the sites where literacy plays a role as hybrid constructions, using the term 'literacy events' to refer to local situations involving literacy, and the concept of 'literacy practices' to denote the link between locally constructed events and generalised patterns of literacy, with the potential to be extended in global contexts.

Another paper which makes reference to Brandt and Clinton's arguments is Collins and Blot (2003). They claim that the main mediating means between local and global sites are not just objects, as suggested by Brandt and Clinton, but principally the exercise of power. They argue for more studies that will focus on the way power relations impact upon the structures of everyday life and the role literacy plays in it. The importance of power relations in literacy research has also been acknowledged by Tusting and Barton who call for researchers to look for power processes in the way literacy is patterned and "to take a critical approach, in the sense of making visible power relationships that are often hidden" (2005: 252). This was also the aim of a number of contributions in the edited volume by Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001) who set out to unravel contexts of unequal distribution of power produced and maintained through literacy.

The exercise of power from the national site of awarding bodies and the administration of the college towards the NVQ candidates is a theme frequently discussed in this thesis. Additionally, the negotiation of power in the local sites of the college classroom and the workplace is an ongoing issue in my research. In an attempt to reconcile the two approaches by Brandt and Clinton and Collins and Blot, presented above, I would argue that it is not just any objects that act as mediators between the local and the global, but in most cases it is objects that act as reifications of power. The NVQ portfolio in this study is a collection of texts, within which the decision makers' power is reified and transferred to the local site where NVQ candidates act. The portfolio is the main means through which the two sites communicate and struggle over the possession of power.

Finally, I would like to add here that in this study the term 'global' will be replaced by the term 'extra-local'. Even though Brandt and Clinton use the word 'global' to refer to those uses of literacy that extend the immediate context of local settings, the term is often being confused with the meaning of the word 'relating to the whole world'. I will therefore use the term 'extra-local' and in this way the meaning can be equally applied to refer to events that take place nationally, internationally or just outside the immediate context of the research participants (e.g. for the college administration or the workplace management) while I will clarify, when necessary, the context I am referring to.

3.3 Textualisation of the Workplace

The increasingly important role of texts in all social contexts has been very well documented by sociologist Dorothy Smith on her work on the domination of ruling relations in modern societies. She refers to 'ruling relations' as "text-mediated and text-based systems of 'communication', 'knowledge', 'information', 'regulation', 'control', and the like" (1999: 77). In this statement, it is evident that Smith sees texts as being in the heart of relations of power and that she identifies the important role of texts as mediators between the local settings they are being used in and the extra-local relations they bear. The significant role played by texts in social contexts, as described by Smith, is confirmed and maybe exaggerated if we focus on their role within workplaces, which can be described as miniatures of larger societies. Recently, a large number of scholars have written about the significance of texts in all kinds of workplaces. Visiting such literature is important here, as the focus of this study lies on a collection of texts originating from the workplace and being used as a meta-language to describe the activities enacted in it.

The new social practices emerging in the modern world of work (as discussed in chapter 1) have resulted in a proliferation of texts much talked about in workplace ethnographies (e.g. Iedema & Scheeres, 2003; Searle, 2002; Wyse & Casarotto, 2004), without implying though, that texts did not exist in the past. It is just that the kind of texts used nowadays as well as their value and meaning have changed significantly. The changing meaning and functions of texts within the world of work has been documented by Alexander (2000) in an ethnography of health workers in a mental institute, where she discusses the changing role of a logbook used by the employees to record patients' daily routine. Whereas in the past this logbook served as a site where employees communicated their thoughts, fears and expectations about their patients and included parts of their own identities in it, now the function of the logbook had changed to serve only as a means of documenting medical observations and actions taken during their shift. In this way, power was taken away from the health care staff, who in the past used the logbook as a means of constructing their own community and as a useful tool in their work with patients.

The exercise of power mediated by texts is an issue of significance when discussing NVQ portfolios. These portfolios are, by and large, composed by texts created or existing in the workplace and are intended to provide proof of the workers' competences. Scheeres (2006) makes a distinction between the textualisation of work and the textualisation of the workplace. The former involves documents related to specific job tasks, e.g. contracts, whereas the latter refers to texts one can find all around in a workplace, such as posters, graphs, diagrams, spreadsheets, production numbers, team photographs, etc. In order to develop an NVQ portfolio, employees have to collect material from both kinds of texts: texts indexing their work and texts indexing their workplace. If literate practices are seen as dominant means of exercising power in the society (Darville, 1995) and if workplace texts discipline to some extent both work and workers (Jackson, 2000), then it is very interesting to examine whether these roles are also characteristic of the portfolio texts in this study. Functioning in a twofold way, both as job-related or workplace texts and as pieces of evidence for one's portfolio, it is very probable that the power they exercise on workers takes a new form and a new meaning. It is possible that workers negotiate the meaning and function of these texts in a different way, depending on if they see them as workplace texts or as portfolio texts and consequently as a means of their assessment.

3.3.1 Changing identities within the workplace

New technologies, communication processes, quality measures, the proliferation of texts and the shift from employees being front-line workers to becoming effective team members, with the right and the risk to make decisions and to carry responsibilities, has had major implications on the identities of employees in 'fast capitalism'. Workplace ethnographies describe workers who, now more than ever, question practices imposed by the management as they refuse to police and 'write up' themselves and their colleagues and to be governed by means of texts and identification with managerial roles (e.g. Alexander, 2000; Jackson, 2000).

At the same time, however, workplace ethnographies present workers who struggle to keep up with the fast pace of the 'new capitalism' and become knowledge workers within a knowledge-based economy. The model-identity of the new workers is portrayed very vividly in popular business texts, described by Gee et al (1996) as 'fast capitalist texts'. These texts, designed mainly by business managers and consultants, describe the new workers as adopting new social identities and becoming new types of employees, new middle managers, new workers as well as new customers, highly committed to the values and the prosperity of their companies. In order to become this model worker in the new capitalist era, workers need to re-invent themselves (Scheeres, 2006), and adopt new roles. As jobs do not last for a lifetime anymore, workers now need not only to go through a process of continuous learning, but they also need to know how to advertise themselves, to promote their knowledge and most importantly to adapt it to new environments in fast and effective ways. In other words, they need to become 'portfolio people' or 'portfolio workers'. The term 'portfolio people' was first introduced by Handy (1995) when referring to people who have "customers not jobs, clients not employers. They are paid in fees not wages. They may work hard, but they have, in theory at least, control over their time" (ibid: 7). Searle (2001) uses the term in a similar way, referring to people who have developed a portfolio of skills within a particular market and move from project to project within one company or more. Referring to the same kind of workers, Gee (2004) calls them 'shape-shifting portfolio people' and describes them as people who see themselves in entrepreneurial terms, who manage their own risky trajectories in building up a career made up from a variety of skills and experiences.

The people in my research are employees or future employees who have set out to become knowledge workers and seek qualifications that will validate their knowledge. Many of them described the NVQ as an extra 'string to their bow', an asset that will open the doors of new and better work prospects. At the same time, developing a professional portfolio was often seen by them as giving them access to new knowledge and changing their perspectives on the company or the industry they (will) work for. Taking up an NVQ course and developing a professional portfolio had major impacts on the ways their professional identities were shaped and this is an ongoing theme in this study. The theoretical tools for discussing the NVQ candidates' identity construction will be discussed in detail in section 3.7 of this chapter.

3.4 The use of Activity Theory in the study of literacy

3.4.1 The Origins of Activity Theory

The cultural-historic approach has been developed answering to the need for a framework that would bring together agents and societal structure. The historical origins of this theory can be traced back in the work of Marx and Engels (1968), who claimed that change needs to take place through 'revolutionary practice' embedded in our everyday lives. This could be achieved through the 'revolutionary' or 'practical-critical' activity.

Borrowing the concept of activity from Marx and Engels, the cultural-historic approach is also widely known as Activity Theory (AT) and has been developed in three distinct phases. The first phase originates in the Russian psychology school during the 1920s and early 1930s. The father of the cultural-historic approach, Lev Vygotsky (inter alia: 1978), developed the concept of mediation between a stimulus and a response. His triangular relation between stimulus-mediated act-response is expressed as the triad of subject-object-mediating artefact. This triad is most commonly depicted as such:

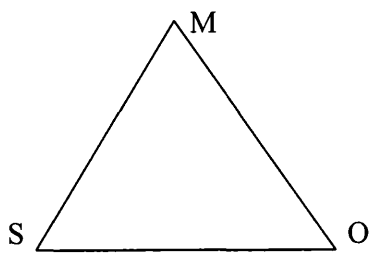

Figure 1. Common reformulation of Vygotksy's model of mediated act.

Thinking in this triadic way, societal structure cannot be understood without human agency and individuals cannot be conceived of without their tools. Vygotsky's model of mediation allowed for a distinction between individuals and the societal structure.

However, the unit of analysis in his framework never exceeded the level of the individual. This was later achieved by Leontiev, who argued that human labour, one of the basic concepts in Marx and Engel's theorising, is never achieved as an individual process but it is always collective.

Until this second phase of its development, AT was only known within Russian scholarship and there were only a few and random relevant publications and references in Western academia. It is commonly accepted that the person who introduced AT in the Western scholarship is Yrjö Engeström, who in 1990 stated that AT is "still one of the best kept secrets of the academia" (Engeström, 1990). Since then, through his and other scholars' publications, whose work will be visited later in this review, AT has gone a long way. Today, the value of AT as a theoretical framework is widely acknowledged and it is used in a multidisciplinary way and in a large variety of fields. In the following sections, I will describe the principles of AT as developed in this final stage.

3.4.2 The principles of Activity Theory

Through a large number of publications based on theoretical analyses and case studies on work teams in American and Finnish organisations, Engeström has managed to bring together the results of the philosophical thinking of Vygotsky and Leontiev, by reformulating and extending Vygotsky's model to what is commonly accepted today as the 'triangle of human activity' or 'the Activity Theory triangle'. In order to describe this triangle and consequently explicate the theoretical framework of AT, I will present here the five principles that formulate it:

a) a collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system is the prime unit of analysis

b) multi-voicedness

c) historicity

d) the central role of contradictions

e) the possibility of expansive transformations

(Engeström, 2001).

1. A collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system is the prime unit of analysis

Focusing on the collective element of human activities, Engeström (1987) adds the element of 'community' in the triangular model subject-object-mediating artefact. He argues that the mediating means between a subject and the community are the existing rules within the activity system; and that the mediating means between the object of an activity and the community is the division of labour. Schematically, Engeström's triangle of an activity system is most commonly represented as such:

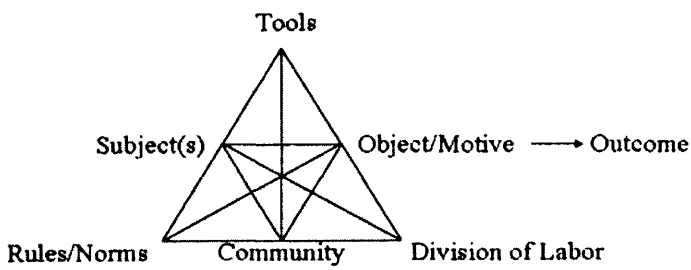

Figure 2 Engeström's triangle of human activity

In order to give a complete account of this definition in combination with Engeström's triangle, I will discuss here each one of these elements. The 'subject(s)', 'object/motive' and 'tools' will be discussed in separate sections, whereas the concepts of 'community', 'rules/norms' and 'division of labor' shall be discussed in one section, as it is hardly possible to understand one separately from the other two.

In general, it is important to remember that all these elements are, to a great extent, interdependent and form a rather strong network, so it is artificial to attempt to discuss one without consideration of the rest.

Subject(s)

The subject in an activity system can either be an individual or a group of people. In the latter case, the group should aim towards a common object in order to be considered as subjects in the same system. Through participation in an activity system, subjects stimulate change in the system itself and also experience change in terms of their identity. According to Roth et al:

> the identity of an individual is not something that can be taken for granted as an a priori constituent of activity, but it is something that is made and remade as activity is enacted and when individuals participate in multiple activity systems.
>
> (2004: 51)

Therefore, when looking in detail into an activity system, a researcher should be able to examine not only the functions and the norms of the system as an entity, but also the way the subjects' identity changes and the way this shift affects and alternates the system and its components.

Object/Motive

According to Leontiev (1981), the generating power of an activity is its object. The object has been described as the 'sense-maker' of an activity (Kaptelinin, 2005) and the "cornerstone of the conceptual framework of activity theory" (Miettinen & Kaptelinin, 2005). Based on the distinction between action and activity, Leontiev argued that collective activities are object-oriented and individual actions are goal-oriented. Therefore, in order to understand the 'raison d'être' of an activity system, it is important to examine not only the object itself but also the goals of individual actions which lead towards the fulfilment of broader objects.

> An activity system constantly generates actions through which the object of the activity is enacted and reconstructed in specific forms and contents –but being a horizon, the object is never fully reached or conquered.
>
> (Engeström, 1999: 381)

It is important to note though that the concept of the object is not unproblematic. A first question posed is whether the object of an activity is material or symbolic. Cole (1996) argues that it is always both and Wells states that "it is when the two modes are combined that the value of the 'improvable object' is most evident" (2002: 45). Kaptelinin (2005) argues for a differentiation between the 'object' of an activity and the 'motive' of an activity, in order to overcome a number of difficulties when using the activity system as a unit of analysis. On a similar basis, Nardi (2005) writes about desires and passions hidden behind objects and urges researchers to study 'object' not only in " a formal, somewhat bloodless way" but also to look for conflicts and contradictions behind this term. This distinction between objects and motives has proved to be a useful one and I will elaborate it further in the analysis of my study.

Tools

According to Engeström, humans construct their activities through the use of tools and, at the same time, these tools constrain human agency. In this sense, AT is relative to actor-network theory where tools are also regarded as agents "in the sense that they can act in the place of human beings to mediate and co-ordinate the activities of others" (Barton & Hamilton, 2005).

One of the most important aspects of criticism that AT has aroused is the alleged neglect of mediation and communication through signs. However, theorists within the field of AT have repeatedly claimed that mediating means can include both material objects and communicative signs. In order to justify this reasoning, Engeström argues that a relatively large number of linguists use AT "as a means of conceptualizing the interface between the sociocultural and linguistic realms" (2005: 24), implying that this would not be the case if communication did not play a significant part within activity systems. In fact, this example applies very well to my decision to use AT, one of the main reasons being, as I will discuss later in this chapter, my wish to study the interplay of oral interaction and written texts.

Community, Rules and Division of Labor

As I showed earlier, activity is a collective process and can take place only within a community. Even the most isolated actions take place within the societal structure. Communities develop relations of mediation both with the subjects and the objects of activity systems. Subjects mediate with the community through the device and implementation of rules and norms and in a similar way, the community mediates with the object of an activity through the division of labor.

The presence of a community within an activity system brings AT very close to Lave and Wenger's (1991) learning theory of 'communities of practice' (further discussed in section 3.7.1). They describe communities of practice as informal and ubiquitous groups of people who have similar interests and act towards the completion of similar goals. Through participation in a community one learns how to be a full member, that is, act, talk and think like all other members of this community. Finally through participation, members' identities shift and consequently the communities are in a constant state of transformation (Wenger, 1998). Engeström, Engeström and Kärkkäinen have described an activity system as

> a complex and relatively enduring 'community of practice' that often takes the shape of an institution. Activity systems are enacted in the form of individual goal-directed actions. But an activity system is not reducible to the sum total of those actions. An action is discrete, it has a beginning and an end. Activity systems have cyclic rhythms and long historical half-lives.
>
> (1995: 320)

An additional difference I have identified between the two theories is the role of tools, in the form of artefacts, within the community. Even though Wenger (ibid) considers tools an important element of a community of practice, he does not believe that they 'participate' in it, in the strict sense of the word. In contrast, AT assigns a significant and participatory role to the tools of a system, since otherwise the mediation between subjects and their objects would not be possible. This is one of the reasons why I believe AT to be a suitable theory for my research, since the mediating tools are a focal point in my study.

In general, it should be stated that the two theories lie very close to each other and even though AT is the main theoretical lens in this study, I often make use of concepts and ideas from Wenger and Lave's 'communities of practice'. To this end, Fuller et al rightly express their surprise that the relationship between the two frameworks has not been thoroughly examined and argue that it deserves further attention (Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2005: 53).

An activity system of relations between people is a 'space' where individuals are never isolated. Studying social practices from an activity theory lens means examining the formation of social networks and the interactions that take place within them. Thus, the concept of 'community' is of outmost importance when using activity systems as a prime unit of analysis. I see an inherent problem when working with such a large concept as a 'community'; it can be very vague and can include from very small to very large numbers of people. In order to specify its use in this thesis, I consider that there is a restricted and an extended meaning of an activity's community. Throughout the analysis, I use the concept in both ways, depending on whether I refer to the immediate members of the activity system or to those that act in extra-local sites.

2. <u>Multivoicedness</u>

The potential multiple subjects in the community can result in the existence of various voices within an activity system. The division of labor is also an important factor here, since it creates diverse points of view and results in the existence of differing perspectives. Engeström (1999) has argued for the significance of perspectives which stem from different communities and practices and possibly coexist in the same collective activity system. Multiple perspectives within a system can be the cause of struggles for dominance and therefore it is likely that not all subjects share common objects within an activity.

3. Historicity

Activity systems do not exist in a vacuum. Rather they have a past and they move towards a future. Historicity here refers to concrete historic analysis of an activity system both as a whole and with regards to each element that constitutes it. Engeström claims that the historicity of a system needs to be studied "as local history of the activity and its objects, and as history of theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity" (2001: 136-137). It is only in this way that we can fully comprehend the essence of an activity as we become aware of the transformations that have taken place and the factors that have resulted in its present form.

4. Contradictions & Expansion

I showed above how the element of multivoicedness can bring about tensions and contradictions for the dominance of one perspective over another. The identification of such contradictions is a very important aspect when analysing an activity system. Engeström described contradictions as: "historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (2001: 137). He also argued that contradictions can take place either within an activity system (intra-systemic) or across various systems (inter-systemic) and they can be manifested in all elements of an activity (e.g. between different objects of activities, between the object and the tools of the same activity, etc). Intra and inter-systemic tensions are seen to be related and it is argued that the resolution of intra-systemic contradictions can result in resolution of the inter-systemic ones (Takahashi, 2003). In the case of sharp contradictions within an activity system, it is possible that some participants will question the norm and attempt to achieve change. In this case, activity systems are transformed and expanded into new modes of activity. Contradictions of activity systems and the ways they lead to expansion is an issue that will be discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this thesis.

3.4.3 Why Activity Theory?

Coming to this research from a situated view of literacy, I felt the need for a complementary analytical framework that would allow me to study literacy practices in context. Satchwell and Ivanič have claimed that New Literacy Studies is central to any study of context "since almost all contexts are in some way textually mediated" (2007: 305). Context plays a significant role in AT; situations and actions are examined as they occur, in their specific spatial and temporal conditions. Engeström (1990) explains that for AT contexts are neither perceived as 'containers of behaviour' which human agency has not affected in the least, nor as purely linguistic and symbolic entities that can be created independently of the deeper socio-economic structures. On the contrary, AT perceives context as a situation under the complete control of individuals and therefore he argues that contexts are "constructed by humans, not by superhuman agents" (ibid: 78).

A second reason for using AT is the collective nature of the vocational qualification process and more specifically of the portfolio development. The NVQ candidates collaborate in many levels with tutors, peers, colleagues and even sometimes with family and friends in order to make sense of what is required of them when developing such a portfolio. I have shown earlier in this chapter that in AT activities are always understood as collective processes. Use of such a theory therefore will enable me to study the development of NVQ portfolios within a community.

At a more practical level, my decision to use AT as a theoretical framework is linked to the need to examine both semiotic and communicative artefacts. The portfolio developed by NVQ candidates is one of the primary mediating tools they use in order to fulfil their object: obtain a vocational qualification. However, the role of oral interaction is of utmost significance in the development of the portfolio. The candidates engage in dialogue with their tutors in order to make meaning of the logbook. Interaction also takes place among candidates when negotiating the meaning of the portfolio and the ways they should approach it. In this case, it becomes evident that a method that would examine written texts in isolation is not suitable for this study. What is needed is a framework that will encompass the written texts along with the oral communication that takes place when negotiating their meaning. As I have discussed earlier, the mediating tools in AT refer to both semiotic and communicative artefacts and I consider this feature of the theory particularly useful as one of my aims here is to study texts and dialogue in interaction.

Another rationale for employing AT as a theoretical framework is its close links with institutions. Engeström and Cole argue that "when activities become institutionalised, they are rather robust and enduring" (1993: 8). A large majority of studies using AT have researched large institutions (e.g. hospitals, schools, other workplaces, etc) and have focused upon problem solving situations as well as identity shifting (inter alia: Engeström, 1990; Ivanič, 2006; Roth et al., 2004). Both of my fields of research, an industrial workplace and an FE college, are powerful institutions and appear to encompass long enduring literacy practices. At the same time, though, as the identities of the participating subjects change, these institutions also undergo significant transformations. My aim here is to study the role texts play within these institutions and AT offers the suitable tools to achieve it.

Finally, the use of AT is also compatible with my methodological choices. Engeström argues that the interactions and developments taking place within an activity system can only be understood "when researchers enter actual activity systems undergoing such transformations" (2005: 36). Lee and Ball also argue that one of the fundamental arguments of AT is that in order to understand object-directed behaviour "one must attend to people's experiences over time, to the cultural contexts of their experiences, and to view practice as the fundamental unit of analysis" (2005: 107). Entering actual activities and attending to people's lives fits in very well with the ethnographic methods of data collection used in this study, introduced in chapter 4.

3.4.4 New Literacy Studies and Activity Theory

I have mentioned earlier that AT is a multidisciplinary framework and has been used extensively in order to contribute to a large variety of fields. It is therefore easy to account for the increasing number of studies examining the links between AT and NLS and in this section I refer to some of them, in order to show the historic continuity of the links between these two disciplines.

One of the first scholars to introduce sociocultural theory, and specifically AT, to the study of literacy is Sylvia Scribner. She argues that "we may conceptualize literacy as a set of activities satisfying distinctive motives related to the written language: creating distinctive genres of communication, for example, or transmitting information over time and space" (1997b: 231). In her famous research with Cole on literacy among the Vai in Liberia (1981), they made extensive use of sociocultural theory, in the form of AT, and in a later publication, Scribner accounts for the use of sociocultural approaches in the study of literacy and thought (1997a). Finally in an inclusive collection of Scribner's selected writings, the editors make reference to her wish to write a book focusing on workplace social practices and using AT as the main analytical framework (Tobach, Joffe-Falmagne, Parlee, Martin, & Scribner-Kapelman, 1997).

A more recent attempt to link NLS with AT has been made by Russell (2005). He argues that some of the commonalities of the two theories are the central role of textual mediation, the situated character of local events and practices, the range of studies beyond formal schooling (e.g. in workplaces, homes, neighbourhoods, etc) and the focus on multimodal texts. However, Russell's practical research is limited in the linkage between AT and genre theory and his work on AT and NLS has only remained at a theoretical level. Kostogriz (2000) has also identified similarities between the two approaches and has defined a Literacy Learning Activity System as "an ongoing, object-directed, historically and culturally constructed, semiotically-mediated practice of literacy learning in dialogical interaction with other participants".

Studying the literacy practices involved in a house-building project in South Africa, Kell (2006) uses AT as the basic unit of analysis. She problematises the size of an activity system posing the question of where such a system begins and ends. In her analysis, she considers the designing and building of a town as a large activity system and argues that within it there are hundreds of smaller sequences of activities. She calls these sequences 'meaning making trajectories'. Kell's research is a good example of how AT can be combined with other analytical frameworks, such as communicative mode and discourse analysis, in order to study literacy.

Ivanič (2006) has used AT to bring together theories of literacy and identity construction. In a study of the literacy practices of students in Further Education, she uses the framework of AT in order to discuss the formation and transformation of the students' identities. In a similar level, Keating argues for the usefulness of AT when studying the situated nature of literacy and identity construction and argues that identities "are being forged in the tension between the subjectivities that emerge from the way the activity is being performed at a particular time, space and social configuration" (2005: 115).

3.4.5 NLS/AT framework in this study

In order to present a methodological framework that will include insights from both NLS and AT, I will start with Ivanič's argument that "any observable activity draws upon the practices, genres and discourses which are socioculturally available to its Subjects" and is in turn shaped by "power relations, values and beliefs in the sociocultural context" (2006: 10). Given that most social practices in this modern world are textually mediated (Smith, 1999), Ivanič's statement implies that within each activity system we are most likely to find a number of literacy practices or to put it differently, literacy practices shape, to an extent, activity systems.

The relationship between an activity and a practice is also explored by Keating (2005) who argues that the two concepts complement each other. The notion of 'practice', on the one hand, captures people's "ways of doing, talking, reading, writing and being in the world" (ibid: 114) imposing and imposed by societal structures. On the other hand, 'activity' is the locality within which these practices are being enacted, taking shape and form, "involving the person in the doing" (ibid). It could be argued, therefore, that the researcher needs to focus on the microscopic level of an activity system in order to identify concrete and ever changing practices.

In my approach of this analysis therefore, I identify the elements of each activity system (e.g. subjects, objects, mediating tools, etc) and then proceed to identify the literacy practices that constitute the activity. Literacy events play a crucial role in the analysis as they are used as a mid-level methodological tool between the activity system and literacy practices. The analytical process is thus hierarchical, proceeding from the identification of an activity system and the elements that comprise it to the literacy events involved in it and finally to the underlying literacy practices that participants draw upon in their attempt to complete the object of the activity.

3.5 Identifying discourses in activity systems

Using AT as the framework of analysis has not proved to be unproblematic. Whereas significant parts of my data can be clearly labelled as elements shaping an activity system (e.g. subjects, objects, tools, etc), I have found that other types of data, collected for the purposes of this research, cannot fit in this framework. For example, very frequently in my interviews with the participants, they expressed their feelings about the practices drawn upon while completing their portfolios. At the same time, a class of NVQ candidates seen as an activity system in itself, involves subjects with different opinions, values, attitudes and behaviours. Very often they expressed positive or negative feelings about other participants of the activity and they agreed or disagreed with their practices and behaviours.

This problematic in the field of AT has been addressed by Davydov who asks if cognitive processes such as imagination, thinking, feeling, etc form different activities or if they are constituents of the general structure of activity. He argues for the latter, claiming that such cognitive processes are "specific components of a general activity structure that promote the realization of its other components" (Davydov, 1999). In this statement there is recognition of the existence of emotional processes within an activity, however it does not offer much in terms of analytic purposes. There still remain questions as to where in the activity such processes lie and how they should be categorised and accounted for when analysing an activity.

The use of literacy practices as a primary analytical tool and as existing within an activity system can partly complement the above mentioned gaps inherent in AT. Earlier in this chapter, I showed that literacy practices are defined as hidden ideologies about reading and writing and that they also involve "values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000: 7). The values, feelings and attitudes expressed by the participants of this study regarding the portfolio can therefore be analysed and understood better as constituting literacy practices and these practices, in their turn, are enacted within activity systems.

One problem that arises here again is where to include literacy practices within an activity system. Their very definition does not allow one to include the concept under one specific element e.g. mediating tools, as it is a lot more than just this. They involve the subjects and the tools of the system, but they also entail the whole community and invoke aspects of the rules and the division of labor of an activity. It seems therefore that literacy practices do not exist in a vacuum, but rather they draw upon all elements of an activity. To answer the question of their emplacement within an activity, it is important to remember that literacy practices are enacted within wider social contexts, many of which are part of other activities. Gee argues that he views literacy and language as "elements in multiple and socioculturally diverse 'ways of being in the world'" (1996: 122), and in order to capture these diverse ways he used the notion of Discourses. Gee used the concept of 'Discourses' spelled with a capital D in order to differentiate it from 'discourses', spelled with a lower case d, a concept used to refer to "connected stretches of language that make sense" (1996: 127).[1] For Gee:

> Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes.
>
> (ibid)

Taking into consideration that the focus of this study is the NVQ portfolio, as a purposeful collection of texts, I am not only interested in the instantiation of discourses within an activity system in general, but more specifically I wish to examine the discourses drawn upon by the NVQ candidates when writing portfolio texts. In this case, discourse defines language but it is more than that. A discourse view of language has been described by Fairclough as "language as a form of social practice" (2001: 18) and discourses have been defined as "ways of representing

[1] The distinction between upper and lower case 'd' will not be further taken up in this analysis. This is because I believe it is not possible to place a clear cut distinction between the two kinds, as the study of language as a discourse leads to the identification of Discourses and the latter cannot be examined without a focus on language use.

aspects of the world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world" (2003: 124). In this study, discourses in Gee's meaning (with a capital D), as 'ways of being in the world' are examined in chapters 5 and 6, whereas Fairclough's understanding of discourses as 'ways of representing aspects of the world' is discussed in detail in chapter 7, where I study the way candidates represent the world in their portfolios.

Going back to the place of literacy practices within an activity system, it is argued that literacy practices are instantiated as part of discourses. Similarly to literacy practices, discourses cannot be placed under one element of an activity system since they involve all elements of the activity. Very often they take the form of mediating artefacts upon which subjects draw in order to achieve their goal. However, they cannot only be perceived as tools as they also permeate and impact upon all other aspects of an activity. The subjects of an activity draw upon different discourses, different ways of seeing and representing the world, which may already exist outside the activity system or which they have created and developed within their own activity. This can be schematically represented in the following figure:

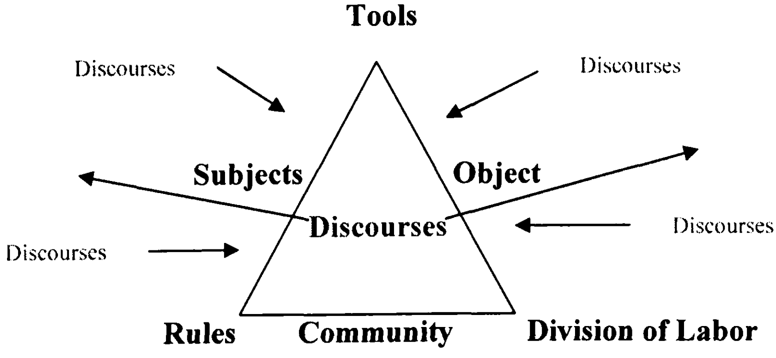

Figure 3 Discourses as enacted within an activity system

In Figure 3, I wish to make clear that within an activity system we can find discourses originating from other activities, as well as discourses created within the particular activity. Discourses permeate an activity by means of the subjects who draw upon them when performing actions or else social practices. In the same way, subjects also create discourses within their own activity system and these discourses may later permeate other activities. What is important to note is that I do not see discourses as anchored on one particular element of the activity system, but rather they exist at the centre of the system impacting upon and being shaped by all the elements of the activity.

The final thing that needs to be said about discourses is that they are social and cultural positions that people adopt as a means to express who they are. Gee (1996) argues that discourses signify social identities and that by making a choice of a discourse we also adopt a particular identity. This is supported by Ivanič who sees discourses as "the mediating mechanisms in the social construction of identity" (1998: 17) and argues that "by making particular discourse choices, writers are aligning themselves with particular interests (in terms of subject-matter) and ideologies" (1998: 46)[2]. By identifying the discourses enacted within an activity system, a researcher can therefore not only construe the literacy practices drawn upon by subjects, but also take a step closer to interpreting how their choices as well as the structure of the activity

[2] Ivanič makes the distinction between 'genre' and 'discourse' and the way they foreground different aspects of identity. She argues that genres are institutionally shaped and ascribe particular roles to people, whereas discourses are "shaped by subject-matters and ideologies" (1998: 46).

construct their identity. This is an important aspect of this thesis and it will therefore be discussed in detail in section 3.7.

3.5.1 Recontextualisation processes

A concept that is essential in order to understand the role of discourses and the movement between local and extra-local settings, discussed in section 3.2.5, is that of recontextualisation. The term originates from Bernstein (1996) who used it in his work on pedagogic discourse. More specifically he discussed the process of transferring work developed in the scientific world to the world of pedagogy and showed how this results to a merging of scientific and pedagogic discourse. He called this process of transferring elements from one discourse to another 'recontextualisation'.

In the case of the NVQ portfolios, there are two prevailing discourses dominating the NVQ candidates' activities, which are frequently in opposition to each other. These are the discourse of vocational education and professionalism, favoured by candidates, and the discourse of formal education, promoted by the qualification providers. The portfolio is the actual place where these discourses meet. And in order for this to happen, many elements from each discourse are transferred, they are recontextualised from one discourse to the other.

Following Bernstein's work, Fairclough has described recontextualising processes as: "the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process" (2003: 32). This is particularly true in the case of NVQ portfolios, where texts developed in the context of the workplace (or simulated workplace for that matter) are now transferred to the portfolio and are therefore used in an entirely new way. Referring to the process of recontextualisation, Bernstein claims that:

> every time a discourse moves from one positioning to another, there is a space in which ideology can play. No discourse ever moves without ideology at play. As this discourse moves, it is ideologically transformed; it is not the same discourse any longer.
>
> (1996: 47)

Taking the example of one of the NVQ candidates, Derry, whose case will be discussed in chapter 5, he sent emails to his clients which he also later printed and included them in his portfolio. These emails are the exact same texts when sent off to the clients and when included in the portfolio. However, according to Bernstein's above statement, once transferred from one context to another, these texts are not the same anymore. Their meaning has changed because their function has changed. Different people are going to read these emails now and for different purposes. And at the same time, the ideology around these texts has changed. Derry has different attitudes towards these texts when seen as emails he sends off to clients and when seen as evidence used for his portfolio.

According to Linell (1998), occurrences of recontextualisation can be found at all levels of discourse: intratextual, intertextual and interdiscursive. Intratextual recontextualisation describes the changes taking place "within the same text, conversation, or focused encounter" (ibid: 146). This kind of recontextualisation is central to the creation of NVQ logbooks, since it is a collection of texts created by a number of contributors, operating both at a local and extra-local level. Each contributor brings with them their own discourses and inserts it in the portfolio. Linell borrows the two remaining terms from Fairclough (1992), using 'intertextual' to talk about the way different texts, discourses and conversations are related, and using 'interdiscursive' to describe phenomena "occurring at more abstract and global levels and concerning relations between discourse types (communicative activity types, genres, etc) rather than between specific text tokens" (Linell, 1998: 147). Intertextual recontextualisation describes the actual process of developing an NVQ portfolio, where many texts originating from different discourses are assembled in the same site, the portfolio. At the same time, interdiscursive recontextualisation takes place since superficially different discourses (professional and educationalist) come into conflict and finally merge, as they are both drawn upon in the creation of a distinct collection of texts, the NVQ portfolio. These different forms of recontextualisation will be discussed in relation to the NVQ portfolio in chapter 7.

3.6 Critical methods of discourse analysis

In the previous section, I discussed discourses as forms of social practice and as different ways of being and representing the world. In this section, I will focus on the role played by discourses in written text and on methods that have been suggested for the analysis of discourses. I have argued for the significant role of portfolios and the texts included in them in the instantiation of discourses and the construction of NVQ candidates' identities. The question I wish to address here is 'how can discourses be identified and accounted for?' In order to answer this question, I have drawn analytical methods from the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is important to stress though, that the focus of this thesis is not critical discourse analysis and that I simply use some of the methods introduced in this discipline, in order to interpret my data.

Rowe has argued for the significance of using CDA as a complementary method to sociocultural approaches. He has acknowledged the failure of sociocultural theory approaches, including AT, "to recognize questions of inequity and authority in the distribution of mediational means" (2004: 81) and argues for the need to complement such approaches with the use of critical discourse analysis. Both theories, he claims, could benefit from each other as CDA needs to be anchored to a learning theory and sociocultural approaches need to be completed with a critical stance towards language, psychology and activity.

AT does not address issues of power relations within an activity system. The factor of power is present almost in all cases where groups of people intersect and therefore should normally be amongst the principles that underpin an activity system. A theory of human relations that does not take into account the differences in possession of power seems to be deficient and this is a criticism that AT has received even by scholars who otherwise endorse it in their research (e.g. K. Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Moje & Lewis, 2007). This defect of AT has also been identified in my own research, as I found it impossible to explain some of the contradictions inherent in the activity, without discussing power issues. Methods of discourse analysis are used here in order to cover this gap. By identifying the discourses inherent in the activity systems and by showing which discourses are considered dominant, and which ones are less favoured by the power holders, I address issues of inequalities inherent in the activity systems under study.

The need to examine the role of power relations in an activity system explains the use of a 'critical' approach to discourse analysis in this study. My aim in this thesis is not simply to locate the many different discourses hidden in the portfolio texts. Rather, I wish to go further than a simple description and link the existing discourses with hidden agendas and the construction of writers' identities. The critical approach is distinctive therefore in my view of the relationships between the language used in the portfolios and the societal structure within which such language is being used. CDA methods are suitable to serve such an aim as this discipline is "fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001: 2). My analysis focuses on the relations of power and control, as described in this statement, and my aim is to unravel such relations exercised by policy makers on the NVQ candidates by means of the discourses included in the portfolio texts.

In CDA, discourse and society exist in a dialectical relationship and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that discourse is socially and culturally constitutive and constituting. They identify three broad areas that can be discursively structured by arguing that: "A useful working assumption is that any part of language text, spoken or written, is simultaneously constituting representations, relations, and identities" (ibid: 275). These three elements, representations of the social world, relations among people and the construction of their identities are the main issues that I am looking at when analyzing NVQ portfolio discourses. Specifically, I am interested in examining whether there are differences or similarities in the way the social world is represented by decision makers, such as the awarding bodies, and the NVQ candidates. Additionally, I am looking for hidden relations of power between the same two parties and the way representations and power relations influence the identity construction of NVQ candidates. Based on the above statement by Fairclough and Wodak, applying methods of critical discourse analysis on portfolio texts will enable me to answer these questions in a meaningful and critical way.

Taking into account the many different schools and approaches to critical discourse analysis, I have decided to use the one that is closer to the questions I seek to answer. The discipline of critical linguistics, originating from Halliday's systemic linguistic theory (1994), places an emphasis upon analyzing language starting from social rather than grammatical categories. Working within this discipline, Theo van Leeuwen suggests the study of texts through a 'field structure' analysis. "Unlike the generic structure, which is the structure *of* the text, field structure is a structure *used* in the text, and its traces can be dispersed through the text in a multitude of ways" (1993: 203). He explains that studying the field of a text involves examining the recontextualisation of social practices, since the representation of each practice implies automatically its recontextualisation. The study of recontextualisation involves locating Rearrangements, Deletions, Additions and Substitutions made in the text (van Leeuwen, 1993, 2005; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Wodak, 2000) and looking for underlying meanings hidden behind these changes.

Based on the above concepts and making their meaning more specific, van Leeuwen (1995; 1996) has suggested a concrete framework of analysing the representation of social actors and social actions. Contrary to other discourse analysts who base their analysis on linguistic categories, he suggests a study of texts based primarily on sociological categories (e.g. focus on agency rather than linguistic categories such as passive agent deletion), which will reveal the text producers' purposes and attempts for evaluation and legitimation of social practices. This approach seems to be particularly suitable to my study, as it suggests that there is more than one way of discoursally representing social actors and social practices, serving different purposes and making different impacts on the targeted audiences. Van Leeuwen's model of analysing social representation will be further discussed in chapter 7, where I apply it to the study of a sample of NVQ portfolio texts.

3.7 Ways of talking about identity

3.7.1 The social construction of identity

One of the research questions of this thesis is the way the literacy practices drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios have an impact on the construction of the candidates' identities. In order to answer this question, it is important to clarify here what I mean by the concept of identity and how it is used in this thesis. In this section therefore, I will describe the ideological premises hidden behind the use of analytic models of identity construction and I will then go on to discuss the relevant models used for my analysis.

The discussion of identity in this thesis falls under the ideological framework of social constructionism. This paradigm opposes earlier essential views of identity as an objective and fixed entity. This view was widely held in the field of sociology and sociolinguistics and ascribed a common identity to people belonging to a certain social category, e.g. sex, nationality, and age. Such categorization suggests that identity is unified and all members of one group would be expected to feel and behave in the same way. In contrast, social construction theorists (e.g. Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994) approach identity as a multiple, historic and therefore continuously changing entity and a direct result of social constructions and constraints. What needs to be taken into account when studying one's selfhood is the social milieu within which this person acts and behaves. Who we are and what we do therefore is not predetermined by the labels of the group we belong, but is continuously influenced by the social conditions we experience.

Locating this study in the social constructionist paradigm, I do not claim to research the participants' identity in all its expressions. Rather, I am interested to understand their identity as it is constructed at one specific time in their history and as a result of one specific activity, study for the NVQ qualification and the portfolios they create as part of this target. The construction of their identity therefore, at any other time and as a result of any other activity, even as a result of different literacy practices, would probably be different than what is described in this thesis. However, it is also important to note that identity construction is a historic process and even though it differs at each situation, the change is progressive and therefore each new expression of identity bears traces from a previous expression and a previous change.

Lave and Wenger's (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) theory of a 'community of practice' (also briefly discussed in section 3.4.2) is one of the most influential theories to adopt a perspective of identities as socially constructed. Communities of practice have been described as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and their expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Participation in a community of practice therefore does not require that people belong to the same pre-existing social category, e.g. nationality, but calls for people with similar interests or activities. The construction of identity in such a community is directly linked to the member's participation. Wenger argues that: "a defining characteristic of participation is the possibility of developing an 'identity of participation' that is, an identity constituted through relations of participation" (1998: 56). Such an identity is likely to take many shapes, as the member's participation alters from being a peripheral member to being a core member of the group.

In this study, the NVQ candidates in the college classroom can be said to belong to the same community of practice. They all share the same concern, namely the completion of their portfolio and the acquisition of their qualification, as well as becoming good therapists and getting jobs in the industry. By participating in this community of practice on an ongoing basis they deepen their knowledge about vocational qualifications, portfolios and being a beauty therapist. Participation in this group has an impact on who they are and who they become through this process. Their identities therefore are constructed in a specific way because they are members of this specific community. Studying in a different college or for a different qualification would probably result in them being in a sense different people.

3.7.2 Two analytic models of the social construction of identity

1. Gee's four aspects of identity construction

A view on the socially constructed nature of identity tied down to education research has been described by Gee (2001a). He argues that "all people have multiple identities connected not to their 'internal states' but to their performances in society" (ibid: 99). He suggests an analysis of identity and the forms it can take in modern and postmodern societies. He identifies four aspects in the description of identity: Nature-identity, Institution-identity, Discourse-identity and Affinity-identity. The first one, Nature-identity, is closer to the essentialist approaches of identity described above, that is, features developed as a result of natural processes, e.g. height, color of the skin, being a twin, etc. Institution-identity foregrounds the institutions we are members of, for example a workplace, a church or a club. Power is an important element here, as these institutions are usually powerful enough to impose on us a pre-fixed identity. Power therefore, rather than anything else, is the prime mover of Institution-identity. This aspect is particularly important in this study, as I am looking at people who act within the frames of very strong institutions: further education and the workplace. Institution-identity therefore is a concept that I will bring back later in the thesis, when discussing how and to what extent the above institutions play a role in the NVQ candidates' identity construction.

The third perspective of identity, what Gee calls the discursive perspective, has to do with the features ascribed to one person that result from enactment of discourse or dialogue. In other words, how we talk about ourselves and how other people talk about us is also a significant part of our identity. Power is not so relevant anymore and what dominates this aspect of identity is interaction. Discourse-identity is of great significance in this research. The way all NVQ stakeholders, including tutors, college administration and awarding bodies, talk about the NVQ candidates shapes their understanding of who they are and what their role is in this setting. The discourse produced around the NVQ candidates can be found in many different places. It is located in the way candidates are addressed by tutors, clients, decision makers, and all texts involved in the qualification process and it is located in the way candidates think and address all these actors. This ongoing interaction between the actors setting the qualification scene has multiple impacts on the candidates' identity. My aim therefore is to look at as many of these sites as possible and look for traces of the process and the stimuli of the discoursal construction of the candidates' identity.

Finally, Gee discusses Affinity-identities as common identities adopted by people who share "allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group's members the requisite experiences" (2001a: 105). Affinity groups are introduced by Gee (2005) as an alternative to the concept of 'communities of practice', which he finds problematic in terms of participation and boundaries. It is, for example, difficult to decide whether the NVQ candidates constitute a community of practice, or whether their clients, their tutors or even their families are also a part of this community. Affinity groups, on the other hand, are composed of people who share common interests and beliefs, but who do not get restricted by the notion of a community. Rather, they interact in a common space, physical or virtual, share and distribute their knowledge and participate in the group in more than one way. For example, people who share a common passion for gardening and read relevant books, attend gardening seminars, look for online information and visit the same websites, participate in forums on gardening, etc, they all belong to the same affinity group and share the same affinity identity. Considering therefore that the completion of an NVQ portfolio is a goal reached by the participation of many different people, it can be argued that all of them belong to the same affinity group. In other words, candidates, tutors, clients, external mediators (e.g. candidates' friends or family), NVQ assessors, all these people belong to the same affinity group and share the same affinity identity of being associated with and involved in the completion of an NVQ portfolio.

Even though Gee suggested the use of affinity groups as an alternative to the concept of 'communities of practice', I find both terms useful in this analysis. I believe, for example, that the college-based NVQ class forms a community of practice, as it is consisted by a certain number of people who share a common interest and work together towards the completion of a common goal. On the other hand, the concept of an affinity group allows me to include in this community additional members, for example, other candidates who study for an NVQ in Beauty Therapy in another college. Calling all NVQ Beauty Therapy candidates of the country a community of practice seems rather exaggerated, as they do not all interact directly for the completion of their goal. But they do have a shared passion and they probably do visit the same sources of relevant information, participate in the same kind of relevant activities and possibly interact indirectly (e.g. through online spaces). Therefore it is easier to describe the wider group of NVQ candidates as an affinity group rather than a community of practice.

2. <u>Ivanič's model of the construction of writers' identity</u>

Another particularly useful way of talking about identity has been devised by Ivanič in her study of the construction of writers' identity. Drawing on Goffman's (1969) research on the way people's behaviour indexes people's identity and on later work by Cherry (1988) who argues that writing, like any other form of social behaviour, can convey meaning about the writer's identity construction, she sets out to study writers' identity construction as depicted in the texts they produce. An examination of the identity of authors in particular is very useful to this study of NVQ portfolios, as I am interested in the identity of NVQ candidates as writers of these portfolios. More specifically, Ivanič makes the following statement regarding the relationship between writing and the making of one's identity:

> I suggest that writing makes a particular tangible contribution to 'the reflexive project of the self', with a three-way interplay between the writer's life-experiences, their sense of self, and the reality they are constructing through their writing.
>
> (1998: 16)

To this end, she argues that three aspects should be taken into account when talking about a writer's identity: the autobiographical self, the discoursal self and the self as author. In a later publication, she also included the 'relational dimension' as an additional important factor shaping a writer's identity (Ivanič, 2005). Finally, she adds to her model the concept of 'possibilities for self-hood'. This is an aspect of identity which does not refer to actual writers writing actual texts. Rather, it refers to a prototypical identity which can be found in social contexts and from which writers draw elements to construct their own identity. In what follows, I will explain these aspects of identity in detail.

The autobiographic self, Ivanič explains, has to do with the identity people bring with them when they engage with writing a text. No writer sets off to write a text empty from previous experiences, assumptions and knowledge either about writing itself or about the content of what s/he is writing. This past social history will be, consciously or not, brought in the text in many different ways. However, what Ivanič turns our attention to is that this aspect of identity is not "some fixed, essential, 'real-self' (ibid: 25). Rather, it is ever changing and developing and can take different shapes according to the historic time and situation. The NVQ candidates, as writers of portfolios, bring with them this autobiographic aspect of identity and one of my aims is to locate it in the portfolio texts they create.

The discoursal aspect of one's identity, as described by Ivanič, has some similarities to Discourse-identity discussed by Gee. They both talk about an aspect of identity constructed discoursally, that is via language and other multimodal means. However, whereas Gee refers to all kinds of discourse produced at any possible setting, Ivanič casts her focus on written discourse. She understands the discoursal self as the impression a writer gives about him/her through his/her writings. She has named it 'discoursal' because identity "is constructed through the discourse characteristics of a text, which relate to values, beliefs and power relations in the social context in which they were written" (1998: 25). The discoursal self is of particular importance in this thesis. When discussing Gee's Discourse-identity, I explained that I am interested in the way the candidates' identity is constructed as a result of all kinds of discourse produced during the qualification process. Taking a step further in chapter 7 and using Ivanič's discoursal self, I am able to focus specifically on the way the candidates' identity is constructed through their own and other people's writing in their portfolio. The development of the NVQ portfolio lies at the heart of this study as well as the impact it has on the candidates' identity. The discoursal self therefore is a useful way of talking not only about how discourse, in general, shapes candidates' identity, but about how written discourse, i.e. the portfolio, adds to the process of identity construction.

The self as author is also related with the stance the author takes in his/her writing and Ivanič (2005) has described it as a sub-category of the discoursal self. The self as author is expressed to the extent the writer foregrounds him/her in the text, to the extent that his/her voice is heard or is repressed. In writing texts for the portfolio, the NVQ candidates often make choices about whether and how they wish to project themselves. Each candidate makes different choices as to the authorial self they will foreground in their writing and their decisions are very often an extension of their autobiographical self. In this way, candidates with more self-confidence are likely to have their voices heard more strongly in the portfolio than candidates who are shy or who believe that a focus on their actions or on other people's opinions is more important than placing an emphasis on what they believe and how they act. The self as author will also be discussed in chapter 7, where the candidates' writing choices are analyzed in detail.

The final aspect that Ivanič (2005) added to her model of a writer's identity construction is the relational dimension. She explains this dimension as the way in which writers take into consideration the readers while writing their texts. The reader of a text is an important factor defining writing, and makes a great difference to the choices the writer makes. Only on very rare occasions do writers write without having a reader in their mind, even if sometimes the reader is only themselves (e.g. personal diary). The role of the reader of NVQ portfolios cannot be stressed too much. The candidates are aware that their portfolios will not only be read but most importantly they will be evaluated by assessors. The primary role of a portfolio is to be assessed and this has a great impact on the way it is written. This awareness from the part of the candidates is evident in many different sections of their portfolio, where they make conscious efforts to adopt the language of decision makers found in their logbooks and to project a discoursal and authorial self that will comply with the identity of an ideal NVQ candidate.

Finally, all the above choices made while writing a text are drawn from the many possibilities of selfhood available to writers in all social contexts. Ivanič argues that in any institution there are several ways of doing the same thing, even though some are more privileged than others. The writers' choices about the way they will include aspects of their identity in their writing are shaped and at the same time restricted by these possibilities. Ivanič argues that "different individuals will feel able to identify with different subject positions according to their social group memberships" (1998: 28). In the case of NVQ candidates therefore, there are many different ways of developing a portfolio but they are mostly defined by regulations imposed by colleges and awarding bodies and by the general culture promoted by FE. Candidates might choose to adopt different writing styles, different perspectives and different formats for their portfolios. However, all these possibilities for expressing their selfhood must be already approved by the college or they would risk failing their qualification. Very often the candidates opposed the existing possibilities for selfhood and this is a well discussed theme in this thesis. In these cases, they would either go back to those possibilities that are institutionally supported, or sometimes they would insist on going further and in this way they would introduce new possibilities for selfhood available in the future. This is what happened with Kevin who, influenced by his autobiographic self, introduced a creative way of writing for his portfolio, which was inserted in the texts with great success (see chapter 7).

Finally, it is important to add that in a later publication, Ivanič (2006) broadened her spectrum of the discoursal construction of identity and analyzed it not only in regards to written discourse, but as a process to be examined in all kinds of social interaction. As a result, she distinguished three ways with which people are discoursally constructed:

- by 'address' – the way we are talked to by others
- by 'attribution' – the way we are talked about by others
- by 'affiliation' – the way we talk like others

Identity construction as 'address' and as 'attribution' are very close to what Gee (2001a) has described in Discourse-identity as 'ascription'. He describes Discourse-identities as existing on a continuum depending upon "how active or passive one is in recruiting them". 'Ascription' lies in the passive end of the continuum whereas 'achievement' lies in the active end. Therefore when we are addressed in a certain way or attributed with certain characteristics, people ascribe to us a certain identity. On the other hand, identity as an achievement is actively sought and coincides with Ivaniç's third way of discoursal construction identity, that of 'affiliation'. Constructing one's identity by affiliation means identifying with a specific group of people we want to be seen as belonging to and behave and 'talk' like they do. Affiliation has also been discussed as 'identification' and has been described as "the process through which modes of belonging become constitutive of our identities by creating bonds or distinctions in which we become invested". (Wenger, 1998: 191)

The NVQ candidates' discoursal construction of identity will be discussed in relation to all three different ways. In chapter 5, I discuss how Derry finds it easy to write certain parts of his portfolio because he identifies with the activities described in them, whereas he finds difficulties coping with other sections of the portfolio, wherein he has to describe situations he is not familiar with and therefore does not identify with. In chapter 6, the beauty therapy NVQ candidates are addressed as and attributed the identity of a student, whereas they affiliate themselves with professionals in the industry. This clash between the identity they are attributed by the institution and the identity they ascribe to themselves is very often the reason for frustration and complaints concerning the NVQ course and the completion of the portfolio.

Finally, it is important to stress that neither Gee's aspects of identity construction, nor Ivanič's aspects of a writer's identity are autonomous entities. Both authors make it clear that these aspects are found in a continuous interplay and they should not be understood as operating in isolation. In this thesis, all aspects of social identity construction will be discussed at different places in the thesis. However, a special focus is cast upon the discoursal construction of identity, as depicted in the NVQ portfolio and the texts written by both decision makers and NVQ candidates. My aim is to show not only how the candidates construct their identity through their texts, but also and more importantly to make a comparison between the candidates' identity as projected in their own writing and as projected in the writing of the decision makers i.e. awarding bodies and SSCs.

3.8 Summary and concluding remarks

In this chapter I have spelled out the major theoretical issues underpinning this research. As this study focuses primarily on the situated nature of literacy, I have spent a large part of this chapter discussing how literacy theories define my research interest and shape my analytic methods and tools. I have first started with a brief review of existing models of literacy and I then moved on to introduce an ideological view of literacy and the reasons why I have embraced it in this study. This model, now known as the New Literacy Studies has developed into a new discipline within literacy studies and sociolinguistics, and the large number of research projects which have emerged out of this field prove the many insights it has to offer on the uses of literacy in people's lives. A new way of seeing literacy requires new language to talk about it. Literacy events and literacy practices are introduced here as the main analytic units when studying literacy in context and I discuss their use within the study of NVQ portfolios. Additionally, I talk about texts as mediating literacy events and as reifications of people's knowledge and experience. Texts have also been discussed as mediating between local and extra-local settings and portfolios are discussed as a good example of such a mediation process. The importance of texts is stressed in many different sections of this chapter, as I claim portfolio texts to be the main focus of this thesis and my aim is to examine them from many different perspectives.

The importance of texts is also evident in the next section of this chapter, where I report some of the findings of other research on the increasingly important role of texts within the workplace. I refer to the intense textualisation of the workplace and show how the role of texts has significantly changed in the new world of work. Within this new working context, the workers' identities have also changed, as their jobs have become more demanding and more stressful. Finally, I show how all this is related to the study of NVQ portfolios, as NVQs are a result of the increased demands placed upon employees and the portfolios are a good example of how texts are used to standardize employees' knowledge and competence and sometimes to constrain and police their actions.

A second major theory that contributes to the theoretical basis of this thesis is Activity Theory (AT). In this chapter, I discuss AT as a descendant of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and show how it has developed since then into a well-known theory in western academia, with applications in many different disciplines. I then continue by outlining the basic principles of AT and by briefly discussing their meaning and the way they will be used in and contribute to my study. What follows is a section on the reasons that led me to use AT in the study of literacy. Using AT as an analytic tool in the study of literacy is definitely not the norm, but there have been an increasingly large number of studies that argue for the benefits of such a combination. I have therefore included a short review of studies that have used AT to research literacy, in order to show how my decision is supported by other scholars in the field. Finally, I discuss the combined use of AT and NLS in my study and present an analytical framework that encompasses concepts from both theories.

Despite the many advantages of AT as a theory of studying literacy and analyzing ethnographic data, there was a point in my research where the use of AT reached its limitations. Beliefs, feelings and attitudes towards life and social situations are not easily captured when describing situations as activity systems. What was needed to complement my analysis here was a theory of discourse. Discourse in this study is understood both as ways of being in the world and as ways of representing the world. After a brief discussion on the theoretical nature of discourses, I present a framework that brings together discourses and activity systems. More specifically, I show how discourses can originate from other activities and enter an activity system, or how they can be created anew in one activity system. Traveling from one activity system to another, discourses are recontextualised, that is, their meaning and functions change and with them the ideologies that define them change as well.

The use of methods from the field of critical discourse analysis is discussed next, as a useful way to analyze the discourses existing in portfolio texts. I first briefly introduce CDA as a discipline of discourse analysis and discuss the need to apply critical analysis to my data. Then, I proceed by presenting van Leeuwen's model of analyzing the representation of social actors and social actions in texts and show the way that this model will be used in my analysis.

Discourses are described as mediating mechanisms of people's identities, and the study of the construction of identities is the final theme I discuss. Identities are understood in this thesis as socially constructed and therefore continuously changing. In the section on identities, I present two different models, two ways of discussing identity, as discussed by Gee (2001a) and Ivanič (1998). These two models are complementary, since Gee talks about the construction of one's identity during all social activities, whereas Ivanič focuses on the way writers' identity is shaped when writing a text. Both ways of talking about identity are used in this study, as I am interested in NVQ candidates' construction of identity, and more importantly the discoursal construction of their identity, both while interacting with other people during developing the portfolio and while writing and reading portfolio texts.

It is important to stress here that the discussions included in this chapter represent only the major theoretical issues underpinning this study. The theme of literacy and literacy practices is one of the principal research questions of this thesis and activity theory is used throughout the analysis as a useful analytic tool. Issues of discourses and identities are ongoing themes in the study and will be visited at many different points of the analysis. However, these are not the only theoretical issues that this study is based upon. Throughout the following chapters, more theoretical models will be introduced, discussed and used to analyze the data. Their role in the study is not as significant as the themes discussed in this chapter, but they still contribute to my analysis and support major and minor arguments. Such theories will be individually discussed in the chapter where they appear.

4 The methodological path of the research

4.1 Introduction

The need for a chapter describing the methodological path I followed in this research originates from the belief that separating the data collected and analysed from the social processes that generated them obscures significant information relevant to these data and can affect negatively the validity of the research. In order for the reader of this thesis to obtain a holistic picture of the study of NVQ portfolios, it is important that I spell out not only the methodological choices I made, but also the reasons that led me to these decisions, the difficulties I encountered and the lessons I learned.

Reflexivity in scientific work has been described as bringing together the social processes encountered in the research with the technicalities of data (Ball, 1990). Reflexivity is an important element in all social sciences as researchers need to be clear about the link and relevance of their methods with the object of their study. Adopting a reflexive stance is seen as a crucial factor in ethnographic work, where the principal instrument of data collection is the researcher and his/her decisions, behaviour, thoughts and feelings are the main generators of data. The present chapter therefore answers this need for reflexivity, by offering a detailed description of the research fields and the methods of data collection, as well as a reflexive account of each one of my decisions as an ethnographer and their impact on the results reached in this study.

In the previous chapter, I explained that at the centre of this thesis lies the study of contextualised practices and texts. Both major theories employed in this thesis, NLS and AT, consider context as a starting point and maintain that practices can only be meaningful when examined in the context where they are being enacted. NLS argue for the situatedness of literacy practices and for the significance of a close examination of the circumstances within which they are being acted out, whereas AT sees any activity as context within which human relations are negotiated. By making use of these two theoretical perspectives, this thesis aims to study the literacy practices drawn upon in the context of developing an NVQ portfolio. Methodologically, the use of ethnographic methods has enabled me to examine such practices not just closely, but more importantly, from the inside, by fully participating in the contexts where these portfolios were created. Use of ethnographic methods therefore is considered here as the most suitable method in the study of social practices and context.

On the other hand, a focus on people's literacy practices requires not only a focus on what they do with texts but also a close examination of the texts they deal with (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). To the macro theory of social practices a micro theory of detailed linguistic analysis must be added, in order for the researcher to obtain a complete interpretation of the data. To answer this need, I have employed methods from critical discourse analysis that helped me analyse and interpret the texts encountered in the field. The application of discourse analysis methods combined with ethnographic methods has recently been widely used in the discipline of literacy studies (e.g. Pitt, 2002). Fairclough argued for their complementary nature in the study of social practices by stating that:

> To research meaning-making, one needs to look at interpretations of texts as well as texts themselves, and more generally at how texts practically figure in particular areas of social life, which suggests the textual analysis is best framed within ethnography.
>
> (2003: 15)

The frequent co-occurrence of linguistic methods of analysis with ethnographic methods of research has resulted in the emergence of a new methodological orientation, linguistic ethnography (Rampton et al., 2004). In this chapter I will discuss how, acting within this new frame, I employ ethnographic methods in combination with CDA in order to understand the literacy practices drawn upon by NVQ candidates when developing their portfolio, and the way the texts included in the portfolio represent the candidates and shape their identities.

I will start with a detailed discussion of ethnography as a method of data collection and analysis and I will go on to describe the content of linguistic ethnography and its links with the study of literacy. I will then introduce the two research fields of this study, by describing my entry to these and providing a mini profile for each one of the research participants found in these sites. Methods of data collection is the next section of this chapter, where I spell out the ways participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, focus groups and document collection were applied for the purposes of my research. I then proceed with a detailed account of the data analysis, breaking it down into two sections: ethnographic data analysis and linguistic analysis. Finally, I discuss issues of validity and reliability and the ethical considerations that underpin all stages of the study.

4.2 Ethnography

In this section, I will explore the concept of ethnography in three distinct sections. In the first section I will discuss the meaning of doing ethnography, as developed traditionally in the field of anthropology and as recently redefined in the wider field of social sciences. In the second section, I discuss 'linguistic ethnography' as a methodological orientation recently developed in the UK and show the way it was applied in my research. Finally, in the third section I make reference to applications of ethnography within the field of NLS and show the well established links between the two disciplines.

4.2.1 What is Ethnography?

Ethnographic research was first originated in the field of anthropology and involved researchers living among people for extended periods of time, learning their language and observing their everyday lives. What they ended up with was a detailed description of the culture they observed, a narrative which was called 'an ethnography'. More recently, the use of ethnographic research has been extended to a wider area of social disciplines. The origins of ethnographic use in the field of linguistics lie in the work of Dell Hymes (e.g. 1977; 1978) and his 'ethnography of communication' where he argues for description of language based on ethnographic data. The opening of ethnography to a greater number of social sciences resulted in a refocusing of the field. Researchers doing ethnography made an important turn from studying 'others' to studying their own societies and from attempting to record every possible thing to narrowing down their focus to a specific subject. Therefore, ethnography has recently come to be defined more broadly as:

> a research process based on fieldwork using a variety of (mainly qualitative) research techniques but including engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time. The eventual written product –an ethnography- draws its data from this fieldwork experience and usually emphasizes descriptive details as a result.
>
> (Davies, 1999: 4-5)

The present study makes a claim to the use of ethnographic methods in that it employs qualitative research techniques in order to explore a particular domain of the participants' lives, their involvement in FE and their engagement with NVQs. Even though I have spent a considerably long time attending the sites where the NVQ candidates worked on their qualifications, I cannot claim that I have engaged fully with the participants' lives. Bloome and Green make a useful distinction between "doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective and using ethnographic tools" (2005: 183). They explain that 'doing ethnography' involves a longitudinal, in-depth study of a social or cultural group. On the other hand, adopting an 'ethnographic perspective' entails: "a more focused approach (i.e., do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group" (ibid), while using 'ethnographic tools' is related to the use of qualitative methods of data collection. These definitions suggest that in the study of NVQ portfolios I have set out to explore the participants' social practices and identities by adopting an ethnographic perspective and making use of ethnographic tools, rather than by doing a complete ethnographic research.

In ethnography the researcher has been described as the main instrument of research. In contrast to other scientific methods that have developed highly accurate measuring instruments, in ethnography objectivity is hardly a possible result to achieve. The researcher's interests, emphases and agenda are highly important as these are the ones that drive the actual research. Therefore, ethnographers such as Ball (1990) and Davies (1999) argue that instead of making fruitless attempts to eliminate the influence of the ethnographer in the collection and interpretation of data, researchers should adopt a reflexive stance to their study. Davies has described reflexivity as "a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference" (ibid: 4).

Having situated my research within the field of ethnography, I must acknowledge that my own interest in finding out about the development of NVQ portfolios was the starting force of the data collection. The decisions I made are followed by a process of "internal dialogue" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) and thus accompanied with large doses of reflexivity. Throughout the research, I made a conscious and sometimes painstaking effort to examine the data in a reflexive way, keeping always in mind the influence of my own presence in the field and later on the impact of my own background, life history and research interests when interpreting the data. Heath and Street argue that "all ethnographic research is inherently interpretive, subjective, and partial" (2008: 45) and proclaim that "reflexivity, rather than innocence, characterize contemporary ethnography" (ibid: 34).

4.2.2 Linguistic Ethnography

The term 'linguistic ethnography' was recently coined by a group of researchers, members of the UK Linguistic Ethnography Forum. In a co-authored paper available on their website (Rampton et al., 2004), they justify the need for such a methodological orientation, define its components and recognise its origins. In this paper they also describe the common underlying assumptions of those ascribed to this discipline:

> Linguistic ethnography generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and

> distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity.
>
> (ibid: 2)

As a researcher working in the field of NLS, I share this fundamental belief that language and society are mutually constituted and consider it to be the cornerstone of my research. Use of ethnography in the research field enabled me to understand the practices involved around developing an NVQ portfolio and the attitudes held by candidates and tutors regarding these practices. My ethnographic research helped me see that there was a conflict between candidates and the portfolios they had to create; it even made me suspect what the reasons could be. However, use of ethnographic methods did not enable me to fully uncover the reasons behind this tension. What I needed in order to complete the picture was a linguistic analysis of the texts included in the portfolio. Only by applying a model of analysing discourse did I manage to understand the discrepancies between the way the candidates saw themselves and the way they were represented by the texts produced by decision makers. In this way, the use of critical discourse analysis methods complemented, to a great extent, the results reached by ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis. The usefulness of combining ethnography with discourse analysis is confirmed by Rampton who states that "combination of ethnography, linguistics and discourse analysis is particularly well-suited to understanding the intersection of communicative practice with social and cultural process" (2007: 595).

Combined use of ethnographic methods and linguistic analysis can possibly lead to methodological difficulties of conducting research. Whereas ethnography has a strong anthropological background and therefore aims to explore a wide area of knowledge, linguistics has a more narrow focus and the primary interest of researchers in this field is the study of language and language use[3]. This inherent opposition between the two disciplines is also identified by Rampton et al (2004) and Rampton (2007) who claim that linguistic ethnography "ties ethnography down" pushing it towards a focused analysis of linguistic data, and at the same time "opens linguistics up" by inviting the researcher to be sensitive to events and practices outside language. This mutually benefitting relationship between the two disciplines was made clear in my research. Ethnography led me to observe situations which were seemingly unrelated to portfolios (e.g. discussions of NVQ candidates in the cafeteria during their break), but which eventually gave me a lot of insights in regards to the participants' literacy practices. Later on, when I used linguistic theories to analyse the written texts collected during the study, I was able to narrow my focus and select only the parts of data that complemented and/or enlightened my analysis. Therefore, ethnography and linguistic analysis not only fitted together well in my study, but more importantly they complemented each other and helped me reach comprehensive results about the literacy practices and the construction of identity of the research participants.

4.2.3 Ethnography and the New Literacy Studies

In the paper outlining the origins and main features of 'linguistic ethnography', the field of the New Literacy Studies has been identified as one of the main traditions that historically played an important role in "shaping analytic sensibilities in linguistic ethnography" (Rampton et al., 2004: 9). This is because in the past two and a half decades there is a strong tradition of ethnographic research developed in the literacy

---

[3] It is true though that there has always been a tradition of Anthropological Linguistics, with a clear focus on language use.

field, which goes hand by hand with the recognition of literacy as socially embedded. Researchers working in this discipline accept that literacy usually manifests itself in sites outside traditional schooling and set off to explore these "social uses of literacy" (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996a). Ethnographic methods and tools have been identified as the most suitable approach for researchers who wish to understand literacy in its highly contextualised form.

Heath's (1983) classic study of children's language at home and at school, Scribner and Cole's (1981) study of the writing system of people in the Vai of Liberia and Street's (1984) ethnographic research on the literacy practices in an Iranian village, all have been described by Baynham as "first-generation ethnographic studies of literacy" (2004: 285) and are commonly accepted as the inaugural point of recent ethnographic literacy research. In the second-generation studies, Baynham identifies among others Barton and Hamilton's (1998) research of literacy in a local community in Lancaster and Prinsloo and Breier's (1996b) study in South Africa. I would also add to these the studies presented in Martin-Jones and Jones's (2000) edited volume on multilingual literacies and those included in the also edited volume of Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (2000) on situated literacies. These are the first studies that set the example for ethnographic research and spelled out the reasons for using ethnographic methods as well as the methodological tools they used and decisions they made.

Since then, an increasingly growing number of ethnographic studies have set out to study literacy in all possible social settings. I have already discussed, in section 3.3, ethnographic studies on workplace literacies, such as Hull's (1997) Searle's (1999; 2001; 2002), Hunter's (2004) and Farrell's (2006). Other examples of research sites of contextualised literacies have been prisons (Wilson, 2004; 2007), streets (Cahill, 2000), families (Papen, 2008; Pitt, 2000), libraries (Cuban, 2007; Cuban & Cuban, 2007) and online spaces (J. Gee, 2005; Gillen et al, 2008; Lee, 2002).

Most of the above ethnographic studies employ as their main analytic unit the literacy event (see section 3.2.3), and using it as a basis they set out to explore the literacy practices of the group of people they study. Baynham (2004) argues that the literacy event construct is a direct descendent of Hymes' ethnography of communication and, in this way, he confirms once again the close links between ethnography, literacy studies and linguistics. Similarly in my study, the literacy events observed are taken as the starting-point for the analysis (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Beginning with a description of an event and in some cases recognising patterns of behaviour led me to identifying the literacy practices of research participants. From there I moved on to discover the discourses in play and how these latter shape the participants' identities. Therefore it is important to stress that a literacy event is not just a useful theoretical concept that helped me (along with literacy practices) conceptualize literacy, but most importantly it is my primary methodological and indeed ethnographic tool, used in my effort to capture the literacy practices drawn when developing an NVQ portfolio.

4.3 The research field

Before discussing in detail the ethnographic methods used in this study, I wish to present the two research fields as well as provide information on the people who participated in the research. As in all ethnographic work, issues of sampling had to be dealt with at the very beginning of my research. Decisions on the sites to visit and the people to participate in the study were not always conscious. Rather, very often they were a result of practical issues, luck and compromises. Ball urges ethnographers to spell out clearly the decisions they had to take during the process of naturalistic sampling and by this term he refers to "the dispersal of the researcher's time and energy in the organization by *places*, *persons* and *times*" (1990: 162). In this section therefore I will discuss how I came to decide on the details of the research and at the same time present the places, times and people shaping it.

4.3.1 The Warehouse

Access to the warehouse was granted to me via Preston College, which delivered NVQs to the warehouse employees. I was initially introduced to a tutor working in this college who brought me in contact with an NVQ tutor, James. He had great experience in working as an NVQ tutor and assessor, visiting many warehouses in the area and working with employees on their NVQs. Our communication with James started with emails where I explained the nature of my research and the questions I sought to answer. At that time he was visiting a warehouse in Morecambe, working with a number of NVQ candidates. We agreed that I would follow him to the warehouse and attend the meetings he had with two of them. Due to the restrictive nature of the warehouse (e.g. restrictions in workforce and working time) there was an initial agreement that I would be given permission to work with two NVQ candidates only. The selection of the candidates was a joint decision. I wanted to meet candidates working on a variety of NVQs and preferably one with an administrative post and one working in the warehouse. James suggested the names of Derry and Kevin and I, being very keen to start the research, immediately agreed. The selection of the warehouse therefore as one of the places of my research and of Derry and Kevin as the two research participants was a combination of my own agenda and that of James, who provided me with access to the field.

Entering the warehouse was not an easy process. The first time, I met James at the entrance and he signed me in at the doormen's lodge. I was given a visitor's card, which I had to have with me at all times in the warehouse. This process was repeated in all my visits. In the warehouse I was first introduced to the people in the Human Resources department. They were the ones who allowed my entrance and therefore had to be informed every time I wanted to visit. James then guided me to a small seminar room where his meetings with the NVQ candidates took place. This room was in the middle of the warehouse and I could therefore observe from there all the work going on. It took me quite some time to find my way to that room when I visited the warehouse without James. Also, being one of the few women at the warehouse and one that was not known to be working there, I caused the curious glances of some of the employees and I continuously had a feeling of awkwardness and not belonging.

The timescale of the research was not completely under my control either. James visited the warehouse every two weeks and therefore my observations of the meetings he had with the candidates were not frequent. One additional problem was that when I met Derry he was very near the completion of his NVQ. I was therefore able to attend only two meetings between him and his tutor. With Kevin I was luckier as when I met him he had only finished half of his NVQ and was thinking about starting a second one, whose progress I would also follow in the future. Overall, my research in the warehouse was conducted in what Heath and Street have called a "selective intermittent time mode" (2008: 63). The period of the research was eight months, from December 2006 to July 2007, but my visits were flexible with a focus on particular events, such as meetings between candidates and tutor or my interviews with the candidates.

Derry and Kevin were both very eager to help me with my study. They expressed no objections to my presence in their meetings with their tutors and were patient as James explained to me the process of the meetings. Additionally, they both agreed to take part in interviews and to provide me with samples from their portfolios. In what follows, I present a short profile for each one of the NVQ candidates in the warehouse, with some facts about their careers so far and the reasons why they studied for an NVQ.

Derry

Derry was the first NVQ candidate I met in the warehouse. He was working in an administrative post, being responsible for assessing faulty products. He had been working in this post for seventeen years and it was the first time that he studied for a vocational qualification. His NVQ was in Business and Administration, and as I said before, he was near completion when I met him. The reason why he decided to obtain an NVQ was because the warehouse was going to close down soon and so he felt the need for a qualification, in order to prove his long experience in administration when looking for another job. Overall, he found the NVQ process pleasant and very useful, as he got new insights in regards to his vocation. Developing the portfolio was for Derry a good but sometimes painful procedure and it resulted in the creation of a large number of new literacy practices. His case is very interesting and this is the reason why I have developed a case study around his practices, which is presented in chapter 5 of this thesis.

Kevin

I met Kevin the second time I visited the warehouse and he seemed a very outgoing and talkative person. Kevin's case was interesting as he was caught up between two posts in the warehouse and two NVQs. When I met him he had just been transferred from a post in the warehouse to the administrative domain of the business. He had been working in the warehouse for about three years when he heard that they needed someone in the finance department and applied for the post. When he was hired in the new administrative post he was half way through the completion of his NVQ on Warehousing. This caused a difficulty, in the sense that he had to write, be observed and evaluated on a job he was not doing anymore. As a result, he had to arrange with one of the line managers of the warehouse to undertake some tasks whenever his tutor was present, so that he could be observed and evaluated.

Even before he finished the first NVQ, he decided he was going to try for a second one in Business and Administration. Prior to this, he had never had a vocational qualification and realised that being able to do it while at work was a good opportunity for him. I had two interviews with Kevin, one while he was doing his first NVQ and another when he finished the second. Even though he initially had worries about taking up a qualification in administration, he eventually admitted that both of them were demanding but in a different way. Kevin had a love for creative writing and brought this in his portfolio. His writing style is very distinct and this is why his case is discussed in chapter 7, where I analyse the candidates' representation of themselves and their actions in their writing.

4.3.2 The FE College

My initial contact for managing access to the college was a literacy tutor introduced to me by my supervisor. The literacy tutor gave me the contact details of a tutor in the beauty therapy department and another tutor in the hairdressing department. After emailing them both with a summary of my research project and research questions and asking for access in their classes, it was only the beauty therapy tutor that responded. She was willing to grant me access to one of her NVQ classes but she would also have to ask for permission from the head of department. Once this barrier was surmounted, I was allowed to attend the beauty therapy class studying for a Beauty Therapy NVQ level 2 and 3. It is clear therefore that the sample chosen was a combined result of my own agenda (wishing to observe an NVQ class in this college), my initial contact's connections (beauty therapy and hairdressing departments), and the NVQ tutor's willingness to co-operate and permission to work with one specific class.

Ball (1990) argues that many times 'entry' to the field is not synonymous to 'access'. Obtaining permission to attend the beauty therapy NVQ class did not automatically solve all my problems. I now had to be accepted by the students. In my first visit, I was given five minutes to explain the purpose of my research and what I would like from the NVQ candidates. Explaining that I was interested in their portfolios did not mean much to the candidates at that point, as they had not started working on them yet. My general impression was that they perceived me as an intruder in their class and were not much interested in my purposes for being there. Later on, I realised that one of the reasons they did not trust me was because I initially spent a lot of time with their tutors during the breaks. What was for me a good way out of the awkward breaks was seen by them as suspicious behaviour. However, when I started going with them to the student cafeteria and being involved in informal chats, discussing our common difficulties of being a student while trying to maintain a personal life, giving them lifts home and, in general, trying to pass as one of them, I managed to gain their trust and therefore obtain good data.

Similar to my research in the warehouse, the time spent in the college can also be described as "selective intermittent time mode". I first visited the class in November 2006, about a month after the course had started, and stayed with them until the end of the academic year, i.e. June 2007. The NVQ candidates had to attend four days per week in the first term and four and a half in the second and third term. My visits were not that long. The average frequency of my visits was 1-2 times per week, depending on the content of their courses. During the first term the portfolios were not mentioned at all. The candidates had heard they would eventually have to develop portfolios but knew nothing more about them. Instead, they were having theory and practice lessons on their three subjects, body massage, aromatherapy and reflexology. Attending the class at this stage was very useful for many reasons. Not only did I manage to get to know the candidates better, but I also got to observe the processes of filling in certain forms which would later be included in the portfolio. In the second term, they started having weekly tutorials working on their portfolios. When I sat for one of the candidate's case studies on aromatherapy, I started visiting the college on one extra day. This was a very happy coincidence for me, as in this way I was both a client and an observer (see section 4.4.1). Towards the end of the year the students were increasingly spending time on their portfolios and therefore my visits became more frequent.

There were twelve NVQ candidates in the class that I observed and they were all women. They all had different reasons for being there and different aims in life, but some patterns were inevitably repeated. The following profiles include information about general aspects of the women's lives as well as their aims in regards to the NVQ. The information was collected through interviews, observation and personal interaction during the course of the research.

Angela

Angela was a woman in her early thirties. She studied on the course because of a general interest in holistic therapies and wanted to know more about the properties of natural oils and self-healing. She was also a single mother and did not want to visit a doctor every time something was wrong with her daughter. Before having her child, she was studying for a degree in 'Youth and Community Studies'. However, she did not enjoy the course and decided to leave it after the first year. This course was her first experience in FE and she had never made a portfolio before. Being a single mother she had her courses paid for, so she wished to continue for some more qualifications on the same field. Eventually, she would like to own her own business or work in a health farm or a hotel.

Dana

Dana was in her mid twenties. Prior to this course she had been working in hotel receptions, bar management and hotel management. She wanted to obtain a Beauty Therapy NVQ mainly because she aimed at a change of career. At the same time as doing her NVQ, she was also taking another course outside the college on Indian head massage. In the near future she planned to move to another county, where she could easier get a job in beauty salons, health spas or beauty farms. Dana did not have previous experience in FE and had never completed a portfolio before.

Kerry

Kerry was in her early thirties and a mother of two children. She had previous experience in FE as she had already obtained a NVQ level 2 on 'Body Massage' and a diploma on Indian head massage. She wanted the NVQ in order to know more on the holistic aspect of aromatherapy and reflexology. She also wanted to improve the skills she already had and move on from level 2 NVQs only to a level 3 one. Such a diploma equalled with better work prospects. Currently she was working outside the college as a masseuse. She was planning to come back to the college the following year and take a 'fast track beauty course', in order to combine holistic and beauty therapies and make more money. Kerry had completed a portfolio for her previous NVQ but she said it was much briefer and simpler; they did not have to add a lot of information and had to do fewer case studies. She justified this by saying that the previous qualification was a level 2 NVQ whereas the one she was doing now was a level 3 and therefore the expectations were higher.

Kay

Kay was a woman at her early twenties. She already had an NVQ in beauty therapy, but the focus was on beauty treatments. For that diploma she had developed a portfolio which she considered more difficult than the one she was doing now because it was provided and accredited by a different awarding body. She found that the previous portfolio required a lot more cross-referencing than the current one. Prior to her first NVQ, she had registered on courses twice, but had not completed them because, as she said, she was too young and in need for paid work. During the course she was practicing massage outside the college on friends and relatives for a minimum payment. At the time of the research, she had already set out to start her own business by opening up a beauty salon.

Rebecca

Rebecca was in her mid-twenties and was currently working in a hospital. She had initially taken time out and worked after school, in order to think what she wanted to do. Her current work was mostly clerical and administrative and she described it as boring. She was doing the Beauty Therapy NVQ because she was always interested in holistic therapies and had now decided she wanted to pursue it professionally. She had no previous experience in FE and had not completed a portfolio before. For the future she wanted to work for herself, but she knew that this would take some time. At the time of our interview, she was planning to contact a friend who was working in the same industry and ask information on how she managed to get her clientele and make a start in the business.

Sandra

Sandra was in her late forties working as a nurse in a hospice over the past twenty years. She wanted to take the Beauty Therapy NVQ for a change in her career. She felt that being a nurse was a highly emotional job and that holistic therapies was a much better way to nurse people. Another reason was for insurance purposes. Sandra was still working part-time while doing the NVQ course and was struggling to fit them both in her daily programme. Apart from her nursing diploma, she had also started another NVQ in the past which she did not complete because the college lost her portfolio. This was a very unpleasant experience for her and she was still afraid that something similar would happen to her in this course. Finally, Sandra had also been trained as an NVQ assessor. However, she said that even though she enjoyed training people, she did not intend to work as an assessor because she did not like the portfolio development process.

Wallis

Wallis was a woman at her late thirties. She was a single mother and sometimes she could not attend the course as she needed to care for her son. She was doing the Beauty Therapy NVQ because she wanted to help her son calm down, with the use of holistic approaches. Her son suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and so did she. She justified her distraction and attention span due to this syndrome and explained that as a child she had to attend a special unit school. Even though Wallis described herself as lacking educational background, she was a qualified welder and had a national diploma in performing arts. For her diploma she had to develop a portfolio, but she described it as much simpler, only having to put evidence together in a file. She described herself as a practical person who prefers doing quizzes and crosswords rather than essay writing and said she had not realised how much theory was involved in this course. In the future, she was planning to come back in the college and take a course in sports massage, which interested her more than the one she was doing now.

Samantha

Samantha was the oldest woman in the class, in her early fifties. She had been working as a nurse in the past, but said that she had forgotten a lot of it now. She also had a degree in law and diplomas in reiki and crystal healing. The year before she had also taken a free course on advanced pottery and had to prepare three separate projects and a portfolio for each project. She had found those portfolios harder than the current one, since she had to do a lot of drawing for them and believed that she was not good at it. She added that during that course, the portfolio took the joy out of creating pots. The reason she was doing the Beauty Therapy NVQ was to, as she said, "add more strings to her bow". She had already created a treatment room at her home and planned to work self-employed.

Kathleen

Kathleen was at her early twenties. As a school pupil she had been very good and her teachers urged her to apply for the university, however, she felt that this was not what she really wanted. In the past, she had practiced nursing for a short time, but decided she did not like it as she tended to get emotionally involved. She also worked for short periods at office jobs, which she also felt were not fulfilling her dreams. She decided to work as a beauty therapist because she liked to relax people and as she said: "it's good for the soul". She had no previous experience in FE and had never developed a portfolio before. Kathleen was determined for her future. After the course she planned to move to another county and get a year's experience in a beauty salon. Then she wanted to work in cruise ships performing holistic therapies, and from there to be sent to spa hotels all over the world. Finally she wanted to save money and eventually open her own business in the industry. She did not like being a student in the college as she felt that she was treated unfairly by tutors because of her young age.

Emily

Emily was a young woman in her middle twenties. She already had a national diploma in health studies but did not wish to work on this domain as she found it very depressing. Instead, she joined in this course because she found it a better way to help people. She had already completed another portfolio for her previous diploma, but found it very different than the one she was doing now, mainly because the first one was pure collection of evidence and did not involve any assessment. In terms of other work experience, she had worked for three years as an employee in the retail business and one year as a supervisor. Emily had enjoyed doing the NVQ course and had found the portfolio useful and straightforward.

Nadia

Nadia, a woman in her mid-twenties, was married with two young children. She registered in this course because she was very much interested in holistic therapies and self-healing. She also wanted to give a boost to her social life by having her own interests outside the house. She did not have previous experience in FE and had not developed a portfolio before. At the end of this course she received an award of excellent achievement by the college. This was because Nadia had taken a literacy test both at the beginning and at the end of the course and in the last one she scored a rate two levels above the first one. She was very proud of her achievement and planned to go back to the college the following year to take a course on fast track beauty, focusing more on the beauty side of treatments.

Sadie

Sadie was the youngest member of the class, in her early twenties. She had already had an NVQ level 2 in hairdressing. She wanted to take the Beauty Therapy NVQ mainly for self-healing reasons. She had diabetes and believed that knowing more about holistic therapies would be good for her. Sadie participated in the focus group but was very shy and did not contribute much. I believe this was also the reason why she avoided giving me an interview. I have therefore no information on her plans for the future.

4.4 Research Methods

In this section, I will describe the application of ethnographic tools in my study. I will start with observation and fieldnotes and continue with the conduct of interviews, focus groups and collection of documents. It is important to stress that even though for practical reasons the methods are discussed in separate sections, they were frequently used in complementary ways to each other. Observation, for example, was used throughout the research and findings from this method added to the individual questions I asked the candidates during the interviews. These methods, therefore, should be understood as a combined effort to approach the research questions and not as isolated strategies of data collection.

4.4.1 Observation

Being an essential part of ethnographic research, observation was the starting point of my research. Not having any previous experience in NVQs and in Further Education in general, I needed to start with a "survey period to learn the basics" (Fetterman, 1998: 8). In this way, observing the candidates, their surroundings and their activities enabled me to understand what is going on when people study for such a qualification.

This is the reason why observation was an ongoing process in the research and complemented all other methods used and described here. In the research of literacy practices, the use of observation is essential for one more reason: people are not always aware of their practices when it comes to reading and writing and an observer is likely to find out that they are doing a lot more or different things with literacy than they actually think (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

The choice between structured and unstructured observation, that is between a focused and an open research agenda, was an easy one. Having aligned myself with ethnography and entering in a completely new setting, with the aim to learn as many things as possible about the people's activities, I needed to keep an open mind to everything that came to my attention. Unstructured observation therefore was the key to such an aspiration. However, as Robson (2002) notes, unstructured does not mean unsystematic. It might be wiser to say therefore that I followed a middle way, what Cohen et al (2000: 305) have called semi-structured observation. In this case, the researcher has an agenda of issues but no pre-determined ways of gathering data in order to illuminate these issues. The content of my observations was a direct outcome of my main research question, that is the literacy practices involved in developing an NVQ portfolio, but I did not have a standard technique of finding out about these practices.

As a result of the unstructured nature of my observations, I was not taken by surprise when I realised that I would have to employ different observation strategies in each one of the research settings. Such flexibility in the research methods is in line with what Barton et al (2007) have called 'responsive methodology', where the researcher acts each time differently, according to the realities encountered in the field. To this end, in the warehouse observation was limited to the meetings between the candidates and their tutors. The portfolio was developed by the candidates either during their personal time or during a fixed number of hours at work. Carrying research in such a regulated institution as a workplace meant that I was not free to visit at all times and to follow people while at work. Therefore, I could not observe the actual process of developing the portfolios, but only the discussions about them between candidates and tutor. I later tried to cover the gap of information by conducting in-depth interviews with the candidates (see section 4.4.3). On the other hand, observing the portfolio development in the college was an easier process. Having gained permission to attend all sessions of the course throughout one year, I was able to observe the complete process of creating NVQ portfolios.

Throughout my observations, I was always conscious about my role as a researcher. Ball (1990) has described entering a new research field as "going on a blind date" and as it usually happens in these occasions, I was not able to take a priori decisions about my role in the research. Gold's (1958) well known classification distinguishes four possible researcher roles in observation, presented in a continuum: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, complete participant. Having in mind that the researcher has to locate herself within this continuum, I wanted to be somewhere towards the right end, but I was not sure how to do it. During the research I reached two important conclusions with regards to this continuum: a) being a participant observer is not always easy and b) my position could not be described in terms of such a fixed continuum as my roles were constantly changing.

The first of these findings, that being a participant observer or a complete participant is not an easy process, was revealed to me during my observations in the warehouse. There, my participation to the meetings between candidates and tutor did not seem welcome. All of them were willing to let me observe their discussions and even record them, but there was no place for me to jump in and participate in the process. I was only there to listen, observe and learn and later on to ask questions, but nothing more. What is more, the physical environment of the warehouse was also not to my advantage, as I was not familiar with it and therefore there were no activities in which I could participate. It can be argued therefore that regardless of my initial intentions, I started and remained a complete observer in the warehouse. On the other hand, it is doubtful to what extent someone can remain a complete observer, as the researcher's participation will certainly influence the setting (Mason, 2002). In my case, such influence was witnessed when during the meetings the tutor stopped interacting with the candidate and turned to me in order to explain what was happening.

On the other hand, my role as an observer in the college was very different. Being in the familiar environment of a classroom, it came more natural to me to become a participant observer and at some instances a complete participant. But this was also not without difficulties. Attending a beauty therapy class where all the desks were also massage beds, there were instances when there was no place for me to sit. When the candidates were working, I moved from one bed to another observing their practices and sometimes recording their interactions, but I always felt that I was in their way, making it harder for them to work properly. Only when I was asked by one of the candidates to become her client in one of her case studies did I acquire a clear participatory role. In this way, I was able not only to observe but to take part in all the literacy events related to the case studies and therefore include personal comments and feelings in my records. This situation led me to the second conclusion regarding my observations, that locating oneself in a fixed place in the researcher's role continuum is not possible. Rather, I adopt Davies's (1999) suggestion of a spiral model of research, which describes the researcher's continuously changing role between observer and participant, depending on the context. Such a model explains my movements back and forth between the roles of participant and observer, enacted at all times of the research without necessarily starting as one and finishing as the other.

4.4.2 Fieldnotes

Adopting an ethnographic approach to research involves two distinct activities. The first is the participant observation described above, when the researcher enters the field, interacts with people and makes meaning of their actions. The second activity is recording these observations in the form of fieldnotes. Fieldnotes can take different shapes and be used for a variety of purposes. An inclusive definition has been provided by Emerson et al who explain fieldnotes as "accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner" (1995: 4-5). But Clifford (1990) warns that fieldnotes do not stop short at descriptions. They also include inscriptions, jotting down words or phrases as mnemonic devices, and transcriptions, recording the participants' own words. This mixture of writing is indicative of my fieldnotes since they vary from incomplete sentences, quotations taken from the field and long winded descriptions of literacy events.

Emerson et al argue that fieldnotes should always be the result of deep 'immersion' in the research field and draw four implications from the understanding of ethnography "as the inscription of participatory experience" (1995: 11). They refer to the whole process of writing fieldnotes as "inscriptions of social life and social discourse" (ibid: 8). Here, I will refer to these four implications in order to describe the details of writing fieldnotes in this study.

The first one is the inseparability of research methods and research findings. By this Emerson et al argue that what is observed and what is finally treated as data or findings are closely linked and cannot be understood separately. Therefore, the importance of reflexivity is again foregrounded here as the only way leading to a complete understanding of the data. To this end, reflexive accounts form a large part of my fieldnotes. I have recorded in many instances the difficulties encountered at different points of the research and my reactions to them. Every time I left the field, I had a new idea about how to proceed, what to ask and how to interpret the findings. In this way, when I later read my fieldnotes for the purposes of analysis, I had a complete picture of the data and the conditions that generated it.

The second implication is the pursuit of indigenous meanings. Even though as a researcher I was interested in revealing the NVQ candidates' understandings of their literacy practices, I could not help filtering them through my own. I understand writing fieldnotes as a process of recontextualisation, as discussed in chapter 3. The participants' realities, actions and words are lifted out from their original context and transferred to my notebook, taking a new form and a new meaning. This is the reason why I did not treat my fieldnotes just as mnemonic devices or descriptive mechanisms, but rather as part of the active process of interpretation and sense-making of the data.

The third implication of writing fieldnotes as a result of deep immersion to the field is their contemporaneous nature. This comes as a result of their immediate relation with the context and their interpretive nature, described above. Writing fieldnotes in retrospect would result in the dissociation of meaning and context, as it would be difficult to remember what initiated each action and reaction. Also, long participation in the research field could result in the loss of first impressions and feelings, as the researcher would become more familiar with the setting and the people. For all these reasons, I wrote my fieldnotes at a contemporaneous pace to the research. Even though such a process is not always easy, as it requires taking a distance from the field and the activities taking place, in my case this was not an issue. Writing was an inherent part of the participants' activities and I was just imitating them. Both as an observer and later on as a participant, I sometimes used a voice recorder to capture the interaction between the candidates and clients. However, recordings cannot replace fieldnotes and this was why I jotted down words or phrases immediately after each treatment.

The final implication, discussed by Emerson et al, is the importance of including interactional details in the fieldnotes. In this way, they argue, the researcher can become sensitive to the relations between methods and substance, come closer to the participants and identify processes in events. There are many sets of interactions included in my fieldnotes, including conversation between candidates, candidates and tutors and candidates and me. Interaction was also captured in some instances with the help of the recording device. In the college this was done mainly in order to record the interaction between candidates and their clients before and after the treatment and in the warehouse I recorded the first sessions between tutors and candidates.

4.4.3 Interviews

It has been argued that participant observation and interviews go hand in hand and that very often data gathered from observation in reality originates from informal interviews in the research field (Fontana & Frey, 2003). These interviews are closer to informal conversations with the participants, in which case the researcher asks questions about the activities s/he observes. Coming into the field as an outsider, somebody who had no previous experience on FE or NVQs, my research was rich with such informal conversations. Wishing to understand what goes on when developing an NVQ portfolio, I kept asking any available participant questions about what they do and the reason why they do it. This form of informal interaction with the research participants helped me learn a lot about the nature of NVQ portfolios and the candidates' attitudes towards them.

However, a large part of my research was also dedicated to a more structured way of asking questions and closer to what we call an 'interview'. All in all, I conducted sixteen interviews. These include two interviews with tutors, one in the college and one in the warehouse, two interviews with Kevin, one interview with Derry and one interview with each NVQ candidate in the college apart from Sadie who kept cancelling our appointments and I therefore decided not to insist upon her.

Even though planned, the interviews were not strictly structured. Given the exploratory aim of this research to find out about people's literacy practices when developing a portfolio, I considered that I ought to ask people about what I wanted to know, but allow them to reply in a spontaneous way, hoping that they would introduce new themes they considered relevant to our discussion. In terms of classification, such loose interviews have been called semi-structured. Davies (1999: 95) explains that semi-structured interviews are "formally bracketed...set off in time and space" and follow some sort of interview schedule.

The combination of semi-structured interviews with participant observation in my study is a frequent one and such interviews have also been called 'ethnographic'. Sherman Heyl argues that ethnographic interviewing takes place in:

> those projects in which researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.
>
> (2001: 369)

Conducting the interviews after a long period of observations and participant observations, I had already established such relations with the participants so that the interviews became natural and relaxing occasions.

Before I move on to describing the specifics of my interviews, I will briefly discuss here the epistemology that defines the undertaking of interview research in this study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discuss the role of the interviewer and his/her relationship with knowledge using a useful metaphor: the interviewer can be seen either as a miner or as a traveller. Being a miner the interviewer digs in order to find knowledge that is buried and waiting to be found, whereas as a traveller the interviewer is out on a long journey and explores new places and people. The miner-interviewer discovers pre-existing knowledge, whereas the traveller-interviewer co-constructs knowledge as the journey evolves. This second stance, the traveller-interviewer, is in line with the approach of reflexive ethnography, adopted in this study, in which the ethnographer is the main research instrument and keeps turning to oneself when collecting and when interpreting the findings. Travelling in the new worlds of NVQs, I co-constructed knowledge with the research participants and I now report it in this thesis. My interviews with the NVQ candidates and their tutors take meaning only when seen as the result of our interaction (Davies, 1999). Therefore, I do not claim that these interviews represent the objective truth (if such thing really exists), but rather they are the result of my interaction with the participants and our combined effort to seek one version of the truth.

The interview questions are a result of the research questions a researcher seeks to answer. Therefore the first thing I did when developing my interview plans was to concentrate on the thematic focus of the research. Considering that literacy practices can be discussed in terms of tangible literacy events and that it is a notion that invites more 'how' and 'what' questions rather than 'why', I decided it was a good place to start from. Questions about identity are usually difficult to phrase and to answer and I soon realised that my questions regarding the candidates' identity construction would have to be answered by me during the analysing stage of the research. My interview questions therefore were centred around facts and behaviour, but I also tried to elicit directly or indirectly the participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding their literacy practices (Robson, 2002).

After locating the research focus and deciding upon the type of questions, I had to move on to the designing stage. Given that the candidates in the warehouse and those in the college worked under very different circumstances for their NVQs, I designed two different interview plans. The first interviews took place in the warehouse. In order to design the interview plan, I broke down the research questions relevant to the warehouse candidates into smaller themes and for each one of these themes I brainstormed a number of questions. The result was a large number of questions which I then had to refine. Using this interview plan with the NVQ candidates (see appendix 1) in the warehouse I realised that even though I got all the information I wanted, the flow of the interviews was not good enough, as there were many repetitions and overlapping questions.

For this reason, when designing the questions for the candidates in the college I decided to change my technique. In this case, I created three main focus themes (reading and writing practices, portfolio and logbook) and I came up with questions for each one of them. The result was a smaller interview plan which, when used, produced more natural conversations and still thematically focused (appendix 2). The interview plan used with the tutors was also constructed in a similar way (see appendix 3). What is important to stress is that these interview plans were always used as guidance. Overall, my interview questions changed considerably from the first to the last stages of my research and I find this to have worked in a positive way: my knowledge regarding the participants and their activities was continually changing and therefore the questions kept improving.

Another decision to be taken was the role I should adopt while interviewing. In the dilemma of whether I should restrict my role strictly to asking questions or whether I should participate as an active member of the discussion, I opted for the second alternative. Engaging in a discussion that only one member is self-disclosing does not describe me neither as a person nor as a researcher. Davies (1999) argues that ethnographic interviewing requires the interviewer to participate in the discussion and in this way make it easier for the interviewee to open up. I found this the most productive way to carrying interviews and I soon came to realise that expressing my own opinions encouraged the participants to share their beliefs. In the college, conducting interviews with participants of the same sex and in some cases similar age made self-disclosure even easier. Fontana and Frey argue that "the sex of the interviewer and that of the respondents do make a difference" (2003: 82) and go on to quote Denzin (1989: 116) who states that "gender filters knowledge". Even though the content of the interviews was not gender specific, the fact that we were all women and most of us in our mid-twenties brought us closer and made it easier for them to talk to me.

Finally, it is important to mention that not all interviews were without their difficulties. The interviews in the college, for example, were conducted amidst many complexities. The candidates were always very busy and not all could make fixed appointments with me. Some would rather prefer that I was around and if they had time for the interview they would let me know. Most of the interviews took place in the college cafeteria, for want of an alternative quiet place. As a result, most of my recordings are full of background noises and music. One of the interviews took place in the library and both I and the interviewee had to whisper. In my interview with

Emily, my recorder stopped working for no apparent reason and I had to continue the interview while at the same time taking notes. Hillier and Jameson (2003) discuss the difficulties of interviewing people in their houses and rightly predict that there will always be a child, a husband, a pet or a phone call interrupting the interview. This was the case during my interview with Nadia at her house. Even though visiting a participant's house and witnessing their everyday lives was very interesting, it made the interview process very difficult. Added to this was the fact that, to my regret, I somehow ended up losing the recording of the interview and had to retrieve the content from my notes and my memory. Even though not disastrous for the overall research, all these difficulties played their part in the interview research process and at the same time gave me valuable lessons for the future.

4.4.4 Focus group interviews

After several months of participant observation in the college, I decided to conduct a focus group as a means of initiating a discussion about the texts dealt with by the beauty therapy candidates for the purposes of their portfolio. A useful definition of a focus group comes from Krueger who describes it as "a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (1994: 6). The word 'discussion' in this definition is of particular interest, as it is interaction here again that generates the data (Myers, 1998). However contrary to the interviews, where the information created is a result of the interaction between participant and researcher, in focus groups interaction takes place mainly between the participants.

Conducting my research in a site with twelve participants, a focus group was an ideal way to bring them all together and discuss the NVQ portfolio. In focus groups there is usually a minimum of four and a maximum of twelve participants (Litosseliti, 2003). I judged that twelve was a large number that would not allow all opinions to be heard and would make it difficult for me to moderate the group. Therefore I decided to have two focus groups with six participants in each one of them. However, as previously discussed, ethnographic research can never be fully planned and predicted. To this end, whereas I managed to have six people in the first group, only two showed up in the second one. Not wishing to lose the information I would gain from these two participants I went on with the focus group, but the very small number of the participants changed the nature of the conversation. However, the discussion generated was very useful and it has been extensively used in my analysis.

The initial reasoning for conducting the focus groups was to generate a lively discussion between the NVQ candidates that would lead them to express themselves in a spontaneous and emotional way. In that sense, the focus groups were a success, as the candidates were asked to talk about their opinions on the texts they used during the massage treatments as well as on the logbook used exclusively for the portfolio (see chapter 6), and they engaged in a meaningful discussion and explored their opinions and attitudes towards these texts. Later on, I realised that the focus groups were useful for two more reasons. The first was that they gave the opportunity for participation to one of the candidates who was reluctant to be interviewed on her own (Robson, 2002). This was Sadie, who later on in the research avoided being interviewed individually.

The second advantage of the focus groups was that the participants felt at ease to express their negative feelings towards the logbook and some features of the other texts. Being and acting within an institutional framework, the candidates were not sure to what extent they could reveal their true feelings. Mutual support between them enabled them to leave their reserves behind, open up and express their negative feelings regarding the logbook, discuss the pros and cons of other texts and reveal their frustration with their tutors for not giving them enough guidance.

Contrary to my participant role as an interviewer, my role as a moderator was more neutral. According to Litosseliti, a moderator "does not interview people, hold a position of power or influence, or inhibit the flow of ideas by intervening" (2003: 44). To this end, rather than engaging in full interaction with the participants, I introduced themes and asked them to comment upon them by interacting with each other. These themes were a result of a questionnaire I had constructed with questions regarding the portfolio and the texts which they would include in it (see appendix 4). I also tried to be supportive and show interest in the participants' ideas. Prompts and probes were systematically used as a strategy to make participants elaborate on the topics discussed. In a study of the role of interaction in focus groups, Myers argues that "the moderator introduces topics, but participants shift, close, and interpret these topics" (1998: 105). This is a good description of what took place in my focus groups, where I continually introduced topics and the participants appropriated them by expanding upon, changing or closing them.

However, my role as a moderator and interaction with participants was not unproblematic. The first problem was that I had not had the chance to conduct a pilot study. The participants of this research were very specific and the focus group could not be tested on another random group of people. Thus, I was not able to foresee the problems that would arise. Being an inexperienced focus group moderator, I was not always in control of the flow of discussion. The participants all knew each other well and as a result there were lively discussions on other topics as well as on those introduced by me. Very often the topics were broadened and the participants ended up talking about many other aspects of their course rather than the portfolio. Again here, Myer's above description of participants as shifting and interpreting topics is relevant, but sometimes their shifts put the whole task in danger. Later on at the stages of analysis, I realised that some of the topics the participants introduced and which at that point I considered irrelevant were actually directly linked with the portfolio development.

4.4.5 Document collection

Throughout the research, I made attempts to collect any kind of text that was intended to be included in the portfolio. In the warehouse, the document collection took place after the candidates had completed the portfolio and gave me permission to take it with me and make copies of those texts I was interested in. In the college, the collection of documents was parallel to the research process. Every time I observed or recorded a literacy event, e.g. the consultation process between a therapist and her client, I then made a copy of the consultation sheet used. Permission to do that was granted by both the therapist and the client. In the same way, I made copies of some case study booklets and made sure that all names were erased from the text. Finally, towards the end of the year, when the logbooks had been completed, I asked some of the candidates for permission to make copies of their logbook work. In this way, I managed to have examples from all the texts included in the portfolio and from many different portfolios.

4.5 Analysing and interpreting the data

The analysis of the data is a major theme in this reflexive account of my research project. In order for the reader to get a good insight of the arguments and the findings of this study, it is important to spell out not only the way the data were collected but, equally importantly, the way they were analysed and interpreted in order to reach their final form in the chapters of this thesis. In this section therefore, I give a detailed account of the material processes that took place after the collection of the data and I also make an attempt to provide the reader with an idea of the mental processes realised when interpreting the data.

As a result of conducting a linguistic ethnography, the data collected takes two different forms: on the one hand there is ethnographic data in the form of fieldnotes, interviews and focus groups, and on the other hand there is linguistic data in the form of texts. Even though these texts are part and parcel of the ethnographic research, my interest in their semiotic aspect is strong and therefore different tools and methods needed to be developed for a related analysis. The linguistic analysis therefore was based on models of discourse analysis which will be discussed separately from the ethnographic analysis conducted for the rest of the datasets.

4.5.1 Analysing ethnographic/qualitative data

In this section, when referring to ethnographic or qualitative data, I include the material obtained from the interviews, focus groups, observations and fieldnotes. Collection of texts is also included here but they are discussed only when the research participants make specific reference to them and are analysed as material artefacts. Cresswell (2005) argues that there are six steps involved in analysing and interpreting qualitative data: preparing and organising the data, exploring and coding the database, describing findings and forming themes, representing and reporting findings, interpreting the meaning of findings and validating the accuracy of findings. Here, I will discuss the first five of these steps in detail, leaving the issue of validity for a later section where I discuss the validity and reliability of the entire research project.

1. Preparing and organising the data

Even though it is difficult to promote good data organisation in the midst of stress and anxiety for sufficient and appropriate data collection, I made an attempt during my research to keep my data in good order. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and thus they were uploaded on my laptop immediately when I was back at my office. I kept a separate folder for each research field and saved the interviews by the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview. In this way, I was able to retrieve the interviews whenever necessary. Neglect to upload one of the interviews as soon as I had access to my laptop led to the loss of the audio file, as I have earlier explained. The fieldnotes were treated less systematically. Because of their rough nature, only a few of the diary entries were typed. The rest of my notes remained in my diary but were equally efficiently used for my analysis.

One of the most time consuming but unavoidable tasks in the preparation for analysis was transcription of the interviews and focus groups. In order to do this I used 'Transcriber', a transcription software, available online, that makes the transcribing process faster and easier (Boudahmane, Manta, Antoine, Galliano, & Barras, 2008). Having recorded the data in a digital format enabled me to upload them immediately on the computer and then easily insert them to the software. Using 'Transcriber' I was able to segment the interviews into shorter sections, arrange a playback mode, and transcribe while listening to the segments as many times as I wanted, without taking my hands off the keyboard. I could also manage the speech turns for each new speaker, which was particularly useful in the transcription of the focus groups. In this way the task of transcribing became faster and less frustrating, even though I still had to do a lot of work distinguishing the speakers' voices from the background noise.

Apart from the technicalities there were other issues to keep in mind when transcribing. Transcribing has been argued to be not just a clerical task but rather an interpretive process (inter alia: Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Transcribing is after all another recontextualisation, changing texts from the oral to the written mode. This transfer has to be made carefully and always in accordance to the needs of the research project. In this study I was interested in the interpretation of the meaning of the interviews rather than the language used by the participants. For this reason, I transcribed the exact words of the participants but omitted linguistic details. On the other hand, I wished to capture possible jokes, irony, contentment or frustration hidden in the interviewees' expressions. To this end, I marked the points where people laughed and capitalized those words that they overstressed in their speech. I have also included false starts and self-corrections, as it is sometimes possible to find hidden meaning in such linguistic strategies. Despite the attempts to render the text close to reality, oral speech is always more lively and expressive than the written mode. As Kvale and Brinkmann argue "transcripts are impoverished, decontextualised renderings of live interview conversations" (ibid: 178). This is the reason why, during my analysis, I often had to go back to the audio files and listen again to certain sections in order to be clear about their meaning.

2. <u>Exploring and coding the database</u>

When the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and the fieldnotes were put in order, I started the main part of the analysis. First, this involved familiarising myself with the data by reading it again and again and making draft notes. Then a more systematic coding took place, which I will describe here in detail. It is important to stress that as in all ethnographic research, the analysing process had started much earlier than the official exploring and coding took place. Every time I chose to write something down in my diary, every time I changed something in my interview questionnaire and as I was transcribing the data I was making conscious and unconscious analyses of the events.

One of the first decisions I had to take was whether to analyse the data manually or using a 'Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis System' (CAQDAS). There were many reasons that suggested a computer assisted analysis, such as the relatively large size of interviews and focus groups and the fact that I had already used such a programme before and therefore I did not have to spend time familiarising myself with its use. Weitzman (2003) argues that qualitative analysis software can help analyse data in a consistent, fast, representative and consolidating way, but it cannot do the analysis work for the researcher. Davies also explains that the most important part of the analysis takes place in the ethnographer's head and not in the computer (1999: 206). This was particularly true in my analysis, as the software used allowed me to code and later on retrieve the data, but the decisions of how and why to code the data in a specific way were all exclusive products of my thought.

Today there are many qualitative analysis programmes available and Weitzman (2003) has created a categorization according to their functions and features, starting from simple text retrievers up to conceptual network builders. The programme I used is Atlas.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development) and is categorised by Weitzman as a 'code-based theory builder'. It is a programme that allows the researcher not only to code and later on retrieve segments of the data, but also to locate the relations among codes, create classifications and visual representations of the coded data and in this way make links with theory. The functions I mainly used in this software was coding and retrieving data and less frequently finding relations among codes or visually representing my analysis. The main advantage I found in Atlas.ti, in comparison to other programmes, is that it does not isolate segments of speech from the context within which they were realised. This is an important feature when analysing ethnographic data, as the context of discussions and observations may influence significantly their interpretation (Davies, 1999).

Joffe and Yardley provide a good definition of coding as "taking chunks of text and labelling them as falling into certain categories, in a way that allows for later retrieval and analysis of the data" (2004: 59). After inserting the interview and focus group transcripts as well as some entries from typed fieldnotes to the Atlas.ti software, I started the coding procedure as described in the above definition. Reading each chunk of dialogue I labelled it with one or more codes, without necessarily having to code every single word in the text. The coding procedure can either be theory-driven or data-driven. That is, the codes can either be created deductively from pre-existing theory or inductively looking for patterns in the raw data. For the purposes of my research, both of these strategies were used at different stages and ended up contributing to two different chapters. The coding process for both cases will be described below.

In chapter 5 I deal with Derry, the NVQ candidate in Business and Administration working at the warehouse. The initial idea was to discuss in this chapter both research participants from the warehouse, Kevin and Derry, but Derry's analysis became too long and it seemed preferable to focus on him only. However, the interviews and fieldnotes from both participants have been coded together in the same way. Having already decided that I would use Activity Theory as a useful heuristic to analyse my data, I applied codes originating from the triangular model depicting an activity system. All the elements in the AT triangle as well as the principles shaping the theory were turned into codes. However, I soon realised that the candidates were acting within two activity systems, that of their job and that of their qualification. There was therefore a need to make this distinction clear in the codes. For example, if I coded a segment as '*community*' I had to specify whether I referred to the community of the warehouse activity system or the qualification activity system. For this reason, I duplicated the codes putting next to each one of them a W or a Q, indicating the Warehouse or the Qualification respectively. Finally, I ended up with the coding list shown in Table 1:

Communicative Sign W	Communicative Sign Q
Community W	Community Q
Contradictions W	Contradictions Q
Division of labor W	Division of labor Q
Expansion W	Expansion Q
Historicity W	Historicity Q
Material object W	Material object Q
Motive W	Motive Q
Multivoicedness W	Multivoicedness Q
Oral communication W	Oral communication Q
Other rules W	Other rules Q
Outcome W	Outcome Q
Space W	Space Q
Subject W	Subject Q
Time W	Time Q
Beliefs	
Attitudes	
Feelings	

Table 1 Coding scheme used for analysing data from the warehouse

In this coding scheme, the 'mediating tools' of an activity system have been translated into '*material objects*', '*communicative signs*' and '*oral communication*'. In this way, I was able to see not only which mediating means are used in each activity system, but also of which nature they are. Additionally, the 'rules' penetrating an activity have been narrowed down to rules concerning '*space*' and '*time*' and I have added a general category of '*other rules*' for all other instances. Finally, I have added three general codes, which do not originate from AT and do not specify one activity system only. These are: '*beliefs*', '*feelings*', '*attitudes*' and they were added due to the inherent weakness of AT to represent such elements (see section 3.5). In this way, I have coded the data in a deductive way based on AT, but I have also added inductive coding, based on my judgement that there was more information in the data, not covered by the theory used.

In chapter 6, I present the literacy practices drawn upon by NVQ candidates at college when creating their portfolio. I am also using AT as an analytic basis, but it is done in a more loose way than in the previous chapter. Having observed in detail the construction of their portfolio, I did not wish to understand only how they worked in terms of an activity system, but there was also a need to focus on their actual literacy practices when developing the portfolio and their opinions and evaluations regarding all aspects of the NVQ. Therefore, I decided to code the interviews and the focus groups inductively, driven by the raw data and see where such a path would take me. Finally, I realised that there were some general patterns appearing frequently, such as the process of developing portfolio texts, their purpose, content and design, interaction among people, collaboration and the candidates' evaluations regarding their course and the portfolio in specifically. In this way, I came up with the coding list shown in Table 2:

Collaboration/ others collaboration/ students Collaboration/ tutors
content/ case study booklets content/ consultation sheets content/logbook
Design /case study booklets design/ consultation sheets Design/ logbook
division of labor
Feelings
intended audience
interaction/ customers interaction/ students interaction/ tutors
mediation/tutor to student mediation/ student to student
process/ case study booklets process/ consultation sheets process/ logbook process/ portfolio
purpose/ case study booklets purpose/ consultation sheet purpose/ NVQ purpose/ portfolio
Self-perceptions
Space time other constraints
technology/ case studies technology/ portfolios
evaluation/ assessment evaluation/ case study booklets evaluation/ consultation sheets evaluation/ course evaluation/ language evaluation/ portfolio evaluation/ profession evaluation/ reading-writing evaluation/ statement of intent evaluation/logbooks evaluation/tracking document
current circumstances imagined futures Past experiences

Table 2 Coding scheme used for analysing data from the college

As it can be seen, this coding list is a mixture of inductive and deductive codes. Even though codes such as '*content*', '*mediation*' and '*evaluations*' were generated inductively, other codes such as '*division of labor*' and '*interaction*' were brought in by AT and the three last codes '*current circumstances*', '*imagined futures*' and '*past experiences*' were introduced from Barton et al's model of adult learners' lives (Barton et al., 2007). In this way, the coding scheme manages to cover many aspects from the candidates' literacy practices when developing their portfolios, as well as underlying information about the way their identities were constructed through this process.

3. Describing findings and forming themes

Starting from the codes described above, my aim was to reach more general categories or themes. Joffe and Yardley argue that "a theme refers to a specific pattern found in the data in which one is interested" (2004: 57). Kvale and Brinkmann also claim that the goal of a research should be "the development of categories that capture the fullness of the experiences and actins studied" (2009: 202). The development of such themes or categories therefore is the immediate step after (and sometimes during) the coding has taken place. In the case of the first coding scheme (Table 1) used for analysing the data from the warehouse participants, it soon became clear that two major categories were being developed: the activity system of the warehouse and that of the qualification. This led me to discuss Derry's actions by breaking them down to two respective sections and describing the detailed literacy practices found in each one of them. More detailed analysis of the codes showed that the two categories/activities were being developed very close to each other and, as a result, it was difficult to code some of the actions as belonging to one or the other category. This led me to include a section on the network relations among the two activity systems and discuss Derry's identity construction as he moved back and forth between them.

A first glance at Table 2 indicates the large number of codes used to analyse the data taken from the college NVQ candidates. A closer look, however, shows that the codes have already been organised in categories. Each row in this table represents a category, other being major and others minor. In the beginning, I started by coding randomly chunks of dialogue where the portfolio texts were being discussed and then I soon came to realise that they were usually discussed in terms of their development process, their purpose, content and design. These therefore became the themes or categories of the analysis and each one of them are discussed in detail in the respective chapter. Evaluations were a major part of the interviews with the candidates and because they covered a wide range of topics, for example on the logbooks, the consultation sheets etc, I discuss them separately in each respective section. Codes that fall under the categories mediation or collaboration appeared very frequently and I therefore decided that there was a need to discuss this topic extensively in a separate section. The codes on the candidates' past, present and future helped me develop the candidate profiles, provided earlier in this chapter (section 4.3.2), and gave me valuable information as to their identity construction during the NVQ course. It becomes evident, in this way, that each category of codes or theme contributed to a different section of this thesis and that some codes played a more important role than others.

4. Representing and reporting findings

The main strategy chosen for the representation of the data is description by means of case studies and inclusion of direct quotes from the participants. I make an attempt to provide inclusive but short narrations and complement my arguments with quotations from the interviews, focus groups and my fieldnotes. In this way, the narration becomes more interesting and trustworthy. Kvale and Brinkmann also argue that interview quotations "give the reader an impression of the interview conversation, and they exemplify the material used for the researcher's analysis" (2009: 279). Finally, direct quotes add to the validity of the analysis, as I demonstrate the data that led me make certain arguments and reach my conclusions.

In order to label each quote I use the Atlas.ti categorisation of texts. Each text that is inserted in the software is called a Primary Document (PD) and is given a number, e.g. PD1. The documents are inserted in 'simple text' format and the lines are numbered. When including a quotation therefore I add underneath it the PD number, as assigned to it by the programme, and the line numbers of the extracted quote. I also indicate whether the quote comes from one of the focus groups by writing 'Focus Group' or from an interview, in which case I write the name of the interviewee. As I said earlier, some of my fieldnotes have also been inserted in Atlas.ti and have been given a PD number. Fieldnotes quotes extracted from my diaries only bear the indication 'fieldnotes' and the date they were written. Finally, it is worth noting that all quotations from the data are indented and italicised in order to stand out from the rest of the text.

5. Interpreting the meaning of findings

Apart from some practical problems in analysing the data, described above, the biggest difficulty I encountered was the incompatibility of adopting an ethnographic approach to my study with making generalisations and finite interpretations. Even though the purpose of using ethnographic methods in the study of such a small group is not to reach generalised results about an entire population, it was still necessary to distance myself from the real people and settings and study the data more as an objective analyst and less as an ethnographer. Davies acknowledges this tension between "the necessary, if risky, processes of generalising and explaining" (1999: 193) and ethnographic knowledge but she also adds that it can and should be a creative tension that helps the researcher distance oneself from the field and analyse data from many different perspectives. The way I approached this tension was by focusing to a large extent on the ethnographic nature of this study and at the same time by linking it with pre-existing theory and thus gradually leading the way to my final interpretations and findings.

4.5.2 Analysing linguistic data

In this thesis, linguistic data is discussed in chapter 7, where I have used methods of critical discourse analysis to examine the language used in the logbooks provided to the NVQ candidates by the awarding bodies and the language used by the candidates in their portfolio texts. In order to do this, I have used aspects from van Leeuwen's model of analysing the representation of social actors and social actions, which was discussed in chapter 3. Here I wish to show the processes followed in order to perform such analysis.

Van Leeuwen's models for analysing social actors and social actions may initially look complicated and confusing. A careful reading, however, reveals the good structure of the model. In order to analyse the representation of social actors, I used the matrix provided in appendix 5.[4] In each row, I added the actual realisation of the representation as found in the text and the line number in the text. Then I moved on to analyse them in terms of some of the most significant categories included in the model. For each category I had to make an 'either-or' decision, for example the actor is represented as either activated or passivated. The numbers in the cells of the first raw correspond to the numbers used by van Leeuwen in his model. If there is a number next to a category (e.g. Passivated (+5)) then this indicates that if you choose this category you also have to move on to category 5. A similar matrix was used for the representation of social actions and is also available in appendix 5. The categories that were most relevant to my analysis were included in the matrix and the analysis followed the same patterns as the one described above. These matrices were useful analytic tools in that they allowed me to emphasise the major categories of the models and think in a focused and structured way.

Every single sentence in the analysed texts was inserted in the matrixes and was analysed (where possible) in terms of representation of social actors and social actions. After each text was analysed, I then moved on to counting the frequency of each category. I was interested, for example, to see how many times the candidates were activated and how many times they were passivated. The numbers reached were not analysed statistically, as this was not the purpose of the study. My aim was to

[4] This matrix has been developed by Roz Ivanič and I would like to thank her for her kindness in offering it to me as a useful analytic tool.

reach rough calculations of representation strategies for each one of the texts. The frequencies reached are reported in detail in chapter 7 in the form of tendencies and not absolute numbers.

4.6 Validity and reliability of the research project

Making claims to validity and reliability is the ultimate goal of a successful research project. In simple words, a research is valid when it has examined what it purports to examine and it is reliable when it is objective and the results are repeatable. In this section, I will bring together all the research steps described above and show how I ensured in all stages the validity and reliability of my research.

An ethnographic approach to research makes it relatively easy to provide evidence for its valid nature. Ethnography is an inherently multi-method research approach, since data is collected by means of observation, interviews, document collection and many other methods. Application of many different research methods results in the triangulation of the data that is, "the attempt to get a 'true' fix on a situation by combining different ways of looking at it or different findings" (Silverman, 2000: 177). Triangulation of the data and the findings therefore ensure the adoption of different perspectives of collecting and interpreting information and strengthen the validity claims of the research. This is particularly true in my study, where a variety of data collection methods and a satisfying number of theoretical models have been employed to collect and analyse the data.

Moving on, Sanjek (1990) provides three additional strategies and/or criteria of ensuring validation of a qualitative research project. Firstly, he argues for the significance of theoretical candour in the research. Making explicit both major theories that underpin the study and terrain-specific theories, is of utmost importance in order to show the initial purpose of the research and its links to related research in the discipline. In this way, the researcher manages "to give ethnography meaning and purpose and to avoid opportunistic study of 'everything'" (ibid: 198). This validation criterion is answered in this thesis mainly by the inclusion and extended discussion of theoretical issues underpinning the study in chapter 3, but also by the theoretical argumentation and discussion that permeates all chapters. In this way, the reader can relate my research to the theory that initiated it as well as to the theory created by it.

The second validation criterion provided by Sanjek is the clear description of the ethnographer's path. He argues that readers would be in a more advantageous position if they knew in detail the circumstances that led the ethnographer to make one choice over another, to meet new informants and to adopt new research methods. This criterion is also answered in this thesis by the inclusion of the present chapter, where I have made an attempt to provide a detailed account of my methodological route. By means of this chapter, I have proved that the methodological choices I made were not random and opportunistic, but most of the time they were a result of careful consideration and planning.

Finally, Sanjek argues that the inclusion of fieldnote evidence is an efficient method of ensuring data and argumentation validity. Writing within the field of anthropology, he refers to fieldnotes only as this is the main data collection method. However, for validating ethnographic research in its whole, I would argue that data from all kinds of research methods should be added. Direct quotes from interviews, focus groups and fieldnotes have been extensively used in this thesis (discussed above in section 4.5.1).

Validation of the research is an important function that such quotes serve. In this way, the readers can have an immediate experience of my data and comprehend the mental route I followed from the row data to the theoretical arguments I have made.

Ensuring the reliability of a research project is an ongoing process and requires continuous cross-checking of the information gathered and the interpretations developed (Davies, 1999). Also, similar to validity, checks on reliability can be applied to many different stages of the study. For example, in my study I made a conscious effort to ensure reliability of my interpretation of the data by frequent discussions with the participants, including both the NVQ candidates and their tutors. Having been clear from the beginning about the purposes of my research, I was able to ask them straightforwardly whether they agreed or disagreed with some of my results. This was a particularly helpful technique as it often gave me insights into my misled assumptions.

Reliability of the interview process, including the focus groups, was ensured by avoiding the use of leading questions that would influence the participants to answer in a certain way (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also made use of similar, but not identical, interview plans. My aim was to ask the participants similar questions, but faithful to the nature of ethnography and semi-structured interviews, I did not wish my interviews to take the form of a questionnaire. Rather, as discussed in section 4.4.3, I interviewed participants in a conversational way, keeping in mind that "a strong emphasis on reliability may counteract creative innovations and variability" (ibid: 245). To this end, Davies (1999) draws our attention to the possibility that consistent answers can often be artificial and deliberate on the part of the participants, who may not wish to reveal their true opinions or facts about a situation. In my study, such a danger was avoided by making clear to the participants the research aims and my non-dependence on the college and the awarding bodies. After all, their answers to the interview questions did exhibit patterns but they were not identical. Finally, I tried to ensure reliability of the transcription process by sending the transcripts back to the interviewees and asking for comments. This process did not result in many changes to the transcripts, but it reassured me about the reliability of the transcription and also served ethical issues, which will be discussed in the following section.

Finally, reliability of a study can also be checked between more than one researcher. This is a common practice in positivist sciences, but its use is doubted and criticised in ethnographic research. Ball (1990) argues that if two researchers are doing the same qualitative research they are likely to reach similar but not identical results because of a difference in emphasis and orientation. He adds that "Qualitative research cannot be made researcher-proof" (ibid: 167) and therefore, when it comes to it, it does not make sense to discuss issues of researcher reliability. In their discussion of linguistic ethnography, Tusting and Maybin also argue that "the involvement of the researcher in social action inevitably changes the language practices under study" (2007: 579) and it is therefore not possible to talk about objective truth found by all researchers when conducting similar research. For all these reasons, even though I have discussed my data and my interpretations with other researchers and have gained valuable insights by their contributions, I do not claim that another researcher would end up with this exact thesis as a final research product. It is likely that they would reach some of my results, but probably this would be done by following a different methodological path and/or by stressing different theoretical issues and therefore employing different argumentation. Their research would most likely be as reliable as mine, but the final product would not be the same.

4.7 Ethical considerations

In social research, the question of ethics is a crucial one since it is human beings that form the object of research. In ethnography, ethical research becomes even more significant, due to the role of the researcher as an instrument, and the close relations developed between researcher and research participants. In this section, I will discuss some of the most important ethical considerations taken into account in the process of this research. In their discussion on conducting research in Further Education, Hillier and Jameson argue that:

> ethics encompasses those principles and standards of good conduct researchers should observe to ensure that research is morally justifiable, reasonable, beneficial to educational purposes, is carried out well and causes no harm to anyone or anything.
>
> (2003: 83)

In order to achieve such standards, I had to pay attention to a series of factors from the very beginning right to the end of the research project. The most important of these factors are: obtaining an informed consent from the participants, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality and non-traceability and taking into account power issues that might come into play. These factors are discussed below in detail.

Obtaining informed consent from the participants is the first important step towards ethical research. This is a form that research participants sign in order to show that they understand the nature of the research and they agree to take part in it. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) have argued that the right of informed consent altered the power relations between researcher and participant, in that both parties can have a say in the nature of the research. Even though this is an ideal situation and it is not always the case, it is true that the use of informed consent has given participants more power to negotiate certain features of the research. In my study, an informed consent form was given to the candidates in our very first meeting. In this form (see appendix 6), I briefly explain the purpose of the study and my research questions. I also add information about my methodological tools, telling people that they would be observed and probably be asked to take part in focus groups and interviews. Additionally, I refer to the possible uses of such research and I go on to state that participation is voluntary and that they are free to refuse to answer questions or withdraw at any stage of the research. I go on to reassure them for their anonymity and ask them to choose a pseudonym. Finally, I state that the findings of the research will be available to anyone interested and I provide them with my contact details for any further questions.

I consider anonymity and confidentiality two crucial factors for the ethical conduct of this research. Even though the subject of NVQ portfolios seems to be one that is neutral and does not raise many sensitive issues, this did not prove to be the case. In the college setting, there were conflicts between NVQ candidates and their tutors and I often found myself caught in a position between them. Having achieved the trust of both parties, they seemed eager to talk to me about their feelings of frustration or resentment against one or the other person. Some of the candidates even revealed to me their positive or negative opinions of other candidates in the group. Confidentiality therefore was an issue of morality and most of the information gathered was not even included in this thesis. However, some aspects of such comments, particularly the ones having to do with relations between tutors and candidates, are relevant to the development of the portfolio and have therefore been included in this final report of the research. It was important therefore to make sure that not only the anonymity but also the non-traceability of candidates was ensured. For this reason, all names of candidates, clients and tutors have been altered and no specific information is provided as to the name of the college or the warehouse where the research took place.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the issues of power present in all social research. Ristock and Penell argue that "power is always present in the complex reciprocal relationship between the researchers and the research participant" (1996: 68). In this study, I had power over the researchers in the sense that I was the one who decided on the topic to be investigated, the methods to be used and the kind of analysis to be followed. However, I made efforts to include the participants as much as possible in all stages of the research. To this end, I had informal conversations with them about my findings (discussed in the previous section on reliability) and asked them to provide feedback after each focus group or interview about the content of the questions and the general feeling of participating in such a process. I also emailed them the focus group and interview transcripts and asked them to send me back any comments or objections they might have. Finally, I sent chapters of the analysis to those that expressed an interest and reassured them that their criticism would be welcomed. I decided not to send the final product to all participants as almost two years had gone by since the end of the data collection and I had lost contact with some of them.

What is worth mentioning here is that during the research I very often felt that power was in the hands of the participants, rather than in mine. In the beginning of the research, the NVQ candidates possessed more knowledge than I did on NVQs and portfolios and it was up to them to explain to me what was going on. In the warehouse, the research was conducted in the participants' workplace and I felt more like a stranger, whereas they seemed to feel more at ease. In the college, the candidates had already formed a community and, when I entered in it, I felt like an intruder. It was particularly difficult to get them to trust me or sometimes, I felt, even to like me. The additional issues of English not being my native language and being much younger than some of them made me believe that I was losing the status and credibility a researcher should have. Despite all these factors, the research proceeded in a productive and successful way and I managed to get the candidates to trust me and respect me. However, it is worth making this point here, as it usually believed that the researcher is the only holder of power in a social research situation.

4.8 Conclusion

As a final note, I would like to bring together all the issues examined in this chapter, by introducing the four aspects of ethnographic research when examining literacy, as discussed by Barton and Hamilton (1998). In their research of literacy practices in a local community, they argue for the need for specific research methods in order to address the complexities of studying literacy as embedded in people's everyday lives. They have come up with four useful principles underpinning such research and my aim here is to show the way this study of NVQ portfolios has made use of these principles. Firstly, Barton and Hamilton argue for the need to study literacy in real life settings. My study has taken place in college classrooms and workplace seminar rooms. I observed real people acting in real situations and did not stage any of the literacy events described in this thesis. Secondly, an ethnographic study of literacy should be holistic. Rather than focusing exclusively on the development of the NVQ portfolio, I kept records of a variety of activities taking place in the field. Considering that literacy is a highly contextualised phenomenon, focusing on the development of the portfolio only would tell me very little about the literacy practices drawn upon when dealing with it. What I needed was to capture all interaction, attitudes and behaviours taking place in the research field and thus reach results about the portfolio and the identity development of the candidates. Participant observation therefore was the best tool available for such a holistic approach to the research.

The third principle underpinning ethnographic study of literacy is its multi-method nature. In this study, a variety of research methods were used in order to gather information and in each one of them I employed new techniques to approach my research questions. In this way, I managed to obtain maximum data and make claims to a valid research. Finally, Barton and Hamilton argue that "ethnography is interpretative and it aims to represent the participants' perspectives" (ibid: 58). For this reason it is necessary to have the participants' voices heard by including in the final reports their actual words and meanings. Reading the following chapters it will become evident that this study is rich in participants' voices, and this was done as an attempt to let the data speak for itself.

Having provided a complete theoretical and methodological background of this thesis, I will now proceed to the main analytical chapters. As a concluding remark, it is worth mentioning that even though reflexivity is only discussed in detail in this chapter, in reality I have intended it to permeate the whole thesis, sometimes in perceptible and sometimes in invisible ways.

5 Network relations and boundary crossing between two activity systems

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the case of Derry, a warehouse administrative employee who had signed up for an NVQ level 2 on Business and Administration. A combination of the conceptual framework of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and Activity Theory (AT) will be attempted here, in order to give a complete account of Derry's literacy practices while performing his job tasks and when working for his NVQ. The aim of this chapter is to provide an answer to the first research question of this thesis:

> What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios in the workplace? Are these practices newly acquired or do they relate to the candidates' work practices?

In order to answer the first part of the question, I discuss Derry's work for his qualification as one distinct activity system and introduce the people involved in it, their mediating means and all other elements involved in an activity system, as discussed in section 3.4.2. And in order to answer the second part of the question, I examine his workplace practices also as an activity system. Treating Derry's two sites of action, his workplace and his qualification work, as two distinct activity systems enables me to examine them in depth and then proceed to comparing the elements included in them and reaching results on their interaction and interdependence. Such an analysis also reveals information about Derry's identity formation while developing the portfolio and this chapter therefore also provides an answer to the third research question of the study:

How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed by the literacy practices in which they participate when developing a portfolio?

This question will be answered here with a focus on NVQ candidates who work for their qualification on a work basis.

The chapter starts with a discussion on Derry's workplace activity system. This is introduced first, as it is the larger of the two activities and Derry has been participating in it longer. Following AT's triangle (see section 3.4.2), I start by discussing each element in it in relation to Derry's workplace. Then, the activity is discussed in terms of the principles underpinning it, that is, multivoicedness, historicity, contradictions and expansion. In that way, Derry's literacy practices in his world of work are gradually revealed. What follows is a similar analysis, but this time on the activity system of Derry's qualification process, always with a view to showing what literacy practices he draws upon when building an NVQ portfolio. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the networking relations of the two activities. In this section, I show how Derry acts within a polycontextual environment and that he continually crosses the boundaries from one context to another. This boundary-crossing results in the creation of a third space where the two contexts merge and new hybrid literacy practices are created. Polycontextuality and boundary-crossing also have an impact on Derry's identity. Therefore in the last section of the chapter, I discuss the discursive formation and reformation of Derry's identity as another significant consequence of the interrelation of the two activities.

5.2 The workplace activity system

5.2.1 Subject(s)

Even though in most workplaces there is more than one subject, for the purposes of my analysis I consider Derry to be the primary subject of the activity system. Derry was a man in his early forties working in the administrative branch of the warehouse. The duties in his post were multiple, but his main role in the company was to receive defective products (mainly clothes and shoes), returned by retailers or individual customers to the warehouse, and to assess them for faults. If he decided that a product was faulty then the company would have to reimburse the retailers. On the contrary, if he found that the problem was not the company's fault then he informed the retailers that the product would be returned to them without any further compensation. This was an administrative post with many responsibilities, as Derry was constantly mediating between the interests of the company and those of the retailers. He had been in this post for the past seventeen years after having worked in numerous other jobs, mostly manual. So far he had not obtained any qualifications or degrees, as he started working straight after school.

5.2.2 Object

Leontiev (1978) has described the object as the key to understanding an activity and has argued that the object of an activity is driven by people's needs. These needs can also be identified with what Kaptelinin (2005) describes as the 'motive' of an activity as opposed to the object (see discussion in section 3.4.2). I have found this distinction very useful as it applies particularly well in this case study. Like any other person, Derry's motivation for participating in any work activity was his wish to cover his financial needs. It was this motive that had led him to look for a job right after school and the same motive that had made him apply for a position in this particular warehouse seventeen years ago. Some secondary motives could have been the need for creativity, socialising, etc.

When subtracting the motive from the concept of the object, what remains is the goal, the tangible or intangible targets subjects set within an activity. When analysing such a long standing and complicated activity as a workplace, it is evident that the object will have taken many shapes and will continue changing in time. Therefore, Derry's object can vary from his daily work targets (e.g. updating his department's information boards) to monthly targets (e.g. learning how to use new software) and even to yearly targets (e.g. increase the speed and quality of the product assessment procedure). In this case, the object becomes a synonym of Derry's work duties. Therefore, assessing the faulty products, dealing with discrepancies, processing the stock that goes back to the warehouse, and updating the system were some of Derry's objects in the workplace activity system. The object here is being constantly reshaped and with it the activity takes new forms and new meanings.

5.2.3 Tools

When examining the mediating tools of the workplace activity system, it is possible to see the rich inventory of literacy events Derry drew upon, in order to achieve his objectives. Correspondence occupied a major part of his work tasks. When receiving the faulty products, he read the accompanying letter in order to find out the alleged problem. If he agreed that it was a valid return then he had to credit the retailer or the consumer in the system. If he thought it was an invalid return, then he had to process a letter on his computer, add his comments and then match this letter with the correspondence that came with the product and return it all together to the retailer.

Correspondence via email was also frequent. This is how Derry described the way he dealt with discrepancies:

> *for instance, the RA number that the products come back on that... be for five pairs, we may only receive four pairs then therefore it will go in as a discrepancy and we'll find out in the system if it is the customer service representative it belongs to with their account number, and I would e-mail them with the discrepancy that we've only received four pairs and the RA is five pairs or vice versa. And then that person will correspond with my information, receive my information and contact the retailer and then the RA number so there's no discrepancies.*
>
> Derry PD 1, 52-61

Other than correspondence, Derry worked with specialized computer software where he logged in all his actions regarding the received products and the discrepancies. To use this software, he needed to know the protocol numbers for the products as well as the meaning of various codes (for example, if a product is status 41 it means that it is already returned in the warehouse). Software was also used when processing the stock that was returned to the warehouse and also in order to communicate internally with other branches or with the central offices of the company.

Finally, updating information boards was one way that Derry communicated information to other colleagues in his department. On these boards he usually put up the department's daily figures as well as the daily measurement sheet. Everything that went on the notice board had to be copied and kept in a file cabinet.

D: we have a daily brief every single day telling you what the figures are, what's going to be picked up so like that we get to know what the whole place is doing, not just our own department, we know the whole picture you see, that's the idea of the briefs, to have them on a daily basis so that's read out, and as I said there's the notice board in the entrance so if anybody comes in they can see what's what or if there are any questions they should ask...should be in some details and, you know tell them what it all means...the notice board

Z: OK

D: And each department has got a notice board. If I was to look up at somebody else's notice board I wouldn't probably that much...I wouldn't have a great knowledge of it because I don't know about how the department runs, you know what I mean, I need more insight to understand it properly.

Derry PD1, 392-411

This extract shows the importance of the information put up in notice boards, but also how this information was only restricted to 'insiders' and excluded those who did not have a clear understanding of the tasks and responsibilities of each department respectively.

When referring to communicative signs, it is also important to take into consideration the oral interaction taking place within the activity system. In Derry's account of his work practices, he referred a couple of times to phone calls made by a secretary to the retailers to inform them about their product. However, these phone calls were always complemented with paperwork and they did not stand alone as a formal way of communicating. In addition, this practice had changed and there were now no phone calls between retailers and the warehouse (at least formally). The oral mode of communication should also be present amongst Derry and his colleagues, however he did not refer to it during the interview and I did not have the chance to observe such a practice in his workplace.

So far I have presented a picture of the semiotic mediating artifacts that Derry uses while performing his job tasks. However, as discussed in section 3.4.2, the tools in an activity system are not restricted to signs but equally refer to the material objects present in any activity. In Derry's case, the list of material artifacts is a long one and I will mention here only those that he referred to during the interview. First there are the actual products that he assessed, shoes and clothes. The whole process of returning the products from and to the warehouse is also highly materially mediated. Apart from the correspondence, which I described above, Derry mentioned specific envelopes, prepaid bags and parcels that he used in order to complete the transfer. These are important artifacts because, as I will show later, when the transfer system changed, the use of these objects changed as well, causing contradictions and expansion in the activity. In addition, there were objects such as barcode scanning devices, file cabinets, shelves and boxes.

Finally, the textually mediated nature of Derry's workplace can be seen by the large number of material objects that are also literacy mediating artifacts. In my code-assisted analysis, this can be seen by the frequent co-occurrence[5] of the codes

[5] Co-occurrence refers to parts of the transcript that have been tagged with more than one code.

'communicative sign W' and 'material object W'.[6] More specifically, the code 'communicative sign W' occurs 36 times in the data[7] and the code 'material object W' occurs 21 times. A query on the amount of overlaps between these two codes shows that there are 19 co-occurrences, meaning that 19 out of the 21 material objects are also coded as communicative signs. Most of these instances are texts that also have a material entity, such as letters, catalogues, barcodes, slips, as well as posters, notice boards, etc. Below is an example of an extract that has been double-coded:

> *I inspect the goods day to day but I won't actually return the goods until a week later because **the paperwork** has gone to the people in EWA they see it's an invalid return, then those people will process **the correspondence**, they then send the **correspondence** out separately to the consumers saying it's not a valid return for such and such a reason going after my comments. Meanwhile while they've got that **correspondence** with the consumer I still have the product here. I hold it back for several days so that when I do send the product back, I send it back with the **compliments slip** and then the idea is that they receive the product and they already have the **correspondence** previously.*
>
> Derry PD1, 315-327

In the above extract, the 'paperwork', the 'correspondence' and the 'compliments slip', mentioned by Derry, are coded as both signs and objects. They are primarily

[6] Note that the insertion of the letter 'W' next to the code is the sign used to refer to the 'workplace activity system'. This was discussed in detail in chapter 3, section 3.5.1

[7] Note that I do not refer to the total of my data but only to the Primary Documents relating to Derry's case study. Namely these are the interview transcript and my fieldnotes from one of his meetings with his NVQ tutor.

texts but their materiality is also of great significance, as it is their mobility that gives meaning to the whole activity. It is worth noting here that e-mails are also double-coded as materially and textually mediating artifacts. The reason for perceiving e-mails as material is because of their mobility but also because of the various things we can do with them, e.g. delete them, forward them, recover them, alter their content, etc, similarly to what we can do with texts on paper.

One more thing that is important in the above extract is Derry's vivid description of the way texts and material objects work together towards realizing the object of the activity, which here was to notify the consumers about the decision made on their product. First he sent the letter (text/object) with his decision to the central offices, they sent it to the consumers, and it is only then that Derry could return the actual product (object) to the consumers along with a complementary slip (text/object). Texts and objects interacted in a very specific order in order to mediate between Derry, the central offices and the consumers.

5.2.4 Community

So far in my analysis, I have mentioned several persons or organizations that participated in the same workplace activity system as Derry did. These can be classified into two categories: those who worked in the warehouse with Derry and those outside of it. In the first category, I include Derry's colleagues, but not every single person in the warehouse. The people who form the community of an activity should work towards the same objective. It is therefore only the colleagues who were in the same department and whose job tasks were related to those of Derry that formed the community of his workplace activity system. Of course we could assume a broader system where all the employees of the specific warehouse form its community, or even all employees working for the specific company everywhere in the world. However, the analysis of such a broad system is not functional and does not serve any purpose in this case study.

In the second category, there were the retailers and individual consumers with whom Derry communicated frequently, in order to inform them about his decisions on their faulty products. In addition, part of the community were some employees in the central offices of the warehouse, who were in constant contact with Derry and with the retailers. Finally, the community is completed by the management departments, whose decisions and guidance influenced directly the shape of the activity system.

All the participants in the activity system had a direct or indirect impact on Derry's literacy practices. It is with the colleagues and the retailers that Derry communicated in oral and written forms and together they negotiated the meaning of their texts and gave them new shapes and functions. On the other hand, it was the managers of the company that defined the actions that every participant in the activity should get involved with. Resistance from the part of the participants in the activity system will be discussed later in this chapter, when I examine the contradictions and expansion of the system.

5.2.5 Rules

In section 3.4.2, I showed that the rules of an activity system mediate between the subject and the community. All activities are shaped by rules, otherwise they would not be established activities but rather random actions. However, in a workplace the significance of the rules is exaggerated since, in the majority of cases, it is not a place that subjects act with free will. People at workplaces obey rules set by the management. The same happens with Derry, whose post was somewhere in the middle of the hierarchical scale in the warehouse. Rules can either be explicit or tacit and they permeate all sections and participants in a workplace. It would therefore not be possible to describe here all the underlying rules in Derry's workplace. As an example of these rules, I will describe here the procedure I had to go through every time I wanted to meet Derry.

As I said earlier, I met Derry during one of his one-hour sessions with his NVQ tutor. This hour was allocated to him by the management as time dedicated to FE. When I asked to have a second meeting with him only, he explained that my claim would have to go through first his supervisor and then the human resources department. This is because Derry would have to take some time off work in order to meet me and this could not be done without official permission. So, when he got his supervisor's consent he sent me an email and then I had to contact the human resources department and let them know about this agreement. The staff member I contacted in the human resources had to make sure she could find a room in the warehouse for our meeting, and once everything was settled she gave me the final permission to meet Derry.

The above is just one simple example of the hundreds of rules every employee in the warehouse has to follow. Rules in a workplace are usually rigid and failure to obey them can result in eviction from the activity system. Also it is interesting that in the workplace, rules are set both by people participating in the system but also by people outside of it. The first ones are usually more flexible and easier to manipulate. For example, when some months later I wanted to arrange a meeting with another employee in the warehouse, I contacted the human resources department but they informed me that the staff member I used to make arrangements with was not working there anymore. The new person told me that there was no need to contact their department, since the person's supervisor had agreed to give him some time off work. The rule had changed because the subjects of the activity system had changed. In contrast, the rules set by the central offices of the company would probably be harder to bend.

5.2.6 Division of labor

Derry's work tasks have been described earlier in this chapter, when I discussed the objectives of the activity system. His tasks and the mediating tools that he used in order to accomplish them are part of the division of labor put into play in the warehouse. Had Derry had a different post, then his objectives would have been different and he would have made use of different artifacts. Below I cite an extract from Derry's interview, where it can be clearly seen how the work was being distributed within the system:

> *Z: Do you also supervise the process when the products are returned to the shelf?*
>
> *D: Well we work as a team in the returns department. And there is usually a person constantly putting the stock that we process back to the warehouse through a scanning devise the scanning barcode that we put the goods back on, the person that's putting... returning the stock will scan the barcode and then the scanned products and it tells them on this scanner which location that product belongs...and then that's how it's done, that's how the system is updated, and it lets staff control know*

where that product is that's been added to the stock that is already there on the shelf.

Derry PD1, 32-44

In this action (putting the products back on the self), there are a lot of subjects involved. There is the person scanning the goods and making sure that they are returned in the right place, there are those who actually put the products back in the self and there are the people working in staff control who need to know where each product is. What is interesting is Derry's assertion that he is not supervising and that they work as a team. In this statement, Derry shows that the division of labor in his department was not strict, but many subjects could take up various roles. This suggests that the subjects knew how to handle all tools in the activity system and they could shift roles according to their needs. At the same time, by making this statement Derry rejected the role of the leader and projected the concept of equality in the way things worked within the activity.

5.2.7 Multivoicedness in the workplace activity system

I discussed earlier the large community shaping the activity system of Derry's workplace. Such a broad community usually results in the existence of multiple voices and multiple perspectives within the system. The correlation between the community and the principle of multivoicedness is clear in my analysis. A query on the co-occurrence of these two codes in Atlas.ti, with respect to the workplace activity, has shown that out of the nine occurrences of the code 'multivoicedness W' seven coincide with the code 'community W'.[8] Therefore, one should look at the interaction

[8] This means that in seven distinct cases the code 'multivoicedness W' overlapped or was within a distance of 5 lines from the code 'multivoicedness W'.

of the members of the community in order to find the various opinions and perspectives within a system.

The disagreements between the retailers or individual consumers and Derry are a good example of the concept of multivoicedness. The consumers sent faulty products back to the warehouse with the argument that it was the manufacturer's liability. Derry, as an expert, could have a different opinion and argue that the products' fault was not due to their manufacture. At the same time, there were more subjects involved in this conflict. When making such a decision, Derry had to remember that he works for a company whose interests he has to support. A series of decisions attributing liability only to the company could cause the dissatisfaction of his managers and could eventually cost him his job. Therefore it is possible that his decisions were also affected by the invisible yet ubiquitous existence of the company's management.

5.2.8 Historicity in the workplace activity system

Having been in the company for seventeen years, Derry had witnessed a lot of ways in which the job had changed. When describing the way the company used to notify the retailers about the returned products he said:

> *so I would write an inspection form out, put in the style and the size and the details of the product, put in a brief description of why it's credit worthy or why it isn't credit worthy, then I would take the first copy off, keep that with the shoes, the second copy would go upstairs, so I'd send to the suppliers several pages and then I would take the issues upstairs and the debit notes would be attached to the paperwork which I filled in and then the girl would have a pile on her desk and she would actually*

ring each individual retailer saying: hello this is [name of the company], it's credit worthy.

Derry, PD1. 225-232

Derry explained that this procedure had changed a lot in the recent years. Firstly, there was no handwriting now since everything was typed on a computer and second, they had replaced the phone calls by forwarding reply-cards to the retailers with protocol numbers and information on the products. Derry explained that it had been a big step for him to learn how to work with spreadsheets and several years later the spreadsheets were replaced by another system, internet-based this time. Derry believed this latter system to be less efficient and described it as if "going back to the Dark Ages". The reason is that it entailed a lot of paperwork and, as a consequence, the communication between the two parties required more time and effort.

In Derry's description of his continuously changing work practices, one can discern the historicity of the activity system. Within the same system, communication practices between the retailers changed three times over the last ten years and along with them changed the mediating tools. Therefore, the initial way to inform the retailers if their product is creditworthy was ringing them, whereas later they used reply-cards and even more recently they did it over the internet. What was initially a combination of literacy practices and oral communication, turned into communication mediated by new technologies. Additionally, the forms of literacy changed in time starting from the three copies describing the product and then progressing to reply-cards, spreadsheets and finally an online system of communication.

Finally, literacy practices also changed in the way the products were handled within the warehouse:

> *For instance when I first started, if a pair of shoes came back it didn't have an actual protocol number on the production of the shoes, so you had to look for catalogues and memorize the product codes, it could be abbreviation of the name in code format, it's a bit difficult to explain but for instance there used to be a shoe called 'the endeavor'. Now for that the code would be N#ENDVI for instance, abbreviated the endeavor, and now a color code, if you had a pair of shoes that were grey, grey and black then you would actually have what we called color code which would be Z and K which would be for indicating grey and black and you couldn't miss anything or otherwise it wouldn't go through the...as a product code, but it's a lot easier now because all the product codes are listed on the shoes.*
>
> Derry PD1, 202-213

5.2.9 Contradictions and expansion in the workplace activity system

A basic contradiction in this workplace activity system is between this study's primary subject, Derry, and the mediating means used to accomplish his work objectives. I described above the continuously changing practices drawn upon in order to achieve communication between the members of the activity. Every time a new system was introduced, Derry felt at odds with it, as he was not familiar with its use. However, this contradiction led to expansion, as Derry got to grips with the new system and in that way his knowledge was broadened. For example, when describing the way he dealt with the computer technology he said:

I was a bit at odds at first picking up the pc, because I didn't have any knowledge of computers earlier before and the first change from handwritten around to pc and to spreadsheets and then you went from spreadsheets, so I did spreadsheets format required for some time and that was the biggest step for me from the way I used to do it...

Derry PD1, 258-265

The way the contradictions of this activity are turned into expansion is clear in the above extract. Derry's managers questioned the practicality of the old system (handwriting) and introduced a new model (the use of information technology). This new model was put in operation and implemented by Derry who gradually internalized its use. Finally, in the above extract Derry reflected on the process, acknowledging that it was the biggest step he had to take and at a different instance he said that "it saves you all the paperwork" (Derry PD1, 236).

In another instance, Derry described the way that expansion took place. When asked about the difficulties he had with picking up the use of a computer, he said:

D: I wasn't fully in to it to start with and you're just learning a lot of things when you've done them a few times you start to remember and you pick it up and you get into...and then once you get into it you get more speed up and you get more quicker and more confident in yourself, whereas at first you had been, well I was a bit slower and methodical cause I don't want to make a mistake, there are many things you can...you know, so I...you know...experience means a lot really

Z: Hmm, of course

D: and you get more efficient like I said

Derry PD1, 150-157

So far I have given examples of the way inner contradictions of an activity system result into expansion. However, this is not always the case particularly within a workplace where relations of power are always in play. Acting within such a context, it was not always possible for Derry to question decisions imposed from the management, even if they had a direct impact on his everyday work practices. This is evident in the way he described a very recent change that had taken place in his work. His company had been recently bought by a larger corporation and unavoidably new practices were introduced. One of these involved the way the warehouse communicated with the retailers. According to Derry, the new system was not efficient as it entailed a lot of paperwork and it was very time consuming. Whereas before he communicated directly with the retailers, he now had to forward the products to the central offices and wait until the products had been sent from there to the retailers, before he could forward the relevant correspondence. This was a process that Derry described as less efficient. However, in this case he could not question the decision imposed from the company's management. Therefore, even though there is a major contradiction there cannot be expansion.

Relations of power is a concept that is not adequately touched upon by AT theorists (see section 3.6). Yet, their role is of outmost importance since they can be imposed at any level of the activity system and change its shape and function. Questioning existing models is one of the conditions for the principle of expansion to be applied. However, power relations can hinder questioning and consequently stop the transformation of the system. This is very often the case in institutional settings, such as the workplace, where hierarchical formations are likely to prevent subjects from doubting the existing order of the system. The issue of power relations is one that appears in many cases within this analysis and will be revisited when appropriate.

5.3 The qualification activity system

The activity system discussed in this section is the one formed when Derry worked towards obtaining an NVQ. It will be called, for convenience and space purposes, 'the qualification activity system'.

5.3.1 Subject(s)

In this activity system, Derry is again the primary subject since he is the person studying towards obtaining a level 2 NVQ in Business and Administration. When I met him he was in the process of completing the final unit for his portfolio. The interview that I had with him took place after he had completed the portfolio and was waiting for its validation.

A second important subject in the qualification activity system is Derry's tutor and internal verifier, James. James had been working as an NVQ tutor and assessor for the past twenty years and had therefore great experience working with similar qualifications. James's role in this activity system was to assist Derry to complete his portfolio and assess his work and his progress. He visited the warehouse approximately every fortnight and met two or three candidates each time. James represented a local FE college that provided the qualifications and in most cases he was the only person from the college that the candidates ever got to meet. Once the candidate's portfolio had been completed, James took it to the college for internal and external verification and then he returned it to the candidate along with his qualification.

The other person who has been mentioned by name by both Derry and James is Derry's line manager, Bill. He was the person who suggested to Derry taking up an NVQ in Business and Administration, and who explained to him what such a process entails. And finally, remote or extra-local members of the activity were the college providing the qualification and the awarding body.

5.3.2 Object

In order to understand the object in the qualification system, it is useful to employ again the distinction between the motive and the object of an activity as discussed by Kaptelinin (2005) and introduced in section 3.4.2. In the following extract, Derry gives a complete description of both the motive and the object of this activity system:

> *D: My NVQ, I plan to...I can apply for positions that before that I couldn't apply for. You see, quite often you see jobs advertisements in the newspapers, it's all about themselves, what the work involves and then at the end of it perhaps it might say must have NVQ level 2. So obviously if you don't have an NVQ then the description you can't apply for that job because it's put in a direct straight way. Whereas I'll get my NVQ and I'll see an advert that says an NVQ must have an NVQ level 2, well I'll have one therefore I can apply for the job and go along and have an interview and perhaps I might be fortunate and get the position, whereas if I didn't have the NVQ I wouldn't even go that far.*
>
> *Z: Yes, of course*

D: So it's another string in my bow so to speak.

Derry PD1, 116-132

In this account, Derry explained that his motivation for wanting to be qualified in his work was his future plan to apply for a better post. He saw obtaining the NVQ as his way into a highly demanding market. It can be argued therefore that the real motive of the activity system was the need to be competitive when applying for new posts. And the NVQ qualification was the object of the activity, since it was the instrument that Derry wanted to obtain in order to equip himself and reach his broader goal.

As the main drivers of the activity, objects tend to remain stable within activity systems. However, a shift in the object of activity is not rare and Derry's example demonstrates that within an activity new objects can be created that can co-exist together with the initial ones. During the process of building his portfolio, Derry developed an interest in learning about management theories and how the company and the workforce should be handled from the management's point of view. This interest will be further discussed when analyzing expansion of the system. What is worth mentioning here is that Derry developed a second object within the activity system, that is, to expand his knowledge on certain topics, and he worked towards completing both objects at the same time, since one did not contradict the other.

5.3.3 Tools

In order to obtain an NVQ, Derry had to develop a portfolio demonstrating prior knowledge of his job tasks and responsibilities. This portfolio is the primary mediating artifact between Derry and his object of obtaining an NVQ. For the portfolio, he had to complete two mandatory units and three optional ones. The mandatory ones read: "Carry out your responsibilities at work" and "Work within your business environment". The three optional units were chosen out of a total of twenty-four units. Derry explained that he had chosen the units that corresponded more closely to his job role. The three optional units he chose were: "Manage customer relations", "Store, retrieve and archive information" and "Specialist of bespoken software". Taking into consideration Derry's job tasks, as described in the workplace activity system, it is clear that these units were very close to his job role.

Derry was given a logbook where each unit was arranged in a page and which he had to arrange in a folder using dividers. For every unit he had to provide evidence for the performance indicators as well as for a set of knowledge criteria. In the following extract, Derry describes some of the texts he had to produce as evidence for his portfolio:

> *He asked me to do various documents and print-outs and screen dumps of my daily working tasks, inspections, response system, demand system so I had an illustration and then do a little write-up about it, a little caption of what both diagrams, meetings, saying that this is what I've processed, functions, defective goods, etc. And then do a brief statement about it and then after I did all these captions...then I did storyboards*[9] *of my job, how I'm doing retails, how it's processed, how the goods are coming in, inspecting them, processing them on the system, doing correspondence if it's been refused, etc...step by step guide really, putting into texture that somebody can read, get the gist of what I'm...I actually do on a day basis.*

[9] A storyboard is a series of illustrations or images displayed in sequence in order to visualise a series of actions. In this case, Derry's storyboards were a series of short narratives, displayed in bullet points, where he described his work tasks step by step.

Derry PD1, 468-482

In this extract, it can be seen that the role of literacy as a mediator for the portfolio development is central, as Derry got involved in numerous literacy events (printing, making screen dumps, writing captions and statements storyboards) in order to produce the evidence for his portfolio.

Oral interaction was also a significant mediating tool. Before working on each unit, Derry had a meeting with James who took him through the unit, they discussed the criteria and James clarified any uncertainties.

> *...and we went through the literature and...we went through it together and each time...each section by section we stopped and had a little discussion about it and what we need to do.*

Derry PD1, 454-457

Dialogue was one of the most important ways that Derry negotiated the meaning of his portfolio and one of the most useful mediating artifacts throughout the portfolio developing process.

> *...I've gone away from here, from each meeting with James and I had it quite clear in my head what I am to do for this*

Derry PD1, 769-770

One reason for the increased role of oral communication is probably the fact that there were not any clarifications accompanying the logbooks. Therefore interaction with the tutor was the only way that Derry could make sense of what was required of him as well as answer any possible questions.

The portfolio as a mediating tool was not chosen by Derry out of free will. It was an artifact that he had to produce in order to reach his object, obtain the qualification. It is interesting therefore to see how he approached such a portfolio and how he negotiated its meaning. When asked whether he found it easy to compose written statements describing his job tasks, he answered:

> *Yes, it was a new style of writing for me and...it wasn't so difficult, because explaining something that I've done and I know so well, I mean doing the job, it's not like you just try to learn a new job, you pick it up as you go along and you are not quite sure of yourself. In opposite, if you're doing a job like that and you try to write about it and it's going to be the same scenario, you're writing about a job that you don't really fully...you're not fully experienced in it so you're not going to be too sure about what you write...so because that isn't involved in this case, I'm fully aware of what I'm doing, inspections and other things, so when I come to actually writing down what I do, this is what I do. Yeah, you just flow it, I was OK at doing that I was quite...quite good. I did make several notes first of all...I did little notes of what I did and then read through it all and then altered one or two little sentences around, so that it sounded better when actually reading it. I altered it around a little bit, I took my time over it.*
>
> Derry PD1, 492-510

In this extract, Derry sounds confident in the way he collected evidence and wrote statements describing his job. He justified his confidence by the fact that he had been working in this job for many years so he had found it easy to describe it in a written format. Throughout the interview, he also referred several times to his notebook as it seems that writing drafts was the easiest and most secure way for him to approach the literacy demands of the portfolio.

When the evidence for each unit was collected, Derry would meet with James and fill in the 'evidence summary' table, a sample of which is provided in Figure 4 below[10].

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

UNIT 209 – STORE, RETRIEVE AND ARCHIVE INFORMATION

Evidence			Process information				Retrieve information					Archive information				
No.	*Type	Description	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1-3 5-9	WP/CS	RESPOND SYSTEM	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				
17-19		DMAP														
18	CS	ADDIDAS	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				
12	WP	JOB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
16	WP	INDUCTION		✓				✓					✓			
20	CS	MANUAL FILING					✓	✓	✓							
23 21	CS	ARCHIVING										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	CS	RESPOND					✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
24	CS	ADDIDAS PROBLEM		✓						✓						

* OBS = Observation, OQ/WQ = Oral/Written Questions, WT = Witness Testimony, CS = Candidate Statement, WP = Work Product, S = Simulation, PRO =Project APAL = Accredited Prior Achievement/Learning,

Candidate Signature ______________ **Date** 07/11/06

Assessor: I judge the above evidence to be sufficient, valid and current. It covers all the requirements of the above performance indicators, knowledge and understanding overleaf.
Assessor Signature ______________ **Date** 7/11/06.

Internal Verifier Signature ______________ **Date** ______________

Figure 4 Evidence summary extracted from Derry's portfolio

In Figure 4, Derry included a description of the evidence he had produced and assigned it with a number. He also clarified the type of evidence by using the initials provided underneath the matrix (e.g. if the evidence is a statement then he put down the initials 'CS'). The numbers in the top rows correspond to the performance criteria of this specific unit. What Derry had to do is put a tick on those criteria that he had

[10] The signatures of the candidate and the verifier have been omitted in order to protect the anonymity of the research participants.

covered with each piece of evidence. So for example, the first piece of evidence is described as a 'respond system map' and is included in 19 pages (1-19). By providing this evidence, Derry had covered performance indicators 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10.

When filling in this table, oral interaction plays again an important role. The following extract comes from my fieldnotes:

> *The assessor and Derry have to decide which of these criteria each of the evidence covers. I notice that Derry does all the writing (e.g. writing down the numbers of each piece of evidence) and the assessor guides him through.*
>
> Derry PD2, 66-69

As it can be seen in this case, the oral interaction does not take the form of a dialogue, since it was James, the assessor, who decided which performance indicators were covered each time. Derry was only ticking the boxes according to the assessor's guidance.

In order to complete the portfolio, Derry used a series of other mediating artifacts. One of these was the use of computer when typing his statements, doing screen-dumps, printing out information, and other related activities. At a later stage, he decided to consult library books in order to find information for certain units he had difficulties with. I will provide detailed analysis of the use of these artifacts and their importance when I discuss the contradictions and the expansion of the activity system. Additional artifacts were two booklets that were given to Derry by the college when he had first started his NVQ. Derry admitted that he had not realized how useful these were until he started working on the mandatory units (which are completed in the end) and he had to look in these for further information.

5.3.4 Community

In my code-assisted analysis, I realized that in most cases the subjects of an activity coincide with its community. It is common, though, that the analysts put an emphasis upon a limited number of subjects, one or two individuals or a group smaller than the whole community, so that the study is focused and easier to control. With a similar focus in mind, I have considered for this activity system Derry to be the primary subject along with some peripheral members. However, the community of the system is larger.

Behind Derry, his tutor and some of the colleagues directly related to his NVQ, lies an entire system of control and support. This is the FE system that administers the NVQs and a number of institutions within it. A quick tracing of the origins of Derry's logbook takes us back to Sector Skills Councils, awarding bodies, such as City and Guilds, and providers such as the college that Derry had registered for his NVQ. All these institutions are part of Derry's qualification activity system since they have a direct and indirect impact on it. These factors form what Brandt has called "sponsors of literacy". She defines sponsors as: "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy -and gain advantage by it in some way" (1995: 166). The extended community in Derry's qualification activity, that is stakeholders in the FE sector, awarding bodies, Sector Skills Councils and the college, are all sponsoring Derry's literacy practices involved in obtaining his NVQ. They are the ones who define which forms of literacy are privileged, and they are the ones who design texts such as the logbook and who eventually evaluate the portfolio and decide upon qualifying Derry's vocational practices. The community of an activity system therefore plays a significant role in its structure, and in the case of the qualification, the extended members of the community are the ones who play the most significant role.

5.3.5 Rules

I have already mentioned, in previous sections, some of the principal rules as to Derry's qualification. For example, the fact that he had to develop a portfolio consisting of five units, three mandatory and two optional; that he had to provide evidence for performance indicators and cross-reference it in pre-fixed tables; that he had to send his portfolio for internal and external validation before obtaining the qualification. All these are some of the rules shaping Derry's activity system and impacting upon his literacy practices.

Acting within two dominant institutions, the FE system and his workplace, Derry was often faced with conflicting rules when completing his NVQ. One example is related to the time when and the space where he worked on his qualification. Derry explained that although he was entitled to take some time off his work in order to complete his portfolio, he did not find such a practice useful:

> *you're supposed to do it in your work's time, there's something like an hour a week for instance...but I...I found it...I mean I was stopping for doing that, but I found it not very easy to actually cut off from the job I'm doing and then start writing and spend a...half an hour doing my NVQ, because there was distractions around you in your daily job, there's just people around you working or there's the telephone ringing it might need answering it so you're getting sidetracked a little bit I've*

not really given it much time at work or attempted to do it, I just thought I better have focus doing it away from work.

Derry PD1, 552-562

Later on, when he started visiting the library in order to work on the portfolio, he had to comply with similar rules in terms of time:

and it's Tuesdays and Thursdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays late nights, so I was going there with my little notebook and I was using the pc, I'd book the pc because it gets quite full, I'd book the pc for like at Tuesday at 5 o' clock and same time on Thursday, I would go there once or twice a week, I preferred Thursday and it would come down fine, but it was slower, I wasn't doing as much work because it was time consuming and going into town from work I might had been a little bit tired...

Derry PD1, 571-584

His work timetable combined with the busy library did not allow him to visit whenever suited him. On the contrary, he had to go late nights when he finished work and he had to be there in specific hours as he had booked a computer to work on. These examples demonstrate how Derry was not able to work on his qualification at his own time or space and at his own pace. The rules of both activities, the workplace and the qualification, along with rules from external factors, such as the library, restricted his choices as to the way he wanted to work and gave a new shape to the activity system.

5.3.6 Division of labor

The division of labor defines NVQs, since the units each candidate chooses should relate to the job roles s/he enacts within the workplace. Therefore different posts and work tasks require the selection of different units for the portfolio. Apart from this characteristic, it is also interesting to study the division of labor among the primary subjects of the activity. In regard to the optional units, I asked Derry who decided which ones he would include in his portfolio:

> *I think...yes it was myself really that chose the units, I was more relevant to the position I am doing you see.*
>
> Derry PD1, 423-424

In a further interview I had with his tutor, James also confirmed that it is the candidate who decides on the optional units but a discussion might precede the final decision. The tutor's initial role is to discuss the criteria in each unit and clarify ambiguous points. In the following extract, Derry expresses satisfaction in the way he worked with his tutor:

> *James is really really good in making sure that...he's really good, it puts you in the picture and it clarifies things...what's required of you, you know, so you are not going away thinking I'm not sure what to do, well there's never been any of that really.*
>
> Derry PD1, 458-462

The division of labor was also evident in the way Derry and James worked after the evidence was produced. The following extract comes from my fieldnotes and refers to the work Derry and James did on a summary table, similar to the table in Figure 3 presented above.

> *What impressed me is that the evidence was cross checked by the assessor and not the candidate. Derry was just ticking the boxes according to James's instructions. James explained to me that this is because Derry is doing an NVQ level 2. If it was an NVQ level 3 then he would expect him to do all the work himself, as a level 3 is equal to a higher degree, something like A levels. Derry didn't seem to know what criterion each of the boxes he ticked corresponded to. I couldn't stop wondering if he checks that later in his own time and if he could question the decisions of the assessor.*
>
> Fieldnotes on Derry

What is interesting is that Derry, as well as other NVQ candidates in my study, was happy with his tutor making this decision for him. James was considered to be better because of his experience with such portfolios and the cross-referencing required. In the above extract, it is also clear that James's expectations on level 3 qualifications increased, as he expected candidates to cross-reference on their own. The division of labor therefore is dependent upon the level of qualification. At a different instance, James also told me that who is doing the cross-referencing also depends on the kind of qualification. Someone doing a Business and Administration NVQ would be expected to do more things than someone doing a Warehousing NVQ.

5.3.7 Multivoicedness in the qualification activity system

The multiple voices in this activity system are evident in the nature of the portfolio. The pieces of evidence that Derry had collected for his portfolio originated from diverse sources. Figure 5 is a list coming from his portfolio, which includes the first 29 out of 44 pieces of evidence he had included in it.

INDEX OF EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE NO:	DESCRIPTION	~~In~~ Portfolio YES/NO If NO state location
01	RESPOND OVERVIEW	YES
02	—"— CONSUMER CARD	YES
03	—"— INSPECTION CARD	YES
04	PDP	YES
05	PRODUCT QUERY — CHWOVEN PANT	YES
06	" " — M- GT SOZE RISK TEE	YES
07	" " — ESSENTIALS GRIP BAG	YES
08	" " — GRAPHIC TEE	YES
09	" " — GREG NORMAN POLO SHIRT	YES
10	DELIVERY SCHEDULE LIST / EMAIL FOR SECURITY	YES
11	DISCREPANCY SENT VIA EMAIL TO REEBOK HQ	YES
12	ROLE PROFILE	YES
13	CONSUMER LETTER FOR INSPECTION	YES
14	USING DMAP	YES
15	PROCESSING DEFECTIVES ON DMAP	YES
16	COMPANY INDUCTION	YES
17	OBSERVATION REPORT 22/8/06	—"—
18	ADIDAS STORYBOARD + SOFTWARE	YES
19	OBSERVATION REPORT 21/8, 201	YES
20	STORYBOARD ON MANUAL FILING SYSTEM + GOODS	YES
21	ARCHIVING OF RETAILER DEBIT NOTES	YES
22	ARCHIVING OF PRODUCTS & PROCEDURE OF D-PROD	YES
23	RESPOND SYSTEM — TRACING OLD RESPOND RECORDS	YES
24	PROBLEM WITH ADIDAS SYSTEM	YES
25	STORYBOARD ON ADIDAS PHONE CALLS RECEIVED & MADE REGARDING PRODUCTS FROM CONSUMERS	YES
26	STORYBOARD ON CONTACTING REEBOK HEAD OFFICE & PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT HEADQUARTERS IN BOLTON	YES
27	RETAILER & CONSUMER INSPECTIONS (999s) PROCEDURE	YES
28	FAULT CODES FOR PRODUCTS (DEFECTIVES)	YES
29	SPECIFICATION CHARTS FOR PRODUCTS	YES

Figure 5 Index of evidence from Derry's portfolio

As it can be seen in Figure 5, Derry has used a variety of documents as evidence for the performance criteria. However, not all documents were produced by him. For example, documents 5-9 are named "product query" and they all consist of a series of e-mails sent by Derry and sent to Derry by other people in his department and by retailers, in order to negotiate the liability for a faulty product. In this instance, the portfolio was compiled by documents produced not only by Derry, but also by other people in the activity system. Similarly, documents 17 and 19 are observations of Derry's work tasks written by James. Again, here, it is the tutor's voice that is being heard and not the candidate's. It becomes evident that even though the portfolio was produced by Derry, the evidence provided comes from a variety of sources, all being members of the qualification activity system, others in its core (i.e. the NVQ tutor/assessor) and others in its periphery (i.e. Derry's clients).

5.3.8 Historicity in the qualification activity system

The historicity of the qualification system overlaps with many of the discussions included earlier in this thesis. For the primary subject, Derry, I have already explained that this was the first time he completed an NVQ and the first time he developed any kind of portfolio. So it was really the first time that he participated in such a system as a primary member. The history of the NVQ has been discussed in chapter 2 of the thesis. For reasons of space, I will not repeat here any of these discussions, but I stress that in order to understand the way the activity system works, it is important to know where the mediating tools are coming from and how and for what reasons the objectives were shaped. As I explained in section 3.4.2, knowledge of the historicity of the qualification system enables us to understand better its present state.

5.3.9 Contradictions and expansion in the qualification activity system

The strongest contradiction in the qualification activity system lies between Derry and the primary mediating tool: the portfolio. I showed, in an earlier section, that the evidence collection was considered easy by Derry, since he only had to write descriptions of his job tasks. He considered that being familiar with the subject meant it was easy to bring it into paper. On the contrary, the same did not happen when Derry was asked to describe situations outside his familiar daily job routine. Towards the end of his portfolio, he stared working on the last mandatory unit entitled 'Work within your business environment'. For this unit, he had to provide evidence for criteria such as 'Interact with other people in a way that is sensitive to their individual needs and respects their background, abilities, values, customs and beliefs'. In this case, an important contradiction took place within the activity system, since Derry was not sure how to approach the evidence collection:

> *I would say things like team working and communication is relevant to my work, we should write about, but the other aspects, especially diversity and stuff, it's not ...in the day to day, in the job tasks, I'm doing story boards about something not being fully aware [...]*
>
> Derry PD1, 807-811

What is interesting to note is that Derry, a man with such a long experience in the world of work, was most probably familiar with concepts such as respect for other people's beliefs, background, etc in the workplace. During the times that I met him, I observed that he treated his colleagues with kindness and he never uttered a negative comment for them. Added to this was his respect towards me, a foreigner and a researcher who was intruding into his world with questions that I am not sure if he always understood their purpose. The point I want to make is that even though Derry argued that he was not familiar with the standards set in the final unit of his portfolio, his behavior in his workplace proved the opposite (at least for a number of them). Therefore one underlying contradiction can be argued to exist between Derry's belief about his lack of familiarity with certain standards and his actual knowledge. The reason for this contradiction may lie in the fact that these concepts were presented to him in an alienating format, that of performance indicators, and thus Derry did not recognize the meaning of concepts long known to him.

In order to meet the demands of this unit, Derry decided to look for help outside his job:

> *D: on the last couple of units I have done a bit of revising and looked for a bit of help from library books*
>
> *Z: Yes tell me about that*
>
> *D: Yes I decided to, because I thought struggling all on my own weren't any...I wasn't putting it probably in any good context, you know, professionally it's not good, so I did a little bit of studying and looked and made a few notes.*
>
> Derry, P.1 623-630

Derry decided that the library was a good place for him to work because he did not have a computer at home. He visited the library twice per week and even though it was time-consuming, he preferred working that way because he concentrated better. He used books on management theory and copied extracts out of them to include them in his statements. I also mentioned earlier that when he started the NVQ he was also given two booklets on diversity and communication. Even though initially he did not find them useful, at this point he used them when writing his storyboards on diversity. His eagerness to *"work professionally"* on his NVQ led him to the decision to buy a computer and a printer to use at home:

...and then I decided to get my own pc...I've got my own pc now so the going to town stopped and now I can do it in my own luxury, you know, I'm home, get a cup of tea, come home from work and I do it on the pc now, I type it home and I found I'm doing more work now because I've got more access to it, I give a little bit more time.

Derry PD1, 586-592

Derry found it difficult to complete a unit that was not directly relevant to his job tasks and used library books to get some help. Engeström (2001: 137) argues that expansion within an activity system is accomplished when "the object and the motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity". Derry believed that his knowledge was not enough in order to complete his task and moved forward, outside the boundaries of the activity system, into a new setting, that of the library, in order to find new mediating means to address his object. And when he realised the importance of the computer as a complementary mediating means, he decided to buy one, even though he was not sure if he was going to use it again in the future. Within the qualification activity system, not only the setting and the means, but also his object changed, from simply obtaining a qualification to doing a professional job and learning:

...because I've studied things and looked up and revised things a little bit, it's given me more knowledge, you see, it improved me as a person and then I've done a storyboard on why communication is important and diversity and stuff like that, so each single subject has given me some knowledge of it.

Derry PD1, 614- 618

In an adaptation of the model of an activity system, Ivanič (2006) placed the concept of 'learning' at the very heart of the triangle. She described learning as an activity *"always embedded in the word 'doing'"* (ibid: 9) and schematically represented the model with the following Figure 6.

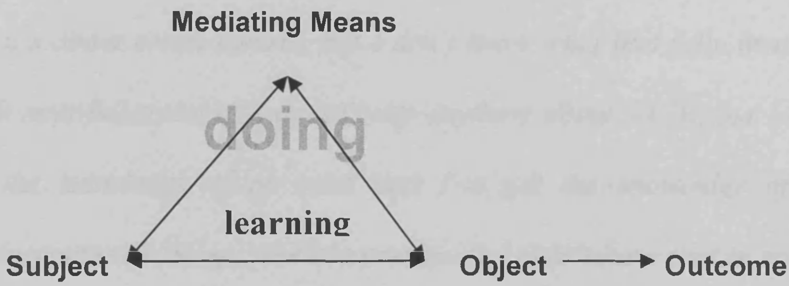

Figure 6 Activity System as adapted by Ivanič 2006.

In Derry's case, learning constitutes the major expansion in the qualification activity system. By collecting the evidence for his portfolio, or else by 'doing', he reached new levels of knowledge and new meanings for his work practices. As a subject in the activity, Derry used literacy related mediating means in order to achieve his object, the completion of the NVQ and to reach his broader purpose that is, the possibility to apply for a better job. Learning was not one of his initial goals in this system, but was nevertheless achieved in the process. Learning can also be explained here by Derry's participation in multiple contexts or else in multiple communities of practice. In their research on learning in the workplace, Fuller and Unwin (2004) argue that boundary crossing between multiple communities of practice, as opposed to constantly acting within one and the same community, can result in more possibilities for learning. By leaving behind the community of his work and of his qualification and by becoming a member of a new community, the library, Derry extended the activity of developing an NVQ portfolio, and thus he engaged in learning something new, something that the community of the workplace would not have offered him.

The final expansion within this system took place when Derry overcame his fears about his abilities and decided to apply for a different job:

> *and I made a phone call last night to jobs advertisement at Lancaster and it's about credit control, but I don't know what that fully involves, but it says full training it doesn't say anything about NVQs, but I have got the knowledge of pc work and I've got the knowledge of the administrational things, whereas previously I didn't have that in my job role. So therefore it's given me more confidence, so I rung up last night and someone will be ringing me back this evening.*
>
> Derry PD1, 835-843

The fact that Derry found the courage to apply for another post shows that expansion took place not only in his qualification system but also, and maybe primarily, in his workplace activity system. More specifically, I would argue that the confidence and knowledge that he gained within the qualification system enabled him to expand his job options. The interaction and interrelationship of the two systems is an ongoing issue that will be further explored in the following section.

5.4 Network relations between the two activity systems

So far I have discussed Derry's actions within two activity systems, that of his workplace and that of his NVQ. By primarily focusing on the mediating tools that he engaged in his attempts to fulfil his goals, I have shown that they do not consist only of material objects, but primarily of literacy artefacts taking various formats and meanings. By discussing the use of these artefacts within a community and through the mediation of rules and division of labor, I have been able to draw a complete picture of the literacy practices that Derry drew upon when acting within each of these activity systems.

In the remaining of this chapter I will discuss the relations of the two activity systems. So far I have shown that the two systems take shape primarily within the same setting, that of the warehouse. In addition, they have certain subjects in common with the most important being Derry, the primary subject of both systems. It is interesting therefore to examine the interaction of these two systems, in order to understand whether the literacy practices developed in each activity remain static or if they move across different domains by possibly changing shapes and meanings.

5.4.1 Polycontextuality and boundary crossing

In a discussion on expert cognition, Engeström et al discuss polycontextuality as a situation where participants of activity systems engage "not only in multiple simultaneous tasks and task-specific participation frameworks within one and the same activity. They are also increasingly involved in multiple communities of practice." (Engeström et al., 1995: 320) In this way, polycontextuality refers not only to actions but also to entire activity systems in which subjects participate simultaneously. The close links of AT with communities of practice have been discussed in section 3.4.2. Derry was a member of the community of practice of his workplace and more specifically of his department, since he had the same work interests and goals with the rest of his colleagues. At the same time, he was a member of the NVQ community of practice, collaborating with his tutor and colleagues towards the completion of the same goal. It is arguable therefore that Derry acted within multiple contexts and this polycontextuality eventually led to 'boundary crossing'.

Derry moved from his familiar workplace activity system towards the new and complex system of vocational qualifications. Suchman argues that: "crossing boundaries involves encountering difference, entering onto territory in which we are unfamiliar and, to some extent therefore, unqualified" (1994: 25, cited in Engeström et al 1995). For AT, boundary crossing is a consequence of contradictions and expansion inherent in the activity system. A contradiction in the workplace activity system between the subject –Derry- and his object –covering his financial needs- was bound to take place since the warehouse was going to close down. Consequently, Derry decided to register for an NVQ in order to be able to apply for similar posts in the future. The expansion of the workplace activity system led Derry to be involved in a new system, that of the qualification, where he did encounter difference and was initially unqualified.

Boundary crossing takes place when subjects move across multiple activity systems and transfer tools, ideas and interests. In Derry's case, the element most frequently transferred from one system to another is texts. Earlier I showed that Derry collected evidence for his portfolio in the form of texts originating from various sources. For example, the storyboards and statements he mentioned are specifically produced for the purposes of the portfolio, whereas some other texts, such as print outs of inspections, correspondence etc, were created as part of Derry's job tasks that is, within the activity system of his workplace. Barton and Hamilton (2005: 23) claim that "texts can move across context, often changing their meanings and functions but nevertheless providing a fixed reference point in different events". They refer to this process as recontextualisation, a concept discussed in detail in section 3.5.1. In the two activity systems under discussion, recontextualisation takes place with a direction from the workplace to the qualification system. The opposite direction has not been witnessed, meaning that, according to Derry, there was never need for the texts produced specifically for his portfolio (e.g. storyboards, statements, screen dumps, etc) to be used as part of his job.

The texts included as evidence in the portfolio take the role of a 'boundary object'. Boundary objects have been defined by Star (1989) as: "objects that are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites". As the texts are transferred from the workplace to the portfolio, they lose their initial function -texts used at work- and acquire a new role, that of evidence for the performance criteria for Derry's portfolio. Therefore these texts are plastic enough since their function changes, but they are also robust enough as their format remains the same. It is not only the texts used for evidence that act as boundary objects. The portfolio as an entity can be argued to be the principal boundary object between the two systems. It initially takes form in the qualification system, but is transferred to the workplace in order to draw its sources. When it has been created, it is transferred again to the workplace, now being used as evidence of prior knowledge and as a basic instrument in the search for a new job. In this case, recontextualisation takes place towards both directions: the portfolios move both from and towards each one of the activities, taking a different shape and a different function each time. In other words, texts and portfolios are the meeting points of the two activity systems discussed here. They are described as boundary objects, that is, ideological spaces present in many different contexts, whose movement causes the enactment of recontextualisation processes and therefore changes in ideology (see section 3.5).

5.4.2 Hybrids and third space

Polycontextuality and boundary crossing between activities often result in 'hybrid' systems. A 'hybrid' is understood here as a mixture of more than one different elements. The multivoicedness and the final expansion of the two activity systems attribute them with the status of hybridity. The qualification activity system is penetrated, to a large extent, by the workplace activity system and vice versa. Derry's job role defined the NVQ he registered for and he often had to go back to his work tasks to draw evidence for his portfolio. Additionally, he later used his NVQ as a useful tool in applying for a job.

The hybridity of the two activities is also evident in the mediating tools that constitute them. The portfolio is a hybrid creation as it contains texts coming from a variety of sources and used for a variety of purposes. Even though Derry created certain texts only for the purposes of the portfolio, e.g. screen dumps, written statements, etc, the portfolio would not be original and probably would not serve its purpose if evidence from the actual work practices was not included. At the same time, the portfolio cannot stand on its own in any of the two systems. It is created within the qualification system, but it only acquires meaning once it has been transferred to the workplace system, as it is only there that Derry can use it as proof of prior knowledge. Therefore, hybridity penetrates most elements of both activities and defines their shape and their function.

Having as a starting point both activity systems and continuously moving across them, Derry creates a third space between qualification and workplace. Gutierrez et al (1999: 287) argue that: "From the perspective of activity theory, the third space might be considered an expanded activity in which the object of activity and the activity itself is reorganized, resulting in new opportunities for learning". The primary element that constitutes the third space developed in Derry's case is the literacy practices he participates in. These practices, as shown earlier in this chapter, originate from both activities and reach a meeting point where they merge. The third space here lies at that meeting point, where Derry's literacy practices at his work and qualification become complementary, borrowing elements from one in order to develop the other, and creating a new space, a new activity system, where they are used together.

At the end of this process, none of the original activities remains the same. Having exchanged mediating artefacts, subjects and rules, the activities have expanded and most importantly their objects have merged. I am not suggesting that this fuse is absolute and that the two activities have become one. I rather argue that the objects became interdependent, since Derry needs to draw on his work literacy practices to complete his portfolio, but also needs his qualification in order to continue working. This interdependence of the objects has caused the creation of the third space, where Derry attempts to complete both of his goals drawing sources from both activities simultaneously.

In section 5.3.9, I showed how contradictions in Derry's qualification system led to expansion and consequently to learning. In the same way, I argue here, contradictions between two activity systems led to the creation of a third space. Learning is here the driving force of the third space. Derry was unfamiliar with the literacy demands that a qualification might entail and instead relied upon the familiar literacy practices of his work. By combining the two, he learned how to engage in new literacy practices, produce texts for his portfolio and, in general, he understood how to create an NVQ portfolio. The result was the development of texts written in a hybrid style, using resources from both activities.

In this third space, an additional product of the interaction of the two activities was the use of a hybrid language. By combining language and discourses from the work and the qualification process, Derry developed a new hybrid language, which is another valuable asset he acquired while developing his portfolio. This is supported by Gutierrez et al who argue that:

> The potential power of hybrid language practices in the third space lies in the broader range of linguistic and sociocultural resources and experiences available to both individuals and the larger interpretive community.
>
> (K. D. Gutierrez et al., 1999: 301)

The use of hybrid language in the portfolio will be discussed in detail in chapter 7, where I conduct a detailed linguistic analysis of a sample from the portfolio texts.

5.4.3 Derry's changing identity

In section 3.4.3, I showed that one of the primary reasons for using AT as an analytic lens is the focus on the collective rather than the individual. This is particularly important when studying identity, as my intention is neither to focus on Derry as an individual isolated from any kind of context, nor to study the societal structure without taking into consideration the subjects that act within it. As Wenger (1998) argues, the focus of analysis when studying identity should be on the mutual constitution of community and person. Derry underwent a continuous negotiation of his identity as he moved across the two activity systems and as his literacy practices and therefore his knowledge expanded. Changing identities is a significant aspect of the network relations between two or more activity systems (Roth et al., 2004) and it is the discoursal formation and reformation of identity, as constructed within polycontextual environments, that I am interested in examining here. In other words, I want to understand how the participation in the two activities and the discourses enacted within each one of them affect the subjects' changing understanding of who they are. Ivanič (2006) argues that the discoursal construction of identity can be achieved by address, by attribution, and/or by affiliation (discussed in section 3.6.2). This categorisation will be used here in order to understand all factors that have an impact upon Derry's identity.

Identity by address refers to the way other people in the community or in the activity talk to us. Derry's discoursal construction of identity by 'address' in his workplace, ascribed him with the quality of an 'expert'. His colleagues looked up to him and addressed him with esteem, as he occupied a good post in his department. In his correspondence with the retailers, later included in his portfolio, he was addressed with respect, as it was his decisions that would define whether the company had to take responsibility for the faulty products or not. This highly valued way of being addressed in his workplace had a direct impact on the construction of identity by 'address' in the qualification activity. His line manager was very supportive towards him and offered to help him with his portfolio. Similarly, his tutor let him decide on the optional units of the portfolio and relied on him to develop his portfolio with very little help.

Identity construction by attribution refers to the way other people talk about us. There is no indication of how Derry was talked about by others in his workplace. However, having a highly-ranked administrative post it is very possible that he was considered as belonging to the 'first floor of the warehouse' group of employees and therefore discussed by others in this quality. This attribution penetrated into and was reinforced by the qualification system. In an interview I had with his tutor, James, he explained that because Derry had an administrative post he was expected to type his statements, to be a good speller and to take general responsibility for the development of his portfolio. It is evident that in the qualification activity system, Derry was also talked by his tutor as someone belonging in the administrative team of the warehouse and therefore ascribing him with certain qualities and roles. This is further reinforced by the fact that James said that the same responsibilities and roles would not be expected from an NVQ candidate who works in the warehouse.

Finally, identity by affiliation refers to way we identify ourselves with certain people in our community or activity. For the past seventeen years, Derry had been a member of his workplace activity and had been accustomed to its tools, community, rules and division of labor. He belonged to and identified with his administrative post in the warehouse and this was evident throughout the interview I had with him, when he took pleasure and pride in talking about his job. I also discussed earlier how Derry found it easy to write statements describing his job role and, according to him, the reason was that he was very familiar with his work tasks. In this case, while acting within his qualification system, Derry identified with the kind of writing he did for his workplace and therefore had no difficulties in printing documents, writing reports, storyboards, and other related literacy practices. In contrast, he encountered difficulties when asked to produce texts that were outside the remit of his workplace and with which he did not identify. Ivanič (2006: 21) argues that when participating in an activity "it will make a massive difference whether a person does or does not identify with the sort of people who are its 'subjects', and whether they take to themselves its 'objects'". I argue here that it is also the familiarity and the identification with the mediating artefacts that plays a significant role in the attitude that the individual will adopt towards the activity.

When discussing the expansion of the qualification activity system, I showed how Derry familiarised himself with those texts and literacy practices required from someone doing an NVQ on Business and Administration. He went to the library, he bought a computer and a printer and he successfully managed to complete his portfolio and consequently his NVQ. Through this expansion of the activity system, Derry's identity was also transformed. From someone identifying almost exclusively with his job role, he had now learned to identify himself with a successful NVQ candidate and with the use of the literacy practices such a role entails.

In conclusion, in this section I showed how Derry's discoursal construction of identity was achieved as the result of the interaction of the two activity systems of which he was a primary subject. First, the identity that was ascribed to him in the workplace system had an impact upon his ascribed identity in the qualification system. Second, the identity he adopted for himself was directly influenced by his role and the mediating tools he used in the workplace. However, the expansion of the qualification system had as a consequence a shift in Derry's understanding of who he was and who he identified himself with, as he was now accustomed to both activities and their involving roles, texts and literacy practices.

5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have employed the use of AT in order to describe the details of the literacy practices of a warehouse administrator and NVQ candidate. By using the basic principles of AT, I have managed to explore the subject's literacy practices in depth, taking into consideration their situated and collective nature. The primary focus of this analysis has been the use of mediating tools used to complete the object of an activity. I have shown that these objects are both material and symbolic and in their majority they are of a textual nature. At the same time, an emphasis has been put on oral interaction as a principal mediating means and the way that its parallel use with written signs permits the subjects to negotiate their practices in a more meaningful way.

The use of a case study has allowed me to produce rich descriptions of the literacy practices drawn upon when completing an NVQ portfolio, and in this way to provide an answer to the first part of the first part of the first research question of this thesis: "What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios in the workplace?" By describing the way the qualification activity system works, the textually mediated tools and the way they are used by Derry, as well as the restraints and affordances originating from the community, its rules and its division of labor, I have shown the large number of literacy practices involved in developing an NVQ portfolio. Derry's participation in these practices was sometimes easy for him, whereas in other cases he met with difficulties and had to look for help either in the community of the activity or by expanding the activity and looking for answers outside its initial boundaries.

The description of the workplace literacy practices is included in this chapter in order to make it possible to understand how they have shaped Derry's development of the portfolio. The NVQ portfolio is a compilation of texts directly related to the vocational life and cannot be understood outside this context. In order to understand what it means to develop a vocational portfolio, we should first understand what it means to work in a specific post of a specific workplace. Additionally, a discussion of the two contexts as distinct activity systems, allowed me to make comparisons between them and find out whether the literacy practices generated in one context are related to the other. In this way, I provide an answer the second part of the first research question: "Are these practices newly acquired or do they relate to the candidates' work practices?" A simple answer could be that some of the practices drawn upon for the creation of the portfolio are new for Derry, whereas some others originate in his workplace and are later recontextualised for the purposes of the NVQ portfolio.

However, by studying the network relations between the two activities I have shown that the situation is more complicated. Derry acts within a polycontextual environment and he continually crosses the boundaries between his workplace and the qualification activity systems. This boundary-crossing is enabled by the use of boundary objects, that is, texts that can be found in both activity systems. Additionally, it is enabled by the enactment of the two activities in the same space, the warehouse, and by involving communities with many shared members. This interaction has resulted in the creation of hybrid literacy practices, which originate from and can equally be employed in both activities. The NVQ portfolio is a good example of a hybrid text, as it is created within the qualification system but some of its components originate from the workplace activity. It is used in the qualification activity as the basic tool in order to obtain the qualification, but it can also be used in the workplace system as an instrument for continuing one's career. This hybridity of literacy practices and texts has led me to argue for the existence of a third space, where the two activities merge and a new activity is created. This third space is the product of the contradictions and the consequent expansion inherent in the two original activities.

Going back to my research question, I would first argue that the literacy practices, wherein Derry participates for the construction of the portfolio, are neither new nor exclusively originating from the workplace activity. Rather they are hybrid practices, originating from the workplace but going through a process of recontextualisation and thus acquiring new format, function and meaning when transferred in the qualification activity. And as far as their sustainability or transferability is concerned, I would argue that these practices are not static but they also do not move from one activity to another. Rather they move towards a new activity, a third space, where they are also dressed with new meanings. In this way, Derry is able to draw sources from the new activity in order to do two things: improve his performance at work, and at the same time obtain the long wanted vocational qualification.

Finally, this chapter also provides an answer to the third research question of this thesis: "How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed by the literacy practices in which they participate when developing a portfolio?" This question is approached here with a focus on the candidates who work for their NVQ on a work basis. When discussing the network relations of the two activities, I showed that the boundary-crossing between the workplace and the qualification process has an impact upon the discoursal construction of Derry's identity. More specifically, I used Ivanič's (2006) framework of discoursal identity formation and talked about identity being constructed by 'address', by 'attribution' and by 'affiliation'. In this way, I showed that aspects of identity ascribed to Derry in his workplace influence directly the way he is perceived by the members of the community in the qualification activity. At the same time, being in the workplace system long before embarking upon the qualification activity, Derry identifies more with the practices related to the former. This is the reason why he finds difficulties when asked to engage with literacy practices that he had not previously encountered in his workplace.

Identification with his job role is, in this case, very strong and Derry considers as easy everything that has to do with describing and impressing this role. However, contradictions between the two activities, between what he was doing as part of his work and what he was asked to do for his portfolio, resulted in expansion and, as previously stated, in the creation of a third space, a new activity. In this new activity, learning had a significant role and Derry's identity was reshaped. From identifying almost exclusively with his job role and the literacy practices that this involved, he was now able to produce new kinds of texts and identify with new literacy practices and with the role of a successful NVQ holder.

The discussion on the NVQ candidates' identity construction will be continued in the following chapter, where I focus upon candidates working for their qualification in a college setting. Additionally, the question on identity will be revisited in chapter 7, where I discuss the candidates' discoursal construction of identity, as depicted by the texts they write for their portfolios, as well as the texts given to them by policy makers, such as awarding bodies.

6 Developing NVQ portfolios at the college: Enacting hybrid discourses and negotiating identities

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the development of NVQ portfolios by the students of a Beauty Therapy class in a Further Education (FE) college. My aim is to provide a detailed account of the literacy practices drawn upon when developing vocational portfolios in the college and, in this way, to provide an answer to the second research question of this thesis:

> What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios at the college?

An additional aim of this chapter is to discuss how the literacy practices the NVQ candidates participate in when developing a portfolio have an impact upon the construction of their identity. This is the third research question of the thesis and will be answered here with a focus upon NVQ candidates in a college-basis.

In contrast to the previous chapter, where I introduced the candidates' workplace and their work for the qualification as two distinct activity systems, here I will discuss participation in the NVQ class and work for the portfolio as the same activity. This is because the candidates in the college did not work for their qualification on a work-basis, like Derry in the previous chapter did. Instead, they worked in a simulated workspace within the college, and their only objectives were to learn the job and thus obtain the qualification. Therefore, it makes more sense to talk about work in the college and work for the qualification as one activity system, as the objective is the same, that is, obtaining an NVQ.

Another difference with the previous chapter is that here I will not concentrate on one candidate only. Rather, I will examine the development of the portfolio as a collective process, the way it was enacted by all the students in the Beauty Therapy NVQ class. Therefore, I draw on data from the interviews and the focus groups I conducted with all research participants and I make an effort to have as many voices heard as possible. This is because the development of the portfolio and the work towards NVQ completion was experienced by the students in the college as a shared process and not as an isolated journey. I will therefore treat all the NVQ candidates as subjects in the activity system, with their common goal being the completion of their qualification. Additionally, I will discuss all other elements of the activity system, that is, the mediating tools used to reach the goal, the community shaping the activity and the division of labor and rules permeating the function of the system. In this way, I will give a complete picture of the literacy practices drawn upon when developing a portfolio in the college, as well as the affordances and restrictions such a process involves.

I will begin by providing information on the NVQ course and how my research progressed within it. Then I will start analysing the activity system of the NVQ class, by introducing the candidates, their reasons for obtaining the qualification and their roles in the class. In the following section, I discuss the portfolio as the main mediating means in the activity. The creation of texts included in the portfolio is discussed in detail and the candidates' opinions towards them are shown through extracts from the interviews. In this way, I discuss the consultation sheets, the case study booklets and the logbook included in the portfolio. I then remain on the issue of the logbook, to talk about the language used in it and the candidates' comments on this text. To this end, I show that the discourse promoted by the logbooks is new and different than the one preferred by the candidates. I continue the analysis by discussing the community of the activity system and by focusing on issues of mediation when developing the portfolio. The rules of the activity are discussed in terms of the time and space allocated to the candidates in order to work on their portfolio. In this section, I show that the candidates are not contented with the rules imposed by the college and try to subvert them and introduce their own ways of working. Finally, taking into account all the above, I include a discussion on the candidates' identity construction, by means of the two opposing discourses permeating the activity.

6.2 Context

The details of the research conducted in the college have been extensively discussed in section 4.3.2. There I described how I approached and finally managed to enter the NVQ class and the difficulties in all stages of the research. I also introduced the research participants and provided a mini profile for each one of the Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates. Here, I will add a few more information on the development of the portfolios within this context.

The portfolios created in the college were not very different from those developed within the workplace. However, the whole process of development was very different. The basic difference is that within a college there are only simulations of workplaces. The Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates were not employees in a beauty salon, but rather they were FE students who simulated their work roles and tasks within an artificial space. What is also interesting is that these students had no previous experience in beauty therapy. Some of them had relevant diplomas (e.g. nursing and hairdressing) but none of them had previously worked in this field, since none of them was a beauty therapist prior to this course. This is an important detail regarding the portfolio development, since NVQ portfolios are designed in order to evaluate prior knowledge and experience. However, these students acquired their knowledge and experience, while at the same time developing their portfolio.

The simulated workspace, where the students spent most of their time, was in fact a classroom fashioned in such a way as to resemble a beauty salon. Two rows of massage beds were spread across the room and they were used by the students both as desks when attending lectures and as beds for their clients during treatments. White was the dominant colour across the classroom in such a way as to remind people of health centres. Surgical gloves, powder, little bottles with aromas, cotton and glasses of water were laid on small tables in front of each bed. At the same time, the room also had characteristics of a traditional classroom. The walls were covered with students' learning posters. The students carried big piles of notebooks along with photocopies, instructions and lecture notes. There were piles of forms that students needed to fill in during the course, which will be discussed here in detail. When the students were working on their portfolios, such forms were spread on the beds which were used as desks on that occasion, along with the portfolio logbooks, photographs, diaries and sheets with the students' personal notes.

The portfolio was first mentioned in the class in the very beginning of the second term. The NVQ candidates were given two logbooks, one for each NVQ (level 2 and level 3), including performance criteria. Apart from the logbooks, the candidates also had to create what they called 'an evidence file'. In the evidence file, they included all pieces of evidence that covered the performance criteria. The evidence took the form of consultation sheets that candidates filled in during each treatment, receipts of payment from their clients, photographs and assignments.

By the second term, the candidates had advanced their vocational skills enough so as to be able to work in the weekly public salons held by the college. During these sessions, they met real clients who paid a small fee to be treated by students. At the same time, they had started their case studies. For these, they had to bring in the college their own clients and treat them once a week for six successive weeks. These were paying clients who, again for a small fee, enjoyed massage treatment. The number of case studies was different for each course with an average of about three case studies for each one (body massage, aromatherapy and reflexology). The forms filled in during the public salons and the case studies were also to be used as primary evidence for the portfolios.

During the second term the class also started having weekly one-hour tutorials on the portfolios. These were held every Monday morning and it was very often the case that candidates skipped this class and preferred to come to the college later in the day. In these sessions, the tutor gave the logbooks to the students and they had to log criteria that were covered during the previous week when working on their clients. On one of these Monday morning sessions, the tutor arranged to conduct individual tutorials where she would meet each candidate for ten minutes and go through her portfolio to check that everything was done properly.

From the above description, it is clear that the development of the portfolio in the Beauty Therapy NVQ class was parallel to the progression of the course. Also what is important to note is that the candidates were allowed to have an individual pace in the construction of their portfolio, meaning that not all of them filled in the same units and covered the same criteria at the same time. On the contrary, this depended upon the progress of their case studies and on their clients during the public salons. It was therefore meant to be an individual process, where each candidate was creating her own portfolio at her own pace. This was the cause of much confusion from the part of some students, who preferred to work collectively and worried when they had completed a section of the portfolio which was not completed by the rest of the class, and vice versa.

Finally, it should be mentioned that throughout the course, the candidates also had to write assignments in order to cover the theory in the performance criteria. These assignments were also included in their portfolios and evaluated accordingly. However, in this study I do not focus on the assignments. This is because I decided that, due to lack of space, I should concentrate only on the development of texts that have not been examined thoroughly by other studies e.g. case study booklets. Assignments, on the other hand, is a well-researched type of text and an additional study would not add much to the already existing knowledge.

6.3 The activity system of the Beauty Therapy NVQ class

In this chapter, the activity system that I discuss in detail is the Beauty Therapy NVQ class. As earlier said, I consider this class to form an activity system because all the subjects have a common goal, that is, the completion of their NVQs. The tutors of the class also form part of the activity as they are also aiming towards their students' NVQ accreditation. The principal mediating tool for this activity is the portfolio, which all the NVQ candidates need to develop in order to reach their goal. Tutors and candidates work together for the development of the portfolio forming a community. In this community other less directly involved members participate, such as the clients, the department of Beauty Therapy, the college and the awarding body. In what follows, I will give a detailed account of this activity, first by introducing the subjects and their objects and then by discussing in depth the portfolio as a mediating tool. Finally, I will examine the role of the community as mediated through the rules and the division of labor of the activity.

6.4 Subjects and objects

Barton et al (2007) argue that in order to study the role of language, literacy and numeracy in people's lives it is important to understand their current identities, present circumstances, past experiences and imagined futures. The profiles included in section 4.3.2 provide information about all these aspects of the NVQ candidate's lives, as collected through interviews, observation and personal interaction during the course of the research. Here, I will provide a summary of some of the common patterns found in these profiles and then I will move on to describe the roles undertaken by them within the activity system.

The Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates were all women. Their ages varied from early twenties to early fifties, with the majority being in their twenties. For some of them this NVQ signified the beginning of their career, whereas for some others it was a means for a change in their career. In the same way, some of them had obtained additional qualifications in the past and had developed similar portfolios, whereas for some others the NVQ and the portfolio were a whole new experience. In terms of their motives for attending the course, most of them wished to get a career in the industry of holistic therapies, whereas some others aimed to continue their education by entering new courses and gaining more qualifications in related fields.

One of the characteristics that almost all of the NVQ candidates shared was their professional attitude whilst on the course. Since my very first visits in the class, I had the impression that they already considered themselves as holistic therapists and behaved accordingly. They always made sure the treatment rooms were clean and clear. They removed all unnecessary objects from the room and wanted everything in perfect order. Their beds were thoroughly made and they had clean linen and towels. Their appearance was also well looked after. Their hair was pulled back and they had white ribbons on. They also wore white aprons and some of them used professional nurse watches. What is important to note is that all these precautions were part of their assessment, as they needed to show that they take into account health and safety issues. However, it did not feel as if the candidates did all these for assessment purposes only. They were eager to take all these measures and aware that they were doing the right thing as practitioners. This professional attitude was also confirmed from their tutor in the interview we had.

Another aspect of their professionalism was evident in the fact that they referred to themselves as being 'holistic therapists' and not 'beauty therapists'. In the interviews and focus groups, not even once did they refer to their profession as beauty therapy. Rather, they all confirmed an interest in holistic therapies and believed it to be an alternative way of healing. Indicative of this fact is Sandra's response when I referred to her profession as a beauty therapist:

Z: ok now do you think that your job a beauty therapist involves a lot of...

S: holistic therapist definitely not beauty

Z: holistic therapist alright

S: definitely not into beauty therapy at all

Z: would you say that beauty therapy is more like giving manicures?

S: nails and yes

Z: ok

S: holistic therapy yes

Sandra PD 8, 29-35

This extract indicates an awareness of the content of the course and of what exactly this candidate wanted to get from it. Sandra considered that the qualification's title as 'Beauty Therapy' was wrong, as in this course they learned how to perform holistic treatments mainly for healing purposes. She did not identify herself with other beauty therapists who gave manicures, pedicures and other similar beauty treatments, but rather she saw this qualification as an extension of her nursing diploma. This feeling was shared by most NVQ candidates in the class.

Opposing the role of the NVQ candidates as holistic therapists was their role as students. Participating in a class in its traditional sense, having tutors and timetables and paying fees gave the candidates the status of a student. Even though this role was evident in every aspect of the course, the candidates did not seem to identify with it. Working with tutors and writing assignments, following college rules and timetables were not enough to make the candidates feel more like students and less like therapists. They all seemed to be aware of the reasons they were taking this course and did not wish to be constantly pampered or scolded by tutors. Very often they expressed negative feelings towards the college for treating them as simple students and not trusting them the way professionals or at least apprentices should be trusted. This contradiction between the status of a student and a professional was evident throughout the year and a lot of the candidates referred to this opposition.

6.5 Mediating tools

The primary mediating tool between the subjects of the Beauty Therapy class and their object of obtaining a vocational qualification is the portfolio. The portfolio is the main product of the course and its significance is as high as the knowledge of the subject-matter being taught in the class. If one of the NVQ candidates had attended all classes and was very competent in holistic therapies but had not yet completed the portfolio, she would not be awarded with the qualification. The portfolio therefore is a compulsory tool that all students in the beauty therapy class had to construct in order to prove their vocational skills.

Thus, the portfolio lies at the heart of the activity system and it should be viewed not only as a file of paperwork, but also as a symbolic artefact, which signifies membership in the activity. Without the portfolio a candidate cannot prove her vocational skills and therefore cannot be accredited with an NVQ. It is arguable therefore that the portfolio reifies the candidates' skills, knowledge and experience (see discussion on reification as experience transformed into 'thingness', in section 3.2.4). It is as though all actions performed and all knowledge acquired throughout the course are included within this portfolio and can only be testified through it. In other words, the portfolio acts as a reification of candidates' experience. It transforms knowledge and experience into a portable and durable collection of texts. The NVQ assessors do not need to witness the candidate perform holistic therapies in order to award them with a qualification. Rather, all they need to see is the candidates' portfolios in order to make conclusions about their vocational skills and abilities and decide on whether or not to award the qualification.

In order to understand how the portfolio acts as reification of the candidates' vocational skills and knowledge, it is important to have a clear picture of the process of its construction. I have said elsewhere that the candidates did not start the development of their portfolios before the beginning of the second term. However, during the first term they had already started collecting evidence for the portfolios, in the form of consultation sheets, case study booklets and assignments. The process of completing these texts is important, as this is where the first level of reification takes place: the candidates' practical work is transformed into written text. In the following sections, I will describe these processes of reification, through identifying the literacy events in the class directly relevant to the development of the portfolio and the literacy practices that underpin them.

6.5.1 Consultation sheets

Filling in consultation sheets was one of the most frequent literacy events that took place in the class, and these forms were the very first texts that the NVQ candidates had to complete on the course. In the early stages of the course the students engaged in a role playing situation, where one of them was the therapist and another was the client. Before the actual treatment began, they needed to complete the consultation process. In this, the therapist had to get to know the client, asking information on his/her lifestyle, on any syndromes the latter might have had and the reasons why they wanted the treatment. They also had to explain to the client what the treatment involved and how it was going to help them. I consider this process to be a literacy event because while engaging in this conversation, the therapist had to fill in a form with all the information obtained by the client.

The same form was also present in another literacy event, right after the end of the treatment. This process was known as 'the after care advice' and the therapist had to consult the client on eating, sleeping and exercising habits. Again the therapist had to complete a section on this form, to show that she had given the necessary after care advice to the client. Finally, the client was asked to fill in a feedback section on the same form.

The consultation sheet is an A4 sheet, folded in the middle in such a way as to form four A5 pages. Figure 7 illustrates the first side of the A4 sheet, which constitutes the fourth and the first page of the form.

/ Lower back pain.

Client quite badly disabled in lower body - although is mobile and able to get on table with aid.

Full body massage given but with less pressure on lower limbs where muscles are wasted.

4

THE FACULTY OF HOSPITALITY, TOURISM, HAIRDRESSING & BEAUTY

Lancaster & Morecambe the College

Treatment (1)

TREATMENT PLAN
Provide head and body massage treatments

M2, M74, BT17 M17

Therapist Name ....

Client Confidentiality Number ....K:C - ①........

***Note:** For confidentiality reasons only client allocated number must appear here. Details of name, address, telephone Number, doctors details, medical history, referral details can be accessed via computer data for checking.*

Pre-Assessment Agreement	Tick	Feedback Review
I have read and understood the performance criteria expected of me		
I understand all my clients requirements		Pass ☐
I understand that once the assessment has commenced, I cannot ask my assessor any questions and if I wish to do so, the assessment will be void		Fail ☐
I have read and discussed the assessment plan with my assessor.		
I understand that I must complete my Assessment within the time stated Body – maximum 60 minutes Tutor signature ———— Student signature ————		Start Time 11·45 Finish Time 12:50 (long consult)
I understand that for my assessment the client must be a paying client and a receipt of the treatment must be attached to the treatment plan.		Payment Received £

Outcome	Tick	Preparation of client includes:		Outcome (consult and plan treatment with the client)	Tick
Lighting	✓	Removal of clothing	✓	Consultation Techniques	
Heating	✓	Removal of accessories	✓	Questioning	✓
Ventilation	✓	Covering of cuts and abrasions	✓	Visual	✓
General comfort	✓	Covering the client	✓	Manual	✓
		Removal of make-up		Reference to client records	
		Securing and protecting hair	✓		

Analysis

Client needs / Body Types and Conditions

Nervous		Contra-indications *Tick if present*		Lifestyle Patterns		Endomorph	✓
Non-nervous	✓	Severe circulatory disorders	✗	Occupation Housewife.	✓	Mesomorph	
16+		Thrombosis/ Embolism	✗	Family situation Single	✓	Ectomorph	
35+	✓	Epilepsy	✗	Dietary and fluid intake	✓	Sluggish Circulation	
56+		Diabetes	✗	Hobbies and interests	✓		
Sedentary	✗	Conditions of nervous system	✗	Means of Relaxation watch TV	✓	good	✓
Active	✓	Pregnancy	✗	Exercise habits	✗		
Male	✗	Skin disorders	✗	Smoking habits	✗		
Female	✓	Nail diseases	✗	Sleep patterns	✗		
		Severe Bruising	✗				
		High Low Blood Pressure	✗	Insomnia.			

Heart condition ✗
Cancer ✗

Medical history
1.. back

Figure 7 Consultation sheet: pages 4 & 1

The other side of the form consists of pages 2 & 3 and is shown below in Figure 8.

This section of the form is part of the 'aftercare advice' literacy event.

Objectives of Treatment are:		Resources are:	
Sense of wellbeing	✓	Recent haemorrhage or swelling	✗
Relaxation		Cuts/Abrasions/ Recent operations Fractures/Sprains (recent)	✗

Electro-Therapy Equipment:		Area's of Treatment		Massage Techniques are:			
Gyratory Massager		Back/Gluteals	✓	Effleurage	✓	Vibrations	
Audio Sonic		Legs/Feet	limited	Petrissage	✓	Frictions	✓
Infra Red		Full Body	✓	Percussion face			
Manual Massage		Neck/face/Head		Percussion body	✓		
		Arms/Hands					
		Chest/shoulders					

Choice of Massage Mediums	Tick box		
Oil ✓	Sweet almond	Gel	
Cream		Emulsion	
Powder			

FEEDBACK - EVIDENCE

Client's Feedback			Any further comments please detail:
Tick as appropriate	Yes	No	[illegible]
1. Did the therapist treat you professionally and with courtesy throughout your treatment	✓		
2. Was the treatment explained clearly to you prior to and throughout the treatment			
3. Was the aftercare explained in detail	✓		
4. Did the treatment meet your expectations	✓		

Therapists Self Appraisal:		
Tick as appropriate	Yes	No
1. Was the treatment area professionally prepared prior to the client's arrival	✓	
2. Was a professional consultation carried out prior to the treatment	✓	
3. Was the treatment explained prior to, during and after care given to the client	✓	
4. Was the treatment carried out within the time allocation	✓	
5. Was the client care professional / did the client book a further treatment	✓	
6. How could the you improve future client care-treatment	✓	
Detail improvements:		

Tutor Feedback Tick as appropriate:	Yes	No
1. Was the treatment area prepared professionally		
2. Was the client care of a high standard		
3. Was the consultation professional		
4. Was the treatment carried out to the desired standard and a plan completed		
5. Was the client satisfaction good		
Was the therapist professional at all times		

Assessor Signature: ——————

Therapist's Signature: ——————

Date: ——

Start Time——————

Finish Time ——————

2

VALUE ADDED TRACKING:
Areas of improvement from previous treatment (discuss with the therapist):
Have these improvements been achieved?
Areas to improve in your next treatment (discuss with the therapist):
KEY AND BASIC SKILLS EVIDENCE CHECKLIST (circle the evidence that applies to your level)

BASIC SKILLS - WRITING			
1.3.5 2.3.6 3.3.7			SPELL CORRECTLY PERSONAL DETAILS

BASIC SKILLS READING			
2.2.6	3.2.11		COMPLETION & UNDERSTANDING OF FORMS
1.2.3	2.2.7	3.2.10	RECOGNISE SPECIALIST KEY WORDS

BASIC SKILLS SPEAKING & LISTENING			
1.1.5	2.1.6	3.1.6	SPEAK CLEARLY TO BE UNDERSTOOD
1.1.6	2.1.7	3.1.10	MAKE REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

BASIC SKILLS APPLICATION OF NUMBER	
1.1.1	MEASURE & MAKE OBSERVATIONS
1.3.4	REACH A SUITABLE OUTCOME
2.2.18	READ SIMPLE SCALES
2.3.4	FOLLOW A GIVEN ROUTINE TO ACHIEVE A SUITABLE OUTCOME
3.2.16	CHOOSE AND USE APPROPRIATE MEASURING EQUIPMENT
3.1.5	USE GIVEN MATERIALS AND METHODS

KEY SKILLS EVIDENCE			
COMMUNICATION			
1.1 21.	1.2 2.2	LEVEL ONE LEVEL TWO	ONE TO ONE DISCUSSIONS READING & SUMMARISING INFORMATION
APPLICATION OF NUMBER			
1.2		LEVEL ONE	USING SCALES/PROPORTIONS & AMOUNTS & SIZES
2.2		LEVEL TWO	

3

Figure 8 Consultation sheet: page 2 & 3

The 'Pre-assessment Agreement', in page 1 of the form, is the first section the candidates work on, when they start their treatment. In this section, they have to sign their agreement with certain conditions (e.g. I have read and understood the performance criteria expected of me). In the top right hand side, they add the start and finish time of the treatment. In the middle section, they have to tick some boxes to show that they have done the proper preparation for the treatment, in terms of the room, the client and the planning of the therapy. From my observations, I found that the candidates ticked these boxes without going through each one of them in detail.

When I brought this matter up in the focus groups, the women explained that this was because they had read through this document many times and were very familiar with it, so there was no need to go through it in each treatment.

The bottom section includes a number of client types (in terms of age, sex and behaviour), contra-indications (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, pregnancy) and lifestyle patterns (e.g. family situation, dietary, smoking habits). I observed and later the candidates confirmed that most of them have different strategies of completing this section of the form. Some of them read aloud the symptoms, asking the clients if they had any of these, whereas others handed in the form to the client and asked them to complete it themselves. In the focus group discussion, Angela and Kerry explained the reason for using the latter technique:

> *A: but then I always say can you just read through the list of contra-indications which may affect you in your treatment because I think it's more sensible if they actually do it themselves, cause if you're going through it and saying do you have whatever and then do you have cancer? It's sort of like she'll be writing it so why don't I just say can you just do it? [...]*
>
> *K: and especially if you say are you pregnant*
>
> *A: have you got cancer? Are you pregnant? When you're like seventy five, oh sorry! [...] you know what I mean? Just read through it yourself*
>
> *Z: of course*
>
> *K: and are you menstruating, or having a hysterectomy and things like that, it's better if you just let them read it through*
>
> Focus Group 2, PD2 92-107

In this section, Angela and Kerry explain that they preferred asking the clients to fill in this section of the form by themselves, in order to avoid embarrassing or insulting them in any way. The same women also agreed that some of the questions included in this section were inappropriate and unnecessary:

> *K: some of the questions on it are a bit stupid and tedious [...]*
>
> *A: yeah so one of the questions I don't actually agree with is family situation*
>
> *K: yeah*
>
> *A: I mean how do you actually phrase that? I think that's really inappropriate because they might have just split up with their husband, their life long partner or whatever and then you'll say what's your situation and it might be a little bit wrong. I mean what...what is that? Why should we need to know information like that, it's personal so I tend to leave that out, I use that to my own discretion*
>
> Focus Group 2, PD2 33-60

Angela and Kerry felt that certain questions in the form disempowered their clients, by asking them to give personal information unrelated to the treatment. The strategies they developed, omitting certain questions or asking the patients to fill in the forms themselves, gave their clients the power to choose which questions they will answer and how they will do it. In this way, the clients would not feel embarrassed or offended and the treatment would continue smoothly. The idea that certain forms have the effect of disempowering individuals has been discussed by Fawns and Ivanič (2001) in a study on bureaucratic form-filling. They argue that bureaucratic forms are used by institutions as an effective means of exercising power and often result in stripping individuals of their identities. This can also be argued for certain parts of the consultation sheet discussed here. According to the NVQ candidates, the form asked more information than what was necessary for the treatment and a lot of the questions were inappropriate to the context within which they were being asked. Again Fawns and Ivanič call for a more critical approach to form-filling practices and prompt individuals to "manipulate rather than maintain the power relations and assumptions" (ibid: 91). The above stance of the NVQ candidates towards the form responded to this call, as they did not uncritically accept the content of the form, but in contrast, they deliberately omitted asking certain questions or they gave the client the option to answer those questions that they felt comfortable with. In this way, they protected their clients from the disempowering effects of the form, acting more as professionals and less as college students.

On the other hand, some of the candidates felt that there was important information missing from this section of the form. According to them, not all contra-indications and symptoms were included in the list and indeed some of the most important ones, such as cancer or arthritis, were not included. The issue of missing information came up in a consultation session I recorded between Angela and Kathleen:[11]

K: Do you have any sort of problems that you are aware of that you want

to tell me about or anything you just want me to work on?

A: I have nothing apart from an asthma

K: right ok

A: is that on the list?

K: no it's not actually

[11] This is a role playing treatment where Kathleen is the therapist and Angela is the client.

A: it should be, shouldn't it?

K: it should be probably yeah

A: but it's precaution isn't it? really

K: it's precaution to what have...

A: it's precaution it's not as though you definitely have to call off the treatment if your client is epileptic but you definitely you can't have the treatment if you are not aware of it, but how are you going to be aware of it?

[...]

K: maybe you should just have to go mild on the chest area or...

A: oh yeah knowing to do that in the first place but if you don't know they've got asthma

K: yeah probably you should just ask and write that down somewhere actually

Consultation session: Angela & Kathleen

This conversation opens up another problem that many of the candidates referred to, that of lack of space in the form. Once they decided that asthma should be included in the list of contra-indications, they had to decide where to include it in the form. The same problem was also faced by Samantha, who filled in the consultation sheet shown in Figure 7 above. Samantha found that there was not enough space in page 2 (Figure 8) and decided to add further details about her client in the empty left hand side of page 4 (Figure 7). Lack of space was a problem that most of the candidates acknowledged and one of the things they wished to change if they made similar forms for their own businesses in the future.

In the first section of page 3 (Figure 8 above), the therapists filled in information about the treatment, such as the resources that were used, the parts of the body that they had worked on and the techniques they had used. This section was filled in right after the treatment. In the beginning of the course, some of the students asked for help with this section from the tutors or other classmates, but as the course progressed they seemed confident in working with it and they never mentioned having any particular problems.

The middle section is the feedback from the client. The NVQ candidates valued client feedback and were eager to read it. They said that it was useful for their progress and enjoyed reading positive feedback. The only problem mentioned was that they had never received any negative comments and therefore did not get the chance to improve further. Kerry thought that this was because of the way this section was structured:

> *It's just sheets and sheets of paper, just saying, with ticks on it, it doesn't say anything about our work, sometimes it says how good we are but it depends what people are going to write, the comments in the box pressure good or anyway, they're not gonna write you were crap, they're not gonna write anything like that I think something like anonymous questionnaires would have been better with all the information or questions where you could evaluate yourself properly like did you think the pressure was good? Did you think the technique was good? And things like that, have you ever had a massage before? [...] And no one is*

gonna write a bad comment but it doesn't have a box to tick did you think the pressure was enough or too much and they'd tick yes or no.

Kerry, PD5 224-238.

Kerry's comments can be further supported by my experience as one of the candidates' client in body massage. I was always eager to provide feedback, but I was not sure as to what was expected of me to write. I usually ended up writing a few general positive comments, which I was sure were not of much help to the candidate. Also, it was true that I was never going to give any negative feedback as this would distort my relations with the therapist. Therefore, feedback was not always objective and most of the time did not contribute to the candidate's progress.

Page 3 of the form (Figure 8) includes a list of the Basic Skills achieved through completing this form. However, the candidates were not assessed as to the basic skills developed in this class and therefore were never asked to deal with this section of the form.

<u>Overall consultation sheets evaluation</u>

The NVQ candidates used the consultation sheets daily with their clients and had grown very familiar with them. Their overall evaluation was that, despite the problems mentioned above, these were useful forms that contributed to their work in many ways. The most important reason for using it, that almost all the women referred to, was legal coverage:

D: it's just people coming back to you if they had a bad reaction and you know especially these days people can sue you for things

Sam: yeah it is completely necessary to do this

D: so you've got something like that it's legally necessary and they've signed and even if someone lies to you they say no we don't have cancer but you find out they do but if they've signed and accept that they haven't then you are legally not responsible, it's their responsibility then.

Focus Group1, PD1 91-99

Angela: I think it's also useful as well if anything it's to protect us as students as well, because if anything did happen at least we follow up the correct procedure, maybe for insurance purposes and stuff

Focus Group2, PD2 28-32

The consultation sheets were also considered useful by the candidates as a means of getting the necessary information from the clients, which otherwise they might not have known. In some cases, this information proved to be crucial, as clients with certain syndromes should not be treated at all:

D: on a Tuesday afternoon when we do the public salon, where we have the paying clients who come in and it's really necessary that we do it [referring to the consultation sheet] *because obviously we get some people who have had cancer and things and totally not being able to have the treatment, so if we didn't have those consultation sheets we wouldn't realise that we can't actually work on.*

Focus Group1, PD1 71-76

Finally, the candidates used consultation sheets as a means of record keeping. Having written down the details of each treatment, they knew what techniques or resources had to be used in each new session:

> *Samantha: but the colour sheets show also that you've done different treatments, that's important, you know what treatment you did.*
>
> Focus Group1, PD1 149-151

It becomes evident from the above that the NVQ candidates did not regard the consultation sheets as unnecessary paperwork, but rather they found that this form contributed to their work in many different ways. However, as I mentioned earlier, they did consider that the layout and some of the content of the form is problematic. When asked if they were going to use a similar form when working in the industry, they all replied positively but explained that they would make it simpler and add more relevant questions. Samantha identified that part of the unnecessary questions of these forms was due to the fact that they were used for assessment purposes. When asked if she would make changes to the consultation sheets in the future, she answered:

> *Well yes because the ones we use at the moment they are for assessments and they've actually got the assessment things on so...it wouldn't need anything like that it would just be a question and an answer.*
>
> Samantha, PD10 26-30

Here a recontextualisation of the consultation sheet takes place, from being used in actual work practices to being transformed into evidence for the portfolio. This recontextualisation changed the meaning of the text and the way it was valued by the people who use it. The candidates found the text useful in their work, but considered that its double nature, as a work tool and as portfolio evidence, complicated its use.

6.5.2 Case study booklets

A frequent literacy event in the Beauty Therapy NVQ class was working on case studies. Before and during the treatments for their case studies, the therapists had to fill in a booklet wherein they included all the case study details. These case study booklets would eventually be included in their portfolios as evidence. There were three booklets, one for each module (aromatherapy, body massage and reflexology) and they had small differences amongst them. In the first page, the client's personal details, medical history and any other additional information were included. Then a page for each of the six weekly sessions followed, where the students had to evaluate the treatment and add comments. In the 'body massage' case study booklet, there was a section for the client to write what they expected from the treatment. For the reflexology case study, there was a list with parts of the body and the candidates had to evaluate the client's sensitive reflexes on a scale from 0 to 5 (see Figure 13 later in this chapter). Also, in all booklets a section for an overall therapist evaluation was included. Finally, the candidates added photographs of the treatments, which were used as evidence.

Working on a case study was a large literacy event, within which we can distinguish smaller and more specific ones. For example, the conversation between therapist and client and the forms filled in before and after the treatment constitute two different literacy events. Table 3, below, shows the literacy events that took place in each of the six sessions of the case studies.

Literacy event: case study		
Sessions	Time	Texts
Session 1	Before treatment	Case study booklet: p.1 personal details, medical history and client's expectations from the six-week treatment. Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment.
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.2 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Consultation sheet: after care advice and client feedback.
Session 2	Before treatment	Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment.
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.3 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Consultation sheet: after care advice and client feedback.
Session 3	Before treatment	Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.4 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Consultation sheets: after care advice and client feedback.
Session 4	Before treatment	Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.5 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Consultation sheet: after care advice and client feedback.
Session 5	Before treatment	Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.6 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Consultation sheet: after care advice and client feedback.
Session 6	Before treatment	Consultation sheet: personal details, lifestyle questions, aims for the treatment
	After treatment	Case study booklet: p.7 treatment evaluation, health & safety precautions. Therapist's overall treatment evaluation. Consultation sheet: after care advice and client feedback.

Table 3 Texts and literacy events of a case study

According to Table 3, the students were asked to fill in the personal details section in the case study booklet during the first session with the client and before the treatment had began. However, some of the students felt that this was too early in the case study to ask their clients for such personal information. In the following extract, Dana explained why she did not fill in the personal details section early in the treatment:

> *that's why I don't fill it out straight away because if you think over the process of six weeks with your client you end up bonding and talk to them and I think you find out more about them and their history that way and that's why I do it more nearer the end, because I get a better idea of their history that way I think, because you know the first time you meet someone people are a bit you know they've got the...they don't want to give away too much but after a few weeks they'll know you a bit better they're used to you touching them and they don't mind as much that sometimes they open up more so you find more about people that way.*
>
> Dana, PD4 76-84

For other students, the time they chose to fill in the booklets was not the result of a strategy, but simply depended on practicalities:

> *Some of them I did whilst or during the treatment, some of them after the treatment, depending on what I was doing on that day really, especially with the case studies if we had to go away right after the case studies then I'd do it afterwards or if I was not doing anything after the treatment then I'd do it.*
>
> Kay, PD6 109-114

Z: and do you fill it in immediately after the treatment?

K: we're supposed to, not always, but it's best to because otherwise you forget, you know, but I think some of us don't, it just depends if you are really tired if you had a lot of treatments you go home without doing it yeah...certain amounts you have to pretend you did (laughs)!

Kathleen, PD11 201-205

Another problem that the candidates identified in the case study booklets was its repetitive character. As can be seen in Table 3, after each session, the candidates not only evaluated the treatment but also had to add a section about the health and safety precautions they had taken. This section tended to be the same, as not many things had changed from one week to another.

Kerry: on every page you've got to put health and safety was ok the surfaces were clean but it's obvious by the pictures, so it's like having to write the exact same thing in every box for every treatment, so there's like we do six treatments five times six for each one what's that? Thirty? So that's thirty times and we've got to write it thirty times for aromatherapy, thirty times for body massage and it's like well it's quite obvious you can see from the pictures what we've done...

Focus Group2, PD2 184-191

It was not only the booklets, but overall the literacy events shaping the case study sessions that tended to be repetitive. Again in Table 3, it can be seen that for every single session with the same client, the candidates had to fill in a consultation sheet. The women in the class complained often about this unnecessary paperwork since, as they claimed, no big changes in the client's medical condition and personal details could take place within a week.

Overall case study booklets evaluation

The case study booklets were considered useful by the NVQ candidates as a means of tracking their progress over the course:

> *D: your case study gives full client history. It shows the development of your skills and the development of how your client has felt over the six weeks.*
>
> *Kath: Yeah it's in a course of six weeks so*
>
> *Sam: that's the important about the case studies it's the development isn't it?*
>
> Focus Group 1, PD1 161-164

> *D: the consultation sheets are more for personal practice and when we are assessed, it's our only piece of evidence really*
>
> *Kath: But that's just for one treatment whereas the case study booklet you write you fill in each week how they felt after the last session and you can see the progression of, you know...*
>
> Focus Group 1, PD1 165-169

The students also found that the case study booklets were valuable for their work, as a means of keeping records of client histories and treatments:

> *see obviously doing the case study thing it does help a little bit because say in the future if we have clients who may have you know certain*

medical problems or past history at least we've got case studies that might have related to it it's something you can always refer to

Dana, PD4 90-94

you could actually go back and see [otherwise] you'd forget and it's more accurate, isn't it? If you write it down then go back later on and write it.

Angela, PD3 141-144

The inclusion of photographs in their case study booklets was considered by many as an act which was only for the benefit of the assessors. I observed the candidates taking photos of each other frequently and without considering it a real problem. However, this is how Dana commented upon the issue:

[Photographs are] more for the exam board, that's more of their case so that they can prove that we've done, you know, that's for the evidence to prove that we've done it by having closer evidence. I don't need photo evidence when I'm at work, you know, these are things that we don't really need we know we can do it we'll do it within college and our tutors see us do it but photos and everything are obviously for the examination board and then so that they can see that we actually have done it.

Dana, PD4 113-119

Here Dana expresses the view that part of the work that they did was not done to address their own learning needs, but rather for the benefit of the assessors and the examination board. The concept of the audience of the portfolio is often revisited by the students. They viewed negatively the fact that their painstaking efforts to create the portfolio were meant to serve the examiners rather than themselves.

As shown above, despite the problems identified in the case study booklets, the candidates considered them, overall, a useful tool for their work. This was briefly confirmed by Angela who, towards the end of the course, answered the question whether she enjoyed doing the case studies and filling in the booklets:

> *Yeah I enjoyed it, yeah I enjoyed doing all the case studies and learning about different things, at the end of it I felt a lot more confident and competent.*
>
> Angela, PD3 143-146

Such statements usually appeared towards the end of the interviews with the candidates. After having identified the problems, they reflected on the forms and found that they could not dismiss them altogether, as they were useful in many aspects. However, this did not happen with the logbook, which is discussed in the following section.

6.5.3 The logbook

The completion of the logbooks was the final stage of the portfolio development. This literacy event usually took place every Monday morning for one hour. The candidates had 3 logbooks, one for each NVQ level and one on 'Health and Safety'. They referred to the latter as the 'purple logbook'. Towards the end of the course, the candidates were working on their logbooks more frequently. Usually, half of the class was working on their case studies while the other half was filling in logbooks. The logbooks were divided into units and each unit consisted of a list of performance criteria. Figure 9 is an example of a unit taken from the level 3 logbook.

 Date: 1st August 2006

Unit VR17 - Prepare for and Provide Body Massage

Knowledge and Understanding

A competent candidate must know and understand:

Prepare treatment room and client for body massage

1. The preparation of the of the treatment room.
2. The preparation of the client for a body massage.
3. The preparation of the area must be according to legislative requirements, industry practice and industry codes of ethics.
4. Why the treatment area must be private and comfortable.
5. How to identify contra-indications and understand the action to take and the advice to give.
6. How to reassure the client so as to promote relaxation.
7. Reasons for client and therapist signing the treatment plan.
8. Why during treatments involving the removal of clothing by the client, this is kept to a minimum and action is taken to ensure that the client's dignity and privacy are maintained at all times.
9. Why treatment processes should not be invasive and all procedures should be explained fully beforehand, understanding ensured and permission given for them to proceed.

Provide massage treatment

10. The importance of correct hand cleansing and why hands are cleansed immediately before and after any physical contact with the client.
11. Why good hygiene practice should be observed by the client.
12. Sufficient anatomy and physiology in order to explain effects to the client.
13. The importance of adapting techniques to client needs.

Evaluate outcomes of massage treatment and provide aftercare

14. The procedures to follow after a massage in obtaining accurate feedback from the client.
15. How the effectiveness of treatment may be judged and how to ensure client satisfaction.
16. Why the client must be given information on after-care treatments, such advice to include relaxation, postural exercises and product knowledge.
17. Why record keeping is essential and that records must be kept securely and confidentially.

Contra-indications: high blood pressure, low blood pressure, history of thrombosis, history of embolism, epilepsy, diabetes, dysfunction of nervous system, skin disorders, severe bruising, recent haemorrhage, swellings, cuts or abrasions, recent operations, fractures and sprains

Key Skills Signposting. The following key skills are appropriate to support this unit:- Communication Level 2, Element 2.1a; Application of Number Level 1, Elements 1.1 and 1.2; Information Technology Level 2, Elements 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Figure 9 Unit extracted from level 3 Beauty Therapy logbook

The candidates had to prove that they had covered all the criteria by cross-referencing them with the content of their evidence file, i.e. consultation sheets, case study booklets and assignments. In other words, everything that was included in the evidence file had to be logged in the logbooks as well. This was done with the use of cross-referencing tables, such as the one shown in Figure 10. Each piece of evidence was given a reference number and in that way it was logged in the table.

Copyright Vocational Training Charitable Trust — Date: 1st August 2006

Unit No. [ ] Candidate Name:

Candidate No:

Knowledge & Understanding Requirements Record

	Date	Evidence Code	P/Folio Ref.		Date	Evidence Code	P/Folio Ref
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							

Knowledge and Understanding complete (date): ....

Assessor Initials & Number: ....

35

Figure 10 Record keeping table from the Beauty Therapy logbook

Another way of cross-referencing was the colour-coding system. According to this, the candidates had to assign a unique colour to each one of their clients and add a coloured dot in all the related documentation. In this way, all the consultation sheets and the case study booklet of a client had the same coloured dot on the top corner. When a candidate claimed that she had covered one of the performance criteria in the logbook, she had to add a coloured dot next to it, so as to indicate the client on which the action had been performed. The following Figure 11 comes from level 3 logbook and consists of lists with range statements.

 Date: 1st August 2006

Unit VR27 – Assess the Client and Blend Oils for Aromatherapy

Range Statements

R1 - Clients

a) nervous
b) non-nervous
c) new clients
d) existing clients
e) active
f) sedentary
g) introvert
h) extrovert
i) young to old

R2 - Treatment Objectives and Client Expectations

a) uplift
b) relaxation
c) stress relief
d) remedial not subject to medical prohibition

R3 - Physical and emotional state

a) current medical condition
b) relevant physical problems
c) motivation in regard to aromatherapy

R4 - Life-Style

a) physical activities
b) diet
c) occupation

R5 - Legislation

a) national and local legislation relating to health, safety and hygiene
b) industry codes of practice
c) National and European legislation relating to essential oils

R6 – Methods of application

a) massage
b) inhalation
c) immersion
d) topical

Figure 11 Range statements and colour-coding from the Beauty Therapy logbook

The candidates had to treat a range of clients (e.g. nervous, non-nervous, etc), with a variety of objectives (e.g. stress relief, uplift, etc) and using multiple techniques (e.g. massage, immersion, etc). The lines (with different colours in the original) indicate the client represented. So, for example, a yellow line indicates a client whose consultation sheets and case study booklets are also marked with a yellow dot. This client was nervous, new, sedentary, young and so on.

By means of cross-referencing, the content of a portfolio was not unrelated and randomly displayed. Rather, all the documents were linked with the logbook, since they all had to be logged in it.

Overall logbook evaluation

The logbook was the text associated with the most negative feelings in the Beauty Therapy NVQ class. When they first started working with it, most of the students seemed puzzled. This was later confirmed in the focus groups which took place early in the second term, and even more intensely in the interviews towards the end of the course. The following statements are just a selection of the candidates' comments about the logbooks:

> *Z: What is it that really annoys you about that? Is it the language? Is it the layout?*
>
> *Kath: Everything, the layout, the language, the colour coding*
>
> *Sam: Yeah*
>
> *Sadie: yeah*

Kath: it's just the fact that it's...and it's also you can't just get it done, it's like progression you can only fill in one tiny bit every two weeks or so

Sam: Yeah

Kath: once we've done an assessment, so it's just this ongoing long whole of a thing that it's just gonna take a million years to fill in what's what

R: But it isn't very easy I think like which bits you still need to do as well, is it?

Sam: Yeah

R: You have to go through your own little map, it's not laid out in such a way that you can clearly see like which columns you've done and which columns you have gaps in

Focus Group 1, PD1 243-256

The logbooks for a lot of people are such a nightmare trying to mark things off, find things, you know, and these are official things that are marked and assessed.

Dana, PD4 135-138

I think the colour coding has been a bit of a headache I think, again I'm not finding it as tricky now, I'm getting there a bit more but it's not an easy system of keeping track what you covered and in which assessment really.

Rebecca, PD7 109-112

Sam: It's one of those things that make life harder than it already is.

Fieldnotes, PD12 46-46

All the above statements reveal the state of confusion around the portfolios. The main problems that the candidates identified were the colour-coding system, the segmented nature of the logbook, the time required to complete it and the vast amounts of cross-referencing. This confusion sometimes resulted in the candidates' frustration and psychological breakdown. The following quote from Sandra illustrates this situation:

By the time I've been doing it about ten minutes my head's gone totally fussing and I'm depressed and I want to cry and I'm not kidding, this is how much I like it and even thinking about it makes me want to cry actually.

Sandra, PD8 520-524

What is interesting to note is that the majority of the students did not consider that the logbook completion required high mental processes. They did not identify its difficulty so much in the content, but rather in the inefficient way that it was introduced and explained to them, as well as in the complexity of its use. They believed that the tutors had not made an effort to explain the process of completing the portfolio from the beginning. Rather, the tutors had asked them to fill in consultation sheets and booklets without explaining what they needed them for. When the logbooks were introduced in the beginning of the second term, the candidates felt that they had no idea what they were supposed to do. According to them, the three tutors of the course kept giving them contradictory advice and guidance. As a result, they all had a very negative first impression of the logbooks:

Z: Let's go back to the logbooks, did you find these easy to use?

Kerry: When they were explained to me yes, because when they were explained at the beginning of the course everyone got a bit panicky.

Kerry, PD5 93-96

No, I don't actually find the logbooks difficult, I think it's because it's like starting reading a book from the end we...you know, were half way through on the course before we really discovered what the logbooks were about.

Sandra, PD8 213-215

6.5.4 Language of the logbooks: A new discourse

The language used in the logbooks was another major factor the candidates referred to. Some of them argued that they had found it fairly easy and had not had any actual problems with it.

A: I find it straightforward

Kerry: I think it's straightforward put it in quite plain language but you know what you're doing there what's what.

Focus Group 2, PD2 346-348

Z: ok how about the language used?

Sam: I think, yeah, I think it's fairly easy once you know what you are doing, it's all the numbers, the numbers at the top the units, individual units that confused everybody to begin with.

Samantha, PD10 85-88

However, some of the candidates repeatedly reported facing great problems with the language, mainly because of its vague and complex nature.

> *D: there was one day with Andrea* [the tutor] *I was asking her on the criteria on this question I really did not understand [...] and she didn't even explain back to me, so I think without I am not saying she didn't know it but I do I think she found it difficult as well*
>
> Focus Group1, PD1 509-516

> *I think the wording of it is a bit more confusing as well it's ...quite, you look at it and you think well quite what exactly does that mean what do I have to have done to show that I've done it?*
>
> Rebecca, PD7, 92-94

> *W: I find the questions can be quite confusing and complicated*
>
> *Z: do you mean the wording, the words used can be very confusing?*
>
> *W: yeah and even if the lecturers state a question on paper not verbally it's very...there's too many openings on it of what actually they want you to do, do they want us to just write about blood or do they want us to go into the composition of blood? Or...like that.*
>
> *Z: so do you rather have something more specific questions?*
>
> *W: yeah, but very simple and understandable.*
>
> Wallis, PD9 34-43

A request for simpler and more specific standards was common among many students. Rebecca proposed an alternative solution, an accompanying leaflet with clarifications on the logbook questions:

> *I think if maybe the exam board produced a little leaflet with each book explaining some of the criteria and what they mean that might be helpful, cause it's got say the aromatherapy level 3 sections got like 'remedial outcome not subject to medical prohibition' but it's not clear whether it means remedial as in just treating muscular problems or if it's any kind of problems like irritable bowel or anything like that so...and there's loads of other things as well and we've all been saying but what does this mean? If they had a booklet explaining this means this that would be really helpful and it'd be clearer what you have to do.*
>
> Rebecca, PD7, 163-171

The language used in the logbooks as well as in other texts, such as consultation sheets and case study booklets, and the language used by the candidates when filling in these forms will be discussed in detail in chapter 7. Here, I wish to make a comparison between these NVQ candidates studying in a course for their qualifications, and the candidate of the previous chapter, who worked on his portfolios while at work. In the warehouse, Derry and Kevin did not complain about the language used in the logbooks. Rather, they seemed pretty sure about what they were expected to do and Derry only encountered difficulties when working on logbook units outside the remit of his job, such as issues on diversity, etc. This difference, between the work-based and the college-based candidates, indicates that it is likely that the latter had difficulties with the language because they were not familiar with the content of their work. Having only started working on holistic therapies and without any previous experience on the industry, they had not encountered the jargon before and therefore had difficulties in interpreting the performance indicators. This, however, did not happen for Derry or Kevin who, having been on their post for a long time, were very familiar with the relevant jargon and were therefore confident about the meaning of the criteria and the kind of evidence they had to provide.

In other words, Derry and Kevin were familiar with the discourse of their workplace and their respective posts. They knew the ways of being and acting as a warehouse employee and the kind of language to be used. This enabled them to understand most of the criteria and to know, more or less, what kind of evidence to provide for each one. On the other hand, the candidates in the college had not worked as holistic therapists before and therefore were not familiar with the dominant discourse of their profession. They were only now learning how to act, dress and talk like therapists, and therefore they were only now figuring out how to answer the criteria.

The different approach to the language of logbooks can be accounted for if we consider Gee's distinction between two poles of a continuum: acquisition and learning. He defines acquisition as: "a process of acquiring something (usually subconsciously) by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching" (1996: 138). He goes on to say that this process takes place in natural and meaningful settings and the acquirers are aware of what they need to acquire in order to function. On the other hand, Gee defines learning as:

> a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated as a teacher) or through certain life-experiences that trigger conscious reflexion. This teaching or reflexion involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytical parts.
>
> (ibid)

Taking into account these differences, it can be argued that Derry (and Kevin) had mastered his workplace practices by acquisition. The years spent on the same post and the experience he had gained resulted in the unconscious acquisition of the ways of being and acting in his post. On the contrary, the Beauty Therapy candidates were learning the practices of their work by means of overt instruction. In fact, they were literally breaking down their profession into its parts in order to learn how to control each one of them. Gee believes that discourses, in the sense of ways of being in the world (see section 4.5 of chapter 4), can only be mastered through acquisition and not through learning. He argues for a process of "enculturation into social practices" with the support of people who have already mastered the discourse. Gee's statement is also supported by Wenger's learning theory of communities of practice (see section 3.7.1). Wenger (1998) argues that when new people enter a community of practice they learn how to function in it by participating in the social practices involved and they are being introduced to them by older members of the community. It can therefore be argued that Derry and other NVQ candidates in the workplace have an advantage over candidates in colleges, since they have been participating in their workplace communities for a long time, they have internalised the discourse of their work and they are called to imprint it in their portfolios.

Learning, however, facilitates meta-knowledge and Gee argues that "acquirers usually beat learners at performance, while learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it, that is, at explication, explanation, analysis and criticism" (2001b: 540). This is not particularly true, though, in the case of the Beauty Therapy candidates, who encounter difficulties in analysing the content of their learning. This can be attributed to one more of Gee's prepositions about learning and acquisition, namely that "acquisition must precede learning" (1996: 139) and the two of them should be balanced. Such balance did not take place in the Beauty Therapy class, whose nature required that the students should first be taught their vocation and then acquire its discourse as time went by. However, a discourse cannot be forcefully learned and therefore the Beauty Therapy candidates encountered difficulties with both the content and the language used to describe it. This was confirmed by one of the candidates, Kathleen, who was asked if she found the booklets' language easy:

> *not at first, but I think as we got into the course, I mean at first we didn't know anything about the industry, you know, as you get used to the industry you kind of get used to the things they are asking like abuse physical, verbal, sexual, neglect, whatever, things like this it's asking you whether you've got an understanding of how to deal with these.*
>
> Kathleen, PD11 324-328

In this statement, Kathleen's 'getting used to the industry' equals with acquiring the discourse, which partly happened towards the end of the year, when the students had gained some experience in working with holistic therapies. Prior to their acquisition of the specifics of their profession, it was rather hard for them to understand the discourse that underpins it and therefore to deal with the performance criteria of the logbooks.

Finally, I should state here that this interpretation of the difficulties the NVQ candidates encountered with the language of the logbooks does not suggest that the language itself is unproblematic. On the contrary, the logbooks contained a lot of ambiguities and the language used in the performance indicators was different from the one the candidates used in the rest of the portfolio texts. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

6.6 The community shaping the activity system

As discussed in section 3.4.2, a community of an activity system can be discussed in both a restricted and an extended meaning. In the former, only those directly participating in the activity are considered as members of it, whereas in the latter more distant members are also taken into account. In the case of the Beauty Therapy course, the community of the activity can be interpreted in both ways: in the restricted sense the community consists of candidates, tutors, clients and college administration. In the extended version, portfolio assessors, awarding bodies, Sector Skills Councils etc can also be included in the activity's community. In this section, I will examine the first meaning by focusing on the concept of 'mediation'. The extended community will be partly discussed in section 7, where I discuss the logbooks provided by the awarding bodies and the language used in them.

6.6.1 Mediation

Mediated action lies at the heart of AT analysis, as it examines social actions in complex networks of action and interaction (Wertsch, 1994). In the previous sections, I studied portfolios as mediating tools between the subjects and the object of the activity system. In this section, I will examine the mediating role of the division of labor between the community of an activity and the object, as depicted in Figure 12.

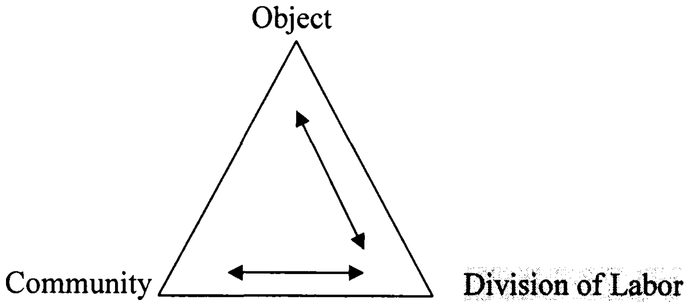

Figure 12 Division of Labor mediating between the Community and the Object

In order to complete their portfolio and obtain the qualification, the NVQ candidates interact with their tutors and with each other. This interaction is a primary indicator of participation in the activity system and an indicator of acquisition of the system's discourses. Doehler (2002) argues that within a learning environment it is not only the specific object of learning that is being mediated, but also the socio-cognitive situation itself as a social practice. Therefore, mediation in the Beauty Therapy class does not only take place in regard to the portfolio construction, but also in what concerns the involvement in the social situation of a vocational course, in the specific college, with the specific tutors and so on. In this way, social interaction within the class directly involves mediation and cannot be examined separately. To this end, Doehler suggests studying "mediation-in-interaction and investigating it as a locally contingent and culturally situated activity by which the social situation itself is interactively accomplished" (ibid: 24).

Mediation as a locally situated activity is omnipresent in studies within the field of NLS and has been found to be a frequent strategy when dealing with literacy tasks (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton & Ivanic, 1991). Focusing on literacy mediation, Baynham and Masing argue that mediation takes place when there is difference or distance between an utterance and its addressee. They add:

> From this perspective, mediation is to do with closing an information gap, which can be seen as both difference in power/knowledge or social/psychological distance. Mediation as a linguistic process is therefore to do with the linguistic means for closing gaps, crossing distances.
>
> (Baynham & Masing, 2000: 195)

The term power/knowledge in the above quotation belongs to the French theoretician Michel Foucault who sees power and knowledge intrinsically linked and argues that "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (Foucault, 1980: 52). Therefore, Foucault believed that in every instance when someone attempts to apply their knowledge by speaking or acting on behalf of someone else, in other words when there is mediated action, there is always some kind of exercise of power.

This was particularly true in the interaction between tutors and NVQ candidates in the Beauty Therapy class. The candidates very often turned to their tutors for advice and guidance in relation to the portfolio. The means to close this gap in knowledge was oral interaction and 'talk-around text'. The tutors answered the students' questions as they were working on their portfolios, sometimes addressing each student separately and sometimes the whole class. This difference in power/knowledge was not happily accepted by the candidates. They often complained that the tutors did not distribute their knowledge equally or in the right way. I mentioned earlier that many candidates believed that the tutors did not explain the process of developing a portfolio adequately or that the tutors did not know how to answer some questions regarding the portfolio. The candidates' reaction to this exercise of power/knowledge was the direct disapproval of some tutors and the collaboration between them when working on the portfolio. Despite the unequal distribution of power in the class and the dissatisfaction of the students, the tutors mediated to a large extent between the students and the portfolio, and in the remaining of this section I will discuss the ways mediation took place.

In her study on agricultural bureaucracy, Jones (2000) identified three strategies accomplished through talk in order to mediate textual bureaucracy: **articulation**, **negotiation** and **inscription**. Articulation takes place when the person who acts as a mediator reads the text aloud by reformulating parts of it into talk. In the negotiation stage, the mediator discusses and elicits facts about the content of the text. Finally, in the inscription stage, the mediator writes down the negotiated facts into text. These strategies have also been identified in my study, in the interaction between tutors and NVQ candidates about the portfolio. The following extract comes from my fieldnotes and describes an individual tutorial taking place between Andrea and Samantha:

> *Andrea explains the categories and shows her how to fill in the tracking sheet. She needs to put all her assessments in it, date it and add the colour code, but this last one is prerequisite. Andrea actually ticks off the tracking sheet instead of Samantha, by asking questions about the assessments she has done.*
>
> Fieldnotes, Individual Tutorials, PD13 62-66

In the above literacy event, Andrea and Samantha are working on a tracking sheet that Andrea had provided to the students so that they could track the progress of their portfolios. Andrea **articulates** the content of the sheet and explains to Samantha how it should be filled in. Then, she asks her questions about the assessments she has done in order to track them down in the sheet. This is the **negotiation** phase where the two interlocutors discuss what needs to be written. Finally, **inscription** takes place when Andrea ticks off the relevant boxes in Samantha's tracking sheet.

The above process involves both the mediator/tutor and the candidates. Even though the former possesses power/knowledge, the candidate also seems to have a say in what gets to be included in the text. However, this was not always the case, as there were instances where only the mediator decided on what had to be included in the text. For example very often, in the Monday morning tutorials, the tutor instructed the candidates as to which units of the portfolio they had covered.

> *On p.24 there is the employment standards range. Andrea says they should cross off the ones they have covered in the book. She also tells them which ones they have covered, R1, R2 (all of them) but not R3. The girls cross off the standards as instructed.*
>
> Fieldnotes, PD14 42-44

In this case, the strategy of articulation can be seen when the tutor explains the criteria to the students. But then the tutor skips the negotiation strategy by guiding them directly as to which criteria have been covered. Such process is rather surprising, considering that the candidates are requested to create their portfolios individually and are supposed to know better than anyone the progress of their work so far. However, the distance between tutors and candidates and the tutor's power/knowledge come into play again and allow her to instruct the students as to the content of their portfolio. This is an authoritative form of mediation, since the candidates are not allowed to question the mediator, but have to follow her instructions. However, never in my observations did the candidates question this kind of mediated action from the part of the tutor, recognising in this way the tutor's power/knowledge and being benefited by it. To conclude, negotiation is not a mandatory strategy of mediating texts and it is often the case that the tutor/mediator exercises power on the students without consulting them on the content of the text.

Another interesting thing to note when studying the above examples is the role of the mediator. In the first example, the tutor ticked the boxes of the tracking sheet herself, whereas in the second example she gave instructions on what needed to be written in the logbook, but the writing was performed by the candidates. Baynham and Masing argue that "people may act as mediators on occasions, taking up a particular discourse role, not as a part of a fixed long standing social role" (2000: 191). They add that when deciding someone's discourse role in a mediated action we need to examine the relationship between the mediator and the utterance. For example, the degree of transformation or recontextualisation of a text results in the distinction between a scribe and a mediator. A message tends to be reproduced in a faithful manner with little or no changes by a scribe, whereas it is transformed or recontextualised by a mediator. Taking this into account, it can be argued that the tutor acts both as a mediator and as a scribe in the above example with the tracking sheet, since she mediates the text and fills in the sheet as well. In the second example, the tutor is the mediator but the scribing is enacted by the students who faithfully reproduce the tutor's message in their logbooks.

It is important to clarify here why the process of mediation is necessary in the case of the portfolios. Earlier I discussed that the NVQ candidates found the use of the logbook difficult and some of them complained about the confusing language. The role of the tutor in such cases was to clarify the meaning of some criteria and explain what kind of evidence the candidates needed to provide. In the following examples, Wallis describes some of the difficulties she met with the language and the role of the tutor:

> *Say for instance I'm doing hand reflex on you I know what I've done but then to try and find it in the book and then Jane will say you've done that range and that range and I say oh have I? She says yeah when is client care you've done this and you've done that, you've made them feel easy you can cross that off and I'm like alright is that what it means? Do you see?*
>
> Wallis, PD9 10-16

And in the same interview, Wallis reads some criteria from the logbook and comments:

> *or like '[using] hand washing products' and I'm going 'Judy do they mean wash your hands?'*
>
> Wallis, PD9 184-185

One could think that Wallis has issues with the English language and cannot understand the criteria, but this is definitely not the case. First, other students have mentioned similar problems with the criteria and second, Wallis asserts that her English is very good and that this is not her problem. The difficulties that Wallis faces can be explained by the difference or distance in discourses between herself and the tutors. In the previous section, I showed that the criteria in the logbook represent a professional discourse with which the candidates, including Wallis, are not familiar. Therefore, the tutors are asked here to perform what Baynham and Masing (2000) have called 'interdiscursive translation', meaning to mediate from one discourse to another. In the above examples, the tutors are mediating from the professional discourse of the logbooks to a more everyday discourse with which Wallis is more familiar. More examples from my fieldnotes assert this kind of mediation:

Sam: What's evidence code?

Andrea: I'll fill these in...I know they are a bit complicated

Sue: And what's 'portfolio reference'?

Andrea: We will put a coloured dot there. You can choose any of your assessments, it has to be three in there.

Fieldnotes, PD12 34-38

Someone asks about the phrase in the criteria 'limits of demarcation'. What does it mean? Andrea explains that it has to do with ethical issues on massage.

Fieldnotes, PD12 59-60

In these examples, the tutor mediates between genres and consequently between discourses, since each discourse has its own distinct genres. The phrase 'portfolio reference' is mediated by explaining what exactly they need to write in this section. Thus, a professional discourse is translated into an academic one. Similarly, the phrase 'limits of demarcation' belongs to the professional discourse of beauty therapists and is mediated by the tutor to an everyday discourse that can be understood more easily by the class. In all these cases, the professional discourse is the powerful one, since its acquisition is necessary in order to complete the portfolio.

This kind of mediation does not take place only between candidates and tutors but also amongst the candidates themselves. One fact that all the candidates agreed upon was the very good collaboration between one another. My observations are rich with jointly constructed literacy events, where the students help each other. The roles of mediators and scribes are interchangeable even though some of them seem to understand the logbook's discourse better than others. For example, Dana frequently helped Wallis with interpreting the criteria in the logbook and Samantha helped Sandra with the cross-referencing and her evidence file:

> *But obviously then I have to get Dana, my friend she'll explain in layman terms, in very simplistic terms.*
>
> Wallis, PD9 20-21

> *Well, this is where we've got to do the cross referencing with the oils in this bit, Samantha's told me, Samantha showed me how to do it, I went round to her house the other night she's done hers...*
>
> Sandra, PD8 459-461

From these examples it becomes evident that difference in power/knowledge also exists between the candidates who mediate the language and the tasks of the portfolio. However, such difference does not necessarily result in negative reactions or conflicts. In her study on scribes, Mace argues that there are "writing situations in life when someone else's collaboration is a welcome resource" (2002). Very often, individuals take up the discourse role of a mediator and in exchange they get other kind of services, while both parties are equally satisfied and benefit from such collaboration (ibid). This mutual exchange of services is exactly what takes place amongst the candidates of the beauty therapy class, who welcome this collaboration and believe it to be beneficial for all:

> *It's such a small group so that makes a big difference, so it's easier for us to communicate with each other and ask each other have you done this, you know, and no one minds helping anyone else because we all feel very confused and the same about it, so it's nice that we can do this with each other.*
>
> Dana, PD4 334-339

Finally, there was a case in my study where a candidate had received external help, meaning from outside the college. This was Sandra who said the following:

> *S: She's an elderly lady but she asked me to come and do a treatment and she'd pay, you know, start paying now, she always gives me some money, you know, for oils and things anyway, ten pounds, so I went and did her a treatment the other day and then I said I don't want you to pay me, I prefer if you can help me sort out the files, just...it may be that*

she'll do it all or it may be that all she have to do is keep me calm while I do it but I just have this mental block

Z: ok so you need someone to get you going

S: well to stay with me and she's, you know, very able in the sort of paperwork that drives me mad I mean I could have ...when I used to have to do timesheets in my first job another clerk used to do it for me cause I always made such a mess and that's just how I am with forms.

Sandra, PD8 252-265

In this example, Sandra wants one of her clients to help her with the portfolio. The client is good with the paperwork that confuses Sandra and she is likely to help her. To this end, the client would act as an agent, that is, she would instruct Sandra on how to organise her files. However, Sandra also refers to some other kind of help, the psychological support she needs so as to be calm and complete the portfolio. The question here is whether this kind of support can be considered a mediating discourse role. The client's role might be just to reassure and relax Sandra while she works on the portfolio. In a sense, the client is mediating Sandra's experience with working on the portfolio from a complex and confusing task that she finds impossible to handle, to an easier one that she can perform. Therefore, this is a different kind of mediation which still contributes to Sandra's work on her portfolio.

To sum up, I have described forms of mediation between students, tutors and other external factors. Mediation in this context can also be described as division of labor, since the tasks are distributed among the members of the community and each one plays a distinct role in the completion of their object, namely the completion of the portfolio and the acquisition of the qualification. Mediation equals the possession of power/knowledge and reveals the dominance of powerful discourses. Certain mediating discourse roles are more authoritative and imposing than others and these roles are not stable; they frequently interchange. Finally, in the case of the portfolio, a kind of interdiscursive mediation takes place, since the NVQ candidates have not acquired the professional discourse of the logbook and require translation to a more familiar discourse.

6.7 Hybridized chronotopes

The principle of historicity of an activity system introduces the concept of time, since activities and the elements that constitute it constantly take new shapes and meanings in time. I explained earlier that each activity can be studied in terms of where it is coming from and where it is moving towards. Even more, each element of the activity can be examined in terms of its historicity, the forms it had in the past and the route that has led it to its present. However, studying time alone seems defective. Asking 'where an activity comes from' is a question denoting not only time but also space. This intrinsic relationship between time and space has been indicated by Bakhtin by using the concept of 'chronotope' or space-time. Focusing on the study of Greek romance, Bakhtin described chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981: 84) . This concept has been used since then in a number of studies to examine the interconnected role of time and space, not only in literature but also in real life social practices (inter alia: Brown & Renshaw, 2006; Hirst, 2004).

Bakhtin's chronotope can be understood as the significance of time and space in the social world and their interconnected nature. Part of the social conventions followed in people's actions is the chronotope of these actions. For example, the times and the places we perform certain actions, such as eating, sleeping, working, entertaining, etc, are interdependent. Very frequently if the space changes, the time is likely to change as well. Additionally, the time and the space wherein these activities take place also define these activities. Eating a light lunch in front of the TV does not involve the same processes as eating dinner with friends or eating at a formal dinner with colleagues. In each situation, the chronotope defines the ways we behave and the ways we react to situations.

In his spatiotemporal analysis, Bakhtin (1981) indicated that chronotope does not only consist of the context within which activities are enacted. Rather, he believed that it plays an active role in the construction and development of the activity. Using the concept of 'chronotope' to examine the roles of time and space in a second-language classroom, Hirst also argues for the treatment of these concepts as "active and constitutive in the appropriation and mastery of literate practices and the construction of identity" (2004: 39). In the same way, when studying the social uses of literacy, the concept of the chronotope is a significant aspect that should be taken into account. The 'when' and 'where' of literacy events shape their structure and have an impact upon the literacy practices with which people engage. The chronotope therefore is an important aspect in the study of literacy, as it defines literacy events and the emerging literacy practices. In this research, the time and space where the NVQ portfolios are created is a theme that keeps being revisited by the research participants. The chronotope of the activity system within which the portfolios are created constitutes the activity and the actions of those who act within it. In the remaining part of this section, I will show how this happens.

It would be wise to say that dimensions of time and space do not involve only one or some of the elements of an activity system; rather all elements can de discussed in terms of their spatiotemporal dimensions. However, such an attempt would require a long discussion, referring to aspects of time and space in regard to an activity's subjects, tools, community, etc. What I intend to do instead, following Tusting's (2000) example, is to focus upon the aspects of time and space that the NVQ candidates considered important and which played a significant and observable role in the development of the activity.

One of the most fundamental contradictions in the Beauty Therapy NVQ class activity was between the candidates and the tutors in what concerned the time and the place where they would work on their logbooks. As I have described earlier, initially the candidates were given their logbooks every Monday morning for one hour. During this hour, they had to log criteria which they had covered the past week and cross-reference all the information in tables, using the colour coding system previously discussed. However, the candidates found that the time allocated to work on their logbooks was very limited and did not allow them to familiarise themselves with it in detail. The following extract comes from the focus group and shows the students' frustration as to this matter:

> *Sam: and the thing is you're not allowed even to see them, I mean I'd like to sit down with that book for an hour*
>
> *R: Yeah I'd like to spend some time*
>
> *Kath: Yeah I'd take it home and look through them yeah*
>
> *R: Yeah*

Sam: We get it only for an hour and then it's taken off you and then you forget what's in it [...] and then next time you get it you say oops you know

K: you get it back again and you go oh what have I done?

D: But that's wrong cause if you read it if you read from that logbook it says that they are our properties it's up to us to look after, so we can actually take them home, it's our tutors who...

Focus Group1, PD1 327-340

Keeping the logbooks at the college was a precaution their tutor took for fear of the candidates losing them. Andrea (the tutor) had told them explicitly that if they lost their logbooks they would have to be charged for getting another one, plus that most of their work would be lost. The candidates found this excuse unreasonable as they said that in many cases it was the college that had been close to losing their work:

Kath: yeah, now when I was nursing here a few years ago I handed in months of work and it all went missing and another time they had a flood in a room and she just said sorry it's gone yeah, no way I'm leaving my stuff here.

Sam: yeah Andrea lost mine and she didn't have a clue.

Focus Group1, PD1 348-353

Therefore the best solution, according to the candidates, was for them to be allowed to take their logbooks home. After unsuccessfully asking their tutor for permission, they decided to complain to their department, towards the end of the second term. The department's head agreed to their request and, in this way, the candidates were allowed, for the first time, to work on their logbooks at home.

This change had a significant impact on the interaction of the candidates with the logbook. By taking the actual text in their personal space and working with it on their own time, they managed to decode some of its aspects that had seemed confusing to them previously:

> *I did most of the work at home because you can't get on with things when everyone is chatting and everyone is at different points, it's easier to take it home to get a baby sitter and just like you do it for about five hours going through everything.*
>
> Angela, PD3 538-542

In this college, the tutor represented an institutionalised discourse of formal education, which requires all dimensions of the course to be controlled by the tutor. Within this discourse, the students were not to be trusted with objects that were considered the college's property, and therefore all coursework should be kept in the college. On the other hand, the candidates did not feel comfortable with acting within such a discourse, as they saw themselves as students of a vocational course in Further Education and therefore as responsible adults. They wished to subvert the institutionally imposed time and space for working on the portfolio and change it so as to fit their ways of working and learning. Here, there is a clear example of contradictions within the activity system, leading to expansion. The candidates' act of complaining to the head of the department resulted in reconsideration of the institutionalised discourse and in the appropriation of a more informal discourse of vocational education, wherein the candidates are regarded and treated as responsible adults.

Angela's opinion, cited above, was a view that most of the NVQ candidates shared as they all confirmed feeling more comfortable with the logbook once they had it at home. In her study on the impact of dimensions of time upon literacy practices, Tusting (2000) argues that the domains of literacy can very often be identified in terms of time and that time acts as a boundary marker of domains. This was particularly true in the beginning of the course, when the candidates worked on the logbook exclusively within the college's imposed timetable. When their lectures or seminars ended, their work on their NVQ ended as well. However, they asked for this to change as they found that working within the domain of the college only did not suit their ways of learning. Rather, by means of their logbook, they wished to merge the domain of the college, that is, the domain of education, and the domain of their house, that is, of their personal time. In this way, they could work on their logbooks outside the time and the space of the college.

Bakhtin (1981) argues for a dialogic relationship between multiple chronotopes, that is, when two or more different references to time and space appear together, they interact with each other. He describes this process as radically changing the character of the combined chronotopes. Similarly, Leander (2001) speaks of hybrid chronotopes within segments of written or oral discourse. Hybrid chronotopes are created when people make reference to two or more different space-times in the same discourse, for example when they talk about two different actions that take place in different times and spaces, but bring them somehow together in their discourse. The space-times intersect and result in the creation of a new space-time, a kind of third space. In other words, in one text, written or oral, there can be reference to more than one expressions of space and time. The result is the creation of a new discourse, a third space or a hybridized chronotope, where the two different references to space and time appear together. It is such a hybridized chronotope that the Beauty Therapy students created, initially within their discourse i.e. their discussions about getting the logbook at home. However, contrary to Leander's examples, this chronotope did not remain only at the level of discourse, but it was later realised with the creation of a third space. Deciding to merge the domains of college and home, the candidates created a third space of work. In this hybridized chronotope, they bring work from the space-time of the college classroom to the space-time of their house. In this way, they can both take care of their household and children and at the same time work on their logbooks in a more focused manner.

A similar contradiction in terms of time and space was seen in the previous chapter in Derry's case study. Derry did not wish to follow the institutionalised discourse which called for working on his portfolio during work hours. On the contrary, he started working in the library which he found less distracting, and later on he worked at home, once he had bought a computer. Similar to the beauty therapists, Derry merged the space-time of his portfolio, by working on it in three distinct domains, namely his workplace, his house and the library. By creating a hybridized chronotope, he managed to work successfully on his portfolio, widen his interests and ultimately construct a new identity (see chapter 5).

Changes in the chronotope of an activity system impact directly on the individuals' subjectivities. Leander states that "the production and hybridization of space-time in teacher discourse has significant implications for student identity, agency and power" (2001: 639) Similarly, Moje argues that:

> Identity can be considered an enactment of self made within particular activities and relationships that occur within particular spaces (geographic, social, electronic, mental, cultural) at particular points in time.
>
> (2004: 16)

This statement implies the constructing nature of the chronotope, or else its properties as a "form-shaping ideology" (Morson & Emerson, 1990: 367). In the case of the Beauty Therapy classroom activity, developing a hybrid chronotope has implications on the participants' identity construction. The NVQ candidates, while working in the college, had developed a certain, rather negative, interaction with the logbook text. However, moving away from this space-time and working on the logbook at their home allowed them to reconsider their relation with the text. They spent more time with it because they could choose when and where to work with it. They chose their house as their preferred space for this part of the activity and their personal time as their preferred point in time. In this way, they acted in the new chronotope under their own conditions (e.g. taking a baby sitter to look after their kids while working on the logbook). Their relationship with the text changed as the text suddenly made sense to them and became more user-friendly. Their identities as NVQ candidates changed as well, from being resentful and frustrated candidates, to being more confident and open to their role as NVQ candidate and to the task of the portfolio. One example of this shift in the students' identity is Angela, who was among the candidates who had very negative feelings about the portfolio. In the interview we had towards the end of the year, she commented on the portfolio stating the following:

> *I feel differently now I think it's a good system actually, at first initially it was quite difficult and complicated but then once you did it, it became more and more... it's got easier and it made sense. I think it's useful for the future.*
>
> Angela, PD3 209-211

This statement shows that Angela had gone a long way from her initial negative feelings about the portfolio. The time that passed from the beginning until the end of the course and the change in the portfolio building process, from an activity that was performed exclusively in the college to an activity that was performed in a new chronotope, contributed to a great extent to the creation of a new meaning for Angela's literacy practices. In this way, she also adopted a new identity, as an NVQ candidate who saw the portfolio building as beneficial for the future.

6.8 Identities of participation and negotiation within the activity system

In section 6.2, I gave an outline of the beauty therapy classroom where the courses took place. There, I showed that the room was structured in such a way as to resemble both a beauty salon and an actual college classroom. It was this detail that gave me the initial hints about the two discourses dominating the activity system of the Beauty Therapy class, which was later confirmed by further observations and by the candidates' interviews. In this section therefore, I will show that there is a powerful institutional discourse of traditional education wherein NVQ candidates are regarded as mere students. And there is also a second, underlying discourse of professionalism, within which candidates consider themselves as beauty therapy apprentices and as being closer to actual therapists rather than to students.

In order to show this more clearly, I will draw on the candidates' discussions about their case study forms. Even though, as shown in section 6.5.2, most of the candidates found these forms useful, there were some sections that proved to be problematic. As a result, when dealing with these texts there were often conflicts between the college's instructions on how to fill them in, and the way the candidates found appropriate to do so. For example, in the following section Kerry discusses what happened in situations when they were asked to write more than what was actually needed.

> *What they give us at college to do has so much more writing, it's stupid for what it is, because sometimes in my case study booklet I've only got one line in a huge box because there was nothing, I've done a massage and everything was fine they had no contra indications, they were fine after the massage, they were fine during the massage, so all was good and in the case study booklets we have to write down all the after care advice you've given and all the information but you just give them a sheet, so it's like just copying the sheet. It's too much it's more than we need to know.*
>
> *Kerry, PD5 61-71*

This is a case of incongruence between the design of the case study form and the content that needs to be added in. The space provided to the students in order to keep record of the progress of their clients is a rather large one. However, Kerry shows that there are cases when there is not much information to add in. Giving a lot of details about the client is in accordance with the demands of Kerry's tutor and the NVQ assessors. Writing only 'one line in a huge box' makes Kerry look like an inconsiderate student, unwilling to pay close attention to her client and obtain adequate information about them. What cannot be seen from this one line is that it has emerged out of Kerry's professional experience and her judgement that there is not much to say about the client because everything has gone well with him/her in that specific session.

The reflexology case study forms also proved to be a problematic area for the candidates. When describing these forms, I explained that in these sessions the candidates have to fill in a section evaluating the client's sensitive reflexes on a scale from 0 to 5. Figure 13 shows the table used in this section. The letters L and R correspond to left and right foot or hand accordingly. In the filled in table in Figure 13, it can be seen that when working on the area of the left foot which connects to the kidney, bladder and adrenal, the candidate evaluated the client's reflexes in the middle of the scale and thus wrote down the number 3. When working on the right foot in the same area then the client's reflexes were evaluated as a zero.

Sensitive Reflexes 0-5	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R
0 - No pain 5 - painful											HAND REFLEX	
Diaphragm												
Heart												
Chest												
Shoulder												
Eyes, Ears Thymus												
Thyroid												
Head (Top/Bottom)												
Sinuses							3	2				
Waist-Diaphragm												
Waist-Sciatic												
Kidney, Bladder & Adrenal	3	0	1	0								
Sciatic Nerve												
Breast area (dorsal)												
Spine/Neck												
Uterus/Prostate												
Ovaries/Testes												
Lymph/Groin incl												
Fallopian												
Knee, hip, lower back												
Lymph pump												
Pituitary			2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2		
Date:	24/1/07		3/2/07		10/2/07		17/2/07		24/2/07		3/3/07	

Therapist Comments:	Tenderness around left kidney area
Therapist Comments:	Tenderness around lt kidney and diminished, pituitary tender today.
Therapist Comments:	No tenderness around lt kidney. Pituitary areas still tender.
Therapist Comments:	Sinus areas tender, client says sinuses blocked.
Therapist Comments:	No tender areas except for pituitary. Sinusitis better today.
Therapist Comments:	Client feeling frail today, not wanting feet done did gentle hand treatment instead.

Figure 13 Sensitive reflexes table from reflexology case study form

Filling in this table was a literacy event that the candidates found particularly annoying. In the following extract, Sandra justifies this opinion.

Z: ok so these case study forms are not good either you say?

S: well they are alright they set the purpose, but it does it breaks the treatment, yeah, when you try to find the little, the right square like ...I mean I'd probably turn to somebody's foot so that it's there in front of me.

Sandra, PD8 66-69

Sandra found that filling in this form was breaking her treatment, as she had to stop every now and then and fill in the form. Acting as a good NVQ candidate required her to fill in the table, but acting as a professional therapist required her not to stop the treatment for any external reason. Wallis found similar problems with this part of the form and said that it was particularly hard to fill it in unless she had specific feedback from her clients:

You're supposed to show like if it's comfort or if it's painful or whatever. And they'll just say 'no I can feel it but it's not painful'. But how do you then put that in there? Is not a not and it's not an 1 and it certainly isn't a 2, 3, 4 or 5, what is it?

Wallis, PD9 207-211

It can be seen therefore that deciding on the level of the client's reflexes can be very difficult, especially since most of the clients are likely to give vague feedback, such as this described by Wallis. This can be confirmed by my own experience as I was once Wallis's client in a reflexology session. I particularly enjoyed her treatment but when asked how I felt in specific moments all I could say is 'I like this' or 'this hurts me'. However, in no instance did I think that Wallis was not a good therapist. The information she was asked to fill in simply seemed irrelevant to the treatment and she did not seem to consider it important either. However, as the above section shows, she did think it was important later, when it came to filling in this form for including it in her portfolio.

A final example of the presence of two opposing discourses in the classroom activity system is Dana's comments when referring to the logbook:

> *Now, it doesn't look very professional to me none of it, you know, there's just coloured dots everywhere it looks like a children's colouring book big ticks and crosses. And this is supposed to be our professional assessment record book that is kept with us and is part of our training, you know, and that's part of our qualification. Is this...well I'm not going to walk into a job and show them this and go look at this coloured dot this shows that I can do this and this. And then I just think it's very...childish as such and a bit...I don't know, I just think it looks silly.*
>
> Dana, PD3 138-148

Again in this case, a candidate finds herself caught between doing what must be done for completing the portfolio and what she considers as efficient and professional in the beauty therapy industry.

In all the above mentioned examples, the women found themselves in a constant conflict between their identity as an NVQ candidate and as professional beauty therapists. Kerry found it inefficient to write more than the necessary information about her client in the provided form, Sandra did not want to stop the treatment session and focus her attention on external factors, Wallis was not sure about how to evaluate her client's reflexes in a numerical scale and Dana found the logbook looked completely unprofessional. All these candidates were trapped between what was required for obtaining the qualification and what they considered as professional behaviour of a beauty therapist. This dilemma was evident in their discussions throughout the year and had a large impact on the way they dealt with the portfolio and their attitudes towards it. The two opposing discourses mentioned above, namely an institutionalised discourse of formal education and a less formal discourse of vocational education within FE, led to their conflicting identities. In other words, we are dealing here with a new hybridized discourse which leads to hybrid identities.

In section 6.4.3 of the previous chapter, I discussed Derry's discoursal construction of identity. There I discussed Ivanič's (2006) three suggested ways with which people are discoursally constructed, namely by 'address', by 'attribution' and by 'affiliation' (see also section 3.6.2). Going back to this way of talking about identity, it can be argued that the Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates' identities are very differently constructed by 'address' and by 'attribution' than they are by 'affiliation'. More specifically, in section 6.7, when describing the contradictions in regard to space-time, I showed that the tutors and the college administration regard the candidates as students who need to be continuously instructed and controlled and this is how the latter are **addressed** during the courses. Such observations were similarly noted in my fieldnotes and this feeling was later confirmed by many of the candidates in informal conversations we had, in the college cafeteria. This meant that the candidates were **attributed** with the identity of a student and this is how they were referred to amongst tutors and college administration. Without wishing to make any judgements on whether such a treatment was justified or not, I would like to stress here that the candidates were attributed and addressed as students only, and therefore this identity was imposed to them by the college. On the contrary, the candidates **affiliated** themselves more with beauty therapist professionals rather than students, they talked to each other under this capacity and, more importantly, they behaved during their sessions with the clients as such.

In his discussion on identification, Wenger argues that it is both a relational and experiential process: "We identify with a community and, conversely, are recognised as a member of a community" (1998: 191). The NVQ candidates identify themselves with the community of the beauty therapy professionals, but they are not recognised as belonging to it by their tutors. Even more, we cannot tell if they are recognised as real members by the community of beauty therapists. Wenger goes on to state that identification takes place through one or more of the following three processes: engagement, imagination and alignment. The candidates identify themselves with the beauty therapy community of practice mostly through **imagination**, since they have never really participated in it. They are only apprentices and none of them has worked as a beauty therapist yet. However, they adopt the practices that they believe beauty therapists engage with in beauty salons, and to this end they identify with them entirely.

On the other hand, the NVQ candidates identify with the college practices through **engagement**. They engage in the practices of an NVQ candidate by attending their courses, working on their case studies and developing their portfolio. Finally, as they act within a hybrid space-time and draw upon hybrid discourses, they **align** their practices to both communities, that of the college and the professional beauty therapists. In this way, they succumb to the practices imposed by the college, but not without resisting. Wenger argues that "identification without negotiability is powerless – vulnerability, narrowness, marginality" (ibid: 208) and that the two concepts exist in a dialectic relation. He defines negotiability as: "the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration" (p.197).

Thinking again of the NVQ class as a community of practice, it can be argued that when the candidates started the course they were new members of the community and were therefore asked to learn the prevailing discourse. However, Fuller et al argue that newcomers in a community of practice are not tabula rasa. Rather, they bring with them their own identities and their own dispositions "to life, to work and to learning" (2005: 66). The college-based candidates therefore came into the NVQ course having their own understanding of what it means to be a candidate for a vocational qualification, based on their past histories and current circumstances. And more importantly, they brought with them their own discourses, their own ways of understanding their work and their position as NVQ candidates and their own ways of representing their ideas in text. Fuller et al argue that gradually the newcomers adjust to the community by learning "to belong in their new setting, adapting, developing and modifying their whole person in that process" (ibid). However, at the same time they reconstruct the community and this is done by means of negotiating with the other members.

The candidates participate in the activity system of the NVQ Beauty Therapy class and negotiate the meaning of being an NVQ student. They do not accept powerlessly the identity of an NVQ student as imposed to them by the college, but they want to relate it more directly to being also a practitioner. They reject aspects of the forms they have to fill in and find their own ways of getting round them as part of this negotiating process. They do the portfolio work collaboratively rather than individually (as they were expected to) because they believe it to work better, and in this way they reject the rules imposed by awarding bodies. They argue for working on the portfolio on their own time and space, rather than following the regulations imposed by the tutor. These are all acts of negotiation of what it means to be an NVQ candidate in the college and they seem to have been successful in most of their negotiating acts.

Overall, their participation in the activity system has led to the enactment of a hybrid discourse, entailing elements from both being a student and being a professional. The hybrid discourse has consequently resulted in a continuous negotiation of their identity, leading to the construction of a hybrid sense of who they are.

6.9 Conclusion

The primary focus of this chapter has been to provide an answer to the second research question of this thesis, namely "What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios at the college?" Unlike the previous chapter, this one has not been based on one research participant, but rather draws information from most of the NVQ candidates who studied in a local college. In this way, I have as many voices heard as possible, whilst at the same time I show the multivoicedness within the activity system.

At the level of theory, this chapter draws again on Activity Theory, but this time this is done in a less exhaustive way. Rather than analysing each element of the activity separately, I have focused on three components, the subjects, objects and the tools. The community and division of labor are also discussed by means of focusing on the use of mediation, as a strategy employed by the candidates in order to complete their portfolios. Instead of writing a separate section on the rules of the activity, I have written a section on the rules that permeate the system regarding the time and the space of the activity. In this way, I have not presented a complete picture of the activity system of the NVQ Beauty Therapy class, but I have specifically focused on the factors that seemed to play a greater role in the construction of the candidates' literacy practices and identities.

From the discussions included in this chapter it can be inferred that the NVQ candidates in the college privileged literacy practices that were straightforwardly related to their work practices, while at the same time they discarded those that they found irrelevant to their work and only applicable to their qualification. It can be argued that these women had registered on this course primarily for becoming beauty therapists and secondly for obtaining the qualification. They were resentful towards most of the paperwork included in the course for this precise reason; they did not see how filling in numerical scales and cross-referencing using a colour coding system made them better therapists. Their idea of what it means to obtain a vocational qualification was that they had to prove their work skills, not fulfil the literacy demands of the portfolio. This can be confirmed by the fact that, when asked in the interviews if they perceived their work as entailing a lot of reading and writing, the vast majority of them replied that it did not. One of the candidates, Wallis, verbalised this contradiction between what they write in the forms and how they actually perform the treatment, in a nice way. When asked about the use of the forms, she answered:

> *So yeah, they are handy but at the end of the day it's what one person says to the other person without any forms any writing. [If] you're not giving the proper information and I'm not giving you the proper information as a therapist then it's...it can be quite...well it's wrong.*
>
> Wallis, PD9 388-391

On the contrary, the college valued the literacy practices that were directly related to the qualification and the portfolio. In other words, as discussed in this chapter, the college valued an institutionalised discourse, within which candidates were expected to follow the instructions and fill in all documents for their portfolios in order to obtain their qualification. On the other hand, the candidates valued a less formal discourse within vocational education, one that enabled them to do their job as therapists properly and not be disrupted by other factors.

As part of the same institutional discourse, the tutor did not allow the candidates to work on their logbooks at home. The candidates, however, resisted, negotiated and thus managed to get permission to work on their logbooks at home, creating in this way a hybridized space-time which they valued more than the original space-time imposed to them by the college. This resistance was a result of their constant negotiation of their role as NVQ candidates and their identification with a less formal discourse. The women in the class saw themselves more as practitioners and less as students. This was also the reason why they questioned sections of the forms provided by the college; completion of certain sections required them to focus more on the literacy demands rather than on the work practice demands of their course.

Once the NVQ candidates realised that it was not possible for them to adopt fully the identity of a beauty therapist professional, they enacted a mixed identity, where they behaved as students when it came to their course and their portfolio and as professionals when dealing with their clients, whenever possible. For example, they were not always able to avoid filling in forms, but they found ways to get round them (e.g. filling in certain sections briefly or skipping sections).

This last section of the chapter, dealing with the conflict between the candidates' identities as students and as professionals, provides an answer to the third research question of this thesis: "How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed by the literacy practices in which they participate when developing a portfolio?" This is done with a focus on the identity of NVQ candidates at college, as opposed to those candidates who study in their workplace, which was examined in the previous chapter. The candidates' identity construction was examined here by casting a focus on the social practices that they participate in while developing their portfolios. However, a more detailed study of identity construction will be conducted in the next chapter, where I analyse the texts included in the portfolio and the ways the candidates' changing identities are depicted in them.

7 Recontextualising processes in the development of NVQ portfolios

7.1 Introduction

The NVQ portfolio has so far been examined mainly as an artefact. This artefact has often been the source of dispute, the reason for contradictions within activity systems but also the reason for knowledge expansion. Having provided a detailed account of the context within which the vocational portfolios are being developed, I intend to take the analysis of the candidates' interaction with the portfolio a step further in this chapter, by focusing on the portfolio as a collection of texts. More specifically, I will examine the language of the portfolio in the way it is used both by the candidates and the awarding bodies providing the logbooks. In this way, I will give an answer to the fourth research question of this thesis:

> Is there a difference between the languages used in the logbooks and the texts created by the candidates for their portfolios? How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed discoursally, by the texts included in the portfolio?

The importance of this question can be understood only in relation to the analysis found in the two previous chapters. All candidates acknowledged difficulties with the language used in the portfolios and they all seemed, even though to different extents, to have problems when dealing with certain sections of the logbook. Some of the reasons for these difficulties were accounted for in the previous chapters and had to do with issues of previous experience, contradictions between students and tutors and the rules structuring the study for an NVQ. However, so far I have not concentrated on the language structures of the portfolio per se, and have not looked at whether language is also responsible for the difficulties encountered by NVQ candidates.

My original hypothesis before starting this discourse analysis was that not only are there differences in the language used by the candidates and the awarding bodies, but also the differences extend to the way the candidates are represented in the portfolio texts. Such differences are likely to result in confusion over how to deal with such texts. This chapter therefore sets out to test this hypothesis by means of comparing texts produced by candidates and those produced by awarding bodies and focusing on the recontextualisation processes drawn upon by both parties. In other words, I will examine the ways they understand and therefore represent reality in their texts and look for differences in such representations/recontextualisations. Using Gee's distinction between Discourses (upper-case D) as ways of being in the world and discourses (lower-case d) as "language in use or stretches of language" (1999: 17), it can be said that so far I have been dealing with the first kind, the Discourses. In this chapter, I will move on to put more emphasis on discourse in its second meaning.

A combined study of "ways of being in the world" and language in use requires an analytic framework that will allow me to study social practices and linguistic practices together. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to discourse analysis that takes a critical stance to language use in society. I have already discussed some of the main features of this approach (section 3.6). Here, I want to emphasise the significance of using discourse analysis methods as a complementary analytic tool to Activity Theory. AT has provided me with the tools to examine the social practice of developing a professional portfolio as a whole, including the interaction between individuals and the community within which they act, the particular ways individuals use mediating means to achieve their goal and the rules that underpin this process. However, using AT has not allowed me to focus on language use, even though most of the tools used in the activity system are textually mediated. This is where discourse analysis methods come to add to this thesis, as they will enable me to apply an in-depth analysis of the language used by the candidates and the awarding bodies and locate the multiple discourses in use and the multiple identities the candidates assume when dealing with different discourses.

This study has already shown that the Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates have often been disempowered by their position as college students and that a warehouse employee faced difficulties when asked to write on topics beyond his familiar work tasks. What is needed therefore is an analytic method that will look for such inequalities in the main product of the NVQ, the portfolio, and account for them. CDA considers discourse to be socially influential and to raise issues of power distribution (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). I consider it therefore as an appropriate discipline and a good source of methods in order to examine the unequal distribution of power in the research fields of this study.

The approach I take in this analysis follows Fairclough's (2003) work in his book *"Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research"* and van Leeuwen's (1995; 1996) analytical models of discoursal representation of social actors and social actions. Both these works have as a common focus the study of recontextualisation (section 3.5.1). The recontextualising processes of all stages of developing a portfolio will be discussed here in relation to the development and distribution of the portfolio, as well as in relation to field analysis. Field is introduced here in order to examine how reality is recontextualised through the language structures of a text and the ways such recontextualisations represent social actors and actions. Both discussions, the recontextualising practices in developing and distributing the portfolio and the portfolio field analysis, shed light on the unequal distribution of power relations when it comes to development, distribution and use of the NVQ portfolio.

The results of the field analysis will be discussed with a focus on the identity of the candidates, as projected both in the texts written by them and in those written by policy makers, i.e. the logbook. This discussion will be based upon Gee's (2001a) concepts of talking about identity in educational research and Ivanič's (1998) model of the construction of writers' identity in their texts (section 3.7.2) Analysing the linguistic characteristics of a text can function as a useful indicator for understanding the construction of the writer's identity (Ivanič, 2005) since writers make use of language, consciously or unconsciously, in order to represent reality as they perceive it, and add in their texts aspects of their own being. The use of van Leeuwen's analytical model of field analysis is particularly suitable for such an aim. This is because by applying this model, the analyst looks directly at social reality and the way it is being represented, rather than focusing on linguistic aspects of texts and then making links with the social context.

In the first section of this chapter (section 7.2), I examine the recontextualising processes occurring during the creation of the portfolio. In order to do this I borrow terms from genre analysis and discuss portfolios in terms of the activities within which they are being enacted, the social relations of the people dealing with them and the communication technologies used for their development. In the second part (section 7.3), I continue with an analysis of the recontextualising processes drawn upon in the creation of portfolio texts, by analysing the field of such texts that is, the actual language structure. Concentrating upon a sample of three logbook units and three texts written by candidates, I study the representation of social actors and social actions using van Leeuwen's socio-semantic model of discourse analysis. Finally, I present a discussion of the findings where I summarise the representations in each one of the texts and discuss the promoted discourses and candidate identities in each one of them. In the conclusion of the chapter, I bring the two parts together and explain how they both contribute to a discussion of the social practices involved in developing an NVQ portfolio and of the unequal power relations among the actors contributing to this process.

7.2 Recontextualising processes of producing and distributing NVQ portfolios

In this section, I emphasise issues of NVQ portfolio production and more importantly distribution and consumption. The production and the structure of a text are usually discussed in terms of the genre where it belongs, meaning particular text types, with common structure and function. However, rather than a genre, the NVQ portfolios should be described and discussed as 'formats'. Portfolios never consist of one text only, but rather they include a collection of texts, which might be representative of a variety of genres. Such text-assembling sites have been named 'formats' and the example provided by Fairclough (2003) is a website where one can interact with a great number of different texts. The NVQ portfolio fits perfectly under the description of a 'format' as it is consisted of a large number of texts, used as evidence of prior knowledge and experience. Most of these texts originate from situated genres (emails, consultation sheets, storyboards, etc), being specific to particular social practices relevant to the skills that the portfolio has set out to demonstrate. Approaching the portfolio as a format and having already discussed the creation of the individual texts that constitute it, in previous chapters, I will focus here on the creation of a portfolio as an entity.

Borrowing Fairclough's (2003) suggested focal points when analysing genre, I will use these points here to discuss the NVQ portfolio as a format. These aspects are: a) Activity, meaning the social situation that the texts are used and what people are doing in it, b) Social Relations, meaning what are the social relations between the people participating in the activity and c) Communication technologies, meaning the technologies used in order for the activity to take place. By focusing on these three aspects of the NVQ portfolio, I will show the recontextualising processes of developing and distributing the portfolio and the ways it mediates between local and extra-local settings.

7.2.1 Activity

The social situation of developing an NVQ portfolio and people's roles and actions in it has been discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6. Here, I will discuss two remaining issues that have not yet been touched upon: on the one hand, the details of the recontextualising processes involved in developing portfolio texts and, on the other hand, the highly structured nature of such texts.

Even though there is an overarching purpose in creating the portfolio and that is the acquisition of the qualification, there seem to be other secondary purposes of creating the texts that are included in the portfolio. Fairclough (2003) suggests that instead of over-privileging the role of the purpose of a text, we could look at hierarchies of purposes. To this end, it can be argued that the primary role of developing the portfolio in beauty therapy is to obtain a vocational qualification, whereas a secondary reason could be to observe the learners' progress and a third reason to keep a record of one's work which could later be presented to a future employer.

Fairclough (ibid) insists on the dangers in privileging the purpose of a text over other criteria by using Haberma's (1984) distinction between 'communicative' and 'strategic' action-interaction. Communicative interaction aims at arriving at an understanding between the participants, whereas strategic interaction aims at getting results. So for example, it would seem that all texts included in the portfolio are strategic, as the main purpose is to obtain the qualification. However, if we take the example of the consultation sheet filled in by the beauty therapy candidates, we will see that in the beginning the reason for filling in this form was to understand what needs to be done in the treatment. Therefore, the purpose of this text was initially communicative and it only became strategic when it was included in the portfolio for assessment. Habermas draws our attention to the fact that communicative texts have a primary role in discourse and should not be marginalised by the increasing tendency of modern societies to over-value deterministic or strategic forms of communication. To this end, the purpose of the texts included in the portfolio can vary according to their function, but most of them were serving primarily communicative purposes, which later became strategic.

In section 3.5.1 I showed that according to Bernstein (1996) a change in context is always followed by a change in ideology. Here, this means that recontextualisation results in a change to people's meaning making of their literacy practices, since literacy practices involve ideologies. It can be argued that the nature of the consultation sheet, discussed above, changed after an intratextual recontextualisation[12] took place. In this case, the same text moved from being used in one context to being use in a completely different one. Its function and meaning changed and therefore the attitudes of the candidates towards it changed. When using the consultation sheet as part of the treatment, the beauty therapy candidates found it useful. On the contrary, when inserting it to their portfolio as evidence, they found a lot of problems with it, related to cross-referencing it to other documents and editing it according to the colour-coding system (see chapter 6). The same text was now associated with negative feelings and was not considered to be as useful anymore. The recontextualising process therefore, responsible for taking this text out of the initial communicative event and inserting it into a strategic one, resulted in a change in the way the candidates made sense of their literacy practices.

Despite the frequent recontextualising processes taking place when developing NVQ portfolios, their structure is highly ritualized. Fairclough (2003) claims that there is a tendency for organizations in the new capitalism to move towards the ritualization of texts, in order to establish and maintain control of social practices. This ritualization and inflexibility of structure has indeed been observed in NVQ portfolios. Whereas portfolios were originally meant to display one's work in an original and creative way, the NVQ portfolios are highly structured and candidates are not allowed to deviate from the norm. The portfolios developed in the warehouse studied in this research were both very similar. As previously mentioned, candidates had to take two mandatory units and three optional. The evidence was included in a large binder and the units were separated by dividers. Each unit consisted of a page with the

[12] Intratextual recontextualisations take place within the same text. See discussion is section 2.5.1.

performance criteria and the numbered pieces of evidence. A table was also included in each unit where the candidates cross-referenced the evidence with the performance criteria. The structure of Derry's portfolio on Business and Administration looked almost identical to that of Kevin on Warehousing and this cannot be unrelated to the fact that they were both being assessed by the same awarding body.

The portfolios made in the college by the beauty therapy NVQ candidates were also very similar to the ones made in the warehouse. According to my observations, the candidates tried at several points to bring in their own originality but they were advised against it by their tutor. For instance, Angela had created her own dividers for her portfolio with her own distinct drawings on each one of them, but her tutor instructed her to replace them with the standard coloured dividers that can be found in the market. A second example of the highly ritualized nature of these portfolios is that the candidates were instructed as to the exact structure of their portfolios and they were not supposed to deviate from it. In Table 4, I have copied the structure of the portfolio as written on the classroom board by the tutor and I have added her additional oral comments in italics.

Evidence File

- Statement of intent → *Coming first.*
- Copy of C.V./certificates →*If you don't have a CV do a pen profile of yourselves - this is who I am.*
- Table of contents → *Don't do it until the end.*
- Yellow section → *Get a cardboard divider that is yellow. Formative=ongoing treatment. The assessments should be put in different sections within this section.*
  VR17 –Body massage
  File all the treatment plans-date order
  Case study booklets –date order with photos
  Exam paper feedback sheet
- Green section (light green) → *the same as above*
  VR 134/ VR 135 Reflex VR59
- Dark green section: VR 131/VR128 aromatherapy
- Purple section: VR02/VR74: Health and Safety. The Health and Safety workbook will have to be added in this part.

Table 4 Portfolio structure as written on the classroom board by the tutor

The numbers in Table 4 refer to units in the logbooks. As can be seen, we have the necessary for portfolios statement of intent, table of contents as well as a CV to introduce the author. And what follows is the evidence for each logbook unit put in different sections and separated by coloured dividers. When I asked the tutor why the candidates had to follow this strict order, she explained that it was the awarding body that wanted it this way, so that it would be easier for them to assess the portfolios. By working with portfolios that have an identical structure, it would be easier for the assessors to locate the evidence corresponding to each one of the logbook units and therefore faster to evaluate. This example proves that highly institutionalised texts (or formats in this case) like the NVQ portfolio, are very likely to have a fixed and clear structure. This ritualized structure is imposed from the high scales of hierarchy of the institution, in an attempt to control the social practices embedded in it.

7.2.2 *Social relations*

The above example on the strict structure of portfolios and the discussion that follows, bring me to the second important element when analysing a genre or a format, namely the social relations between people. Fairclough argues that interaction can take place either "between organizations or groups or individuals, or combine different types of social agents" (2003: 75). In the case of NVQ portfolios, the social agents are an institution i.e. the awarding body and individuals i.e. the candidates. A second institution acts as a mediator between the two and that is the college or the workplace or, very often, both at the same time. The social actors in this case communicate through the portfolio which also acts as a mediating tool between them. I showed earlier that the structure of the portfolio is influenced by the power exercised by the awarding body over the candidates. The authority of the awarding body seems to be so powerful that even the mediating institutions i.e. the college or the workplace cannot do much to mitigate this unequal relationship.

The exercise of power by the awarding bodies can be explained by the fact that it operates at a national level. Fairclough claims that the new capitalism era is characterized by "the increasing power of organizations operating at increasingly global scales over individuals" (ibid). Indeed, the NVQ candidates seem to operate only at a local level and, despite their protests, their voice cannot be heard beyond their locality. Therefore the structure as well as the content of the NVQ portfolio still remain under the institutions' authority and despite the problems encountered with it (as discussed mainly in chapter 6), the candidates do not possess the power to react in a meaningful way.

Social relations between the portfolio stakeholders are also defined by the portfolio's movement between local and extra-local sites (section 3.2.5). Fairclough has argued that genres are important in sustaining "scalar relations between the local, the national, the regional and the 'global'" (2003: 33). Based on this thinking, Burgess (2008) has researched the use of individual learning plans introduced by the Skills for Life policy and examined these texts as mediating tools between the local site of a classroom and the extra-local site of Skills for Life policy makers. She argues that the actions and intentions of policy makers are extra-local "to the extent that they have the power to travel into many different contexts, often as a result of being embodied in objects" (ibid: 50). On the contrary, the actions and intentions of students and teachers are seen as local actors "who are co-opted into the systems and processes of policy" (ibid). Similar to these individual learning plans, the NVQ portfolios are also caught between the local site of the classroom and the extra-local site of the awarding bodies. And the way that this move takes place, from one level to the other, is through the process of intratextual recontextualisation. More specifically, a specific profession (e.g. beauty therapy) is the focused encounter of many different stakeholders. In order for this profession to be turned into material for vocational assessment and finally into a portfolio for assessment, a great number of recontextualisations occur, taking many possible directions, as described below.

The first recontextualisation takes place when specific job descriptions are broken down and written as performance indicators. In this case, the movement occurs from the local level to the extra-local, from the specifics of a job to the generalisation of creating broad-spectrum standards. What is implied here is a process of decontextualisation, i.e. extracting a job's features out of the workplace context, which is always inherent in any recontextualising process (Sarangi, 1998). A second recontextualisation takes place when these standards are distributed to the candidates, this time moving from the national to the local level. The candidates need to prove their competence in these standards, by providing evidence in various forms. In this case, the performance indicators are recontextualised into new forms of evidence. Therefore, the initial job tasks have now been shifted into semiotic elements. A final recontextualisation takes place from the candidates' local level to the awarding bodies' national level, when the portfolios are sent in for assessment. This series of recontextualisations form what Fairclough (1992) has called an 'intertextual chain'. The same text, or else the same focused encounter (i.e. a specific job), is constantly being reconstructed, taking new shapes, serving new purposes and resulting in different meanings.

At the same time, these recontextualising processes are also interdiscursive. Going back to the beauty therapy candidates, the discourse of the beauty therapy industry was recontextualised into an educationalist discourse within the frame of the college. The candidates struggle to change this newly acquired discourse, giving it a more professional direction. As Linell argues:

> Recontextualisation can be related to institutional and professional role shifting. It may function as an available strategy to change the status of information, evidence and claims, and to move between institutional and professional roles.
>
> (1998: 151)

The result is a mixture of discourses blended in the final product of the NVQ, i.e. the portfolio, which co-exist together, some of them in harmony and some others in constant opposition. It can therefore be argued that an NVQ portfolio is a site where not only different genres meet, but also different voices, different discourses or, according to Linell, a place of polyvocality and hybridization (as discussed in sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2).

7.2.3 Communication technologies

NVQ portfolios are based on print technology. The logbooks are sent to the candidates in printed form and all the evidence included in the portfolios is also printed. The evidence takes the form of semiotic texts. The candidates very often use online material when writing essays, but this is not depicted anywhere in their portfolios as they do not reference their sources. The emails that Derry has included in his portfolio are all print outs and their function is not clearly distinguished from that of letters. Following Fairclough's (2003: 77) statement that 'formats' often bring together genres taken from a variety of technologies, the NVQ portfolio is composed by handwritten texts, typed texts, texts copied from the internet, photographs and various forms.

Fairclough (ibid) explains that communication technologies enable the interchange of discourse in either a two-way or one-way interaction system. Also communication can either be mediated or non-mediated. In the case of NVQ portfolios, communication has a one-way nature. That is to say that the candidates do not have the opportunity of immediate interaction with the policy makers. The printed nature of the main mediating means, the portfolio, allows its smooth transfer from one interactant to the other, without them ever having to meet in person. Such a one-way interaction has as a consequence the exercise of power from the part of the policy makers. By not having the opportunity of an immediate interaction with the awarding body, the candidates have no way of expressing their objections to the way they are being assessed, or the difficulties they encounter with the portfolio. This research has shown that the candidates have many opinions and ideas about the ways the NVQ portfolio could become more user-friendly, but have no means of having their voices heard. In the case of the beauty therapy candidates, an assessor representing the awarding body visited the class twice per year, but this was only in order to assess the progress of the portfolios and not to discuss with the candidates any possible problems.

The only other factor that acts as a mediator between the two interactants is the college. The college tutors are the only persons with which the candidates communicate directly. To the candidates' eyes, the tutors and the college administration often take the role of decision makers and therefore become receivers of complaints. The college is indeed in many cases responsible for the way the candidates interact with the portfolio. (For example, the tutor of the beauty therapy class did not allow the candidates to take portfolio home (chapter 6)). However, in most cases the college and the tutors are only the mediators and cannot be held responsible for portfolio faults or accommodate the candidates' opinions and attitudes by making important changes to the way the assessment takes place. On the other hand, direct communication with the tutor answers many of the candidates' questions regarding the content and the structure of the portfolio. Therefore, it can be argued that oral communication as a technology relevant to the development of the portfolio is important when it comes to interpreting the logbooks and creating the portfolio, but has a restricted role in challenging power structures.

7.3 Field analysis

This section aims to take the study of the recontextualising processes, embedded in the construction of the NVQ portfolio, a step further. So far, I have shown that recontextualisation is a prominent practice in the portfolio development, from its initial stages right to the very final ones. More specifically, I explained that the social practices involved in vocations are turned, for the purposes of the NVQ and in various stages, into discourse. In this section I wish to discuss the details of such recontextualising processes.

Van Leeuwen (1993) has argued that analysing the generic structure of texts is never enough in the analysis of discursive practices. There are certain questions that genre analysis cannot answer on its own, such as the rules prescribing the production and reception of a text, the discourses penetrating texts and the underlying knowledge and intentions of producers and receivers of texts. According to him, there is not one simple answer on the meaning and function of genres. Instead there are "different regimes of control over the production and reception of meaning" (ibid: 203). He sees the study of such regimes as an important addition to critical discourse analysis.

Van Leeuwen has suggested the analysis of the 'field' of a text and described 'field' as the structure used in a text. To this end, he has developed two models of analysing the representation of social actors and social actions in discourse (1995; 1996). These models have been discussed in section 3.6 of this thesis, along with a rationale for using them in this study. Here, I briefly extend this discussion under the new light of the analysis and the findings presented so far in this thesis.

The NVQ portfolio has earlier been described as a 'format' where different texts come together. These texts are not all written by the same authors and for the same purposes. The majority of the evidence is produced by the candidates, but there are also texts written by the tutors (e.g. observations). And the text that stands out from all the others is the logbook, co-produced by sector skills councils and awarding bodies. All these texts have a common focused encounter, the vocation they are representing. For example, in the Business and Administration NVQ, all the evidence provided by the candidates, as well as the logbook represent the same social practices i.e. those involved in being an administrator, and the same social actors i.e. the administrators, their employers, clients, etc. What is different, though, in each one of these texts is the way the social actors and their actions are being represented. The awarding bodies have a different understanding of what it means to be an administrator than the administrators themselves. Why is that? And how is this difference discoursally constructed? In van Leeuwen's words, applying such an analysis helps answer the following question:

> How are social practices transformed into discourses about social practices –and this both in the sense of what means we have for doing so, and in the sense of how we actually do it in specific institutional contexts which have specific relations with the social practices of which they produce representations.
>
> (1996: 35)

These questions will be answered here with a focus on the NVQs examined in this thesis, with an aim to understand how NVQ candidates represent themselves and their actions in their writing and how the same people and actions are represented in the writing of decision makers, such as the Sector Skills Councils and awarding bodies. Such an analysis will provide a concrete answer to the fourth research question of this thesis, regarding the language used in the NVQ portfolio and the discoursal construction of the candidates' identities.

Due to the large sample of portfolios collected for this study, there has been a need to select only part of them for this analysis. I have therefore concentrated upon the case study forms of two beauty therapy candidates, Rebecca and Samantha (see appendices 7 & 8 respectively). The reason for choosing to analyse Rebecca's case study is that she was one of the candidates who complained frequently about the amount and the kind of writing they were asked to do for the portfolio, as well as for the language used in the logbooks. Samantha's case study was chosen here because she was considered one of the best students in the class and her portfolio was frequently used as an example of good practice by some of the other candidates. From the warehouse, I have analysed Kevin's writing sample (see appendix 9). Even though Kevin, as an NVQ candidate, has not been discussed thoroughly in this thesis, it is important to examine his writing here as it is quite distinctive from all the other candidates. Finally, the respective logbook units that these documents provide evidence for have also been analysed (see appendix 10). In this way, my sample includes texts from both candidates and decision makers. In the Table 5, I present an outline of the analysed data:

Participant	**Research Field**	**Text Analysed**
Rebecca	College	Case study on body massage
Beauty therapy logbook	College	Unit VR17: Prepare and Provide Body Massage
Samantha	College	Case study on aromatherapy
Beauty therapy logbook	College	Unit VR13: Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends
Kevin	Warehouse	Task description: Bulk pick order verification
Warehousing logbook	Warehouse	Unit B.9: Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution

Table 5 Analysed data sample

Finally, I should stress that the following analysis does not, by any means, aim to be exhaustive of van Leeuwen's model. Rather, I concentrate on recontextualisations that appear on a frequent basis and/or whose function plays an important role in the representation of the candidates and other significant social actors (e.g. their clients), as well as the representation of their actions.

7.3.1 Representation of social actors

In his model of the representation of social actors, van Leeuwen (1996) devised twenty-one different categories. These describe actors either in a mutually exclusive way (e.g. activated or passivated) or can be valid simultaneously (e.g. activated and personalised). Here this model will be applied to my data sample, in order to examine the social actors that are included in or excluded from the texts and whether and which actors are represented as activated or passivated.

1. Exclusion Vs Inclusion

The main mutually exclusive categories in the representation of social actors are exclusion and participation. Social actors can either be included in a text or excluded purposefully or accidentally. Starting with the two units from the Beauty Therapy logbook, the main actors are the NVQ candidates and their clients. Additional actors mentioned only in few instances are the legislators, a physician mentioned only once and some other colleagues and professionals. The following Table 1 summarises the instances of representation of the main social actors, candidates and clients, included or excluded from the text:

	Candidates Included	Candidates Excluded	Clients Included	Clients Excluded
Unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage'	3	22	12	6
Unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'	0	40	19	5
Unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution'	1	19	1	-
Rebecca	8	37	30	14
Samantha	26	29	77	13
Kevin	38	20	-	-

Table 6 Representation of actor inclusion and exclusion

A. Candidates

In unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage' the candidate as a social actor is only mentioned once in the introductory clause [1. A competent **candidate** must know and understand:]. Other than that, candidates are only explicitly referred to in clause 8, where they are named 'therapists': [8. Reasons for client and **therapist** signing the treatment plan]. The existence of a main clause turns all the other criteria in this unit into subordinate clauses. If one reads the subordinate clauses in combination with the main clause, then the candidates are included in all the criteria. However, each criterion was read by the candidates as autonomous and evidence was provided for each one of them separately. They should be therefore examined as main clauses; in this case the candidates are mainly backgrounded. Overall, the candidates are represented 25 times in this text, in 22 out of which they are either backgrounded or impersonalised. The backgrounding takes place either by the use of passive agent deletion [9. Why during treatments involving the removal of clothing by the client, **this is kept** to a minimum and **action is taken** to ensure that the client's dignity and privacy **are maintained** at all times], or by infinitival or non-finite clauses [5. Why the treatment area **must be** private and comfortable]. Impersonalised actors are represented as non-humans and are in this way partially excluded from the representation. A frequent method to achieve impersonalisation is through the use of nominalisation i.e. using a noun instead of a verb, and there are a few such occurrences in this text: [3. The **preparation** of the client for body massage], [11. The importance of correct **hand cleansing** and why hands are cleansed immediately before and after any physical contact with the client].

Similarly, in unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends', the candidates are represented 40 times and they are backgrounded or impersonalised in all instances. In the majority of criteria, the candidates are backgrounded by the use of passive agent deletion: [5. The treatment plan and required outcomes **are confirmed**]. In this example, the effect of passive agent deletion is to make unclear the person that needs to confirm the treatment plan and outcomes; it can only be assumed that it refers to the candidates. Impersonalisation is also achieved with the use of objectivation (similar to nominalisation), that is making reference to a thing or a place rather than to the person related to these. Such an example in this text is the following criterion: [14. **Massage techniques** are flowing, not unduly repetitive and delivered to meet client needs]. Here, 'massage techniques' replace the therapist using these techniques.

Moving on to Rebecca's and Samantha's writing, it can be seen that there are some distinct differences between the two texts, in terms of participation and inclusion of candidates. In Rebecca's case study, the candidate is backgrounded and/or impersonalised in 37 out of 45 representations. What is noteworthy though, is that most backgrounding and impersonalisation take place in the health and safety section [5. Clean couch cover, fresh bedroll, clean towels, all equipment clean]. This could suggest that Rebecca is copying or slightly altering sentences from another text, where health and safety actions are described. Alternatively, she is purposefully changing her style into more formal, as she considers this an important section where she needs to sound professional. This is confirmed by the fact that Samantha also backgrounds herself in the same section [12. Area also **cleared** of any clutter and electrical wiring], whereas overall she personalises herself to a great extent: [86. All in all **I feel** the course of treatments have been effective on both a physical and emotional level]. It can be said therefore that in the health and safety section, the candidates draw on a separate discourse, a formal discourse that is possibly originating from another text (maybe the Health and Safety Act, quoted by Samantha in sentence 11). In this way, they might wish to project the work they have done in the course of their studies and make their writing sound more formal since they know that the case study forms are going to be included in their portfolio and therefore assessed.

Contrary to this formality, in many cases of personalisation, both candidates omit the use of personal pronoun. For example, Samantha writes: [48. Spent more time than usual on warming up the area with effleurage] and similarly in Rebecca's text we find: [53. Felt the massage went very well, was able to spend a little extra time on neck and shoulders]. The absence of subject in these clauses shows that the candidates also regarded the case study forms as personal records of their treatment or as a means of note taking intended to be read and understood by them and nobody else. This comes into clear opposition with their use of formal language in some other sections of the form, as discussed above. Such contradictions in their writing are also a proof of the candidates' struggle between two discourses. On one hand, the discourse of education, wherein the case study form is a formal document to be included in the portfolio and thus requires careful writing. And on the other hand, the discourse of professionalism that assumes this form to be a record keeping or note taking tool, intended to help the therapists in their work and thus written in an informal and careless style.

Finally, in the unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution' of the warehousing logbook, the candidate is also backgrounded in the majority of the criteria. This is done mostly by the use of infinitival clauses [4.**Working out** whether the goods can be despatched in time], as well as with the use of imperative form [1. **Identify** requirements for bulk order by:]. Kevin's writing on the other hand, is very different from that of his logbook. He describes the specificities of a job task in the form of a storyboard, and he is therefore making extended use of personalisation, mainly by employing the personal pronoun: [30. When this was done **I took** the consolidated order down to despatch where **I finalised** the order]. What is also worth noting is the way Kevin personalised himself in his introduction, where he introduces himself by use of the third person: [1. Once upon a time in a warehouse in Morecambe, **there was a young grafter going by the name of Kevin**[13]]. In this clause personalisation is embodied by nomination (he tells us his name), identification (young) and functionalisation (grafter). All these characterisations manifest that Kevin wishes to project himself in his writing and to describe his job tasks not as activities unrelated to him, but rather as activities that take meaning by who he is and what he does.

B. Clients

The second important social actor in this dataset is the clients. Clients play an important role, mainly in the case of the beauty therapists, and it is therefore interesting to see how their participation in the activity system is represented in the portfolio.

[13] Kevin here also added his surname, but it will not be mentioned here.

In the unit 'Prepare and provide body massage' of the beauty therapy logbook, the clients are represented 18 times and backgrounded in 6 of them. For example, in the following standard: [10. Why treatment processes should not be invasive and all procedures should be explained fully beforehand, **understanding** ensured and **permission given** for them to proceed] it is not clear whose understanding should be ensured and who should give the permission to proceed, even though reference to clients is implied. Personalised client representations are all categorised, meaning that they are referred to in terms of their shared rather than unique identities. More specifically, they are always referred to by the noun 'client', that is in terms of their function in the field of beauty therapy (functionalisation): [3. The preparation of the **client** for body massage]. In the unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends', the client is represented 24 times and backgrounded only 5 of them. Here again, personalisation is achieved by means of categorisation and functionalisation. Also, in all instances reference to clients is generic and not specific. It is very interesting to note that in both these units, the participation of clients clearly outnumbers that of candidates.

In Rebecca's writing, reference to clients is, to a great extent, personalised. In the majority of these representations, she has not included a subject to her clauses, in line with the note taking approach to her writing, discussed above. Only in one case has she included the client's name, by writing down only his initials[14]. She also refers to him by the same functionalisation used in the logbook i.e. the client, but also by revealing his profession and twice by reference to other characteristics, such as his age and sex (classification): [1. **Young, male** client, **law student** spends a lot of time working on

[14] This is in sentence 23, where, apart from the initials, the rest of the sentence cannot be read and is therefore not included here as an example.

computers and has a lot of tension in shoulders and neck.]. This is a very specific representation of the client, compared to the generic references included in the logbook. When the client is backgrounded, this is mainly done by impersonalisation [3. Regular **gym activities** –uses as a means of relaxation for the mind]. Very often, this impersonalisation takes the form of somatisation, that is making reference to a part of the body rather than to the person: [53. Felt the massage went very well, was able to spend a little extra time **on neck and shoulders**]. The use of somatisation here is justified by the nature of the beauty therapy activities described.

In Samantha's case study, the client is represented 90 times and in 77 they are personalised. Very often she has omitted the subject, also in line with the less formal approach to the case study writing. She also represents her client by means of classification [1. Steve **is a male -60 years old**] and functionalisation: [1.and **'retired'**]. Reference to him as 'the client' is mainly used in the sections on health and safety [13. **Client's** skin cleared before treatment], which, as shown above, are written in a more formal style than the rest of the case study. There are 15 cases of nomination in Samantha's text, using the first name of her client when referring to him. Such a specific representation demonstrates that she wishes to project her client and represent him in her writing as faithfully to reality as possible. Backgrounding of the client is only done 10 times, mostly in the section on aftercare advice, where she is writing about the advice she has given him: [20. **To refrain** from washing off the oils for at least 3 hours, and **not to add** essential oils to back for at least 24 hrs].

In the unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution' of the warehousing logbook, there is only one reference to clients: [3. Using the stock inventory system to find out whether you have the items that **the customer** has ordered], whereas there is no such reference in Kevin's description of his job. This can be easily justified by the fact that his post does not involve a lot of direct communication with the clients, at least not to the extent that beauty therapy does.

C. Other social actors

The presence of other social actors in the logbooks is minor, compared to the representation of candidates and clients. In the unit 'Prepare and provide body massage' the only other social actor included is the 'legislators', represented in only one of the standards: [4.The preparation of the area must be according to **legislative requirements**, industry practice and industry codes of ethics]. The legislators here are excluded and suppressed, meaning that there has not been a previous reference to them anywhere in the text and only the traces of their actions remain in it. In this way, the reader of this text is not told who has set these requirements and is only instructed to follow them. In unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends' the legislators are again represented by exclusion and suppression: [16. Length of treatment is in accordance with the client's needs and **commercially acceptable**]. In addition, a physician is represented as participating in the action [9. Where contra-indications are established, the client is advised to ask the **physician** if there is any reason why treatment may not be given], as well as a generic reference to 'other professionals', who are also included in the clause: [22. Other **professionals** involved in the treatment are advised of progress]. In the warehousing logbook there are no additional social actors included.

In Rebecca's writing there are also no other social actors involved. Samantha makes a brief reference to her client's family, first by means of introduction [2. He is married with two grown up **children** and five **grandchildren**], and then in order to justify his stressful lifestyle: [7. Steve gets very stressed when working, feels an obligation to get the work done for his

children, and gives himself deadlines to fill]. Reference to his family is not done by nomination (as it would be irrelevant at this point), but is specific and shows that Samantha chooses to write about her client in his human dimension, including information about his personal life, which she believes to be directly relevant to the treatment. On the contrary, Rebecca seems to keep a distance from her client and includes minimal information on his lifestyle. This could be explained by the fact that she did not know the client as closely as Samantha seemed to know hers.

In his writing, Kevin makes reference to two of his colleagues. In both cases, they are represented as participating in the activity described and their full names have been included: [5. I liaised with the Bulk Pick FLM, (**Philip Neal**), with regards to a bulk pick order] and [14. Kindly, the outstanding **Wayne Hodge** stepped in...]. Reference to and inclusion of the names of these two colleagues adds to his personal and more casual writing style. Finally, he makes a generic reference to certain decision makers [7. **It was decided** that I would have a crack at a Bulk Pick Verification order], whose suppression leave doubts about who he refers to (possibly one of the colleagues he mentioned just earlier).

2. <u>Activation Vs Passivation</u>

In a representation, the social actor can either be activated "represented as the active, dynamic forces of an activity" (van Leeuwen, 1996: 43) or passivated "represented as 'undergoing' the activity, or as being 'at the receiving end of it'" (ibid: 44). When passivated, an actor can either be treated as an object and is therefore 'subjected', or can be 'benefitted' from the actor's activities. In this section, I will examine whether the candidates and clients assume an active or passive role in the logbook criteria and how this representation possibly differs in the candidates' writing. Here, the representation of candidates and clients will be studied together under one section for each author (as opposed to the above section on inclusion and exclusion, where representation of candidates and clients was discussed in separate parts). In the following Table 7 , I summarise the instances of activation and passivation for candidates and clients:

	Candidates Activated	**Candidates Passivated**	**Clients Activated**	**Clients Passivated**
Unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage'	18	0	6	6
Unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'	34	?	13	12
Unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution'	22	0	1	-
Rebecca	45	0	6	0
Samantha	29	0	73	7
Kevin	50	2	-	-

Table 7 Representation of actor activation and passivation

In the unit 'Prepare and provide body massage' of the beauty therapy logbook, the candidates appear to be exclusively activated. On the contrary, the clients are equally activated and passivated and when passivated they are in their majority benefitted from the candidates: [17. Why **the client must be given information** on after-care treatments].

In the second unit under study, 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends', I have shown above that the candidates are all backgrounded by use of passive agent deletion. However, van Leeuwen's model is used here exactly because not all grammatical categories are indicative of the sociosemantic context. Therefore even though backgrounded, the presence of candidates is implied in these clauses and, in this case, they can be considered as activated in all cases: [7. **A blended oil is chosen** to suit client needs]. The clients, on the other hand, are equally activated and passivated and in the case of the latter, they are again benefitted to a large extent. When the client is activated, it is usually an activity that the candidates should take into consideration: [4. **Client 'body language'** is observed and correct responses made].

The same actors, especially the clients, are represented in a completely different way in the two beauty therapy candidates' case study forms. In Rebecca's writing, all representations of social actors, that is, both candidates and clients, are activated. When the candidate is activated, it is usually to show her activities in the treatment. The clients, on the other hand, are activated in order to show mainly their feelings before, during or after the treatment: [26. **Relaxed**, shoulders **felt** good, really **enjoyed** the massage], as well as their feedback on the treatments: [59. **The client found** that the massage helped this problem a great deal].

In Samantha's case study, the candidate (herself) is also activated in all cases. In some cases, this is done in a similar way to the logbooks: describing activities relating to her techniques, e.g. [62. Good massage **worked on** muscle tension in legs and back] or to other ways that she benefitted the client: [21. **Warn** that symptoms such as headache or nausea may be expressed]. In other instances, her active role is not passivating the client, but rather they are being together actors in the same activity: [18. **Discussed** how treatment is detoxifying and how this can be enhanced by...]. Her tendency not to passivate the client is clearly indicated by the 73 instances of active client representation and by the only 7 cases of client passivation. Specifically, her client is passivated in the health and safety section (wherein, as discussed earlier, candidates tend to adopt a formal style) and on aftercare advice sections where she expresses constant worries about his unhealthy lifestyle: [67. **Will emphasise to Steve** the value of continuing with treatments in the future and good aftercare and general lifestyle]. On the contrary, in her writing Samantha allocates her client with a very active role and she continuously writes about what he feels, thinks, and does and how he reacts to the treatment: [59. **Steve very tired** today, **looks forward** to treatment] or [51. **Steve still going** straight back to work and to the pub later].

Continuing with the warehousing logbook, unit 'Assemble bulk order for distribution', the candidate, as shown above, is mainly backgrounded. However, if we consider that his presence as an actor is implied (similarly to the second unit of the beauty therapy logbook above), then he is activated in all instances: [6. **Telling** the right person if an order **cannot be fulfilled**]. Following the same tendency, Kevin represents himself as activated in the majority of cases. The nature of his text, a detailed storyboard on one of his job tasks, justified the extended activated role he allocates himself with: [22. Once **I had scanned** each carton it was time **to move on** to the next phase]. The candidate is passivated only in two instances, having to do with people or objects that helped him with his work: [14. Kindly, the outstanding Wayne Hodge stepped in and **allowed me** to use his sign in codes for his scanner].

7.3.2 Representation of social action

In his suggested model, van Leeuwen has devised 15 categories that describe the representation of social actions. He argues that this model of analysis is an attempt "to sketch the outlines of a sociological 'grammar' of the representation of social action, an overview of the ways in which action can be represented in English and of their import in discourse" (van Leeuwen, 1995: 82). In this section, I will focus on some of these categories, in order to analyse the way social actions are represented in the same data set analysed above. More specifically, I am interested in unravelling the similarities and differences of representing social action in the NVQ logbooks and the texts produced by the candidates. For this reason, I will concentrate on the following distinctions: actions or reactions; semiotic or material nature of actions; use of objectivations; agentialization or de-agentialization and generalised or concrete actions and reactions.

1. Actions Vs Reactions

Van Leeuwen associates reactions with mental processes, while he also warns that the two categories do not fully overlap[15]. He further distinguishes three types of reactions: affective, perceptive and cognitive. Actions, on the other hand, could be material, describing somebody's 'doing', or semiotic describing somebody's 'meaning'. The different kinds of actions and reactions enacted by the candidates and their clients are the main focus of the following analysis. Table 8 above shows how many times the social actors are represented in terms of their actions and Table 9 in terms of their reactions in each text:

	Candidates' Actions		**Clients' Actions**	
	Material	Semiotic	Material	Semiotic
Unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage'	15	8	1	4
Unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'	12	16	3	5
Unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution'	12	6	-	-
Rebecca	25	0	10	11
Samantha	26	12	24	7
Kevin	49	9	-	-

Table 8 Representation of actions

[15] This is because of the possibility of expressing a mental process by using a grammatical metaphor. As an example, he uses the clause 'I fear you', which is literally a mental process, as opposed to 'I am afraid of you' which is a mental process only metaphorically (see Halliday, 1994). Even though grammatically different, van Leeuwen takes them both to be reactions.

	Candidates' Reactions			Clients' Reactions		
	Affective	Perceptive	Cognitive	Affective	Perceptive	Cognitive
Unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage'	-	-	4	-	1	-
Unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'	-	2	3	1	-	-
Unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution'	-	-	3	-	-	-
Rebecca	-	-	2	2	28	3
Samantha			2	13	35	2
Kevin	2	1	4	-	-	-

Table 9 Representation of reactions

In the unit 'Prepare and provide body massage' of the beauty therapy logbook, there is a total of 33 actions performed, in their great majority, by the candidates. What is characteristic about actions is that the candidates seem to undertake more material actions, whereas the clients appear to enact mainly semiotic ones. To this end, the candidates are represented as mainly 'doing' in an activity: [2. **The preparation** of the treatment room] whereas the clients are rarely represented as acting and when they do, they mostly appear to verbalise their reactions on the treatment: [15. The procedures to follow after a massage in obtaining **accurate feedback from the client**]. Representation of reactions is very limited in this unit and client reactions especially are clearly underrepresented. The candidates are also rarely talked about in terms of their reactions, and when they do it is always cognitive reactions that are foregrounded: [16. How the effectiveness of treatment **may be judged** and how **to ensure** client satisfaction].

Similar results are found in the unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'. The limited representation of their reactions is also evident here. However, here the clients seem to have a more active role as the number of their semiotic actions increases: [8. Explanations and opportunities for discussion are made available and **client's questions** are answered fully and accurately]. The candidates, on the other hand, continue being represented as enacting material actions, but here their semiotic actions are dominant: [10. The client **is reassured** and all **questions are answered** promptly]. Finally, candidates' reactions are, in their majority, of a cognitive nature signifying obtained knowledge.

In Rebecca's case study form, there is a clear focus on her client's reactions. She wishes to show her client's feelings to the treatment and therefore has included 33 reactions enacted by the client, as opposed to only 2 enacted by her. The client's reactions are mainly perceptive, describing his physical and emotional condition before, during and after the treatment: [13. Client seemed **a little nervous** at first, but **rested** more during the massage]. When it comes to her reactions, on the other hand, she follows the logbook pattern and represents herself only in terms of cognitive reactions: [28. **Remember** to keep to slightly shorter timings for legs…]. Moving on to actions, the client here also has a more active role, with an increased number of material action realisations. This is because Rebecca provides a short description of his lifestyle and therefore refers to some of his activities: [3. **Regular gym activities- uses** as a means of relaxation for the mind]. Also, the client's semiotic actions are represented here, and in order to include his viewpoint in the text, she uses the strategy of rendition, that is not including his exact wording, but rather using reported speech to convey the meaning of his words: [14. felt very relaxed -neck and shoulders felt better].

Samantha in her writing tends to represent her client more than herself. This is also evident in her client's actions and reactions. There is a sum total of 52 reactions represented in her writing and it is notable that she is the actor to only 2 of them. The clients act out a great number of perceptive reactions, which, like in Rebecca's case, demonstrate their physical and emotional condition: [23. **Good, relaxed** after session]. However, Samantha has also included extended information about her client's affective reactions, meaning his thoughts and emotional state: [35. Took a while to relax but he did eventually and **really enjoyed** the treatment]. Finally, this is the only case where a client's cognitive reactions are also represented: [9. Steve is nervous and **unsure** of what to expect from the treatment]. In terms of the candidate's reactions, here as well the cognitive are the only ones represented: [86. All in all **I feel** the course of treatments have been effective on both a physical and emotional level].

In terms of actions in Samantha's writing, what is noteworthy is that candidates and clients have a very similar number of material actions -26 performed by candidates and 24 by clients. This is the only text in the dataset that the client's material actions are foregrounded to this extent. This is mainly done when she introduces the client's lifestyle: [3. Still **works** as builder –**working** on his kid's houses –**gets exercise** through work], but also in other parts of the case study: [75. **Is sleeping** much better]. With regards to semiotic actions, representations of herself involve the discussions with the client and the advice she gives him: [40. **Talk to** Steve at start of session and **discuss** how treatment can be relaxing even though he is very busy]. His semiotic actions are represented by means of rendition, but also by quoting his exact words: [8. Complains of stiffness in shoulder –had **'frozen shoulder in past'**].

The unit examined in Kevin's logbook includes representation mainly of material actions enacted by the candidate: [8. **Picking out** the goods you need and **preparing** them for dispatch]. Semiotic actions are also represented in the criteria when describing interaction with other people: [6. Telling the right person if an order cannot be fulfilled]. The candidate's reactions are only represented three times and they are all cognitive: [5. **Deciding** if any alternative items should be offered...]. In his text, Kevin includes a great number of material actions enacted by himself. Reference to material actions is unavoidable here, as he describes the process of a job done in a warehouse. The acting out of semiotic actions is also included, not only in cases of interaction with other colleagues, but also when describing his work: [31. This involved **putting the order onto the D-map system** and **618ing it**]. Kevin has also included representation of his reactions. Following the general pattern, most of them are cognitive: [26. Once **I had chosen** my printer...], but there are also affective reactions represented: [19. Once **I was happy** with said stock...] and one perceptive: [35. This included using proper manual lifting techniques, use of a pallet truck & **being vigilant** with regards to Fork Lift Truck traffic].

2. <u>Objectivations</u>

Representations of actions and reactions are often realised in an objectivated format, that is nominalizations or process nouns are used in the place of verbs. Such instances are very frequent in both units of the beauty therapy logbook. There are many different reasons justifying the existence of a large number of objectivations in the performance indicators of the logbooks. Van Leeuwen explains that "when an action or reaction is objectivated, the representation downranks it, in order to give priority to something else" (1995: 94). This can be seen in the following example from the first unit: [4. **The preparation** of the area must be according to legislative requirements, industry practice and industry codes of ethics]. Here, the focus is placed upon the second part of the sentence 'legislative requirements...codes of ethics' and the action of preparation is undermined.

Another reason for the use of objectivations, offered by van Leeuwen, is the labelling or classification of social actions. This is also the case often in the beauty therapy logbook, where an attempt is made to include a large number of actions in such a short space as a performance standard. This is done considerably easier by ascribing a general objectivated term to a group of actions: [10. Why **treatment processes** should not be invasive...] and [8. **Explanations and opportunities** for discussion are made available...]. It is clear that many activities can be included in the terms 'treatment processes' and 'explanations and opportunities' in the above examples. The use of objectivation makes indeed the description of activities shorter. However, there is a significant negative impact following the application of such a structure: objectivations aiming at grouping social actions often result in generalisations. Therefore, objectivations in the logbook make it difficult for the candidates to break them down into their constituting elements. Generalisation is a strategy discussed at a later point of this section.

It should be noted here that the candidates use objectivation to a considerably less extent and, for the most part, when writing in a more technical or formal way. For example, in her overall evaluation of her client, Rebecca writes: [58. The client presents with a lot of **muscular tension**, **stiffness and pain** in his neck and shoulders, due to extensive **computers use** at university]. Here, there is a series of objectivations that make her writing sound more formal. Still, such examples are very limited in her case study.

Finally, it is interesting that there is a lack of objectivation in the unit from the warehousing logbook. Rather, most of the actions are realised by use of infinitival clauses: [10. **Labelling** the order clearly with the destination details]. Such a remarkable difference, between the warehousing logbook and the beauty therapy one, could be justified either by the dissimilarity of the subjects they are representing, or more plausibly by the fact that these two logbooks come from different awarding bodies. The answer to such a question would require further research, which is, however, outside the immediate scope of this thesis. Going back to Kevin's writing, objectivations are also very rare here. The only times he objectivates actions is when labelling a group of actions, for example: [36. I had to lift several cartons during **the completion of the order**...].

3. Agentialization Vs De-agentialization

Social actions and reactions can either be represented as enacted by humans, or as brought about by processes outside the human control, for example by natural forces. In the first case actions are agentialized, whereas in the second they are de-agentialized. Van Leeuwen (1995) distinguishes three types of de-agentialization, depending on the way the action or reaction is represented: eventuation –something that just happens-, existentialization –something that just exists- and naturalization –a process brought about by natural phenomena. My analysis has shown that when social actors are backgrounded or impersonalised, often their actions are also represented as de-agentialized. Bearing this into mind, it is expected to find more de-agentialization in the logbook units, as there is a large number of actor backgrounding in them. The following Table 10 shows the frequency and the kind of de-agentialization in each text:

De-agentialization			
	Eventuation	Existentialization	Naturalization
Unit 'Prepare and Provide Body Massage'	12	3	-
Unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends'	36	11	-
Unit 'Assemble Bulk Order for Distribution'	5	-	-
Rebecca	24	13	-
Samantha	34	5	-
Kevin	9	3	-

Table 10 Representation of de-agentialization

The hypothesis that there are more de-agentializations in the logbook units is certified by the frequency that it occurs in both units of the beauty therapy logbook. In unit 'Prepare and provide body massage', actions are mainly de-agentialized by eventuation: [5. Why the treatment area **must be** private and comfortable]. In such instances, it is not made clear who needs to perform the action; the actor is backgrounded and therefore the action is represented as enacted without an agent, as an event that simply happens without anyone causing it. In the unit 'Provide massage with aromatherapy oil blends' de-agentializations are even more frequent: there are 47 such instances and 36 out of them are realised by eventuation: [10. The client **is reassured** and all questions **are answered** promptly]. Existentialization is also frequently occurring: [12. Forms of massage with **blended oils** are delivered according to client needs]. In this example, 'blended oils' is something that simply exists, without any further explanations on who has blended the oils; is it the candidates who had to do it or where they already blended by someone else? De-agentialization, in these units, was often the reason of many similar questions from the candidates. Even though it can be argued that these answers might have been provided by the tutor during the lessons, de-agentialization is yet another indicator of the complex nature of the logbooks.

In the candidates' case study forms, there are also quite a few cases of de-agentialization, realized either by eventuation or existentialization. It is worth noting that both candidates use this structure more frequently in the health and safety section. For example, in Rebecca's case study we find: [8. **Jewellery removed** (therapist and client), **oils stored** in cool, **date placed in labelled bottles** and within using date]. I have already shown that in the health and safety section the candidates employ their most formal and technical writing style and this could be a result of copying from other texts. Samantha explicitly states that she has been guided by a certain health and safety act: [11. **Health and Safety Act 1987 adhered to** in terms of personal hygiene and treatment area hygiene]. Another case when actions are represented as de-agentialized is when including terminology of materials and techniques. The de-agentialized clause 'effleurage, petrissage, tapotement and frictions' is repeatedly mentioned by both candidates, to show the techniques used in their treatment. Finally, the candidates de-agentialize actions that they find sensitive to describe in any other way. Samantha, for example writes: [80. Making sure that only the body part **being treated** at the time **was exposed** and the rest **covered up**]. There are three de-agentialized actions here and they indicate Samantha's uneasiness or maybe cautiousness when referring to strategies of discretion when treating a male client.

The unit 'Assemble bulk order for distribution' of the warehousing logbook has a small number of de-agentializations, compared to the beauty therapy logbook. However, it should be noted that many of the criteria are written in infinitival clauses, e.g. [2. **Asking** the right person for more information if an order is not clear] and it is a matter of interpretation to decide whether the actions represented are de-agentialized or not. In Kevin's text, most of the de-agentialized actions occur when he provides general description of a task and before he goes on to explain how this task was performed by himself: [8. To cut a long story short, Verification is when some **bulk cartons have been picked** and **need consolidating** with other cartons **to make a complete order**]. On the contrary, when describing his actions, the majority of them are represented in an agentialized form.

4. Generalisation

I have already referred to the presence of generalisations in the logbook performance criteria. Use of objectivations and de-agentializations result in abstract representations of actions and reactions and explain the bewilderment of many of the candidates when dealing with these texts. I do not include a summarising table when discussing generalisation, as it is difficult to say with precisions how many times generalised language is used. The attribution of this code has not always been consistent in my analysis and sometimes it depends heavily on the interpretation of the clauses.

Generalised actions or reactions can generally be broken down to more specific ones (van Leeuwen, 1995). The beauty therapy logbooks include many examples of generalisations. Actions frequently mentioned in them, such as 'treatment processes', are generalised and a detailed semantic analysis would show that they encompass many other smaller actions. For example, 'treatment processes' could mean massage, aromatherapy or reflexology. And these actions again could be broken down to even smaller ones. Criteria such as: [12. Why **good hygiene practice** should be observed by the client] involve generalised actions such as 'good hygiene practice'. Here, the candidates could wonder: "What exactly should the client observe? Is hand cleansing included in the practices observed by the client?" Similar clarification questions were often posed by the candidates, in their attempt to break down the criteria and make clear what kind of evidence they need to provide for each standard.

On the other hand, the candidates were required to be very specific in their case studies. They had to provide detailed analysis of the health and safety measures they took for each treatment and had to explain in detail the client's and their own actions and reactions. The amount of detail required in these forms often tired the candidates, who chose to leave blank spots rather than have to repeat all the procedures. Similarly in his description of work tasks, Kevin is being very specific and describes his actions one by one. On the contrary, his logbook seems to describe the work process in a more generalised form, leaving out a lot of the details that Kevin has included in his writing.

Taking into consideration that the logbooks are documents produced outside of the locality within which they are eventually being used, such generalisations are inevitable. Fairclough argues that:

> When other social practices are recontextualised within policy documents, it is predictable (an aspect of the recontextualizing principle at work in such documents) that there will be a high degree of abstraction from and generalization across concrete events.
>
> (2003: 141)

Breaking down the criteria into more detailed actions and reactions could result in the candidates' difficulty in associating with them. Presumably, not all warehouse workers perform the exact same actions in their workplace when assembling an order for distribution and not all beauty therapists use the same massage techniques. Addressing a variety of candidates is therefore the main reason of generalised performance criteria. However, their effects on the candidates seem to be more disturbing than positive. Candidates resent the fact that performance criteria are written in such a vague and generalised way and negative feelings were often expressed in my interviews with them. Most of the times, negotiation of the meaning of such generalised actions is necessary, resulting in longer and more tiresome processes.

7.4 Discussion of findings

Based on the above analysis, a clear picture can be drawn of the way NVQ candidates are represented in the logbooks, as well as of the identities they wish to foreground in the texts they include in the portfolio. Discussion of client representation is also relevant as the clients turn out to be an important social actor in the beauty therapy portfolio and their comparison with the representation of candidates sheds further light on the latter's representation. As initially stated, using van Leeuwen's model of representation has allowed me to study the recontextualising processes embedded in the portfolio development. But most importantly it has also enabled me to decipher the discoursal construction of candidates' identities.

In this section, I will revisit the two models of talking about identity, introduced in section 3.7.2. The first one has been devised by Gee (2001a), who provides us with four different ways of talking about identity: Nature-identity, Institution-identity, Discourse-identity and Affinity-identity. The second model has been formulated by Ivanič (1998; 2005) and focuses on the way writers construct their identity by means of their texts. She argues that there are four aspects writers might choose to include in their writing: their autobiographic self, their discoursal self, their self as an author and the relational dimension that refers to the way writers think about their readers when writing a text. Finally, she has argued that each institution offers several possibilities of selfhood that shape and constrain writers' choices of self representation in the text. I see these two different ways of talking about identity as complementing each other and I will use them here, in light of the above analysis, to discuss which elements of the candidates' identity are projected in the portfolio and for what reasons.

By examining representation of social actors and their actions in the NVQ logbooks, I have been able to unravel the 'ideal' NVQ candidate identity, as constructed by policy makers and decision takers. And by analysing the way the candidates choose to represent themselves and their actions in their texts, I have come up with representation of 'actual' identities of NVQ candidates. And finally, a significant finding is the underlying struggle of the candidates, who are caught between two discourses and between two assumed identities.

More specifically, in the above section I have shown that a significant aspect of all the three logbooks is the backgrounding of the candidates. This could be justified by their nature: the texts included in them are not presented in a coherent and logical form. Rather, the performance criteria are structured in separate, individual clauses and reference of the candidate in each one of them could result in unnecessary repetitions. On the other hand, each one of these criteria is treated as a separate entity by the candidates and exclusion of the actor in each one of them has proved to be confusing (see chapter 6).

When included in the representation, NVQ candidates are described as activated actors who perform mainly material actions. At the receiving end of these actions are the clients, who are being passivated and usually benefitted by their therapist. Representation of clients is always generic and functionalised (they are always referred to as 'the client'). Additionally, there is a great number of objectivations and de-agentializations, which result in vague and over-generalised statements in the performance indicators.

Such a representation is indicative of an institutional discourse, dominant in the new capitalist era and the logbooks seem to emphasise the Institution-identity of the candidates. The focus is upon the actors' material actions and hardly ever on their reactions; what is important is what they do, not how they feel about it. The NVQ candidates are expected to be the driving forces of all activities and they have to satisfy their clients without, however, focusing a lot on what the latter do, think or feel. Processes are objectivated and categorised in general and vague terms and it is up to the candidate to infer the details of what they need to do. At the same time, the legislators or decision makers are excluded from the texts, and as a result it is not made clear who has set up the rules that the candidates need to abide with and for what reasons. The Institution-identity, projected here, is the identity of an ideal NVQ candidate and, in order to obtain the qualification, the candidates need to demonstrate clear alignment with the prescribed institutional identity and project it in their portfolio.

Such a representation comes into sharp contrast with the identity chosen by the candidates for themselves and foregrounded in their writing. The candidates seem to reject the identity imposed on them and this is made clear in the discourses drawn upon in their texts. Each one of the candidates brings in their own autobiographical self, meaning their own past experiences and ideas of who they are. As a consequence, each one of them has their own distinct writing style and even when responding to the same performance criteria (as Rebecca and Samantha do), they still end up with different representations of themselves and their clients. What remains common though is the struggle towards the institutional discourse imposed on them by the logbooks. The NVQ candidates are not at ease with adopting the generalising and formal discourse found in their logbook; instead they use an everyday and lively language, which represents more truthfully their reality at work and, in the case of beauty therapy, their relations with their clients.

In her case study form, Rebecca foregrounds the client to a great extent. The client is personalised but this is mainly done by functionalisation, referring to him as 'the client'. The only instance Rebecca makes reference to his name is by using his initials. The client is activated in all cases and there is a clear focus on his reactions during and after the treatment. She chooses to represent his words in the text by means of rendition. When it comes to representing herself, Rebecca impersonalises herself to a great extent and refers to a limited number of her cognitive reactions. This choice indicates that she does not wish to foreground her self as author in the text. The focus lies on the client whereas she remains in the background. On the other hand, the limited information Rebecca provides on the client's personal life shows that she does not wish to signify their personal relationship, if any, in the text.

All these choices of representation show that Rebecca brings into her text three possible identities: a) an Institution-identity imposed by the logbook and which is responsible for the backgrounding of herself and the non-nominalisation of her client, b) a discoursal identity, within which she emphasises on the client's reactions rather than the therapist's actions, and c) her autobiographical self, which originates from her past experiences, the way she perceives herself and her relations with others. The autobiographical self is probably responsible for the distance she keeps from her client in the text, as Rebecca was a shy woman, had initially difficulties finding a male client and did not seem to establish any personal relations with her client outside the weekly massage. All these facts constitute her autobiographical self but also have an impact on the way she sees herself as author and on the discourses she chooses to project by means of her writing.

Samantha, on the other hand, adopted a more confident style, foregrounding both herself and the client in her text. Representation of herself is in many cases personalised and activated, referring mainly to her actions in regards to the treatment. When it comes to her client, what is interesting is that she chooses to represent not only his reactions (cognitive ones included) but also his actions. When transferring his words in the text she includes direct quotes, which indicates her intention to represent him as faithfully as possible and make his feedback credible. In the majority of the cases, she refers to him by his first name showing, in this way, that they maintain friendly relations and that she feels comfortable with him. Finally, she includes information about his everyday life and his family, thus turning him into a 'real' person with a life outside the massage table. Such representation choices are probably a combined result of Samantha's autobiographical self and herself as author. First of all, she chooses to bring in the text the good relations she maintains with her client and the genuine interest she has on him as a patient. Second, when stressing the aftercare advice she provides to the client, she makes sure her voice as a therapist is clearly heard in her text.

Additionally, Samantha is more successful than Rebecca in refraining from using the institutional logbook discourse. Her institution-identity as an NVQ candidate is backgrounded. Massage techniques and health and safety precautions seem to be only secondary issues in her text. Rather, she foregrounds her Institution-identity, this time not as an NVQ candidate but as a therapist, showing a genuine interest in her client's reactions and thoughts and trying throughout the case study to find a way to convince him to appreciate the value of a healthy lifestyle. Such concerns are not included anywhere in the logbook, but by expressing them, Samantha manages to represent herself as a good therapist and thereby as a worthy NVQ candidate.

Despite the differences, the two beauty therapy candidates also have certain similarities in their case study forms. Most importantly, they both repeatedly avoid including subjects in their clauses. This decision is a result of their discoursal and authorial identities found in the text. They wish to personalise the texts and accentuate the feeling that the form is completed for their own use only, as a means of note-taking and not as a formal document which will be included in their portfolio. The relational dimension is also evident here, as by writing in the form of personal notes, the candidates make a clear stance (which was also confirmed by them in the interviews) that these records should be for their personal use only and that no one else should have access to them and read them.

Other than that, both candidates use a considerably smaller number of objectivations and de-agentialized actions than those used in the logbook. However, it is interesting to notice the enactment of a formal discourse in the health and safety section of their case study forms. Van Leeuwen (1996) states that different representational choices in different sections of the same text can be revealing. The use of an increased number of impersonalised actors, de-agentialized and/or objectivated actions and lack of nominations in this specific section, indicates that this is the space where the candidates choose to include the institutional discourse of the logbook and thus project their Institution-identities as candidates for a vocational qualification. Going back to the relational dimension, it seems as if, despite their wishes, they know that these texts are going to be read by their assessors and therefore they should include sections using the privileged institutionalised discourse, in order to align themselves with what is considered a successful NVQ candidate.

Finally, coming to Kevin's storyboard of his work tasks, it can be said that his text has a lot of similarities with the beauty therapy candidates' writing, but also quite a few differences. Obviously, Kevin's job does not involve the same amount of interaction with clients and therefore the latter are not prominent in his text. The focus lies on his material actions while performing the job as well as on a few semiotic actions involved in his duties. He also chooses to represent some of his reactions to the tasks. Objectivations are very rare and de-agentialized actions occur only when generalising. He refers to two other colleagues, using their full names but in a friendly and casual manner. What is interesting in Kevin's text, is not only the specifics of the representation but the whole discourse he is drawing upon. Taking a clear distance from the logbook, he is choosing to narrate the performance of the task, adding elements from the narrative genre, using features such as starting his description with the phrase 'once upon a time', referring to himself in the third person and providing self-descriptions and phrases which would be more suitable in a story rather than in a storyboard: [2. He was a quiet and unassuming boy with friends in all areas of the business]. In this way, Kevin introduces a new discourse in his portfolio, the discourse of creating writing. And by doing that he constructs a discoursal and authorial self that we have not seen in any of the candidates' writing in this research. Through his discourse he constructs an image of himself as a funny and witty person, someone with good control of language, who can use two opposing discourses in the same text and do it well. In the interview, when asked about the writing style he adopts when writing for his portfolio he said:

> *I imagine that James (the tutor) must get to look at the same thing again and again and again and again, so I thought I might as well make it a little interesting for him...you know [...] liven it up slightly.*
>
> *Kevin, 133-135*

In this statement, the first thing that should be commented upon is the role of the relational dimension in Kevin's writing. He justifies his unusual writing style by claiming that he employs it in order to entertain the reader of his texts. Such a strategy is rather unexpected from someone whose writing is going to be assessed, as we rarely write in order to amuse our assessors, but rather in order to prove our knowledge on a subject. What Kevin is doing here is making a rather unusual choice from his many possibilities of selfhood. Writing a humoristic text that will be included in a portfolio for assessment is one of the extreme possibilities Kevin could have chosen as a means of expressing his identity in his writing. After all, it is a risky decision which, in the best case, would result in his being asked to write the text again using a more mainstream writing style and, in the worst case, it could have cost him his qualification. Nevertheless, Kevin took up this possibility of selfhood and it resulted in being successful, opening up, in this way, a new possibility for future NVQ candidates who wish to write by adding a creative and humoristic element in their texts.

To conclude, what is common in all three candidates' writing is a struggle to cope with the institutional discourse imposed by the logbook and a preference for a discourse that will truthfully represent themselves, their work and the relations they have with other people in their workplace. Employing such a discourse indicates an attempt to project their autobiographical selves and an Institution-identity that will define them not as students but as knowledgeable professionals. The adoption of such identities is achieved by the candidates rather than ascribed to them from above. They feel that employing a discourse that will represent the reality of their work, the way they perceive it, is more appropriate for the kind of qualification they want to obtain. Therefore they succeed in foregrounding an identity that is not imposed by institutional regulations, but rather is a result of who they are and how they want to represent themselves in their writing.

On the other hand, rejecting their Institution-identity as NVQ candidates altogether would possibly result in failure to gain their qualification. For this reason, they also make attempts to ascribe to the rules of their course, either by adopting a more privileged discourse in some sections of the portfolio, or by changing from a humoristic to a more serious discourse as the writing progresses. The hybridised discourse therefore used in the portfolios also results in representation of multiple and continuously changing identities. Autobiographic, institutional and discoursal aspects are all used interchangeably in order to both ascribe to the rules of the system and do it in a way that expresses better their beliefs about who they are and what they do.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus lies on the recontextualising processes drawn upon when developing an NVQ portfolio. Such processes permeate the portfolio construction from the very initial stages to the very final ones, since each social action included in the portfolio is at the same time a representation or a recontextualisation of reality as understood by the writers. The recontextualising processes of developing and distributing the portfolio and the portfolio field have been introduced in order to discuss the social practices involved in the NVQ portfolio development and the power relations between the actors involved in this process.

More specifically, I have started by defining portfolios as 'formats', sites where many different genres come together and form a larger entity. I then moved on to analyse them in terms of the activities involved when people deal with such texts, the relationships between the actors constructing the portfolio and the communication technologies drawn upon while it is being developed. Such analysis showed that the process of recontextualisation is ubiquitous when dealing with portfolios. The evidence, in the form of texts, included in the portfolio is recontextualised from the domain of the workplace and at the same time its function and its meaning change radically. The logbooks are also recontextualisations of the actual practices involved in each vocation and are further recontextualised by the candidates into written texts functioning as evidence of knowledge and experience. Such processes create a space for new ideologies to develop: work practices do not remain the same when turned into performance criteria; work-related texts are different texts when included as evidence in the portfolio. At the same time, I have showed that recontextualisation of texts finally results in the creation of new literacy practices or of new meanings for the ones that already exist.

Discussion of the communication technologies used in the NVQ portfolio revealed that communication here is an one-way process. NVQ candidates are not offered the opportunity to voice their opinions about the portfolio, whereas the awarding bodies and other decision makers have the power to communicate their will to candidates. This unequal relationship was justified by the fact that decision makers act in an extra-local level and their voices can reach the whole country. On the contrary, NVQ candidates act within their locality and have no chances of being heard outside its limits. Recontextualising processes here again move between the local and the extra-local site and bring these two groups together.

The recontextualisation taking place while writing portfolio texts is discussed in the second part of this chapter, in the field analysis of NVQ portfolios. When recontextualising social practices we are giving them a new form and therefore we are able to decide upon how to represent them. In this section, I discuss the different ways that candidates and other prominent actors, such as clients, are represented in the portfolios. Firstly, I have concentrated upon the way they are represented in the logbooks, which are texts produced by the policy makers, and secondly upon texts written by candidates themselves. My focus has been on the representation of social actors and social actions using van Leeuwen's socio-semantic approach. Such an analysis showed that the logbooks make use of a highly generalised and impersonal discourse with a focus on the candidates' material actions and a limited interest in their reactions or in the clients' perspective. To this end, the logbooks promote the use of an institutional discourse and the admittance of an institutional identity for the NVQ candidates, focusing on homogenised actions and reactions rather than on contextualised behaviour.

On the other hand, analysis of the candidates' writing has shown that they struggle between using the discourse imposed by the policy makers and a more personal discourse which originates from their everyday working experience and from their identities as authors. Within the framework of such a discourse, they use more personalised and concrete language structures. Additionally, the beauty therapy candidates choose to cast their focus upon their clients' actions and reactions, whereas the warehouse candidate borrows elements from a creative writing discourse, making his text look more like a humoristic story rather than a storyboard of his work tasks. In this way, the candidates reject the institutional identity ascribed to them in the logbook and instead insert in their texts aspects from their autobiographical self, and their self as author. In this way, prominent in their texts is what Gee has called a 'discourse-identity', constructed by their everyday experiences and relations with other people.

Finally, it should be stressed that a combined analysis of generic aspects and field of NVQ portfolios, have brought into light the unequal distribution of power among the actors dealing with the portfolio. Such an analysis has made clear that, through the processes of developing an NVQ portfolio, the NVQ candidates are often disempowered and given very limited opportunities to act against it. The Sector Skills Councils and awarding bodies have constructed an ideal identity for NVQ candidates and failure to abide with it could cost them the qualification. As a reaction, the candidates project in their writing their own discourse and their own identities. This, however, is often done in a covert way, mixing the two discourses together and resulting in what can be described as hybrid texts (as discussed in chapter 5). All candidates in this study seemed to be aware of their disempowered position, but also acted against it and their reaction is evident in the discourses they enact in the portfolio texts.

8 Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to bring together all the major discussions presented in this thesis, by summarising the findings and answering the research questions stated in the introductory chapter. I will begin by a reflective account of the major theories that frame this study, namely New Literacy Studies, Activity Theory and methods of critical discourse analysis. More specifically, I will discuss how I brought these three frameworks together in the thesis, the affordances such a combination provided and the difficulties I met. Then, I will proceed with answering each one of the research questions and, in this way, summarise the main discussions of the thesis while at the same time introducing some new ones. The implications of my study are also discussed in this chapter, with a focus upon the implementation of NVQs both at workplaces and FE colleges. Additionally, I discuss the limitations of my study and provide suggestions for further research on the subject of NVQs. Finally, I include a section on the overall contribution of this study, in the level of theory, methodology and research content.

8.2 Studying literacy using AT and methods of discourse analysis: Affordances and restrictions

In this thesis, I have argued for the use of AT as complementary to the study of situated literacies. I have explained that both studies originate from sociocultural theories and they both focus on context as a significant factor when studying people's social actions. In this study, I have used them in order to analyse the literacy practices of NVQ candidates when developing portfolios. Here I would like to offer a final reflection on the combined use of these theoretical and methodological tools.

Using the concept of 'literacy practices' as an analytic tool to describe what people do with literacy encompasses many aspects of social life that a researcher should take into account. Literacy practices are constructed by a series of complex and dynamic factors, such as actions (individual or collective), beliefs and feelings (conscious or unconscious) social relations, different ways of being in the world, etc. These are aspects that are not always easy to be captured by researchers. Collecting data on people's literacy practices requires systematic and acute observations and later on precise analyses. This is where AT was useful in this thesis. The elements of an activity system (subjects, objects, tools, community, etc) were used as guidance regarding the elements to take into account when studying literacy practices. Lee and Ball argue that understanding systems of literacy practices is a major challenge and that AT helps the literacy researcher "to identify the elements of the activity system about which she or he might collect data" (2005: 113). This was particularly true in this thesis, as the activity theory triangle and the elements included in it inspired me as to what observations to make while being in the field and what aspects of the activity to focus upon during the interviews.

However, I would like to further Lee and Ball's argument, by saying that AT does not only offer indications about the data to be collected, but also about the ways the data should be analysed. Doing ethnography means collecting huge amounts of data, which is later difficult to systematize. Using an activity system as an analytic unit, I was able to organise my data in terms of the elements included in it. Therefore, as explained in section 4.5.1 of the thesis, the coding of the data and later on the structuring of the chapters were all based on the elements included in the activity system triangle and the principles that underpin it. In this way, I was able to systematize the data, and later on analyze it and describe it in this thesis in a structured and meaningful way. AT also enabled me to show the conflicts that shape literacy practices, in activities enacted by groups rather than individuals. And finally, by means of describing the working dynamics of activity systems, I showed how changing literacy practices contribute to the reconstruction of the activity and the shaping and reshaping of people's identities.

My argument therefore is that the use of AT in the study of situated literacies is a useful addition, that contributes both at a theoretical and methodological level. This argument is confirmed by chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, where AT was used as an analytic method in order to understand and describe the literacy practices drawn upon when developing vocational portfolios, at work and at the college.

However, when studying the candidates' attitudes and beliefs regarding the NVQ portfolio and, most importantly, when looking at the unequal distribution of power between members of the activity system, the AT theoretical lens proved to be insufficient. The principles of an activity system allowed me to locate the conflicts within the activity, but not the real source of such conflicts. This is the reason why methods of critical discourse analysis are introduced in this thesis, as they offer the necessary theoretical and methodological tools to talk about the positioning of the members of the activity and to identify dominant and vernacular discourses inherent in the activity system being studied. Moje and Lewis argue that discourse analysis can help researchers understand the way literacy practices are enacted within activity systems "by examining how the cultural models and discourses that operate in different activity systems get brought into a given activity through language and other means of representation" (2007: 23). Discourses were defined in this study as "ways of being in the world" (J. Gee, 1996) and as ways of "representing aspects of the world" (Fairclough, 2003), and were studied in both capacities.

By studying the discourses that underpin the activity systems in this study, I was able to show the different ways of conceptualizing the role of an NVQ candidate, between the students and the decision makers. I showed that different viewpoints within an activity system can be the result of the enactment of opposing discourses. Such opposing discourses can be made visible in the interaction between the subjects of an activity, in the opinions they express about each other and most importantly in the texts they produce. Therefore studying the discourses of an activity means studying all the forms of language and other means of representation within the activity and, in this way, interpreting people's actions and beliefs. Studying activity systems, without taking into consideration the enactment of discourses, means examining and describing people's actions and reactions without really interpreting them. The absence of a theory of discourses in this study would result in the identification of conflicts between the subjects of the activity, without providing a meaningful interpretation of their presence. In other words, according to AT, people engage actions for the completion of their objects, but it does not account for the different ways people choose to approach the completion of such goals. And finally, the implementation of a discourse analysis in the study of activity systems enables the researcher to move a step further and reach conclusions about the identity construction of the activity's subjects, as mediated through the enactment of discourses.

To sum up, the principal argument I make in this thesis, at the level of theory, is that AT can be a substantial addition to the field of NLS, as it provides additional theoretical and methodological tools to study participation in literacy, by analysing literacy events and describing literacy practices. However, literacy practices are shaped by ideologies, values and beliefs and AT does not account for such factors. Additionally, it does not provide the tools to talk about relations of power between the members of the activity and unequal distribution of authority. Therefore, in order for AT to add in a meaningful way to the study of literacies, it has to be supported by an additional theory of discourse.

8.3 Review of the research questions

This thesis has set out to provide answers to a number of research questions, presented in section 1.3 of the introductory chapter. For most of these questions, the answers have been discussed throughout the analysis chapters and have been summarised in the final sections of the respective chapter. There is one question though (No5) that I have been waiting to answer in this final chapter, as it is important to take into account the analysis provided throughout the whole thesis. In this section, I will revisit all the research questions, summarise the findings for each one of them and discuss anew the one that has not been dealt with adequately in the previous chapters.

RQ 1: What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios in the workplace? Are these practices newly acquired or do they relate to the candidates' work practices?

This question was addressed in chapter 5 of the thesis with a focus upon Derry, an NVQ candidate on Business and Administration. By treating the process of developing his portfolio as an activity system, I discovered the rich inventory of literacy practices he participated in when developing the NVQ portfolio. And by a similar analysis of his work practices, I showed that the two sets of practices were related in many ways. More specifically, the portfolio was argued to be the main 'boundary object' between the two activities, but its meaning and function changed depending on the context it was being used. The portfolio texts were a product of both, Derry's work practices and those practices that he drew upon for the qualification. As a result, I argued that the portfolio was a hybrid collection of texts, with discourses originating in both settings and that it was created in a third space, where Derry's work and qualification practices came together and gave meaning to each other.

RQ2: What literacy practices are drawn upon when developing NVQ portfolios at the college?

This question was answered in chapter 6, where I present the case study of twelve NVQ candidates in an FE college, studying towards the completion of an NVQ on Beauty Therapy. Examining their yearly course as an activity system, I described the development of the portfolio as the main mediating tool between the subjects and their goal. I showed that in order to create the portfolio, the candidates engaged in a number of literacy events before, during and after the treatments with their clients and completed various texts. Analysis of such literacy events indicates that the candidates appreciated the value of these texts as useful tools for performing their work tasks, but on the contrary, they did not approve of some sections or functions that were not related to their work practices and were only there as a means of assessment.

Overall, the literacy practices drawn upon during portfolio completion in the college can be described as being of two kinds: those practices that were meant to help the candidates do their job better and those that were meant to prove their knowledge and experience and thus help them gain the qualification. Very often these contradicting sets of practices were drawn upon in the same literacy event, causing conflicting emotions and opinions for the candidates. Finally, I also showed that the literacy practices shaping the college-based NVQ portfolios were often the result of contradictions and conflicts between the college administration and tutors and the NVQ candidates.

RQ3. How is the identity of NVQ candidates constructed by the literacy practices in which they participate when developing a portfolio?

This question was addressed in chapters 5 and 6, each time with a different focus. In chapter 5, I discussed how Derry's participation in literacy practices while developing the NVQ portfolio shaped his identity. And in chapter 6, I concentrated on the same issue, but with a focus on the NVQ candidates in the college.

Starting with Derry, I showed that his long-established identity in his workplace had an impact upon the construction of his identity while building his portfolio. Additionally, I showed that when he started working on his portfolio, Derry identified completely with his work role. The easiness with which he approached the evidence for his portfolio is not something that I would expect all candidates with a long work experience to confirm. On the contrary, it is very likely that people who have been successfully working in a job for many years will find difficulties when having to put their daily tasks onto paper. This, however, did not apply to Derry, who thought it was easy to describe actions that he had been performing for so many years.

On the contrary, he did not feel comfortable with writing about situations he was not familiar with, as they were not part of his work description. However, driven by the necessity to complete the portfolio and obtain the qualification, he had to face his fears and write about new topics. This entailed new literacy practices and therefore I argued that his activity system expanded. The new literacy practices Derry engaged with resulted in a shift in his identity. Rather than seeing himself as a good administrator only, he now felt his horizons had expanded.

On the other hand, the situation was not similar for the Beauty Therapy NVQ candidates in the college. Not developing the portfolio in an actual workplace, but in a vocational course, proved to be a problem. They got trapped between two discourses and consequently two identities. In the college, they were attributed the identity of a student. The college regulations seemed to represent a discourse of formal schooling, rather than a discourse of vocational education in the FE sector. At the same time, the texts they had to fill in for their portfolios sometimes acted as a barrier to their work. Instead of concentrating on their clients, they often had to disrupt their treatment and engage with literacy events for the purposes of the portfolio.

The candidates resented being treated like school students and identified more with being practitioners. They were interested in learning how to perform beauty therapy treatments and did not focus upon the evaluating aspect of the course. In order to balance the two opposing views of what it means to be an NVQ candidate at college, the women negotiated their role in the class. As a result, they adopted a mixed identity, trying to align themselves with the student identity, imposed on them by decision makers, and more frequently with the professional therapist's identity, favoured by them. It is important to add that, similarly to Derry, the beauty therapy candidates also learned a lot as a result of the new literacy practices while developing the portfolio. At the end of the course, they were also confident holders of an NVQ, with many prospects ahead of them. However, the argument I am making here is that the contradicting literacy practices made them negotiate who they were and resulted in the construction of mixed identities.

RQ4. Is there a difference between the languages used in the logbooks and the texts created by the candidates for their portfolios? How is the identity of NVQ candidates discoursally constructed by the texts included in the portfolio?

The language of the portfolios has been examined in detail in chapter 7 of the thesis. Using van Leeuwen's (1995; 1996) socio-semantic approach to discourse analysis, I have conducted a comparative study of the language used by decision makers in the logbook and the linguistic choices made by NVQ candidates in the texts they include in their portfolios.

The linguistic choices made in the three logbook units, in terms of representation of social actions and actors, have a lot of similarities. Overall they make use of an institutional discourse, with many generalisations and vague points. It is a discourse that treats vocations as a number of skills which once mastered can be performed at any context. In an analogy with the autonomous model of literacy, it is an autonomous view of vocations, where context is not taken into account. Additionally, they promote an identity for the NVQ candidates as students who mechanically perform certain actions, who are the driving forces of the activity and do not deviate from the standards described in the logbooks. Additional elements such as establishing personal relations with clients or with other colleagues are nowhere included in the standards. The overall image of the NVQ candidate projected is far from the actual ones, as the analysis of the candidates' texts indicates. The linguistic choices made by the candidates are very different. They seem to reject the institutional identity imposed on them and instead they project their own identities, as constructed by their past experiences and by the way they perceive themselves and the work they are doing. On the other hand, they are aware that their portfolio texts are going to be assessed, so at certain points they feel compelled to imitate aspects of the discourse promoted by the logbooks.

To sum up, I have argued that the candidates use in their portfolio texts a mixed discourse, combining their own ideas of what it means to be a good NVQ candidate and the ideas imposed on them through their logbooks. The beauty therapy candidates negotiate their identity in the text, similarly to the way they negotiate it during the course. And Kevin uses a different mixture of discourses, hoping in this way to show who he really is and what he can do through his writing.

RQ5. Does the development of NVQ portfolios empower or constrain employees for their (future) careers?

The final research question of the thesis is addressed by bringing together the threads of all the discussions on the NVQ and the accompanying portfolio conducted so far. It is a question that I would like to visit here, taking into account the literacy practices associated with the development of the NVQ portfolio and the construction of the candidates' identity. In the introduction of the thesis, I described the creation of NVQs as an element of recent changes in the vocational sector and the creation of a new reality in the world of work that promotes a knowledge-based economy and presupposes the contribution of 'knowledge workers'. Possessing an NVQ is a first step in being a knowledge worker, as NVQ holders do not rely on their work experience only, but take a step further by entering FE and obtaining a qualification. Such actions prove that they seek further career development and thus are successful candidates for participating in the modern workplaces.

However, the question I pose here is whether the development of an NVQ portfolio truly prepares candidates for or evaluates their performance within such a new vocational environment. Throughout the thesis, I have shown that developing an NVQ portfolio requires following strict rules about its content and its structure. The candidates need to provide evidence for performance indicators that have been issued to them by awarding bodies and sector skills councils. However, the performance indicators are argued here to adopt an institutionalised discourse that approaches vocations as an aggregation of a number of skills. These skills, most of the time, are related to the performance of specific work practices, isolated from the wider context within which such practices are enacted. In other words, the performance indicators approach vocational skills as autonomous entities and do not view vocations in their holistic perspective. Taking the example of the Beauty Therapy NVQ, the standards require that the candidates to know how to ask clients' personal details and medical history. However, they do not address sensitive issues, such as how to approach the client and how to ask questions that might be sensitive or inappropriate. And a second example could be taken from Derry's NVQ, where he is asked to show how he communicates with clients, but do not take into account how Derry reacts in unexpected situations, for example when an angry client calls and asks to be compensated.

The above examples are indicative of the restricted nature of the performance indicators included in the NVQ logbooks. It can be argued therefore that competence-based criteria approach vocations in a partial way, emphasizing the performance of certain skills, but leaving out the skills that are most highly appreciated in current workplaces and most importantly by ignoring the context within which such skills are enacted. For example, skills such as taking initiatives, establishing relations with customers and other colleagues, working with restricted resources and within flexible timetables, responding to unexpected situations quickly and efficiently, accepting responsibilities, all these are competences that a worker should demonstrate when working within modern workplaces. And they are competences that, with a few exceptions, are not addressed within NVQs. In this way, it can be argued that the NVQs focus on sterile work practices, without recognising other important skills that a worker might possess and, most importantly, without encouraging workers to exhibit them. In this thesis, there have been many examples where candidates took more actions than what was required of them in the performance standards and documented them in the portfolio texts. However, it is likely that such actions (e.g. visiting the library to get information, establishing techniques in order to ask sensitive questions, using mediation techniques, etc) were not valued by their assessors, as they did not correspond to any of the performance criteria in their logbooks.

Therefore, I argue that even though the NVQs and the accompanying portfolios were introduced within FE as an answer to the demand for knowledge workers, they do not address the large variety of situations that workers encounter in their workplace and the large number of competences they demonstrate. Rather, they focus on work skills as isolated from the context within which they are being performed and they do not take into account the new demands placed upon workers by modern industries.

8.4 Implications for the implementation of NVQs

The purpose of this research has not been to make generalised statements about the implementation of NVQs and the creation of NVQ portfolios. Rather, my aim has been to understand the complex set of literacy practices drawn upon when developing such portfolios and their impact on the candidates' identities. However, conducting an ethnographic research to study the literacy practices embedded in a qualification, brings the researcher closer to the reality of this qualification and exposes what works and what needs further improvement. To this end, I have come up with some suggestions for the improvement of NVQ portfolios and I will discuss them here with the hope that they will be taken up by other researchers and FE stakeholders.

One significant implication of this research is related to the difference between developing an NVQ portfolio on a work-basis and on a college-basis. It has become clear that there is a great difference between developing portfolios in these two different settings. In chapter 5, I showed that for Derry developing an NVQ portfolio was a pleasant experience, which resulted in expanding his horizons and making him appreciate his work and his self in a more positive way. Derry did not meet the same difficulties with the logbook that the Beauty Therapy candidates met. His only problems concerned a certain unit, which he felt was outside the limits of his work role. The same sense of easiness, when approaching the NVQ logbook, was also confirmed by Kevin, even though his case is not discussed here in detail. On the contrary, most of the NVQ candidates in the college acknowledged meeting a lot of difficulties with the discourse used in the logbook and were often uncertain about what they were asked to do.

Such a difference of approaches can be attributed to the fact that NVQs are meant to assess prior knowledge and experience. The work-based candidates usually possess these qualities, whereas the college-based candidates are only now learning how to perform their work tasks. The women in the college were learning how to be beauty therapists at the same time as developing their portfolio. In section 6.5.4, I showed that the college-based candidates were learning the discourse of their work, whereas the work-based ones had acquired this discourse through participation in it. Therefore, being evaluated on prior knowledge and experience, while not yet possessing such qualities can be a difficult task. This study suggests therefore that since the role of NVQs is to qualify people's vocational skills, they should be applied only to those situations in which workers actually possess these skills, that is, when people are already working in the industry in which they are being evaluated.

A second implication of the research involves the time and the space wherein NVQ portfolios are developed. In both research settings, the NVQ candidates had issues with the time and the space allocated to them when working on their portfolios. Derry was not pleased with working on his NVQ at his workplace and preferred the library and his own house. And the Beauty Therapy candidates were upset with the fact that they were not allowed to take the logbook at home, and started working better on their portfolio when this rule changed. The result that can be drawn is that developing an NVQ portfolio is a process that requires the candidate's focused and wholehearted engagement and therefore it should be up to them to decide where and when they feel more comfortable to work on it. Whereas for some of them, working within the institution can be preferable, others feel restricted by the time and the space allocated to them, and want to be the ones deciding on these factors. This thesis suggests therefore that NVQ candidates should be allowed to work on their portfolios when and where they choose to, as in this way it is more likely that they commit to it and complete it successfully.

A third implication concerns the language used in the logbooks provided by the awarding bodies and Sector Skills Councils. Whereas some NVQ candidates in this study stated that they had no issues with the language used, most of them, mainly those who worked on a college-basis, admitted to having difficulties with the performance indicators language. A group interview I had with representatives from an awarding body[16] confirmed that awarding bodies do not pay attention to the language of the performance indicators. They stated that language use is one of the least important issues, as they cast their focus upon the content of the standards. These statements, along with the complaints of the candidates included in this thesis, suggest that a substantial improvement of the logbooks' language should take place. More specifically, it is suggested that the language of the logbooks becomes less generalised and more concrete, making specific reference to the actions the candidates are expected to take, simplifying the manneristic way of describing work tasks and adopting a discourse that will make a better impression on the candidates, that will be

[16] This interview is not otherwise used in this thesis. One reason for this decision is the lack of space to expand upon the points that were made during this interview. But more importantly, I did not include extracts from this interview based on the fact that the focus of this thesis is placed upon the NVQ candidates' voices rather than on other stakeholders, such as the awarding bodies.

closer to the realities of the workplace and to the work roles the candidates are called to enact.

Along with the simplification of the performance indicators language, accompanying instructions should be given to the NVQ candidates, explaining the rationale behind the construction of the portfolio and behind each unit included in it. In this way, the candidates would better understand what is required of them to do and the burden will not fall on the tutors/assessors and their abilities to understand and explain the meaning of the portfolio and the standards.

A final implication concerns the last research question of the thesis, regarding the role of the NVQ and the accompanying portfolio within the 'mew work order'. I suggested earlier that the performance indicators included in NVQs do not address the complexity and the dynamic role of modern workers within new working environments. The performance indicators approach work roles as isolated from any kind of context and therefore do not correspond to reality. This study suggests therefore that the nature of the performance indicators should change, taking into account the demands of modern workplaces on employees and viewing work roles in their holistic dimensions. Vocations should not be approached and assessed only as an aggregation of skills, but rather the performance indicators should capture the context and thus the many different ways of performing a work task. In this way, actions such as being innovative or approaching clients in a sensitive manner would be encouraged and appreciated, rather than ignored. And most importantly NVQ candidates would be empowered by being made aware of the new reality taking place in the world of work and the demands that such a reality places on workers. In its most extreme form, such a suggestion would include alternative ways of assessment that complement or develop the idea of NVQs.

8.5 Limitations of the study and scope for further research

This study draws conclusions from two case studies, regarding the development of NVQ portfolios in the workplace and an FE college. Because of the nature of the ethnographic data collected and the case study analyses, the study does not claim to reach generalising results. The discussions included here are only representative of the people who participated in my research, but they are also indications of a more general situation in the study of NVQs. An ethnographic approach to research and resulting case studies were the only possible methods for getting to people's experiences and addressing the research questions.

Such an ethnographic approach can be followed by a survey that would address a large sample of NVQ candidates and thus represent a larger population that complete NVQs. Even though the analysis would not be as thick as the one included in this thesis, such a survey could reveal whether the opinions expressed by the NVQ candidates of this study, at least in what it concerns the language used in the logbooks, is shared by a larger number of people.

Additionally, this research approaches the study for obtaining an NVQ and the completion of portfolios from the point of view of the NVQ candidates only. Even though I have interviewed the tutors in the two research settings, their perspectives have not been the focus of this thesis. An alternative approach would be to focus upon NVQ tutors and examine the practices of facilitating an NVQ and the difficulties that such a process might entail. Such a study would probably provide a different perspective regarding the relationships and the contradictions between tutors and candidates and would shed light on the tutors' positioning towards NVQ portfolios.

Similarly, in this study I have not included the perspective of decision makers regarding the NVQ, such as awarding bodies and Sector Skills Councils. An idea for a further study is to approach representatives from such institutions and examine the development of the performance indicators, the rationale behind the discourse used in the logbooks, as well as the way they evaluate the NVQ portfolio. Such a study would complement this thesis, in the sense that my study concentrates on the local sites of NVQ candidates and the development of their portfolios and the additional study would focus upon the extra-local sites where the NVQs are created and later on evaluated.

Finally, this study does not study NVQ portfolios as an assessment tool of vocational skills. Even though I indicate some of the skills that NVQs fail to address, I do not make any judgements on whether such a form of assessment is reliable. This could be the scope of an alternative study that would look at whether NVQs are a valid and reliable means to assess vocational skills and would indicate any possible strengths or weaknesses such an assessment tool might involve.

8.6 Contribution of the research

In this final section, I would like to bring all the issues discussed above together and, in this way, to make explicit the contribution of this thesis. The contribution of a study can be discussed at many levels. At the level of theory, I have introduced a combined use of the New Literacy Studies framework with the principles that underpin Activity Theory and methods of critical discourse analysis. By approaching the process of developing an NVQ portfolio as an activity system, I have been able to discuss the many different aspects that shape the literacy practices drawn upon by the activity participants. And by applying methods of critical discourse analysis, I have been able to identify some of the discourses inherent in the texts included in the activity. A combination of these three theoretical frameworks has not only enabled me to draw conclusions regarding the uses of literacy and the expression of discourses, but even more importantly, it has led me to understand how literacy practices and discourses have an impact upon the identity construction of the activity's members.

At the level of methodology, this thesis contributes to the newly introduced field of 'linguistic ethnography', by applying its suggested methods in the study of NVQ portfolios. More specifically, I have combined traditional ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis and complemented them with analytic methods from the field of critical discourse analysis. In this way, I was enabled to study NVQ portfolios both as artefacts playing an important role within an activity and as linguistic devices created by the use of discourses. 'Linguistic ethnography' is a promising field in social studies and this research is a good example of how it can be applied to the study of literacy.

At the level of the actual research, this study sheds light on the literacy practices drawn upon when developing vocational portfolios. I have shown how these portfolios are created in two different settings, the workplace and an FE college, and I have discussed the complex and dynamic nature of this process. I have enriched my arguments with statements from the NVQ candidates, making in this way their voices heard and showing some of the difficulties they meet when studying for an NVQ.

Additionally, I have focused upon the textually mediated nature of such portfolios and examined them as textual artefacts that mediate between local and extra-local settings and that cause contradictions and expansions within activities. But I also examined their language and identified the discourses hidden in them and the influences they have upon the people who deal with these texts.

An additional contribution of the study is that it foregrounds the relations between literacy practices and identity construction. More specifically, I have studied the literacy practices drawn upon when developing an NVQ portfolio and I have shown how participation in these practices influences people's identification with certain groups and changes their sense of who they are and what they can do. In addition, I have added to those studies that examine the discoursal construction of identity through the study of texts, by approaching this subject by means of the study of the language used in vocational portfolios. The language used in vocational portfolios proved to be a good indicator of the writer's understanding and projection of their professional identity.

This thesis also adds to a series of workplace literacy studies that set out to research the uses of literacy in the workplace. By focusing upon the construction of vocational portfolios and by entering a warehouse and a vocational beauty therapy course, I have collected data about the uses of literacy in actual and simulated workplaces. More importantly, this thesis has concentrated upon the way literacy practices drawn upon in the workplace can be embedded in the sphere of vocational education and vice versa. And it has shown the problems that arise as well as some of the positive elements of combining these two worlds. Finally, this thesis approaches NVQs and the accompanying portfolios as products of the knowledge-based economy and society and examines the role they play as empowering or restricting workers for their future employment.

References

Aldcroft, D. (1992). *Education, Training and Economic Performance, 1944 to 1990.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Alexander, K. (2000). Writing up/Writing down: Literate practices in a mental health boarding home. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies, 10*(1&2), 23-38.

Angrosino, M., & Mays de Perez, K. (2003). Rethinking observation: From method to context. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials.* London: Sage.

Ashworth, P., & Saxton, J. (1990). On 'Competence'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 14*(2), 3-25.

ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development. Atlas.ti. Retrieved 06 January, 2009, from http://www.atlasti.com

Bakhtin, M. (1981). Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Ball, S. J. (1990). Self-doubt and soft-data: social and technical trajectories in ethnographic fieldwork. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 3*(2), 157-171.

Barton, D. (1994). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Barton, D. (2001). Directions for literacy research: Analysing language and social practices in a textually mediated world. *Language and Education, 15*(2&3), 92-104.

Barton, D. (2007). *Literacy: An Introduction to the ecology of written language* (second ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local Literacies: reading and writing in one community.* London: Routledge.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context.* London: Routledge.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2005). Literacy, reification and the dynamics of social interaction. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power, and social context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanič, R. (2000). *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context.* . London: Routledge.

Barton, D., & Ivanic, R. (1991). *Writing in the community.* London: Sage.

Barton, D., Ivanic, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., & Tusting, K. (2007). *Literacy, lives and learning.* New York: Routledge.

Barton, D., & Tusting, K. (2005). *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power, and social context.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barton, D., & Tusting, K. (2006). Changing literacies in the knowledge-based economy: background paper, *Paper presented at: Changing Literacies in the Knowledge-based Economy.* Lancaster University, May 2006.

Baynham, M. (1995). *Literacy practices: Investigating literacy in social contexts.* London: Longman.

Baynham, M. (2004). Ethnographies of literacy: Introduction. *Language and Education, 18*(4), 285-290.

Baynham, M., & Baker, D. (2002). Practice in literacy and numeracy research: Multiple perspectives. *Ways of Knowing, 2*, 1-9.
Baynham, M., & Masing, H. (2000). Mediators and mediation in multilingual literacy events. In M. Martin-Jones & K. Jones (Eds.), *Multilingual Literacies* (pp. 189-207). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Beaumont, G. (1996). *Review of 100 NVQs and SVQs*. London: NCVQ.
Bernstein, B. (1996). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
Bloome, D., & Green, J. (2005). Ethnography and ethnographers of and in education: A situated perspective. In J. Flood, S. B. Heath & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Boudahmane, K., Manta, M., Antoine, F., Galliano, S., & Barras, C. (2008). Transcriber: A tool for segmenting, labelling and transcribing speech. Retrieved 6 January, 2009, from http://trans.sourceforge.net/en/presentation.php
Brandt, D. (1995). Sponsors of literacy. *College Composition and Communication, 49*, 165-185.
Brandt, D., & Clinton, K. (2002). Limits of the local: Expanding perspectives on literacy as a social practice. *Journal of Literacy Research, 34*(3), 337-356.
Brown, R., & Renshaw, P. (2006). Positioning students as actors and authors: A chronotopic analysis of collaborative learning activities. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 13*(3), 247-259.
Burgess, A. (2008). The literacy practices of recording achievement: how a text mediates between the local and the global. *Journal of Education Policy, 23*(1), 49-62.
Burke, J. W. (Ed.). (1995). *Outcomes, learning and the curriculum: Implications for NVQs, GNVQs and other qualifications*. London: Falmer Press.
Cahill, C. (2000). Street literacy: Urban teenagers' strategies for negotiating their neighbourhood. *Journal of Youth Studies, 3*(3), 251-277.
Cherry, R. (1988). Ethos versus persona: Self-representation in written discourse. *Written Communication, 5*(3), 251-276.
Clifford, J. (1990). Notes on (Field)notes. In R. Sanjek (Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The making of anthropology*. London: Cornell University Press.
Coffey, A. (1999). *The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity* London: Sage.
Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural Psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge: The Bellknap Press.
Cole, M., & Engeström, Y. (1993). A cultural-historical approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed Cognitions: Psychological and Educational Considerations* (pp. 1-46). New York: Cambridge University Press.
Collins, J., & Blot, R. (2003). *Literacy and literacies: Texts, power and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Cox, A. (2007). Re-visiting the NVQ debate: 'Bad' qualifications, expansive learning environments and prospects for upskilling workers [Electronic Version]. Retrieved 25/05/09 from http://www.skope.ox.ac.uk/WorkingPapers/SKOPEWP71.pdf.

Cresswell, J. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Crowther, J., Hamilton, M., & Tett, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Powerful literacies* (3rd edition on 2006 ed.). Leicester: NIACE.

Cuban, S. (2007). *Serving new immigrant communities in the library.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group and Libraries Unlimited.

Cuban, S., & Cuban, L. (2007). *Partners in literacy : schools and libraries building communities through technology* New York: Teachers College Press.

Darville, R. (1995). Literacy, experience, power. In M. Campbell & A. Manicom (Eds.), *Knowledge, experience and ruling relations* (pp. 249-261). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Davies, C. A. (1999). *Reflexive ethnography.* London: Routledge.

Davydov, V. (1999). The content and unsolved problems of activity theory. In Y. Engeström (Ed.), *Perspectives on Activity Theory* (pp. 39-52). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Denzin, N. (1989). *Interpretive interactionism.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). (1996). *Building the framework. A consultation paper on bringing together the work of the NCVQ and SCAA.* London: DfEE.

Department of Education and Science (DES). (1991). *Education and training for the 21st century.* London: HMSO.

Department of Employment/Department of Education and Science (DE/DES). (1985). *Education and training for young people.* London: HMSO.

Doehler, S. (2002). Mediation revisited: The interactive organization of mediation in learning environments. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 9*(1), 22-42.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

Engeström, Y. (1987). Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research. Retrieved 25/02/07, from http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/Paper/Engestrom/expanding/toc.htm

Engeström, Y. (1990). *Learning, working and imagining: Twelve studies in activity theory.* Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit Oy.

Engeström, Y. (1999). Innovative learning in work teams: Analyzing cycles of knowledge creation in practice. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen & R. Punamaki (Eds.), *Perspectives on Activity Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work, 14*(1), 2001.

Engeström, Y. (2005). *Developmental work research: Expanding activity theory in practice* (Vol. 12). Berlin: International Cultural-historical Human Sciences.

Engeström, Y., Engeström, R., & Kärkkäinen, M. (1995). Polycontextuality and boundary crossing in expert cognition: learning and problem solving in complex work activities. *Learning and Instruction, 5*(4), 319-336.

Fairclough, N. (1992). Intertextuality in critical discourse analysis. *Linguistics and Education, 4*, 269-293.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). London: Pearson Education.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research.* London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction* (Vol. 2 Discourse Studies: A multidisciplinary introduction). London: Sage.
Farrell, L. (2006). *Making knowledge common: Literacy and knowledge at work.* New York: Peter Lang.
Fawns, M., & Ivanič, R. (2001). Form-filling as a social practice: taking power into our own hands. In J. Crowther, M. Hamilton & L. Tett (Eds.), *Powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE.
Fetterman, D. M. (1998). *Ethnography: Step by step* (Second ed. Vol. 17). London: Sage.
Fontana, A., & Frey, H. (2003). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
Foucault, M. (1980). Prison talk. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/ Knowledge* (pp. 37-52). Brighton: Harvester.
Franklin, K. (1997). National vocational qualifications, Scottish vocational qualifications and competence-based education and training: From de Ville to Beaumont. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 49*(4), 511-529.
Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey.
Fuller, A. (1995). Purpose, value and competence: Contextualising competence based assessment in the civil aviation sector. *British Journal of Education and Work, 8*(2), 60-77.
Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Hodkinson, P., & Unwin, L. (2005). Learning as peripheral participation in communities of practice: A reassessment of key concepts in workplace learning. *British Educational Research Journal, 31*(1), 49-68.
Fuller, A., & Unwin, L. (2004). Expansive learning environments: Integrating organizational and personal development. In A. Fuller, A. Munro & H. Rainbir (Eds.), *Workplace learning in context*. Routledge: London.
Further Education Unit (FEU). (1984). *Towards a competence-based system: An FEU view*. London: Further Education Unit.
Further Education Unit (FEU). (1988). *NCVQ and its implications*: FEU.
Gee, J. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: ideology in discourses* London: Falmer Press.
Gee, J. (2005). Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces: From the Age of Mythology to today's schools. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power and social context* (pp. 214-232). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method.* London: Routledge.
Gee, J. P. (2001a). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 25*, 99-125.
Gee, J. P. (2001b). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction and what is literacy? In E. Cushman, E. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook.* London: Bedford Books.
Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling.* London: Routledge.
Gee, J. P., Hull, G., & Lankshear, C. (1996). *The New Work Order: Behind the language of the new capitalism.* Sydney and Boulder: Allen & Unwin and Westview Press.

Gillen, J., Littleton, K., Twiner, A., Kleine Staarman, J., & Mercer, N. (2008). Using the interactive whiteboard to resource continuity and support multimodal teaching in a primary science classroom. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning 24*, 348-358.

Goffman, E. (1969). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: The Penguin Press.

Gold, R. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces, 36*, 217-223.

Goody, J. (1977). *The domestication of the savage mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goody, J., & Watt, I. (1968). The Consequences of literacy. In J. Goody (Ed.), *Literacy in traditional societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grugulis, I. (2003). The contribution of National Vocational Qualifications to the growth of skills in the UK. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 43*(1), 457-475.

Gutierrez, K., & Larson, J. (1994). Language borders: Recitation as hegemonic discourse. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 3*, 22-36.

Gutierrez, K. D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., & Tejeda, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 6*(4), 286-303.

Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of communicative action* (Vol. 1). London: Heinemann.

Halliday, M. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.

Hamilton, M. (2001). Privileged Literacies: Policy, institutional process and the life of the IALS. *Language and Education, 15*(2&3), 178-196.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography : principles in practice* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

Handy, C. (1995). *The Future of work.* London: W H Smith Contemporary Papers 8.

Hargraves, G. (2000). The review of vocational qualifications, 1985 to 1986: An analysis of its role in the development of competence-based vocational qualifications in England and Wales. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 48*(3), 285-308.

Hart-Landsberg, S., & Reder, S. (1997). Teamwork and literacy: Teaching and learning at Hardy Industries. In G. Hull (Ed.), *Changing Work, Changing Workers* (pp. 350-382). New York: State University of New York.

Heath, S. B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society, 11*, 49-76.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S. B., & Street, B. (2008). *On ethnography: Approaches to language and literacy research (An NCRLL volume)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hermann, G., & Kenyon, R. (1987). *Competency-based vocational education. A case study* London: Further Education Unit/ Professional, Industrial, and Commercial Updating (FEU/PICKUP).

Hillier, Y. (1999). Higher level vocational qualifications: The candidates' experience. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 51*, 199-227.

Hillier, Y., & Jameson, J. (2003). *Empowering researchers in Further Education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Hirst, E. (2004). Diverse social contexts of a second-language classroom and the construction of identity. In K. Leander & M. Sheehy (Eds.), *Spatializing literacy research and practice*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Hodkinson, P. (1995). Professionalism and competence. In P. Hodkinson & M. Issitt (Eds.), *The challenge of competence: Professionalism through vocational education and training*. London: Cassell.

Hull, G. (1997). *Changing work, changing workers*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Hunter, J. (2004). Working life and literacies at the Urban Hotel. In G. Hull (Ed.), *Reading work: Literacies in the new workplace*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hyland, T. (1994). *Competence, education and NVQs: Dissenting perspectives*. London: Cassell.

Hyland, T. (1996). NVQs, skills training and employers' needs: Beyond Beaumont and Dearing. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 48*(4), 349-365.

Hyland, T., & Matlay, H. (1998). British learning and the 'New Deal' vocationalism: Vocational training, qualifications and the small business sector. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 46*, 399-414.

Hymes, D. (1977). *Foundations in sociolinguistics*. London: Tavistock.

Hymes, D. (Ed.). (1978). *Language in education: Ethnolinguistic essays*. Washington, D.C.: Centre for Applied Statistics.

Iedema, R., & Scheeres, H. (2003). From doing work to talking work: Renegotiating knowing, doing, and identity. *Applied Linguistics, 24*(3), 316-337.

Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Ivanič, R. (2005). The discoursal construction of writer identity. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research* (2nd ed.). Creskill: Hampton Press.

Ivanič, R. (2006). Language, learning and identification. In R. Kiely, P. Rea-Dickins, H. Woodfield & G. Clibbon (Eds.), *Language, culture and identity in applied linguistics* (pp. 7-29). London: BAAL & Equinox Publishing Ltd.

Jackson, N. (2000). Writing-up people at work: Investigations of workplace literacy. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies, 10*(1&2), 5-22.

Jessup, G. (1990). National vocational qualifications: Implications for further education. In M. Bees M. & Swords (Ed.), *National vocational qualifications and further education*. London: Kogan Page.

Jessup, G. (1991). *Outcomes: NVQs and the emerging model of education and training*. London: The Falmer Press.

Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic Analysis. In D. F. Marks & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. London: Sage.

Jones, K. (2000). Becoming just another alphanumeric code: Farmers' encounters with the literacy and discourse practices of agricultural bureaucracy at the livestock auction. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. New York: Routledge.

Kaptelinin, V. (2005). The Object of activity: Making sense of the sense-maker. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 12*(1), 4-18.

Keating, M. (2005). The Person in the doing: Negotiating the experience of self. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kell, C. (2006). Crossing the margins: Literacy, semiotics and the recontextualisation of meanings. In K. Pahl & J. Rowsell (Eds.), *Travel notes from the New*

Literacy Studies: Instances of practice (pp. 147-169). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
Kostogriz, A. (2000). *Activity theory and the New Literacy Studies: Modelling the literacy learning activity system.* Paper presented at the meeting of Australian Association for Research in Education. Retrieved 13/11/07, from http://www.aare.edu.au/00pap/kos00161.htm.
Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age.* London: Routledge.
Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: the grammar of visual design.* London: Routledge.
Krueger, R. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research.* London: Sage.
Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing.* London: Sage.
Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Leander, K. (2001). "This is our freedom bus going home right now": Producing and hybridizing space-time contexts in pedagogical discourse. *Journal of Literacy Research, 33*(4), 637-679.
Lee, C. (2002). Literacy practices in computer-mediated communication in Hong Kong. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal, 2*(2).
Lee, C., & Ball, A. (2005). All that glitters ain't gold: CHAT as a design and analytical tool in literacy research. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research.* Cresskill: Hampton Press.
Leontiev, A. (1978). *Activity, consciousness and personality.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Leontiev, A. (1981). *Problems in the development of mind.* Moscow: Progress Publishers.
Linell, P. (1998). Discourse across boundaries: On recontextualisation and the blending of voices in professional discourse. *Text, 18*(2), 143-157.
Litosseliti, L. (2003). *Using focus groups in research.* London: Continuum.
Luke, A. (1997). Critical approaches to literacy. In V. Edwards & D. Corson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (Vol. 2: Literacy, pp. 143-151). Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
Mace, J. (2002). *The give and take of writing: scribes, literacy and everyday life.* Leicester: NIACE.
Manpower Services Commission (MSC). (1977). *Young people and work.* Sheffield: MSC.
Manpower Services Commission (MSC). (1981). *A New Training Initiative: A consultative document.* Sheffield: MSC.
Manpower Services Commission (MSC). (1985). *Report of the working group on contents and standards for YTS.* Sheffield: MSC.
Manpower Services Commission/Department of Education and Science (MSC/DES). (1986). *Review of vocational qualifications in England and Wales* London: HMSO.
Martin-Jones, M., & Jones, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Multilingual literacies: reading and writing different worlds.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1968). *The German ideology.* Moscow: Progress.
Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching.* London: Sage.

Miettinen, R., & Kaptelinin, V. (2005). Perspectives on the object of activity. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 12*(1), 1-3.
Moje, E. (2004). Powerful spaces: Tracing the out-of-school literacy spaces of Latino/a Youth. In K. Leander & M. Sheehy (Eds.), *Spatializing literacy research and practice*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
Moje, E., & Lewis, C. (2007). Examining opportunities to learn literacy: The role of critical sociocultural literacy research. In C. Lewis, P. Enciso & E. Moje (Eds.), *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency and power*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Morson, G., & Emerson, C. (1990). *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Myers, G. (1998). Displaying opinions: Topics and disagreement in focus groups. *Language in Society, 27*, 85-111.
Nardi, B. (2005). Objects of desire: Power and passion in collaborative activity. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 12*(1), 37-51.
National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). (1988). *NVQ criteria and guidance*. London: NCVQ.
National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). (1991). *Guide to National Vocational Qualifications*. London: NCVQ.
National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). (1995). *NVQ criteria and guidance*. London: NCVQ.
National Statistics. (2003). NVQ awards: by framework area and level, 2000/01: Social Trends 33 [Electronic Version]. Retrieved 4/5/09 from http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=6435&More=Y.
Omerod, F., & Ivanič, R. (2000). Texts in practices: interpreting the physical characteristics of children's project work. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge.
Pahl, K., & Rowsell, J. (2006). *Travel notes from the New Literacy Studies: Instances of practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
Papen, U. (2005). *Adult literacy as social practice: More than skills*. London: Routledge.
Papen, U. (2008). Pregnancy starts with a literacy event: pregnancy and nate-natal care as textually-mediated experiences. *Ethnography, 9*(3), 377-402.
Pitt, K. (2000). Family Literacy: a pedagogy for a new century. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*. Londo: Routledge.
Pitt, K. (2002). Situating literacy within a theory of discourse: Creating imaginary letters. In M. Baynham & D. Baker (Eds.), *Ways of Knowing* (Vol. 2(1) Literacy and numeracy practices (special issue)).
Prinsloo, M., & Breier, B. (Eds.). (1996a). *The social uses of literacy : theory and practice in contemporart South Africa*. Cape Town: Sached Books.
Prinsloo, M., & Breier, B. (Eds.). (1996b). *The social uses of literacy : theory and practice in contemporary South Africa*. Cape Town: Sached Books.
Raggatt, P., & Williams, S. (1999). *Governments, markets and vocational qualifications: An anatomy of policy*. London: Falmer Press.
Rampton, B. (2007). Neo-Hymesian linguistic ethnography in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 11*(5), 584-607.

Rampton, B., Tusting, K., Maybin, J., Barwell, R., Creese, A., & Lytra, V. (2004). UK linguistic ethnography: A discussion paper [Electronic Version]. Retrieved 10 November 2008 from www.ling-ethnog.org.uk.

Ristock, J., & Pennell, J. (1996). *Community research as empowerment: Feminist links, postmodern interruptions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (Second Edition ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Roth, W., Tobin, K., Elmesky, R., Carambo, C., McKnight, Y., & Beers, J. (2004). Re/making identities in the praxis of urban schooling: A cultural historical persective. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 11*(1), 48-69.

Rowe, S. (2004). Discourse in activity and activity as discourse. In R. Rogers (Ed.), *An introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in education*: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rowsell, J. (2006). Corporate crossings: Tracing textual crossings. In K. Pahl & J. Rowsell (Eds.), *Travel notes from the New Literacy Studies: Instances of practice* (pp. 195-216). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Russell, D. (2005, June). *Texts in contexts: Theorizing learning by looking at literacies*, Paper presented at Seminar Two in the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) thematic seminar series, 'Contexts, communities, networks: mobilising learners' resources and relationships in different domains'. Lancaster University.

Sanjek, R. (1990). On ethnographic validity. In R. Sanjek (Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sarangi, S. (1998). Rethinking recontextualisation in professional discourse studies: An epilogue. *Text, 18*(2), 301-318.

Sarbin, T., & Kitsuse, J. (Eds.). (1994). *Constructing the social*. London: Sage.

Satchwell, C., & Ivaniç, R. (2007). The textuality of learning contexts in UK colleges. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 15*(3), 303-316.

Scheeres, H. (2006). *Knowledge on the line*. Paper presented at the 'Changing literacies in the knowledge-based economy', Lancaster University.

Scribner, S. (1997a). A sociocultural approach to the study of mind. In E. Tobach, R. Joffe-Falmagne, M. Parlee, L. Martin & A. Scribner-Kapelman (Eds.), *Mind and social practice: Selected writings of Sylvia Scribner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scribner, S. (1997b). Studying literacy at work: Bringing the laboratory to the field. In E. Tobach, R. Joffe-Falmagne, M. Parlee, L. Martin & A. Scribner-Kapelman (Eds.), *Mind and social practice: Selected writings of Sylvia Scribner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1981). *The Psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Searle, J. (2001). Constructing literacies in the New Work Order. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies, 11*(1), 21-40.

Searle, J. (2002). Situated literacies at work. *International Journal of Educational Research, 37*, 17-28.

Sherman Heyl, B. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography*. London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London: Sage.

Smith, D. (1999). *Writing the social: Critique, theory, and investigations.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smithers, A. (1993). *All our futures: Britain's education revolution.* London: Channel Four Television

Smithers, A. (1999). A critique of NVQs and GNVQs. In M. Flude & S. Sieminski (Eds.), *Education, training and the future of work II: Developments in vocational education and training* (Vol. II). London: Routledge.

Star, S. (1989). The structure of ill-structured solutions: boundary objects and heterogeneous distributed problem solving. In L. Gasser & M. Huhns (Eds.), *Distributed artificial intelligence* (Vol. 2, pp. 37-54). London: Pitman.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (1993). *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (1994). Cross-cultural perspectives on literacy. In J. Maybin (Ed.), *Language and literacy in social practice.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Suchman, L. (1994). Working relations of technology production and use. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work, 2,* 21-39.

Swailes, S., & Roodhouse, S. (2003). Structural barriers to the take-up of higher level NVQs. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 55*(1), 85-112.

Takahashi, N. (2003). Learning of disabled children in Japan: Simultaneous participation in different activity systems. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 10*(4), 311-331.

Tobach, E., Joffe-Falmagne, R., Parlee, M., Martin, L., & Scribner-Kapelman, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Mind and social practice: Selected writings of Sylvia Scribner.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tusting, K. (2000). The new literacy studies and time: An exploration. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context.* London: Routledge.

Tusting, K., & Barton, D. (2005). Community-based local literacies research. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy research.* Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Tusting, K., Ivanič, R., & Wilson, A. (2000). New Literacy Studies at the interchange. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 210-218). London: Routledge.

Tusting, K., & Maybin, J. (2007). Linguistic ethnography and interdisciplinarity: Opening the discussion. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 11*(5), 575-583.

van Leeuwen, T. (1993). Genre and field in critical discourse analysis: a synopsis. *Discourse & Society, 4*(2), 193-223.

van Leeuwen, T. (1995). Representing social action. *Discourse & Society, 6*(1), 81-106.

van Leeuwen, T. (1996). The representation of social actors. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis.* London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics.* London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimising immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies, 1*(1), 83-118.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Weitzman, E. (2003). Software and qualitative reserch. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. London: Sage.
Wells, G. (2002). The Role of dialogue in activity theory. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 9*(1), 43-66.
Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
Wertsch, J. (1994). The primacy of mediated action in sociocultural settings. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 1*(4), 202-208.
Wilson, A. (2000). There is no escape from third-space theory: Borderland discourse and the 'In-between' literacies of prisons. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanič (Eds.), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge.
Wilson, A. (2004). Four days and a breakfast: Time, space and literacy/ies in the prison community In K. Leander & M. Sheehy (Eds.), *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice*. New York: Peter Lang.
Wilson, A. (2007). 'I go to get away from the cockroaches': Educentricity and the politics of education in prisons. *Journal of Correctional Education 58*(2).
Wodak, R. (2000). Recontextualisation and the transformation of meanings: a critical discourse analysis of decision making in EU meetings about employment policies. In S. Sarangi & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Discourse and social life*. London: Longman.
Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA is about - a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage.
Wolf, A. (1995). *Competence-based assessment*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Wolf, A. (2002). *Does education matter? Myths about education and economic growth*. London: Penguin Books.
Wyse, L., & Casarotto, N. (2004). Literacy in the world of the aged care worker. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies, 13*(1), 19-30.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Plan: Warehouse candidates

Warm-up questions

- Where do you work?
- How many years have you been working in the company?
- Previous work experience?
- Educational background
- Reasons for taking an NVQ.
- Have you taken any other NVQ or similar qualifications before?
- What do you plan to do with the NVQ? How do you think it will help you?
- Future plans.

<u>What reading and writing practices are introduced when building an NVQ portfolio?</u>

- Can you tell me what the NVQ portfolio is about?
- Taking the example of one specific unit, can you take me through the steps you use in order to complete it? Do you have a specific strategy for doing it?
- Do you ever consult other books, dictionaries or the internet in order to complete the texts you include in the portfolio?
- Do the courses in the college help you in terms of gaining knowledge to complete your portfolio?
- How do you collect the evidence that you will put in your portfolio?
- Do you handwrite the texts included in the portfolio or do you produce electronic copies?
- Is there anyone helping you with the portfolio? Tutors, friends, family? Why do you ask for their help?
- What skills do you think someone should have in order to fill in this portfolio?
- What changes to writing have you been aware of over time?
- Do you think that the writing you do for the portfolio affects your perspective on other aspects of life?
- Can you think of any ways in which your writing for the portfolio has affected other areas of your life?
- What is hard about the writing you do?
- What is most satisfying?
- What is most unpleasant?
- Have you had to upgrade your technical skills to perform writing tasks for the portfolio?

- Do you think there is too much reading and writing entailed in this course and more specifically in the portfolio building process?
- Did you know from the beginning that there would be reading and writing entailed in this course?
- Were you put off by the amount of reading and writing entailed in the portfolio building process?

<u>Are the literacy practices drawn upon when developing the portfolio new to the candidates?</u>

- Have you ever compiled a similar portfolio?
- Do you feel you are learning new things while building this portfolio?
- Do you do any reading or writing for this portfolio that you have never done before?
- Do you do any reading or writing that you have also used in your workplace or anywhere else?

<u>The usefulness of new literacy practices gained throughout the portfolio building process.</u>

- Do you think the new reading and writing practices you have gained during the portfolio building process will be useful for you in other domains of your life?
- Would you rather have avoided engaging with new reading and writing practices during the portfolio building process?
- Do you feel that through this portfolio you can show who you really are and what you can do?
- Would you rather demonstrate your vocational skills in another way than the portfolio? How?

<u>Description of the workplace.</u>

- Can you describe your main duties at work?
- Can you describe a typical day at work?

<u>Literacy practices within the workplace</u>

- Do you do any writing for the purposes of your work?
- Do you do any reading for the purposes of your work
- Do you have to deal with a lot of paperwork when at work?
- Do you deal with paperwork when receiving your salary?
- Do you have to keep records of your work?
- Do you write reports?
- Do you deal with the customers in written format?
- Are there notice boards and posters at your workplace?
- Do you ever read them or put up notices on them?
- Do you enjoy reading and writing at your work (if there is any)?
- Would you rather avoid it?

<u>Are the work literacies transferred into the portfolio building process?</u>

- Was the reading and writing that you do for your work similar to the one you had to do for the portfolio?
- Do you feel that record keeping at your work is similar with the records you keep for the purposes of the portfolio?
- Has your work experience helped you in building your portfolio? In what way?

<u>If yes, do they have an impact on the portfolio building process?</u>
- Do you think that your work has helped you develop the portfolio?
- Do you feel that office employees develop portfolios in a different way than employees with a manual job?

<u>Is their use sustained and transferred to the workplace context?</u>
- Have you been using any of these practices in your workplace context after the completion of portfolio?
- Has it been easier for you to do your work since you developed the portfolio?
- Do you feel you have become better in your work because of the new reading and writing practices you have gained?
- Do you understand some parts of your work better?
- Did you start taking notice of things having to do with literacy within your workplace context that you would not notice before?
- Did you undertake any new tasks at your work because of the new reading and writing practices you have gained?

<u>Do the candidates engage with new literacy practices in order to deal with the documents' language, style and format?</u>
- Do you find any difficulties dealing with the language the portfolio documents are written in?
- Do you think the language used in the portfolios is easy to understand or not?
- Have you ever been in doubt about what a phrase or a word means?
- Have you ever been in doubt about what kind of evidence to include in order to answer a criterion because of the language used in it?
- How do you decide on the meaning of a phrase or word when in doubt for its meaning? Do you consult dictionaries, other books, friends, family, etc?
- Have the style and format of the portfolio documents caused you any difficulties?
- Did you ever have difficulties locating the space where you are supposed to write in the portfolio documents?
- Were you ever been puzzled on whether it is you or the tutors who has to fill in a specific section on the logbook?
- Do you find problems with the logbook layout or do you find it user friendly?
- Can you indicate sections that have already created problems to you and sections you found very easy to understand?
- Do you have any recommendations in terms of the portfolio language, style and layout?

Appendix 2

Interview Plan: College candidates

Initial Questions

- Previous work experience
- Present work
- Other qualifications.
- Reasons for taking up an NVQ in Beauty Therapy.
- Do you think that your job as a beauty therapist requires a lot of reading and writing?
- Will you go on using the consultation sheets when you get a job in a salon or anywhere else?
- How about the case studies forms? Were these easy to fill in? Did you come up with any problems?
- Do you think you will use any other practices related to reading and writing that you learned during this course?

Portfolio

- Did you ever develop a portfolio before this course? Was it similar to this one?
- Where and when did you complete the majority of your portfolio? Was it during the Monday morning tutorials or when you took it away in the library or at home?
- Did you struggle with any particular parts, e.g. the language, the colour-coding, the order of the sections in it, etc?
- Has your previous work experience helped you when developing the portfolio?
- Did you learn something new by developing this portfolio? For example, organising yourself, new jargon related to your work, etc.
- Did you develop any new reading and writing skills that you did not have before starting this portfolio, e.g. typing, using the pc, printing, etc?
- Do you feel that through this portfolio you can show who you really are and what you can do?
- What is your overall estimation about the portfolio you made? Did you think it was a good experience? Do you think it offered you some new insight regarding your work?
- Do you think that the NVQ would be easier if you didn't have to do the portfolio?

Logbook questions

- Did you have to write any assignments in order to fill in the 'essential knowledge' sections of the logbooks? If yes, was it easy? Have you written similar assignments before? Did you learn something new by doing it?

- Did you always know which piece of evidence corresponds to which level, 2 or 3? Where you confused by the fact that you did two levels at the same time or did you find it easy?
- Did you find the tracking document useful? Did you understand what purpose it served? Did you use it at all?
- Purple logbook p. 23. Is it clear how you are supposed to fill in this table? What does 'evidence code' and 'portfolio reference' mean? Did you fill in this table yourself? How about the table in p. 25?
- Page 24 of the purple logbook. R1 *"national and local legislation"*. The same phrases repeated in R7. What do you understand from these phrases? Did you know what sort of evidence you were supposed to present for these range statements? Are you familiar with this legislation? Do you know where you can find it if you ever need it?
- R1 same page, phrase g. Which are the commercially acceptable time scales?
- Again on p. 24, R3. What is internal and external communication?
- p. 26. R9. Do you know what the phrase 'limits of demarcation' means?
- R12 and R13, p. 26. Have you ever come across similar situations? What happens if you cannot cover the range? Is it easy to write an assignment on conditions you haven't come across with?
- Purple logbook p. 14. Do you know in which cases you covered the range mentioned in this page? Andrea has told you that you have covered it.
- Purple logbook p.17. Was it Andrea or you who filled in this table? If it was Andrea do you understand what is going on here?
- Level 2 logbook. Do you think it is easier to fill in units like VR121 on p.29 which are more general or do you prefer more specific ones like VR59 on p. 28? Do you understand the jargon used on p. 28? Did you learn it in the college?

Appendix 3

Interview Plan: NVQ Tutors

Background Information

- Educational Background
- Time length working as an NVQ assessor
- Previous work experience
- What kinds of NVQs do you usually work with?

Performance Criteria

- What is your general opinion about the performance criteria in the NVQ?
- How would you judge the language used in them?
- Have you had students that had difficulties understanding the language used in the criteria and thus, not being sure of what they are expected to do for their portfolio? How would you deal with such a situation?
- In the skills listed in each unit 'reading' and 'writing' appear quite frequently. Do you think they are essential skills for someone to complete their portfolio? What happens in the case a student does not master these skills very well but still he/she is good at his work? Can he/she prove that?
- Do you think that students whose work includes a lot of reading and writing can develop portfolios in a different way than those who do manual jobs?
- What skills do you think a student should have to compile the portfolio in a successful way?

Literacies while building the portfolio

- What reading and writing practices should a student employ when constructing a portfolio?
- Are these new practices or have you found that the students have practiced them before in other contexts?
- Are these practices relevant to their actual professional duties?
- Do the students learn new things while building the portfolio?

Links of portfolio literacies and workplace literacies

- Do you know how students use the NVQs after they have obtained them?
- Do you think they are practically useful for them in their professional life?
- Do you think they employ the literacy practices they learn while building the portfolio in their professional life?
- Do you think that reading and writing employed at work have anything to do with the literacies employed while building portfolios?

Appendix 4

Focus Group Questionnaire

1. Ask everyone to briefly introduce themselves. They should include:

    - names
    - age (if they want)
    - educational background
    - reason for doing the NVQ.

2. Start with the consultation sheets.
    - What is your opinion about them?
    - How useful are they for a good treatment?
    - Do you find them boring?
    - Do you find it easy to fill them in?
    - Do you think they manage to capture what you are actually doing during your treatment?
    - Should they be different and if yes how different?
    - Would you rather not fill them in?
    - Do you understand their usefulness as evidence in the portfolio?

3. Portfolios.
    - Did you know you would have to create a portfolio for your NVQ?
    - Have you made portfolios of any kind before?
    - When did you start dealing with the portfolios during the year?
    - Did you have adequate guidance by your tutors?
    - Why do you like them or do not like them?
    - What is particularly difficult or easy about them?
    - Is it the language? The layout of the units? The cross-checking and ticking boxes?
    - What about the colour coding? Do you find it easy to follow?
    - Personal statements. Have you started with them? Do you find it easy to write one of those?
    - Do you like the fact that you can include photos in the portfolio to demonstrate your work or would you rather do it another way, e.g. write about it.
    - How much time do you spend on the portfolios?
    - Do you feel you are getting enough support?
    - Would you rather be assessed in a different way?

Appendix 5

Matrixes used for the representation analysis of social actors and social actions

Analysis of Representation of Social Actions

1 Li ne	2 Realis ation	3 Social Actor	4 Reaction (+6) Action (+5)	5 Material Semiotic	6 Unsp. Cogn. Perc. Affec.	7 Active Deacti ve	8 Agent/ Deage nt (+9)	9 Event Existing Natural	10 Abst ract Con crete

TEXT | ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL ACTORS | ANALYST | DATE

Line	Realisation	SOCIAL ACTOR	(4) Part/ Circ./ Possess.	(3) Activated/ Passivated(+5)	(5) Subjected/ Benefiting	(6) Personal/(+13) Impersonal(+22)	(13) Categorised/ Nominated	(22) Abstracted/ Objectivated	(7) Generic/ Specific	Other	NOTES

Appendix 6

Informed Consent Form

My name is Zoe Nikolaidou and I am a Lancaster University Research Student. I am doing research on my PhD entitled 'Literacy at the Workplace'. What I am interested in examining is students' NVQ portfolios and the new reading and writing practices that are developed through this procedure. The questions I seek to answer are whether there are new reading and writing practices created while building NVQ portfolios, how these practices are perceived by students, if they have a positive or negative impact on the successful NVQ completion and finally whether these practices are sustained and transferred into the workplace context.

In order to answer these questions, I intend to attend NVQ classes and find out what happens when candidates build professional portfolios. I will also ask some of you to participate in short-length focus groups and individual interviews.

The findings of the research will provide feedback to colleges and policy makers. NVQ candidates might also find it interesting and useful to participate as this kind of research could help oneself become more conscious of one's reading and writing practices and the way these are employed within a college and/or a workplace context.

Before starting the research I would like to emphasize that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary;
- You are free to refuse to answer any question;
- You are free to withdraw anytime.

For purposes of anonymity I will use a pseudonym in all references to you (verbal and written) unless you expressly give me permission to use your real name. The pseudonym you choose is ______________________.

As I wish to conduct this research in the spirit of collaboration I would be very willing to provide you access to the analysis of the data and to include you in potential benefits, in ways that do not conflict with the issue of anonymity.

For any further questions you are very welcome to call me (07962805117) or e-mail me at:z.nikolaidou@lancaster.ac.uk

Please sign this form to show that you have read and agreed with the contents of this form.

____(name)

____(signature)

______________________(date)

Appendix 7

Extract from Rebecca's case study booklet

CLIENT INFORMATION – PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL	REF:	85

1/5/07

TREATMENT OBSERVATION	
BRIEFLY STATE HEALTH AND SAFETY : And how you applied this to your treatment clean couch cover, fresh bedroll, clean towels, all equipment clean. clean uniform, hands washed, nails short and clean. Area round couch tidy - no trip hazards. Jewellery removed (therapist and client), oils stored in cool, dark place in labelled bottles and within use-by date.	
Oil used:	Massage oil.
Treatment areas	full body
Forms of massage	effleurage, petrissage, tapotement, frictions.
Aftercare advice: See attached sheet.	
HOW THE THERAPIST FELT Client seemed a little nervous at first, but relaxed more during the massage.	
HOW THE CLIENT FELT **After last session** **After this session** felt very relaxed. neck and shoulders felt better.	
INFORMATION TO BE CARRIED OVER TO NEXT TREATMENT: Get 60-65ml oil next time. Shorten leg and arm sections slightly to allow longer on BNS.	

Assessed treatment. Treatment plan filed with summative assessments.

Leg 2 6

Appendix 8

Extract from Samantha's case study booklet

Treatment 1 26/02/07 3

CLIENT INFORMATION – PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL	REF:	

TREATMENT OBSERVATION

BRIEFLY STATE HEALTH AND SAFETY : And how you applied this to your treatment

Health & Safety act 1987 adhered to in terms of personal hygeine and treatment area hygeine. Area also cleared of any clutter and electrical wiring. Clients skin cleaned before treatment.
COSHH adhered to with use of aromatherapy oils.

Oil used:	cedarwood Sandalwoods – good for stress & tension – odour – good
Treatment areas	full body.
Forms of massage	Effleurage, petrissage, frictions.

i man oils 3% in Grape seed oil

Aftercare advice: Discussed how treatment is detoxifying, and how this can be enhanced by drinking plenty of fluid, eating a light diet, avoiding stimulants such as alcohol and caffeine. To rest if possible. To refrain from washing off the oils for at least 8hrs, and not to add essential oils to bath for at least 24hrs. Warn that symptoms such as headache or nausea may be experienced.

HOW THE THERAPIST FELT Considering the client was nervous, the massage was successful in relaxing the client, and helping with shoulder stiffness.

HOW THE CLIENT FELT good, relaxed after session..
After last session
After this session Very nervous to start with. Took a while for him to relax, and 'switch off'. Thinks shoulder feels easier.

INFORMATION TO BE CARRIED OVER TO NEXT TREATMENT:

- Says it is unlikely he will stick to aftercare advice, needs to go back to work and drinks alcohol daily.
will ask next time, and try and reinforce value of good aftercare.

Appendix 9

Kevin's storyboard

#28

<u>Distribution, Warehousing & Storage Operations</u>
<u>NVQ Level 2</u>

<u>Bulk Pick Order Verification</u>

Once upon a time in a warehouse in Morecambe, there was a young grafter going by the name of He was a quiet and unassuming boy with friends in all areas of the business. Here is his heroic, and at times, tragic tale of triumph against all odds. Let us begin…

30.01.07
I liased with the Bulk Pick FLM, ( ), with regards to a bulk pick order. Unfortunately, due to work being a little thin on the ground at this time of year, we had to ad-lib and collectively find a task for me to do!
It was decided that I would have a crack at a Bulk Pick Verification order. To cut a long story short, Verification is when some bulk cartons have been picked and need consolidating with other cartons to make a complete order. The completed order is then taken to despatch where it is completed and logged on D-Map. The order is then ready to be shipped.

The first task I undertook was getting a scanner and beginning the process. This started by picking a pallet of stock from the Sortation zone. Now, as I haven't been a warehouse Op for some time now, I had no codes to access a scanner! Kindly, the outstanding stepped in and allowed me to use his sign in codes for his scanner. Once I had signed in I then had to scan the Ruk no. (Consignment No.) and press enter. Upon pressing enter, the scanner then informed me of the location of the remaining cartons for said order. I went to the location, picked the correct boxes, (this was done by checking a) the Location & b) the Ruk no.) Once I had got the correct cartons I added them to the original pallet and checked the carton total to

31/7/07

make sure I had the correct amount of pieces. Once I was happy with said stock I had to "manifest" the order with my scanner. This basically involved scanning the Ruk no, followed by the bar code. This had to be done for each carton!

Once I had scanned each carton it was time to move on to the next phase. The next phase involved getting a print out of all goods on the order, (please see evidence no. 35). This meant completing the scanning and pressing enter. Once I had pressed enter, the scanner then asked which printer I wished to use. Once I had chosen my printer I typed the print no. into the scanner and pressed enter. This then began the printing process.

Once I had got my print out I then went back to my stock. I then had to place the print outs inside carton no. 1, (each carton is individually numbered). When this was done I took the consolidated order down to despatch where I finalised the order. This involved putting the order onto the D-map system and 618ing it, (Completing on the records). Once it had been 618ed I then had to scan each carton so it was ready to be despatched. And that was the end of my duties!

During my time in the Despatch/Verification areas, I had to adhere to several Health & Safety regulations. This included using proper manual lifting techniques, use of a pallet truck & being vigilant with regards to Fork Lift Truck traffic. I had to lift several cartons during the completion of the order and use the pallet truck to move the stock from Verification to Despatch. Also all the way through said order I had to be aware of all the Fork Lift Truck activity that was going on around me.

Overall I spent a fruitful hour with the warehouse types and have gained many treasured memories!

31/01/07

Appendix 10

Analysed Logbook Units

Unit VR17 - Prepare for and Provide Body Massage

Knowledge and Understanding

A competent candidate must know and understand:

Prepare treatment room and client for body massage

1. The preparation of the of the treatment room.
2. The preparation of the client for a body massage.
3. The preparation of the area must be according to legislative requirements, industry practice and industry codes of ethics.
4. Why the treatment area must be private and comfortable.
5. How to identify contra-indications and understand the action to take and the advice to give.
6. How to reassure the client so as to promote relaxation.
7. Reasons for client and therapist signing the treatment plan.
8. ? Why during treatments involving the removal of clothing by the client, this is kept to a ~~minimum and~~ action is taken to ensure that the client's dignity and privacy are maintained at all times.
9. Why treatment processes should not be invasive and all procedures should be explained fully beforehand, understanding ensured and permission given for them to proceed.

Provide massage treatment

10. The importance of correct hand cleansing and why hands are cleansed immediately before and after any physical contact with the client.
11. Why good hygiene practice should be observed by the client.
12. Sufficient anatomy and physiology in order to explain effects to the client.
13. The importance of adapting techniques to client needs.

Evaluate outcomes of massage treatment and provide aftercare

14. The procedures to follow after a massage in obtaining accurate feedback from the client.
15. How the effectiveness of treatment may be judged and how to ensure client satisfaction.
16. Why the client must be given information on after-care treatments, such advice to include relaxation, postural exercises and product knowledge.
17. Why record keeping is essential and that records must be kept securely and confidentially.

Contra-indications: high blood pressure, low blood pressure, history of thrombosis, history of embolism, epilepsy, diabetes, dysfunction of nervous system, skin disorders, severe bruising, recent haemorrhage, swellings, cuts or abrasions, recent operations, fractures and sprains

Key Skills Signposting. The following key skills are appropriate to support this unit:- Communication Level 2, Element 2.1a; Application of Number Level 1, Elements 1.1 and 1.2; Information Technology Level 2, Elements 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Unit VR131 – Provide Massage with Aromatherapy Oil Blends

Performance Criteria

Assess the client for massage with blended oils

1. Client requirements and expectations are determined and recorded.
2. A sensitive, tactful and respectful manner is adopted at all times.
3. Relevant information concerning the client's emotional state, lifestyle and physical condition are elicited.
4. Client 'body language' is observed and correct responses made.
5. The treatment plan and required outcomes are confirmed
6. Relevant conclusions are recorded and procedures implemented to ensure confidentiality.
7. A blended oil is chosen to suit client needs.
8. Explanations and opportunities for discussion are made available and client's questions are answered fully and accurately.
9. Where contra-indications are established, the client is advised to ask the physician if there is any reason why treatment may not be given and any treatment or service given is in accordance with medical advice.

Apply massage with Aromatherapy oil blends

10. The client is reassured and all questions are answered promptly.
11. The blend is applied to the client as appropriate to the area to be treated.
12. Forms of massage with blended oils are delivered according to client needs.
13. The pressures used are suitable for the tissue density and the desired outcomes.
14. Massage techniques are flowing, not unduly repetitive and delivered to meet client needs.
15. Maintenance of the client's modesty and comfort is ensured throughout the treatment.
16. Length of treatment is in accordance with the client's needs and commercially acceptable.

Evaluate the massage with oil blends and provide aftercare advice

17. Feedback is elicited from the client by questioning.
18. Non-verbal signs are observed and correct responses made.
19. Relevant outcomes of treatment are accurately recorded and recommendations for future treatment made.
20. The treatment plan is revised as necessary and meets with the client's approval.
21. The client is advised clearly and accurately of the physical effects of the treatment and aftercare.
22. Other professionals involved in the treatment are advised of progress.
23. Potential contra-actions (adverse reactions) are explained to the client accurately and concisely.
24. Full and accurate records are kept confidentially and securely.

Competent performance must be observed for all criteria.

Evidence for performance criteria 9 and 22 may be given in written form.