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**Cakes of Knowledge: Teachers and learners views on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

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**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Sunderland for the degree of Master of Philosophy MPhil.**

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## **Cakes of Knowledge: Teachers and learners view on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

### **Abstract**

Facilitating discussions with teachers and students on functional skills literacy courses is vital in illuminating the issues which are present today in the Further Education sector in the U.K. A fundamental statement pertinent to this investigation, is 'In what way does the impact of functional skills literacy impact them in their work and for life? Discussions around historical literacy programs (core skills) and new teaching programs (T Levels) which imbed basic skills in vocational qualifications are threaded throughout this inquiry. This is not the first time that the perceptions of stakeholders and policy professionals are foregrounding these as fundamental skills which learners need to enable them to be prepared for future employment, Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011 cited in BIS, 2010.

Three perspectives are explored. Reflective contributions from research participants are analysed and presented in this study. This research listens to and considers the views of students and teachers specifically looking at employer views and industry expectations at a secondary research level. It uses these insights to better understand how this has influenced policy and curriculum planning. I then highlight how the lack of basic skills enables learners to prosper in the vocational sector are absent from their education experiences. I then go on to consider the influence of teacher expectations in relation to planning for learning and engaging learners.

The purpose here is to deepen understanding of the ways in which approaches to curriculum planning impact upon improving outcomes for learners. Links to professional development and teacher training are critically considered, discussed, recorded, and analysed. Methods employed in the study include interviews and focus groups discussions. Data from these sources are thematically analysed and discussed with reference to wider research and literature. A further aim of the study is to amplify the voices of the twelve participants involved. Finally, the experiences and views of learners will be analysed. This study is influenced by Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) and Michael Golby (1975) on Curriculum Design and the works of Coughlan (2010) and Norman and Hyland (2003) regarding the status of vocational education in the UK. A key issue here is how and why learners are revisiting functional skills literacy qualifications as well as the impact of their loss of faith in the system upon their learning. Discussions about their personal learning journeys are integral to the findings of this research. Data are analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Keywords: Further Education; literacy; students; teachers; professional development; industry expectations

## **Introduction**

At the end of another busy day teaching at a local FE college, another staff meeting was called. This time it was to discuss the importance of vocational teachers imbedding literacy skills in their teaching and learning, to aid learners in acquiring the skills they are lacking or require improving. A new policy was released for teachers, so that a systematic approach was taken from all, in the college to 'get on board' with this new agenda. Something felt different about this expectation. It felt like there was a change of wind in the air, with the expectations for vocational teachers. I had been a learner in my younger days, who needed extra support with learning literacy. No one took the time to reinforce my failings, and I did not have parents at home that were able to aid me in correcting my errors. I looked around the room amongst my peers and could almost hear the dread amongst them having to implement this. Then the questions begun, what are the English teachers doing about this? Why do we have to do this for them? Interestingly my thoughts didn't go there, mine went with the learners, my own practice and what I needed to do to improve outcomes for the learners and aid them in their educational journeys.

My role within the research is that of a dual professional, firstly as vocational teacher, which listens to the views and comments of the learners and staff with the department and secondly as a practitioner researcher. I am also 'in' this research as a practitioner, and as a result am conducting a form of practitioner research. My aim is to gain a deeper understanding of thoughts, feelings, and emotions which are associated with teachers and learners about functional skills literacy as an insider. I am interested in community and what role this must play in outcomes for learners and as a professional who is required to support the literacy agenda and upskilling of

learners in F.E college. Literacy itself it a relatively new term, therefore I will be adopting the UNESCO definition of it as the:

*... ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts [which] involve a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (UNESCO, 2005: 27)*

*Cited In Nutbrown et al., 2017.*

**My research questions are.**

**RQ1 – What do Further Education Teachers need to consider when designing curriculum to develop students' literacy skills and prepare them for work in the vocational sector in Further Education?**

**RQ2 – What do teachers need to consider when designing a curriculum to develop students' literacy skills to prepare them for a love of literacy for life?**





## **Chapter 1**

### **Context and problem**

Working in the Further Education (F.E) sector for over 12 years as a vocational teacher and being asked to embed 'high quality literacy skills' in learners has led me to want to better understand what the students are being taught in their English classes and what the student experience of this is. The reasoning behind this is that there is an increasing animosity amongst teachers and learners relating to feeling of hopelessness and an expectation of increasing these linked to literacy, expectations, and outcomes. Learners feel that whatever they do is not enough. The teachers question the pressure which is placed on them in F.E settings, to change or improve the outcomes for learners and question why they are doing this, when the learners have spent the last 10 years of their education 'fine tuning or refining' these skills and still are not deemed as competent.

### **The first problem – Understanding Literacy and links to employment.**

I will be focusing on Functional Skills Literacy (FSL) at level 1 and 2, as in recent years there has been an agenda, around increasing students' knowledge and understanding of literacy skills in their vocational areas (Egan, 2016). The Education and Training Foundation, (ETF) (2014) in their professional standards support this view further and claim that teachers in the U.K should address this, as part of their 'professionals' skills, which they are required to be working to when working in the sector, highlighting further, that there is a need, for teachers to 'be creative in their

approach and work with individuals to overcome barriers to learning, in English. This viewpoint is not new, and dates to, 1970's with Moser's' research concluding in 1999 that, *"millions of children leave school not being able to read and write effectively and that the government aims to address this by 2050"*. A question that might arise is "where are we now?"

Wolf, 2011:8 identifies that, *'English and Maths GCSE (at grades A\*-C) are fundamental to young people's employment and education prospects. Yet less than 50% of students have both at the end of Key Stage 4 (age 15/16); and at age 18 the figure is still below 50%'*. The learner participants in this study, fall into this category of learners, as they did not acquire maths and English whilst at school. The school leavers in this study according to Ofsted 2019:2, state that *'school leavers served by this college attain a little less well than those in other area of the country, particularly in English and Mathematics'* Highlighting that on a national stage, they do not perform as well as other parts of the country.

Furthermore, the learners in this study, are completing Level 1 English and they are being educated in a F.E college in rural Norfolk over split sites. The findings here, illuminates that the learners in this study, are significantly below the expected standards in England, Wolf (ibid), so questions around what the reasons for this are, is pertinent to this research. Both sites are regarded as being in areas of deprivation and have a high proportion of stereotypically White British Families with a high percentage known as pupil premium attending them Ofsted (2019). The six learners whose experiences form part of the data in this research are learners who I have taught or come across in a variety of roles at the College where I work. They have

all discussed with me in an informal way prior to this research their discontent and disconnect, with learning English at college and how this has made them feel. Their comments were very negative at this time and not one, showed a direct interest in attending the classes neither could they see the benefits of this to themselves. This sowed a seed of interest within me and developed a desire to try to understand their experiences and what we might have to do in education to change, modify or upskill so that we can meet the demands and expectations of industry for these learners as well as them developing a change mindset about their view of English.

In respect of wider current discussions relating to literacy, it is worth noting is that there is a continued expectation for learners to be 'proficient in literacy' (H.M Government, 2022). Learners are expected to reach these proficiency standards in functional skills with 1.5 hours of learning a week. Within these lessons, the expectation is that teachers support or improve their skills. The latest government vocational qualifications known as T Levels, introduced in 2020, in my sector, illuminates and outlines what the expected level of competencies are, identifying them as '*The quality of written and spoken English language*' Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, 2023. Therefore, if this is deemed as an 'expectation' how is this being done? What vehicles or media are being used to enable learners to become proficient and what is happening in our classrooms and communities now, which has not happened over the last 20 years?

Currently in U.K teachers are still battling with suggested approaches in teaching literacy and related fundamental skills such as reading. Wyse and Bradbury (2022) suggest that the expectations to support reading with learners in the early years,

enables them to 'access all other areas of the curriculum' to learners. Moreover, being able to read is an enabler in opening the world for them to see. The fundamental issues identified by Wyse and Bradbury (ibid) is that the current curriculum and how its realised through qualifications that learners in the FAVE sector study towards can sometimes create a disconnect with learners as it often makes no sense or has no meaning and has relevance to them. This discourse is not new, with, Chall (1981), identifying this issue known as 'the great debate' more than 40 years ago. The ability to read well, comprehend well and add meaning to this is fundamental to demonstrating competence in literacy. Nutbrown et al. (2017) further suggests that community plays a fundamental role in literacy achievement and outcomes for our learners. But what community do our learners have at age 16-19 and are they aware this community exists? Drawing on the work of Yamanda-Rice (2015) a suggestion relating to different communities and cultures is discussed, with discourse around teachers understanding how the many different cultures which are present in England interpret and understand literacies and that the *'lived experiences have multiple realities for the learners'* Kapur (2018), thus meaning that no assumptions should be made as to what support or guidance a young learner receives is still relevant today. Nutbrown et al. (ibid) further argues 'that literacy and the context in which this happens cannot be divorced from one another', therefore accepting this view, integral to this research must be when and where literacy is being used today for or with our learners and how it this developing or shaping them.

To this end, a recent report published by the Education Endowment Foundation, (2021a) concluded that learners in the most disadvantaged areas are at least 18.1 months behind their peers and whilst some challenges have been met, the challenge

today is great than ever' Education Endowment Foundation (2021b). This is presentient to this research, due to the geographical location of this FE setting along with the suggestion by Nutbrown et al. (2015) stating that, homes with books in them improved literacy at home with the learners and if parents were adequately qualified, they supported reading at home. Drawing on the report by Ofsted (ibid) their findings indicate that *'Among the local population, fewer individuals are qualified to level 3 or above than the national average. Wages in the region are lower'* therefore skills and finances to support an agenda to read at home may be limited and supports the findings of the of the Education Endowment Foundations (2021a) that *'if books were never read at home, they are behind in their literacy skills'*.

A key aspect identified by Crockford and Atkins (2017) is that of motivation. They align *'motivation to being key in achieving success'*, which draws me to consider, how are these learners being motivated and by who? Crockford and Atkins, (2017) report *'I just find it boring'* focus on the significance that motivation has on learners and suggests four main aspects, these being:

*1 - Seeking to develop students' feelings of self-efficacy—for example, by carefully scaffolding tasks and by explicitly linking the use of strategies to improvement.*

*2 - Selecting tasks that are engaging—for example, some collaborative learning approaches have been found to be effective at improving adolescent literacy, particularly when students are required to work as a team towards a common goal.*

*3 - Sharing strategies between teachers in different subjects.*

*4 - Ensuring students have an opportunity to use skills from the intervention setting in the classroom and across different subjects.*

Crockford and Atkins, (2017)

Heighton et al. (2018) supports this view, suggesting that ‘providers often need to cultivate a positive mental attitude amongst students to increase motivation and confidence to retake their English and mathematics qualifications’, therefore for, this to be fostered, drawing on the works of Aristotle (384-322BC) cited in Meyer, (2016) ‘motivation is created by the outcome. He further aligned motivation to this being that when one is given an appropriate motivation, ‘*virtuous agent- doing it for their own sake*’, then virtuous actions take place as they ‘*reflect and determine a person’s reason for acting*’. Seligman (2000) supports this view and terms it as ‘*happiness linked to meaning and purpose*’ and if we deal with the past – previous experience and consider the new experiences – then we can be motivated and achieve happiness, success, and achievement.

Highton et al. (2017) further suggests that as a way of challenging deep-rooted attitudes towards English this is done by changing the approach which learners are used to in secondary schools claiming that ‘Colleges adopt an adult-to-adult relationship that is based on understanding the students’ concerns, encouraging them to think differently about the subjects and themselves, and increasing confidence. Curriculums for learning is an integral part of the discussion in this research, as it is only when we fully understand these, can we make judgements about the suitability and appropriateness of them, in relation to developing a deeper understanding of what impacts, affects or influences a learner when preparing them for work and for their life. Considering this further, questions around curriculums with meaning and purpose form a critical part of the discussion.

## Literacy as a Social Practice

The concept of *literacy as a social practice* refers to the idea that literacy is not just an individual skill or cognitive ability but is also shaped by and embedded in the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. People actively shape and negotiate their own literacy practices, whether it's through adapting reading and writing to suit specific contexts, using language creatively, or engaging in alternative forms of expression with the people they interact with. This is ever changing with new expressions, meanings and understandings being evident in spoken literacy in society today. Drawing on the work of Vazquez, (2007) regarding social practice, she claims that social practices are particular ways of doing and being as well as particular ways of acting and talking that are rooted in life experiences.' Literacy (reading, writing and speaking and listening) as a social practice infers, that this is integral in everyday life and that literacy usage takes place every day in different situation. It is not a standalone skill, tool or measured but can be used or measured, but is evident all of the time and permeates all parts of our lives, similar to breathing and eating.

In society today, we converse, engage views, express an opinion on topics of significance to us, in our social worlds on a daily basis. The art of conversation across a room from one another, is no longer the only way we converse and learners within this study engage with their peers in alternative ways. To this end, they, fail to acknowledge or recognise that this is literacy and how frequently they engage in acts relating to 'literacy'. An example here is, 'the use of voice notes'... These are used to respond to one another with using mobile devices. Learners, frequently use these to respond to one another as the quickest means of communicating with one another,



and the art of reading a text message is no longer 'the new form of communication' in their worlds as these are ever changing but fail to acknowledge that they are competently using literacy in their worlds.

Kalman, (2008) suggests that '*we are all continuously developing our reading as we take part in new reading practices in new contexts or for new purposes*'. Once again this can be aligned to Facebook messages or Tik Tok's which young people use today, with current literacy practices being decided by the individual outside of the classroom Meek, (1992). Comber and Cormick (1997) *suggest that 'literacy is evident, if a person is connected with the issues*. In this case, as long as the learners are engaged through the media, they have chosen literacy is taking place in the way in which the learners choose to engage in it, and it should be acknowledged as such. Drawing on the work of Duncan, (2012) who further argues that Literacy is '*... 'mediation, is not something abnormal done to make up for individual deficiencies, but rather a common and fruitful way of working together on a common goal, with each person contributing their specific expertise*. Acknowledging this viewpoint, some might suggest, that learners use TikTok in their social literacy practices, as a form of meditation and this enables them to feel comfortable, balanced and at peace when engaging in literacy activities in their worlds and can take away the fear or anxiety when engaging in literacy in a formal context, in the classroom. Communicating using social media, in this way engages the young population with literacy in their worlds in forms, which they enticed into and engage with Meek, (1992). Acknowledging the way that learners chose to engage with literacy, is a starting point for the educator to form relationships with them and understand what literacy is like for them in their worlds. Bruner, (1981)

*acknowledges that literacy is constructed by individuals and groups as part of everyday life. At the same time literacy also is constructive of everyday life. In literate societies it becomes a crucial element of one's cultural 'tool kit'.* Therefore, in order for us to evolve in society and embed literacy as a social practice we must understand the 'social expectations of literacy practices' in the young people's world today.

In 1984, Street (1984:8) suggested that policy makers, need to consider the 'lived experiences' of individuals when developing curricula moving on. This research seeks to understand whether policy holders develop curricula in this way, or whether the current curricula remain abstract to the learner and 'set aside' from literacy as a social practice and literacy to pass tests in school for a qualification. Literacy as a social practice is ever changing, therefore in order to us to keep up with the evolving world of literacy which we live in, we must acknowledge that, '*... literacy is socially constructed is to acknowledge that you are differently literate than your grandparents, that today's children and their children are and will be differently literate than their teachers* Comber and Cormack, (1997). Drawing on this view, an understanding of curricula and the historical context took place when completing this research with an historical timeline used to inform my understanding of literacy. Luke, (1993) suggests, that 'many factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity, geographical location, class and socio-economic status determine the opportunities people have'. This paper seeks to understand if this is the case and if learners in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, make progress in line with the rest of the England. To conclude, Luke (1993) cited in Comber and Cormick (1997), suggests that in order for us to understand literacy and a social practice, we must also understand

*'what influences our settings and the ideologies which they have'*. Therefore, it is only when we explore this, can we fully absorb, internalise and understand what drives the learning in literacy today. This paper will explore, how the learners are taught in an F.E college in the East of England today and whether the learner experience is based on 'who they have in front of them' or whether there is a universal expectation in the setting and how the learners feel about the learning in their classroom but more so, what they are learning and how this is done. Comber and Cormick (1997) suggest that *'effective knowledge and understand of literacy begins with the training of the teachers and how contemporary their knowledge and understanding is'*. This research seeks to acknowledge the level of understanding of literacy which the teachers have. It also, explores, what professional development is offered and what the teachers are exposed to. It aims to shine a light on how learners like to learn and what literacies they engage. It further seeks to explore, if the teachers, understand the different 'cultural backgrounds' which are present in a typical classroom in England today and also what cultures are present in their classrooms. This research is set out to illuminate and whether, teachers are teaching in the same way they were taught or if their practices have evolved in line with government expectations. Throughout this report, learners' views, experiences and voices permeates, Exposure to experiences and supportive measure are examined and used as a way of understanding what motivates learners to build resilience when learning literacy and who supports them to thrive.

## **Curriculum theory and development**

### **The Ever-Changing English Curriculum**

Over 20 years ago, David Blunkett, shadow education secretary, introduced The National Literacy Strategy, 1997, led by Professor David Barber, (DfE, 1997) with the focus being, *'improving literacy in schools'*. Parallel to this, the Dearing Review, in Post 16 Education, 1996 was concluding and the findings from this illuminated three main themes, for development at the time. These were: improving literacy skills for learners for life, professional development for teachers with the introduction of Initial Teacher Training required for Literacy teachers and a new curriculum. This was because, of the introduction of the new Key Skills qualification by the qualifications regulatory body for England (City and Guilds, 2000). These three themes are the focus for this critical discussion in, Functional skills literacy curriculums in FE, for learners aged 16-19 as they are still apparent 20 years later.

Dearing, (1996) findings were that there were many curricula on offer for learners, this was confusing for: industry, teachers, and learners as well as highlighting, that there are fundamental skills known as, *key skills*, which learners need, these are: *'Communication Application of Number and Information and Communication Technology'*, City, and Guilds, (2000). This was not the first time, that 'low literacy skills' was identified by the public, as previous governments had tried to address the issues in the late 1960's and 1970's BIS, (2011). The Moser Report, 1990 highlighted *'Level 1 literacy standard as acceptable for learners to be able to function in society, life, and employment'*. Moser, 1999 further suggested that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), should survey of all adults in Britain. The findings were that *'5.2 million adults had literacy levels below Level 1'*, Williams, et al, 2003. £5 billion invested over 7 years to improve the literacy levels in the United Kingdom (U.K) at the time BIS, (2011) with over 1.25 million skills for life qualifications, been

delivered (Leitch, 2006). In 2004 Lord Sandy Leitch, was approached by her majesty government at the time, to complete a report exploring what was needed in the U.K to keep up with their competitors globally. His findings were the U.K were in the bottom of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (2016) tables and that around five million people lacked functional skills in literacy, a further suggestion was that '*the government try and become a global leader in*

### The UK's future skills mix

**Qualification profile 2.12** The Government and the Devolved Administrations have set stretching targets to continue the improvements in the UK's skills base seen over the past decade. Table 2.1 sets out the main targets to improve skills among both young people and adults across the UK.

**Table 2.1: Key UK targets to improve skills**

England
By 2008, 60 per cent of those aged 16 to achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A–C.
Increase the proportion of 19-year olds who achieve at least Level 2 by 3 percentage points between 2004 and 2006, and a further 2 percentage points between 2006 and 2008.
Improve the basic skills of 2.25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007.
Reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007.
Reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010. Working towards this, 1 million adults in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006.
By 2010, increase participation in higher education towards 50 per cent of those aged 18 to 30.

*economy by 2020 Benchmarked by the OECD tables (Leitch, 2006) A*

recommendation was for this to be achieved and that 95% of the population have a level 2 functional skill in literacy by 2020:44, known as *The UK's future skills mix*.

#### Scotland

The Scottish Executive does not have PSA targets. Instead, they have a series of high level indicators contained within their Lifelong Learning Strategy. The suite of indicators focus on similar areas of skill as the PSAs for the rest of the UK.<sup>a</sup>

#### Northern Ireland

By 2007, 63 per cent of year 12 pupils to obtain 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A–C (or equivalent), compared with 59 per cent in 2002.

By 2007, 97 per cent of year 14 pupils to obtain 2+ A levels at grades A–E, compared with 95 per cent in 2002.

To increase the proportion of working age people qualified at Level 2 or above from 63 per cent in summer 2003 to 68 per cent in spring 2007.

To increase the proportion of working age people qualified at Level 3 or above from 46 per cent in summer 2003 to 48 per cent in spring 2007.

By 2007, 18,500 people will have achieved a recognised qualification in Essential Skills compared with 100 in March 2003.

#### Wales

By 2010, over three quarters of pupils finish compulsory education attaining at least 5 GCSEs at grades A\*–C or equivalent.

By 2010, reduce the proportion of adults of working age without qualifications from 1 in 4 in 1996 to 1 in 10. By 2010, increase the proportion of adults of working age with a Level 4 qualification from 1 in 5 in 1996 to over 3 in 10.

<sup>a</sup>The lifelong learning strategy for Scotland, Scottish Executive, 2003.

Drawing on the work of Department for Education, DfE, Wolf (2015) states ‘currently there are 15 different awarding bodies integral to her research. One finding is *‘awarding bodies differ in their approaches’* along with *‘more reliable and valid assessment methods should be used’*, Wolf (2015) therefore raising the question are all students being judged fairly? And are all the students being taught what is required for industry as well as learning literacy for life? Curriculum designs are pertinent to this research as this is the vehicle for learning. If this vehicle is not suitable then it could be influential on the outcomes for learners firstly linked to skills for life, and secondly flourishing in life.

Educational establishments and the design and delivery of curriculum is nothing which is new and can be dated back to Aristotle and his work relating to curriculum theory. Smith, (2000) states that Aristotle’s’ model has three main disciplines which are still used today when considering curriculum and curriculum planning.

There are:

1. *The Theoretical* - the syllabus, what is going to be taught and how.
2. *The Practical* -the process of imparting knowledge to others, here the *Praxis* can take place where the learners internalise and absorbs the knowledge, deliberation might take place along with technical aspects being shared. The *Praxis* is when thoughtful, practical doing takes place,
3. *The Productive* - learning from this and using this in their work to create their own understanding and meaning of it.

Smith, (2000) and Dennison, (2013).

Aristotle believed that children should be submerged in a world which was filled with literature, poetry, and the arts, as this was a way to ensure balanced and well-being as they required an outlet, as he was against '*the suppressions of natural feelings*', so advocated for literacy to be part of the curriculum for learning, way back then.

Aristotle also believed that learning was for all, highlighting the significance, then that all people had a right to an education and that it should not just be kept for the wealthy (Shawal, 2022). Curriculum planning and the use of this model, and how we plan for learning, is still evident today and the significance of literacy and what it develops in young people is ever present. But what does curriculum really mean? Merriam-Webster, (2022), dictionary states that the definition of the word curriculum arises from the New Latin word which means '*course of study*', '*body of knowledge, subject of content*' which should be taught. Leading me to conclude in this context, what learners should study in relation to literacy, which is what this paper is going to explore.

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) was a teacher who had a love of the curriculum and became a British education researcher. He believed that curriculum should be views as an '*entire educational project.*' He believed that when planning a curriculum, we needed to '*explore, what the intention was for society*' and that we had to consider,

the individuals, who lived in it as this was fundamental in developing change. He further suggested that educators had a '*vision of knowledge*' which should be shared, and that this could be done through teaching and learning and that the teachers should know from the beginning, what change they wish to make to their learners, from the beginning (Stenhouse, 1975). Stenhouse, believed that teaching embraced several factors such as: ideological, socio-anthropological, educational, epistemological, and psychological concepts and that the educators should have knowledge of these concepts to aid the learners in achieving their intended learning objective, with a view that change will happen (these will be explored in chapter 2 further).

Stenhouse (ibid) advocated that teachers should be part of the curriculum planning process and that they should be involved in this, as they are the ones teaching it. He suggested that by allowing this to take place, the curriculum could be '*creative, open, innovative and flexible*' and that teachers, could be '*researchers at the heart of curriculum development process*' Elliott and Norris, (2011) and that *curriculum development only happens when curriculum study takes place*, Stenhouse (1975). He advocated the importance of '*reflection in practice*,' (Gregson, and Duncan, 2020) so that changes could be made to what is being delivered and that teachers should explore what they did, how they did it and why they did it, to '*modify or perfect*' their strategies. This is an approach which is used, still, today. This is done as a way of revisiting the 'exercise, of teaching' to identify if changes can be made, so that the learning experiences with the students could be enhanced, or diversified in any way, to meet the changing needs of the learners in the groups (Gibbs,1988 and Kolb,1984) however, this promoted, but often in my experienced cannot be fully



actioned, as they are limitations placed on us as teachers, (This too will be explored more in subsequent chapters).

Stenhouse's curriculum theory model (ibid) also stated that 'one's own knowledge' is crucial in this model and that teachers, need to understand and know, what they know, what they are aiming for, what the expectations and what methodologies they are going to use for the learning to take place. He also believed that the influences of this should not just come from in the classroom, but the wider societal context, so that the learners can meet the needs of others, such as stakeholders and employers. He explored the role of the three main factors, in his model, which were the teachers (authority) the learners (autonomy) and the subject matter (understanding) claiming that teaching can advance or inhibit learners depending on who is teaching and how the teaching takes place Elliot and Norris, (2011). He aligns his understanding of curriculum to that of a *recipe in a cake* and claims that many people add their own variants to cakes, based on their likes, dislikes, interests and that this is what teachers do, when given a curriculum to teach. He claims that whether a teacher likes the ingredients they have been given in their cake, can influence or affect the outcome of the cake, therefore each teacher produces a different cake as they have different learners with differing needs in their class.

This is evident today, as the T Level's in vocational sectors, recently being supports Stenhouse's (1975) viewpoint as we have adopted a new theoretical stance, in what and how we are preparing learners to learn in a vocational context. The 'skills, knowledge and behaviours' are integral to the approach we take when delivering these qualifications, I describe these as 'cultures in education.' My reasoning for this

is that we are expected to develop learners now, who have been submerged in a culture, where we are developing their knowledge skills and behaviours, therefore knowledge of this should be shared with the English teaching teams, so that they can understand the 'new learner' which they are engaging with, and what is being expected from awarding bodies, stakeholders and educational ministers today. This is something which, I wish to investigate later in this research, as undoubtedly if the expectation is for T Level learners to have these skills, then other learners will be expected to have to these as well, at some level, to enable them to succeed in life and find employment. Stenhouse (1975), also states that 'professional development' for teachers is crucial too, so that they are contemporary and understand the expectations in society, industry and for the learners. This relates to the problem as if we have a range of learners – *cakes*, and they require a different environment to enable them to rise, such as, resources or approaches, to enable them to flourish or feel enriched Aristotle (384-322 BC), then we cannot keep up with the needs of the recent learners. If we do not know about different approaches or other ways to encourage the learners to grow, then how can we be implementing them in our classrooms.

A highly skilled trained workforce is a minimum expectation with education today, however if the teachers-the chef has been trained over 20 years ago then how do we know, they can still – *bake cakes well* (adapt and change to the needs of the learners – the cakes) or if the recipe which they use in their classes is suitable. Historically views relating to how people learn differ, today we appreciate the difference which the learners bring concluding the ingredients in the cake – the learner, may need to be adapted so that the cake can rise. The learner can flourish

and feel happy Seligman (2000) meaning eudaimonia is reached Aristotle (384-322 BC).

CPD is an integral issue to this research, as without understanding or knowing what opportunities have been given to the teachers, we are unable to understand why the learners are feeling the way they do and why the learners do or do not make progress.

### **The second problem -Curriculum design**

Golby et al. (1975) and their Curriculum Design theory argues, that '*curriculum*' is *not easy to define, and curriculum issues spread far and wide.*

They believed that there are five aspects which curriculum design needs to consider these being:

- a) *Political, moral, and social ideologies*
- b) *The nature of knowledge itself*
- c) *The social context of the curriculum*
- d) *The ways in which children learn and develop.*
- e) *Styles of developing the curriculum*

*Golby et al, 1975:2*

Within their theory they suggest that curriculum designers are *behind the times* because they do not change, adapt education to social change.

Benjamin cited in Golby et al., 1975:10 draws on the works of Peddiwell, (1939) named, 'The Saber-tooth curriculum' where he explores the works of New-Fist-Hammer-Maker (New-Fist), creating a curriculum for prehistoric tribes and his approach to a systematic education for children. Within this work, he discusses how he has observed the children and adults in their lives, social environments and then

uses this as a starting point, to begin the planning of the curriculum, with the aims and focus being, what he wanted the children to learn, with his main aim being, [that] *the tribe had a better life*, he named this his 'educational goal'. Peddiwell, (1939) cited in Golby et al, 1975:9 further suggests that the term 'Great Mystery' became evident, and that this is when '*the children want to learn*', begins. He claims he has no answers for how this happens, just that it does, and that this is the effect, of children who have been educated systematically. He further argues that if the conditions in which the tribe continued to live in remained the same, *then all would have gone well*, however over time, these conditions changed and the conditions for the learning changed, meaning that the skills what the children needed to learn, had to change as well, to reap success. Within this body of work, there is much reference to the skills which are required for adult life, simultaneously educating the young. This illuminates the discourse around teaching of the young, in readiness for vocation and that this has been around since prehistoric times. Similarities here can be drawn to the introduction of the new T Level qualifications in the vocational sectors, as well as changes in the Functional Skills qualifications, as the 'environment' in which learners live and work in, is one which is ever changing.

Mary Coughlan (2010) Irish Education Minister considered the 'ever changing environment' in relation to her curriculum planning for children and young people being educated in Ireland also. Coughlan (ibid) suggested that the current curriculum in Ireland, for school leavers studying Irish, disadvantages learners as the weighting of the 'Irish oral exam' had changed to 40%. Coughlan, (ibid) claimed that this had a 'negative impact for Irish speaking learners,' as the main part of the examination being in spoken and communicative use of the language with 40% of the overall

grading being given to this one element. Coughlan, (ibid) argued that ... *'this was made at the expense of the history aspect of the language and the syllabus language elements'* Murray, (2010). Coughlan, (2010) ordered a review as this increased weighting seemed to be unfair especially as only fifty of the 730 schools, spoke or taught entirely in Irish and that any system had to be fair to all.

Simultaneous to this, Coughlan, (2010) ordered a review into the workforce for Early Education and Care, stating that lots of finances had been ploughed into development of Early Years settings in Ireland previously, and that was essential that staff development is integral to success of these objectives, in the vocational sector. staff that required 'upskilling' to better educate children in these settings, would be offered the chance and people who are entering the workforce, will be appropriately prepared and that *'articulated planned pathways'* will be shared for staff, so that they know what pathway they are on and can chose, their future professional development experiences, along with an *'agreed set of national standards'* being shared with the workforce. Similarities can be made here, to the work of Peddiwell (1939), as in both scenario's Coughlan has looked at, as the social aspect of the world her learners live in and work in, they have been responded to, with the changes in her curriculums and workforce expectations.

Hyland (1999) shines a light on the importance of having a Vocational Educational Training (VET) Curriculum which is fit for purpose and comparable to those offered in other European countries. He called for a review to take place so that educational experiences offered in England move away from the *'three track model system including: NVQ's GNVQ's GCSE's and A Levels.'* Hyland (ibid) further argues that

*'common core knowledge and understanding, along with social justice and community interest, should be integral to the VET, moving forward and away from 'utilitarian economic objects,' this being 'designed to be useful rather than decorative' as stated by Cambridge dictionary, (2022).*

Once again comparatives can be made here, to the works of Peddiwell, (1939) and Coughlan (2010), with changes to the curriculums being necessary as a result response to the changes in societal expectations. Furthermore, within the T Levels qualifications and Functional Skills Literacy curriculum, they incorporate some of the common themes argued by Hyland (1999) with his view of what learners should develop as well as a framework, and Stenhouse (1975) viewing curriculums as an *'entire educational project' being that the learning in the vocational context is 'foundational and essential'.*

### **Influencers and research focus of the problem**

The focus of this research links directly to the problem, which is to understand student experiences of learning literacy in the FAVE sector. Exploration of environments and communities is integral to this research and fundamentally an interest relating to this has been formed along with a deeper understanding of Humanism approach for learning and flourishing, Seligman (2000). Cross purpose working with literacy and vocational teams is integral to understanding the depth and breadth of this issue along with the learner voice. It is only when we truly understand the problem pertinent to this research, can we fully understand the problem can we seek to find answers.

Humanism approach to learning is described by Drew (2021) as *[having] a strong focus on students' emotional wellbeing and eternally view children as innately good 'at the core'*. Teachers are to work towards building relationships with the learners and develop them holistically.

Drew argues, there are four pillars, which are fundamental to this approach, and these are:

- **Free Will:** *We have free choice to do and think what we want.*
- **Emotions impact Learning:** *We need to be in a positive emotional state to achieve our best.*
- **Intrinsic Motivation:** *We generally have an internal desire to become our best selves.*
- **Innate Goodness:** *Humans are good at the core.*

*Drew, (2021)*

Crain, (2015) supports this view but goes further in stating, that humanist psychology is about humans, being the best version of themselves and this includes ensuring that their social and emotional needs are met. 'Humans are capable of growth and self-actualization with this approach placing an importance on the individual's thought, emotions and feelings at the forefront of all human development.'

Martin Seligman (2000) a pioneer of positive psychology supports the views of the humanist approach for learning. He supports that people must understand flourishing and what this means and when this has been reached. This is a concept which is discussed further in Chapter Two. Seligman believes that once a person understood their strengths and celebrated them, then they could go on to achieve great things and happiness is linked to the work of Aristotle (384-322 BC) and his virtue on ethics. Seligman believes that happiness can be cultivated. This research explores

the concept of flourishing in relation to happiness in withing the context of studying functional skills literacy in and FE context.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, behaviourists viewpoints of learning became known. This approach was called the Behaviourist with Albert Bandura's being one of them. Bandura cited in McLeod (2016) placed and emphasis on the importance of modelling, intimidating attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. He further suggested that it is environmental factors, will influence learning and the cognitive behaviour in people (McLeod, 2016). This approach is known as the Behaviourism approach. It involves the operant and classical conditioning. Therefore, approaches which teachers take is fundamental in this research and considerations linked to what they use in their teaching practices to engage learners and motivate them is another consideration of this research.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917 –2005) cited in Guy-Evans (2020) a Russian-American psychologist, best known for his theory relating to ecological systems in child development and that there are a set of complex systems, which influence the child such as: family, schools' cultural values, laws and customs and that all of these are interconnected, and may affect or influence a child, being educated (College of Human Ecology, 2022). These systems were called:

- **Microsystem** - *Things which are in direct contact with The child in their immediate environment for example, parents, siblings, teachers, and peers.*
- **Mesosystem** - *Interactions between the microsystem, like parents and assert influence on each other.*
- **Ecosystem** - *These are the environments which the child is not involved and are external, for example: media, neighbourhoods, parent's, friends which affects them.*
- **Macrosystem** – *Socio-economic status, wealth, poverty and ethnicity and how cultural elements can affect the child.*



- **Chronosystem** – *Environmental changes which occur over the child's lifetime for example: moving home, transitions, parental divorce, or separation.*  
Guy-Evans, (2020)

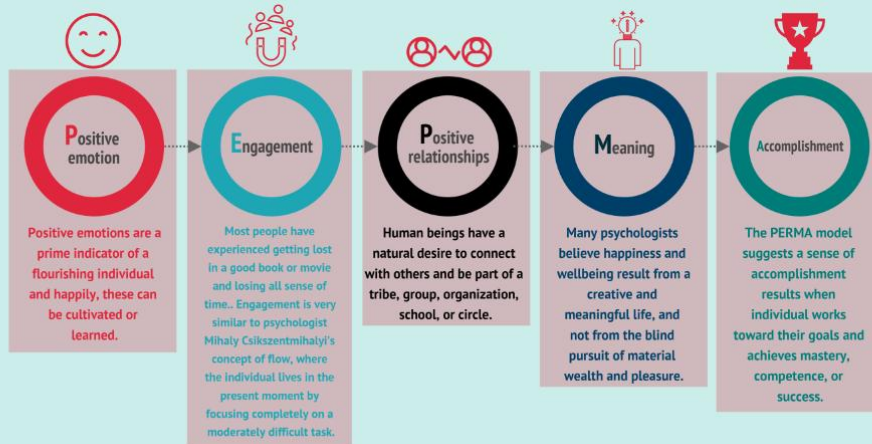
My interest relating to Bronfenbrenner's work and his ecological theory and the work of Stenhouse, (ibid) with the learners being – *the ingredients in the cake*, is something which I found interesting, and an interest developed into. The environments and communities – *The oven, which bakes the cake*, to support the developing learner in literacy is also another area which this research examines. Martin Seligman (2000) and his PERMA model is another theoretical viewpoint, which underpins this research as he explored flourishing – *how we make the cake rise*, and how we know that the cake has risen enough and how does the learner feel they have risen. Understanding the environments and teaching which takes place in the to enable the learners to flourish or feel successful is another consideration of this research. Drawing on the work of Stenhouse and his cake analogy– *does the temperature in the oven need to change, for different learners?*

Another point pertinent to this research is, do learners at 16-18 years of age, have support mechanisms in place, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) and *do* they work together to aid the *cake is rising* and is the learning environment correct for this to take place, or does a change need to happen for the environment to be correct to enable them to flourish – *be baked and rise*.

Flourishing is a concept which is discussed later and links to Seligman's' PERMA model.

## The PERMA Model In A Nutshell

The PERMA model was created by American psychologist and educator Martin Seligman. The PERMA model is a framework for happiness and wellbeing based on positive psychology through five elements: positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.



Cited Cuofano, 2023

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, behaviourists viewpoints of learning became known. This approach was called the Behaviourist with Albert Bandura's in 1977 being one of them. Bandura (1977) placed and emphasis on the importance of modelling, intimidating attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. He further suggested that it is environmental factors, will influence learning and the cognitive behaviour in people (McLeod, 2016). This approach is known as the Behaviourism approach. It involves the operant and classical conditioning.

## Conclusion

This research is focussed on gaining insight into teachers' and learner' experiences of both teaching and learning Functional Skills English. There are understandably a number of factors that need to be considered if we are to successfully understand

these experiences. Chapter One has sought to highlight these key aspects which form the foundation of this research.

Firstly, the learners, what are we doing to develop learners to meet the desired '*employment readiness levels*', HM Government (2022) Apprenticeship and Training Foundation (ibid) and expected in industry today in England and what is happening in the teaching communities for these learners?

Communities for learning - Nutbrown et al. (2017) and Yamanda-Rice (2015) suggest consideration of what these communities are and what they look like is integral to understanding within a study. Therefore, inquiries into, who is part of the community and how they are significant or beneficial to learners' achievements in literacy and flourishing for life will be a consideration in this study?

Within the communities for learning, there are industry expectations. Exploration into what is being done to ensure that learners are proficient in literacy, to enable them to gain successful employment and be deemed as employer ready (HM Government, 2022) for Apprenticeship and Technical Education? A final point here, is what vehicles are being used to encourage, support, and develop the learners to meet government employer readiness expectations whilst developing literacy skills for life?

Another point to consider is why learners have a disconnect with the current curriculum for learning literacy Wyse and Bradbury (2022) and what steps are being taken to reconnect? Crockford and Askins (2017) ask: What motivation and drivers

are being offered to reengage learners. Furthermore, it is only when we understand how integral '*feeling and emotions*' of the learners are Drew (2021), can we begin to understand how every interaction can cause a reaction. The works of Golby et al. (1975) and Coughlan (2010) relating to 'deep rooted attitudes' will form part of the inquiry as it is only when we understand what they are, can we begin to hear the learner voice and move the conversation along to enable learning to place.

The voice of the teachers is integral here also, therefore inquiring, what tools teachers are using in their environments to reengage the learners is necessary Highton et al. (2017) so that we can gain a deeper understanding of what is working or not. If we consider the work of Golby et al. in relation to 'deep rooted attitudes' it is imperative that we understand the strategies and approaches which are being used to challenge these attitudes, so that a growth mindset Dweck (2015) can be adopted, and a change in attitude take place to enable a feeling of success Seligman (2000) and reaching eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC)?

Another point permeating through this study, is that of CPD of the teachers Stenhouse (1975) Knowledge of what is 'on offer' has been acquired, but do the teachers know? And what discussions around what they, have engaged with, will be a point of interest throughout this thesis.

The process of 'reflection' Gregson and Duncan (2020) and Gibbs (1988) will be another theme which flows throughout this research to make judgements against to try and understand if teachers in practice today, change their environments to enable the learners- the cake, to rise Elliott and Norris (2011).

In conclusion, an understanding of curriculums, humanistic psychology, flourishing and reflection, and community, will be used in this thesis. Works from, Aristotle (384-322 BC) Seligman (2000) Crain (2015) and Drew (2021) and Bronfenbrenner (ibid) will be used. However, it is only when we understand 'literacy' today, employer expectations, government demands and teacher's skills, can we build on our own understanding of literacy environments for learning to enhance literacy skills for life. This will be the focus in Chapter Two.

## **Chapter Two**

### **A critical review of literacy**

In this critical review, an understanding of the problem – Are English Functional Skills Level One Curriculums in the U.K a suitable vehicle for developing learners is an integral part of the problem. This research seeks to find out, if developing a deeper understanding of literacy and how it influences or impacts learners' well-being and well-ness, ultimately leads to happiness –flourishing, Seligman (2000) and eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC). It further seeks to expose that if the learners are submerged in appropriate curriculum does this lead to successful outcomes in life.

### **The literature**

I should explain that any key reading from Government publications or reviews explore 'English and maths' as 'core subjects' in education and are often discussed together, therefore on occasions, I may use the verb 'them' as often one is not commented on without the other. I will move between the term 'literacy and English' as well, depending on the context of the discussion. Whilst examining, English

curriculum, as well as links to vocational qualifications being explored, within the context of employability and work ready. These qualifications, are, commonly referred to as '*vocational qualifications*'. Defined by Sainsbury, (2016) as '*everything other than GCSE, A levels or degree programmes*' of study.

Functional English as described by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), (2007) are, functional skills, which are skills that citizens can use, for them to function as '*effective citizens in society*' which can benefit them in: work, education, and life. The term 'functional' is defined as '*real life situations*' or '*designed to be practical or useful*' QCA, (2017). The Cambridge dictionary (2022), further define Literacy as '*the ability to read and write*'. Functional skills in Literacy are skills which students require for them to demonstrate their understanding and skills in: speaking and listening, reading, writing in a context which enables them to be easily interpreted in a range of contexts, such as the workplace and in educational settings (QCA, 2007 and Kelly, 2005). This paper is aimed at the ETF, teacher and stakeholders who are invested in research in the Further Education Sector with the purpose to amplify the voices of the 12 participants involved.

### **Historical context 1996-2009**

Literacy skills in the UK were introduced in education in 1996 by the then shadow secretary of state for Education, David Blunkett, under the incoming Labour government. A review was conducted by the Department for Education (DfE)- National Literacy Strategy, 1997 (DfE, 1997) and the conclusions were that '*the approach needs to be a steady, consistent strategy, to raise those standards*' and that '*teachers need to be trained in raising literacy standards*' (cited in Beard, 2000).

Prior to this in, 1996 John Dearing was commissioned by the Department for Education to conduct a review of the education system at the time, with a focus being on how to 'strengthen, consolidate, and improve frameworks in England, to this end he, introduced '*key skills qualifications.*' These qualifications were brought in as a response, to all stakeholders at the time. Dearing suggested that 'key skills are '*... skills that underpin success in education, employment and life*' as many employers commented that young people were not able to read and write well. He further suggested that '*at the time '30% of the students in Further Education, lacked the skills in basic literacy*'. Consequently, these 'key skills', became the basis for the curriculum 2000 approach to education, then known as core skills.

Additionally, in 1997, a recommendation was that in initial teacher training '*teachers should 'consolidate their knowledge and skills into the teaching of literacy*' (National Literacy Strategy, 1997) a view further supported by Dearing, (1996). Parallel to this, the government set up a fund to 'upskill' all people working in education, including head teachers' governors and the introduction of literacy coordinators came about along with a 'training pack' issued by the DFE, (1999) as a way of raising the profile of investing in teachers (Joyce et al. 1995:17). Guidance and training were further given in 2009 by the Department for Schools and Families, (2009) to enable schools and colleges to deliver the new 'functional skills qualifications' in a way which is expected at a national level as a way of addressing inequalities across the country. Furthermore, at this time, vocational teachers were expected to acquire functional skills qualifications, if they did not have them as a way of ensuring that all staff that young people engage with are educated to a 'basic' level in educational settings and literacy focus kits, were introduced to aid teachers in their own development.

## **Contemporary issues**

Moving on from this and nearly a decade later the, Walport and Leunig, (2017) report highlights that, *'teachers were still being observed with lack of skills and were unable to support learners understand concepts, in maths and English'*. Moreover, teachers were observed, unable to develop students development in literacy and numeracy, (OFSTED, 2014), therefore highlighting that even though the DfE, in 1999 had supported investing in teachers, and revisiting this, once again in the 2005 white paper, where Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and Skills highlights once again, that staff require training and guidance, to enable them in being able to *'accurately assess students' performance*, raising the question once again, what happened prior to this, and why do we have to revisit teacher skills, when considering outcomes for learners?

## **New approaches**

Moreover, in 1997 the National Strategies (NLS) were introduced, with the first being '[the] National Literacy Strategy' within this, there was an expectation that professional development for teachers of the subject took place as a way of addressing the need 'to drive improvement and standards' which in 2011, is still present (DfE, 2011) therefore raising the question, why are teachers still needing to be trained and developed when so much time and money has been invested in them over the last 20 years? Is something happening in the sector which means teachers are not staying or is it that the curricula, is ever changing, which means teachers are unable to keep up with the demands from employers and awarding bodies? Another point to consider is, rules of spelling punctuation and grammar have not changed, so



why are we where we are today, and why has so much time and money been spent on upskilling teachers? An interesting viewpoint raised in DfE, (2009) report, is the 'timeframe' in which teachers are given to educate the learners when revisiting these curriculums, is a contributing factor and that timetabling and time constraints, may be underlying contributors as to why learners, are not making as much progress as they might. Leading me to question, is too much pressure being placed on the teachers, in too short a timeframe for them to build relations and develop the student's skills effectively?

Ireland, (2019) highlights that learner can revisit literacy qualifications, if they do not achieve the grade 4 when in secondary school, as part of the government's core offer in 16+ education. She amplifies those students who gain a grade 3 in schools, can now complete a functional skills course, as a 'steppingstone qualification' to revisit and refresh their prior knowledge, as a way of building confidence in students' skills. This raises the profile of these qualifications once again and revisits the view of QCA, (2007) that functional skills have a place in education in modern day Britain. Conversely, Williams et al, (2017) suggests that the reason learners are not making progress is that they have, lost faith in the education system and that we need to '*rebuild their confidence*'. Ireland, (2019) identifies that, learners have suggested, strategies to support them with addressing their concerns which they have with their learning and the curriculums, which will allow them to '*feel respected and more supported*'. Teachers using the '*growth mindset model*', by Carol Dweck cited in ETF, (2014) was one suggestion and this will be explored later in this research.

Furthermore, Highton et al, (2017) suggests that class sizes might be impacting on the outcomes for learners. As well as teachers being able to identify the '*gaps in knowledge*' which learners have, as these gaps are not known to themselves. Moreover, support from the wider curriculum staff and them, not embedding literacy skills into their teaching and learning, has not aided this issue and problem. Highton et al, (2017) and Haywood and Homer, (2015) explored maths and literacy curriculums, found that in FE, teachers were trained in other areas and were 'not adequately trained' in numeracy or literacy, raising the question, who is teaching learners in FE these core subjects and how can they assist learners getting better at literacy if they are not trained in this area themselves? Furthermore, Walport and Leunig, (2017) findings show that, '*a high proportion of teachers, were not developing students effectively.*' Highlighting once again that maybe the issue is with the training of teachers and their ability to support the learner's progression and development. This has led me to question, what qualifications do they have, and do we need to explore this and consider could this be a fundamental reason why learners are not progressing? Another viewpoint explored by Porter, (2015) relates to 'recruitment of trained professionals. The findings suggest that this is inconclusive, as trained professionals in literacy can develop learner's skills, however it has been found, that they do not have the skills, to contextualise literacy in the vocational context, therefore widening the gap between education meeting the employer's' needs. This will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

### **Present day- 2022AD**

"Today in practice, the National Literacy Trust, (2022) works with the government to raise the profile of literacy with learners, teachers, and the government in the teacher

training standards. The DFE, (2021a) state that, teachers must '*demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy, and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject to develop these skills*'. The reasoning being, that they can better educate future generations. This has led me to consider, has the 'upskilling of previous teachers not been impactful for learners, as we are still having to address the issue of standards, and learners not meeting the governments' targets of grade 4.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, learners have arrived in post 16 education with literacy levels lower than normally accepted on most programmes and staff at my provision, have commented on the lack of skills students have arrived with. This has led me to consider, will the curricula this year in Functional Skills literacy (FSL) aid them achieving the required level of literacy skills needed for their future and the workforce. The Wolf Report, (2011), suggests that a grade C in English is required for them to be proficient in their vocational area and claims that 50% of them arrive in the settings, with a need for English, to be improved and that only 4% of them achieve this standard during their time in the post 16 educational setting. I would like to explore if, this is still the case, or if over the last 10 years, something has changed, with the highly skilled teachers and new standards from the DFE, (2021a) for teachers in training over the last 10 years.

The Wolf Report, (2011) further made recommendation that students should benefit from remedial actions if their '*maths and English, subject areas*', and that this should be offered and must continue to study these subjects, as other European countries claim that these have been focused on this prior to now, highlighting that England

appear to be catching up and that *'core academic skills, like English, should be concentrated on'* and that *'good levels of English are one of the most valuable and useful vocational skills'*, leading me to question, is the level of English, which is taught in colleges, today viewed the same way? Does it allow students to engage well in employment and what does English curricula look like in education today?

In 2015, the review of the Wolf (DfE 2015) report took place, highlighting the importance of keeping 'English' as part of the core offer for students in FE in the U.K on vocational courses. Students were still leaving schools without the necessary levels in this subject. Vocational courses which were offered, are now required to be recognised by the employers, which links to employer readiness as prior to this any qualification could be offered which might not successfully skill them for the workforce. Furthermore, students should be offered, progression courses, to continue to develop their work skills whilst addressing, their literacy issues and outcomes. Placements which are linked to industry should be offered, to ensure students are employer ready at the end of their study period, as a way of educating them on expectations in the sector they are working in, and how integral the literacy skills are in the sector. Sadler, (2016) from the London Councils' Members' briefing support this suggestion of *'close integration between college-based and employment-based education and training'* so that they can all fit together to enable students to progress and move seamlessly from one aspect to another and by involving employers in developing standards and assessment plans, this could happen.

## Reading Schemes to support community literacy

Way back in a former role working for a Sure Start setting in Norfolk, I remember my experiences of sharing books with young mums in local settings to educate them on the power of reading, speaking and listening to support their little people and share the power of books to develop relationships with one another. Little did I know that over 20 years later, my interest remains in reading, speaking, and listening and the power that these experiences bring. This current research focuses on this as being one of the fundamental parts within the literacy level 1 curriculum and how learners must demonstrate proficiency in this. My intrigue here remains with 'what is happening locally' to support this agenda now and does community support for literacy enrichment still exist. More pertinent, and central in this research, is the question of what is being offered for learners in the over 16 demographics to foster a love of reading for them.

The **National Literacy Trust** (NLT) champion a range of literacy programs for schools and colleges to use to support and engage their learners with 'active reading for social pleasure,' along with programs to support and encourage 'creative writing' for the next generation. The NLT- The Power of Voice, (2023) shared that only '1 in 7' share their views in the power of voice, relating to issues which are important to them. The programme is designed to '*empower young people and tell their stories*, whilst harnessing the power of writing stories from a lived experience stance' to enable societal changes. The programme has enabled learners to '*find their creative voices and allow creative freedom.*' (Aristotle, 384-322BC).

Drawing on the work previously mentioned in Chapter One from Duncan. (2012) linked to meditation for wellness and wellbeing with the use of literacy, The NLT – Writing for wellbeing clubs (2023) is introduced as a way of supporting and encouraging, writing to support ‘mental wellness’ at lunchtime in schools and colleges. A key finding here is that ‘*1 in 3 students that participate] that this helps them to relax.*’ Whilst good work has taken place, notably the findings in their report NLT - Children and young people’s writing in 2023, (2023) shares, that writing for pleasure has ‘*decreased by 12.2 percent’ over the past 13 years*’. Highlighting this as a real concern.

On a more local level, the **Suffolk County Council** in partnership with the NLT, have identified this as an area of interest and developed a community literacy programme with the libraries association, to ‘Get Suffolk Reading’ as a way of addressing this area of concern for people living in their county. **Norfolk County Council** - Duncan. (2012) has also been created to address the lack of proficiency in literacy for young people in their area, claiming that ‘*many children leave school unable to read*’. What both projects in the neighboring counties reveal are important to this research is that there is lots being put in place to address ‘literacy deficits in children,’ but our young person’s demographic is still being left unaddressed. This research seeks to bring to light the suggestion that this needs to be addressed, as it is only when we work with the current learners are we able to understand, what their requirements are for them to develop and foster a love of literacy in their worlds today.

## **A change in direction**

Parallel to this, a funding change happened, which linked students' achievements in English to revenue, whereas prior, this was linked to retention, bringing to the fore, the importance of this agenda and how its uptake over the last 4 years appears to be decreasing, arguably, this may have not been the case, had the change in funding happened earlier, as identified by Wolf, (2011). She argues that colleges were not actively encouraging students to revisit '*English and maths*', which is her opinion '*were in the wrong direction*', Therefore raising the profile of this once again and bringing '*funding streams, regulatory compliance and performance tables*' together meaning, all are addressing this concern from the same standpoint as the DfE, 2015 review claims '*...over 300,000 18-year-old students start adult life without the competency skills*' they need in these subjects. English coordinators came about in my setting because of funding being made available to address the agenda once again and tighter monitoring of student's achievements were implemented, with a view to tighter monitoring from the government and accountability from the settings, to secure their funding, as this now changed to 'per student' rather than 'per course', DfE, Wolf, (2015) applied in policy in 2013, leading me to question, why now? And why has this not been a priority prior to this, when the agenda had been around for 2 years prior to this?

The appointment of placement coordinators, student mentors and careers advisors came about, as a way of monitoring 'attendance and achievement' in these subjects, with an emphasis on addressing any embryotic issues with learners, in all parts of their curriculum, but with a greater focus on, English and maths attendance, achievement and success outcomes. Furthermore, Sainsbury, (2016) in the Good

Careers Guidance suggest that their role was to guide students on career choices, suitability for work in this sector whilst raising the profile of the literacy agenda. Teachers in training continued to be monitored on their knowledge of 'literacy skills' and are part of the 'success criteria' for them whilst completing their training. Teachers in situ, in English, maths and vocational areas, were also being offered and encouraged to take, enhanced continuous professional development to 'up skill' them and support them in embedding their skills and knowledge in their chosen area to raise the profile of the literacy agenda. At the same time, the measuring tool used, for students' achievements, which historically had been 'A\*-E' changed to 'progress 8' along with a new 'performance table measure' DfE, Wolf (2011), which some might suggest was confusing for staff and industry to understand. Parallel to this, a change in the functional skills curricula,' improving functional skills was implemented by Benson, (2015). Within this review, 15 different awarding bodies were investigated, and judgements were made about the content of the curricula. One suggestion was '*awarding bodies differ in their approaches*' along with '*more reliable and valid assessment methods should be used*', therefore raising the question are all students being judged fairly? Are all the students being taught was required for industry?

### **Falling behind**

Sainsbury, (2016) further explored curricula on offer in the FE sector in 2016, because of a concern, raised by Nicolas Gibb, the Minister of State for Schools under the Governments conservative rule of David Cameron, with a focus on Technical Education. Once again Maths and English, are discussed as '*vital skills* and that students should have exit routes in education and industry which are linked



to competencies in these areas, and these are '*set as a minimum standard for them to achieve technical certification.*' Sainsbury, (2016) further suggested that '*the government should raise English requirements and should include standards in the apprenticeships as and that English, should relate directly to occupational requirements, and being employer ready, as well as occupation specific English being included in their curricular.*' leading me to question further, where are we now, and how we are meeting this recommendation 5 years on and has any progress been made in closing the gap between us, and other European countries, as suggested by the Musset and Field, (2013), survey in adult skills report?

Walport and Leunig, (2017) concur with this viewpoint that we are falling behind and suggest that these skills are the '*bedrock*' therefore we need to ensure these are built into the training and development of young people. Currently we are only ahead of Chile and Turkey among a group of 24 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, *claiming that '16-29 today have on average worse literacy levels than those aged 30-45.* They further claim that this is not the first time, and that this has been a '*historical trend*' with declining levels of literacy and numeracy in the workplace. Moreover, they suggest that outcomes in literacy varies in the UK by region with London and the Southeast achieving the highest scores, leading me to question why is this the case? And what is being done to ensure all students in the UK are receiving adequate teaching and learning?

Additionally, Walport and Leunig (2017), suggest that students are not readily prepared for the workforce and that employers are looking for '*better literacy skills,*' which should be taught in conjunction with qualifications. Likewise, they suggest that

this should be done, in a work-related context, to promote a positive attitude to employment and that a suggestion for greater collaboration should be made. Supporting, Wolf's, (2011) suggestion of '*working collaboratively*' so that all students leave education with the skills which are in demand and understand what is expected in the vocational sector. Walport and Leunig, (2017) further suggest that if this is not done, then we are in danger of '*slipping behind our competitors*' in the OECD countries. This has led me to question, is the curricula which is being taught 'fit for purpose'? Does it meet the demands of the employability sector in modern day Britain and for the lives of the young people we are educating?

This is not the first time, this has been explored, historically as the Department for Schools and Families, suggested in their 2009 guidance - Nuts and Bolts, that the responsibility should lie with the '*functional skills team*', however, all teachers should accept responsibility for the submerging of basic literacy skills, and this should be a whole school approach. Moreover, teachers and learners' attitudes towards the learning experience and the environments, in which they are taught in, are fundamental in achieving success Melrose (2014). Additionally, Functional Skills Coordinators were introduced, to ensure that all teachers, were aiming high and assessing student appropriately as well as ensuring that, functional skills were contextualised in their main area of learning, embedding the requirements of the T Level framework as employers identified that learners required the technical level of skills, required in industry DfE, (2021b).

### **Literacy curricula and the teacher role – a timeline of development**

Literacy curricula, in its previous contexts such as: Core skills, and Key Skills, was explored in the earlier chapter. In this chapter, I will begin the discussion in the period of, 1999-2007 when the government introduced the National Literacy Strategy in all schools along with the implementation of the National Curriculum as a framework to develop better literacy habits for teachers and students alike. Teachers at the time, were expected to '*set aside an hour each day*' to focus on literacy as well as '*working with parents*' to raise children's aspirations for literacy and in particular reading, with the year being designated as the '*National Year of Reading*' as well as the introduction of '*[the] Summer Reading Schools*' (Blunkett, 1997, Beard, (ibid), and DfES, (2002). Simultaneous to this, other strategies were advised such as: using systemic phonics, identify weaknesses in writing skills and the promotion of 'quick diagnosis for learners' as a way of addressing the deficit, sooner rather than later. The use of questioning in lessons, was promoted, with a view to encouraging learners to be confident speakers. Writing was another area of development, with the advice relating to '*composition and presentation*,' as well as the '*sentence level and grammatical awareness*' for all learners including their handwriting abilities, in their written work (Beard, 2000 and DfES, 2002).

Literacy is referred too, by DfES, 2002 as the tool which '*unites the important skills of reading and writing*,' The framework acknowledges that integral to this, is '*speaking and listening and that they are an essential part of it*', for the learner to be competent, work ready and have skills for life. The emphasis on the ability to speak well and respond appropriately, is integrated in the framework as a way of indirectly assessing their ability and skill. The emphasis here is also placed on teachers, who do not solely teach, Literacy and that all teachers at this time, were expected to

embed their knowledge of these skills into their lessons and work on building these skills for industry as a way of – bridging the gap, for learners in literacy. The reason for this was, that there was too much reference made to only learning literacy in English lessons and the government needed to ensure that learners, literacy skills, were being addressed in all areas of their studies, as it had been identified that in other areas of their learning learners, inadequacies, and competencies in these areas, were going unnoticed.

Judgements at this time made by teachers were based on the following factors: learners would be able to *‘read and write fluently, with meaning and understanding’*. Teachers at this time, were expected to teach them the skills to be able to do this, and the learners were then expected to comprehend what they had written, with a view to using self-reflection and change if this was required, so that they could change anything they felt was incorrect or irrelevant. Learners were expected to be able to spell, well and correct their spelling mistakes. They were also expected to be developing a *‘growing vocabulary and demonstrate and interest in words’* with an expectation that, the understanding of their meaning be integral to this process. Teachers were expected to teach learners the process of creating a plan for writing, revisiting the plan, then editing, all skills which are beneficial in everyday life, when using literacy and being self-reflective. Self-reflection according to Dewey, 1933 cited in (Gregson, 2015:39) *‘is how we think, and that past experiences can influence this’*, with the focus being on, if they have experienced similar situations previously, then they can deal with them well. However, if the experiences are new, then they may be less able, to deal with them so some support might be needed, but it is the process which is important for the learning to take place. The meaning of this was

so that learners could be self-critical, and learnt skills at an early age to decide, if what they had written, was acceptable, with a view to preparing them for using literacy in life, and not just in education.

To support this process learners were encouraged to develop and interest in books along with be able to read and write in a '*variety of genres*' including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Learners were also expected to be able to 'understand reading cues, for example phonic -This is a way of '*teaching people to read by correlating sound with symbols*', graphic – being able to interpret written information displayed in graphs, this is also '*connected- connected with drawings and design, especially in the production of books, magazines, websites.*' syntactic - is '*the way that words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language; the rules of grammar*' and contextual – '*connected with a particular context*' (DfES ,2022). Learners were expected to be able to '*discriminate separate sounds in words*', *learn letter sounds and combinations as well as soundings out and blending parts of words and write words which combined spelling patterns*' (DfES, 2002). Teachers were expected to teach them the skills to be able to do this, this was done through a programme known as '*guided reading*' which was promoted by the government at the time.

These approaches were taught as a way of monitoring their own reading and they were taught strategies and skills to '*correct their own mistakes, when reading*'.

Imagination and how we can use this for writing, was another aspect, which was imbedded in this curriculum and the medium, in which this came through was promoted, when the learners were asked to write stories or poems, with a view to them '*developing powers of inventiveness and critical awareness*', which again are tools, which one could suggest, are necessary in industry today, and being intuitive

and self-sustaining are all expectations of employees today, which is why continuous professional development is expected in learners and teachers alike, so that when we are working, we are also, the '*best version of ourselves*' Aristotle (384-322 BC). Phonics programmes such as Jolly Phonics, which is a rhyme, sound, and action programmes, which is used with young children, to develop their understanding of the grapheme, phoneme was heavily promoted at this time. The thinking behind this was that learner, need to be aware what the sounds were in words, as looking at them in books alone, did not seem to develop their understanding of them and how they worked. Learners were taught how to 'word build' using the CVC – consonant, vowel consonant model, such as: Sat, Pin, words, then moving onto the next level of words, which would be build using the consonant vowel, consonant, consonant model.

The reasoning behind this, is that learners need to be able to see, hear and feel the letters so that, when learners see a set of letters, on a page, they do not just remember what they look like, they are required to be able to understand the meaning when they are in words. Conversely, Dyslexic learners, especially use this approach of remembering how a word looks, rather than what it sounds like, or the meaning of the letters in the words. Dyslexic learners, see the image of the word, shape, and pattern, but appear to not be able to understand their phonological meaning in the words, which is why strategies like Jolly Phonics, are used, to aid learners who may have difference (British Dyslexia Association, 2022). Therefore, to conclude, if all learners have been taught how to use, these tools and strategies in schools previously, are learners able to use them today, with a view to aiding them with their understanding of literacy. Or is this something which has stunted, or not

been promoted on their educational journeys, which is why they are where they are today with their understanding of literacy?

### **The Reform - Revised Functional Skills Qualification**

In 2018 Ofqual, revised Functional Skills qualifications again and as a result, new aspects were introduced such as, '*spelling tests*' along with '*contextualised reading tests*' as well as a '*bank of 8 test papers*' which allow teachers to decide which one, learners can access, to best meet their needs. Strategies for teachers in the curricula are suggested, along with how teachers can aid the learners in their lessons, such as '*correcting spelling*', in the classroom activities, without the use of spell check. The teaching of '*phonics*' was reintroduced, along with, '*practicing speaking and listening in class*', to build learners' confidence by allowing practice along the way. Addressing learners '*punctuation and grammar*' in class, was another strategy to raise standards and achievement, whilst embedding skills for life in learners (Beach, 2019). Integral to this is, the emphasis on the 'continued professional development' of teachers, as when new curricula are implemented, they must 'upskill' to ensure they are current and meeting the needs of their learners, with a focus being on the assessment conditions and the awarding bodies ruling. Parallel to this, the government decided to increase the number of '*contact hours*' students have for these sessions, leading me to question, have they now decided the previous amount of contact hours was not enough for students to have successful outcomes? The assessment model, in these new qualifications has changed also and a blended model, with '*some internally and externally set and marked assessments*' being introduced, leading me to consider, why has this change been introduced?

Prior to this, and in readiness for the new qualifications, Ofqual, (2018) have suggested that '*greater scrutiny for centres and annual monitoring*' must commence in line with the reform and suggestions of how this could be done are given. Moreover, students are no longer allowed, to 'aggregate scores' from different components (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and that all, parts must be achieved for them to pass. Furthermore, qualitative, and quantitative data is required to justify learners on the courses along with outcomes and prior attainment. This leads me to conclude, that greater rigor, accountability, and openness is required for Ofqual with these new qualifications, so that they can substantiate the suitability of these qualifications in education systems in England. Leading me to question, what systems and approaches were in place prior to this? Were students advantaged or disadvantaged, as they now claim, that the use of 'spell checking tools undermines the candidate's abilities in the underpinning skill – spelling!

### **Previous Educational Journeys**

As mentioned previously, many learners historically have been taught the basic skills, required as a child, to progress in literacy, in their younger days, However, under the new GCSE study programmes in schools, in 2014 in the U.K young people were expected to '*read varied and challenging texts*'. Alongside this, they were expected to develop their '*writing skills and drafting abilities*', and use '*grammar and vocabulary*' consistently throughout. Moreover, the focus was also on emphasising and focusing the use of '*their imagination*', both from reading and in their writing. An expectation of learners at this time was that they, could '*interpret, summarise and synthesise*' points in texts also. Furthermore, their spoken abilities would be



analysed, and they would be assessed on their 'verbal skills with aspects such as: *'speaking confidently, audibly and effectively'*, being the new benchmarks to success Department for Education, (2014). Thanh (2018) supports the suggestions that these are all skills which learners need in modern society, however he further suggests that it is the process of *'being able to apply these skills and connect to them'* which makes a person literate. Arguably, there are lots of learners still today, who do not have a love of reading or literacy, therefore raising the question, is the curriculum suitable to foster this skill? Moreover, as the learners are in F.E now, one would hope that a greater understanding on the significance of achieving a literacy qualification would be present. This viewpoint will be central to the discussion in this research.

Staying with the theme of curriculum as afore mentioned, considerations of the works of: Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Stenhouse (1975) should be discussed further. Aristotle (384-322 BC) who's view is that there are three main disciplines within this those being: *'The theoretical, practical and productive'* and that child should be *'submerged in a world full of literacy, poetry, and the arts'* to ensure there is a *'balance in their well-being'*, but is our current curriculum doing this? Stenhouse (1975) introduced his curriculum theory model and thoughts surrounding *'curriculum being an entire educational product'* and teachers being a *'vision of knowledge'* is another interesting viewpoint pertinent to this study. Conversely, Young, 2013 cited in (Gregson et al. 2015:138) raises the question ... *'do you see knowledge in the curriculum as a constraint on learning or a source of opportunity'*? To this end, Alexander (2007) suggests that current *'Pedagogy is twisted into a service'* and that *'the pressure is to raise standards which 'can lead to a transmission model type of teaching'*. The assessment models, such as targets, teaching schemas and testing,

being called into question, as they were designed to raise literacy standards, but have they?

The drive for standards is made all the more complex against the already introduced and ongoing debate about the nature and purpose of the national literacy curriculum. The English Association in 2012, added their views to the debate as part of a Westminster briefing and fiercely argued that '*English as a subject, needs to include reading for pleasure as a fundamental part of it and that specialism should be the teaching of literature*' English Association (2012). Gupta (2004) suggests, there are two kinds of readers: transactional and reduced, definitions of these being, that the transactional reader, is one that can make connections and visualise the reading and the other being that they read the words on the page, and this is a painful experience. This viewpoint is one of interest, and within this study, I aim to find out from the participants if they, read for a purpose - education or employability, or if they read for the love of literacy, as UNESCO (2013) suggests. Literacy around the world is at the forefront of its mission, with the ambition to raise global literacy, suggesting that a '*literate community is a dynamic community*'. Arguably, here in the UK, Beard et al. (2011) cited in Cambridge Assessment, 2013 suggest that the challenge identified through the transnational tests such as PISA when, interpreting the results as the measurement model used for analysis of the results can be called into validity. Furthermore, De Wall and Cowan (2017) argue, that the pressure to raise standards and to *close the achievement gap between the privileged and disadvantaged*' have influenced the outcomes and that this has been attained at the result of the expense of learning taking place. Hodges (2011) echoes the same view highlighting that '*the*

*formants and education have come adrift from one another'* raising the question why?

### **Modern Curricula in Functional Skills Literacy**

For the purpose, of this study the term 'curriculum', will be defined using the working definition this being: curriculum involves, a range of learning activities which involves knowledge being shared with learners, planned activities, with teaching learning and assessment tasks taking place. Within this curriculum there is an expectation that the teachers have knowledge which is shared with them from their backgrounds or a curriculum which is given to them.

Modern approaches to teaching and curriculum planning have been discussed over the years, with the works of: Jacobson and Kilpatrick (1871-1965), Rugg (1886-1960), Caswell, (1901-1989) and Tyler (1902-1994) being integral to this.

Hlebowitsh, (2021) quotes (Tyler, 19.02-1994) stating,

*Tyler believed that the structure of the school curriculum also had to be responsive to three central factors that represent the main elements of an educative experience:*

*(1) the nature of the learner (developmental factors, learner interests and needs, life experiences, etc.).*

*(2) the values and aims of society (democratizing principles, values, and attitudes); and*

*(3) knowledge of subject matter (what is believed to be worthy and usable knowledge).*

*Tyler (1902-1994) cited, Hlebowitsh, 2021*

Tyler (1949) argues that curriculum should be '*society centred*' and introduced, student-centred approach in education. Tyler's' view is that students should be

taught in a way which accommodates their learning styles best and that time should be spent on evaluating the students learning. Student centred learning became a core aspect of teaching at this time, and remains the focus today, with learners, all expected to be at the heart of the process. Sennett (2008:277 cited in Gregson, 2015:144), view supports this however he takes it one step further claiming that learners' brains need to be able to use, '*visual, language and symbol information in parallel to one another*' for learning to take place. Therefore, with this viewpoint in mind, curricular in modern teaching and delivery, for modern students, should encompass these aspects to stimulate the learner. Unwin (2009) cited in (Gregson 2015:144) suggests that vocational teaching when done well, will '*inspire and motivate, however a more sophisticated pedagogy is required to be able to switch from classroom to workplace to workshop*'. Therefore, teachers educating them should be reminiscent of this, as they are the vehicle which is used to make the connections from school to industry and learners, should be submerged in a world where literacy skills are reinforced to meet this end goal, but are they?

Furthermore, Pring, et al (2009), in the Nuffield Review, 14-19 suggests that the '*relationship between teachers and learners, is central to a successful education*' therefore with this in mind, are we aiding them in crossing this bridge and becoming proficient learners? Social and economic conditions in F.E colleges is integral to this study as; we are the gatekeepers for developing the young people's: skills, resilience, and self-esteem through the educational programmes we offer. All learners may be impacted in their worlds, based on issues placed on them in a social or economic context, therefore how we teach them and the way in which we engage them, needs to be explored carefully, so that we can enable learners to flourish.

Arguably, often the only measures we can give them, are performance indicators, therefore the interaction we have with the learners, may hold more 'currency' than the outcomes themselves. To this end, the: thoughts, feelings and emotions of the learners are integral to this study, and within my findings, I wish to bring to the fore, how the learners feel when they are engaged in learning literacy. Dweck, (2015) with her mindset theory, as previously discussed enables learners the vehicle to change, therefore if this model is being promoted, we should be able to measure a change in the learners, but can we? Furthermore, Rogers (1902-1987) cited in McLeod, 2014, building on the work of Maslow, believes that a person 'can grow' if they are in the correct environments, with fundamental values linking to: 'openness, acceptance, and empathy. Along with Bandura's views (1977) cited in (McLeod, 2016), relating to key factors '*...being attention, retention, reproduction and motivation*', which will also be a key factor in this paper. To conclude, I will immerse myself in, these environments to see if teachers are developing a growth mindset in the learners and eliciting change.

### **Curriculum Theory Models do they work?**

Curriculum theory models splits into two domains: Process and Product models, and there have been many debates over which one works best, with a plethora of information available relating to curriculum and how they work, including works by: Benjamin (1939) – A Sabre Tooth Tiger Curriculum and Jenkins (1972) - Classic and Romantic in the Curriculum landscape are only but just a few pieces of work discussing the theory relating to curriculum. In this paper the view of Stenhouse (1975) will be used. Stenhouse, believes that for a curriculum to be 'fit for purpose' it needs to be able to share, the essential principles and features, as well as having

the ability to be scrutinized over time and should be effective in translation both in theory and in practice; for the people who are going to have to teach from it. Building on from this viewpoint, I will discuss how the Functional Skills literacy Level 1 Curriculum, works and if this meets the suggested outcome, based on Stenhouse point of view, relating to, those that teach it or learn from it. He suggests that *'...in so far as a curriculum is itself an object of enquiry that is tested in the classroom and seminar by both teachers and students.* Interestingly Stenhouse (1975) comments on how the curriculum must be robust, ready to change to accommodate the people living in society who access it as well as, all people can *'think of their learning in terms of enquiry* and that all people could fulfil their potential. Within this paper, I will discuss what the learner and teacher views are based on this viewpoint.

The process model is when a curriculum is taught and the focus in the curriculum is the learning which takes through discussions, and interactions in the class and that the learning is imbedded in the person through this way, and they are not accessed against outcomes, Stenhouse (1975) suggests that this model is *'rather like a cookery book, where it can be scrutinised and is effective in its translation of knowledge.* The product model is the opposite to this, with this being that the curriculum is built, with tests, and outcomes which the candidates are measured to and tested against with judgements being made on several *'mastery of skills'* (Samuel, 2015). This model is the approach which the U.K is currently using with the functional skills literacy Level 1 curriculum today. Secondary to models of curriculum we have approaches to teaching, with a cyclical or linear approaches being used. The Cyclical model (Wheeler, 1967 cited in Chaudhary and Kalia, 2015) means the curriculum is built where it visits in other aspects of the course context

aspects of it again and again, so the learner can revisit the knowledge and new learning experiences are planned because of, the learning which has taken place. The linear model is, when learning is taught straight through, with teaching specific aspects happening at set times and points in the curriculum (Tyler, 1949 cited in Chaudhary and Kalia, 2015).

The Functional Skills Literacy Curriculum (2019) used in the teaching of literacy today, is regarded as a 'linear model- with steps from the beginning to the end, needing to be covered in order of the learners to pass. The learner will have a series of moderated tests, but to demonstrate proficiency, a test will take place. Currently these tests are being offered in a paper-based format and online, but this itself, is open to discussion as some establishments do not like to offer 'paper-based exam papers' as they prefer learners to sit computer-based testing, but why? Who benefits from this approach, the setting, or the learners?

Carl Rogers, seminal piece of work, details the development of the Phenomenon theory cited in (McLeod, 2014), the definition of this being – Phenomenology, is an approach which concentrates on the consciousness in philosophy and how we perceive our lived experiences in our worlds. Humanistic psychology is integral to this paper, as it looks at the '*...the whole person, and the uniqueness of each individual*'. He further goes on to say that this theory is about '*the organized, consistent set of perceptions and beliefs about oneself*'. It is based on the view that people have free will and are motivated to achieve their potential and self-actualise (Maslow, 1943). Saevi, (2014) argues that Phenomenology is education works

stating that, *'Phenomenology as a methodology is not merely a method to be applied, it is implicitly also a way of seeing and living life'* (Savei, 2014:20).

Therefore, this viewpoint is at the heart of the paper, as the lived experiences of the students, is fundamental to identifying if they believe, their learning is taking place, and if the functional skills curriculum, which they are being taught, and by whom they are being taught, is effective in developing a love of literacy, for work and in their lives.

Building on from this viewpoint and thinking back to the works of Wittgenstein 1922, cited in Biletzki and Matar, (2021) relating to his views on *'language games'*, with one view being *'that speaking is part of and activity and or a forms part of life'* within this paper, I will discuss, how this *'game is played'* and how it changes based on the lived experiences of the students and staff who are either learning literacy or being taught it. Wittgenstein 1922 relates his work to *'forms of life'*, to that being influenced by: *'constantly changing, and are dependent on culture and shared human behaviours'*, therefore considering this viewpoint and that life forms: change, develop and social expectations differ, we need to critically consider, if the current functional skills literacy curriculum is adapting and changing in line with this notion.

Furthermore, we need to consider if the learners are fostering, the love of literacy poetry and rhyme, in the way intended today, or are we leading the learners, to a fixed view relating to literacy, being taught to pass a competency test?

Wittgenstein (1922) further suggests that *'forms of life change'* therefore, whilst embracing this viewpoint, we should consider the fact, that current learners being taught are different to those in the past, and that literacy is more than a tool to base



judgements of competency on, such as in the times of when the 'three R's' were important. We should be fostering a love of literacy for their everyday lives, but are we? Furthermore, whilst considering the view of contemporary literacy -functional skills literacy and in keeping with Wittgenstein's (1922) view relating to '*different life forms*' which arise, are we moulding this love of literacy for learners, in the broadest sense? What do we offer them, when teaching, which allows them to develop a love or passion for literacy? Moreover, we should consider points such as, what literacy interests the learners have and in what way are we embracing this in their teaching and learning to nurture this love of literacy? Furthermore, new words, or a modern stance on their meaning might be used in literacy today, these words and definitions, are now included in the English language and dictionaries, highlighting once again how society may influence language or meaning, compared, to what they were originally intended, therefore is this being included in their plethora of literacy knowledge? Are we growing the literacy skills which empower learners to be confidence and competent to use, them in their worlds? To this end, one should consider the view relating to, what is taught and learnt and that this should be to; better enrich the learners so that they can foster a love of: reading, writing and speaking, and that this should be because they have the passion or inclination to do so and not because they are expected to do this, to pass a test, as Wittgenstein (1922) cited in (Winter 2020) suggests '*the limits of my language means the limits of my world*' therefore it is our job as educators, to make this world as big as possible meaning educators should submerge a learner in a world filled with literacy opportunities to enable them to flourish not only to pass a test but in learning literacy skills to be successful in life.

As has been discussed above, the study of literacy and English can have a profound effect on the individuals' relationship with themselves and the world. In consideration of this we can take a look to work of Martin Seligman's' (2023), with his influential work being in the positive psychology arena, and the PERMA model, as a way of thinking about and understanding this. The Positive Psychology Movement is area of psychology which believes in focusing on, well-being and happiness and what a person can achieve and not what they cannot.

Seligman's' PERMA model links to five pillars, which enable a person to flourish. The five pillars are:

### **1. Positive Emotion: The Foundation of Well-Being**

- The first component of PERMA, Positive Emotion, emphasizing the significance of experiencing joy, gratitude, and other positive emotions in our daily lives. He explains how cultivating positive emotion, can be a stepping stone toward a more fulfilling existence.

### **2. Engagement: The Flow of a Meaningful Life**

- The concept of engagement, which involves being fully immersed in activities that provide a sense of flow and absorption. He discusses how engaging in activities that align with one's strengths and interests can lead to a sense of purpose and well-being.

### **3. Relationships**

- The importance of positive relationships as a key component of the PERMA model. He explains how nurturing meaningful relationships and building strong social bonds contribute to a flourishing life, emphasizing the role of relationships in enhancing overall well-being.

### **4. Meaning: Discovering Purpose in Life**

- The significance of finding purpose and meaning in life, exploring how aligning one's values and aspirations with a sense of purpose can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful existence.

### **5. Accomplishment: Striving and Achieving Goals**

- How setting and achieving goals that align with one's values and strengths contribute to a sense of achievement and overall well-being.

Seligman, M. cited in Pursuit of Happiness (2023)

The working definition of this will be *happiness or an increase in self-belief*, is something which this study aims to explore further. Drawing on the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC) further, and using his definition of happiness, this being '*happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim of human existence.*' Will be integral to this research. Therefore, for us to determine if a learner or teacher, has flourished, in literacy we must first, understand this concept of flourishing fully. Secondly once we understand this, we must be able to see if participants can understand the concept and judge whether they believe flourishing has taken place in relation to literacy understanding skills and knowledge in all areas of life. Drawing on the work of Bronfenbrenner, (1977) cited in Guy-Evan, (2020) as previously mentioned and how communities come together, will simultaneously be behind the development of questionnaires and meetings with participants which will be used in Chapter Four.

## **Conclusion**

Common themes that have emerged from this chapter, lead us, firstly to consider why learners in 2022 leaving education with inadequate literacy skills for industry and what is being done to challenge this? All the curricula which learners are exposed to, 'fit for purpose, relevant for industry? And what is the education sector doing, to explore what industry requirements are and how are the two working together to ensure about all stakeholder's needs are met?

Secondly, in this new approach, in the current Functional Skills Qualification in Literacy, which reinforces phonics, reading and writing, speaking, and listening and spellings, having the desired impact, on the outcomes for learners; along with vocational staff imbedding the skills in their subject areas. Furthermore, how do teachers feel about having the autonomy to be creative in their approach to curriculum delivery, whilst being able to decide which tests students sit and does this motivate and drive teachers more or do, they feel having this autonomy makes them more accountable?

Thirdly is the broader appreciation and consideration towards language and literacy as a way of better understanding oneself and the world around us. The idea of the curriculum is a key discussion here, not in respect of a qualification, but as a collection of the skills, qualities and behaviours that are necessary and vital to the living of a good life. Here we consider the importance of happiness and flourishing, which are ideas that will be returned to in later chapters.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **What is in an Ology...?**

Considerations of epistemology, ontology and methodologies are fundamental within this thesis in respect of presenting where this research lies, within the 'research traditions. This chapter aims to justify and defend the stance the research has taken relating to the thought processes behind the epistemological, ontological, and methodological approaches chosen. Further to this, in this chapter I will make clear and defend the decisions made for the approaches used with the participants, with the overall aim to compliment the research questions chosen.

**To critically discuss teachers and learners' views on learning Functional Skills Literacy.**

**RQ1 – What do Further Education Teachers need to consider when designing curriculum to develop students' literacy skills and prepare them for work in the vocational sector in Further Education?**

**RQ2 – What do teachers need to consider when designing a curriculum to develop students' literacy skills to prepare them for a love of literacy for life?**

Identifying and understanding the approaches to defend this thesis is imperative to justify its credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity as a body of legitimate research. In a section below I consider these three imperatives and outline how through the research design they remain central to this research. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Coffield et al. (2004), preliminary consideration should be taken into account "Before making any change in practice, professionals are duty bound to consider two possibilities: first, that the proposed change may make matters worse; and second, that some alternative change may be more beneficial than their preferred option" (2004: 135), when completing practice-based research therefore, this needs to remain central in this research.

Credibility in the words of *Aristotle* (384BC-322BC) is '*when a person constantly delivers on their promise*' – in this case, that the responses from the participants, are echoing their true voices, thoughts, and feelings. Moreover, Hamersley (1992) and Maxwell (1992) both have their views on this. Hamersley's (1992) *being 'that if we*

*replace certainty with confidence from the results we yield, then this adds credibility to it and that our accounts will be representations of this*'. Maxwell, (1992) suggests that *'understanding is more significant and adds validity and credibility as it is the meaning drawn from the data, which interferes this'*. Therefore, we should use the research to show an understanding of challenges and possibilities within contexts today, which is what makes this research credible as it is bringing to life, the voices of the participants. Building on from this viewpoint, this is imperative, within this study, as the research question is designed to enrich our understanding of the participants views, be it teacher education or student. It is only when we hear their views, can we gain a balanced understanding and insight into literacy teaching and learning today, from those that it is most significant to, firstly those being taught it and secondly, those teaching it. It is my belief, that only once we understand what is happening, through the eyes of those; teaching, or learning, can we utterly understand what is happening. This research is being completed as a way of 'shining a light' on the experiences for all.

In order for the light to be shone, the researcher must understand the data's credibility and significance within this research, and it is only when this is done, then can the light be shone on the participants, their views and voices. This is only done when specific actions take place within qualitative research, as this cannot be scrutinised in the same way as quantitative data can be, as often hard facts and figures are used with quantitative data, whereas with qualitative data, it is how the researcher internalises, understands and make correlations to the perspectives and experiences of the participants McLeod (2024). Therefore, it is paramount that a rigorous approach was used when conducting this research to ensure the credibility

of it. Furthermore, by ensuring that each participant's view was analysed equally, by using the coding system, this allowed for the '*truth value*' McLeod (2024) to be considered, included and drawn upon. Triangulation is used to ensure this is done. This occurred when the research spent time with the participants, firstly to build a relationship with them and secondly to develop this deeper of them, so that the participants felt at ease and shared willingly.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) created the popularity of 'member checking' to establish credibility in qualitative research. Participants are given copies of their transcripts and given the choice to 'omit' information from them which they did not including in the research. This showed the audience that participant not only took part in the research but also had a say in what was included, giving them more of a voice and allows them to feel as exposed as they chose and not what the researcher believes the audience should hear or see. Giving the participant the choice to remove information from their transcripts further strengthens the relationships with the researcher. Moreover, allowing the participants the opportunity to revisit, reflect and reconnect with their views, is critical and honours the integrity of qualitative research McKim (2023). McKim further argues, that '*this is a great tool to use, with underrepresented groups*' which this group of learners falls into so validates, the use of this tool further and supports the credibility of the research. Knapik (2006) further suggests that not only do we use the information from the participants, once they have seen it in print, once this process has taken place, the information acquired from the experience and within the transcript is perceived as 'far greater knowledge' than before.

In conclusion, McKim (2023) emphasizes that employing a member-checking method, where findings are presented to participants followed by an interview, enhances the validity of the results. Guba (2008) argues that *'credibility is one of the four key criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative a naturalistic research paradigm'* QDACity (2025) and is linked to the *'truth value'* of the information gained. It demonstrates that accuracy, authenticity and plausibility of the research. it would be remiss of me, to pledge that credibility is floorless, therefore I acknowledge that, *'absolute credibility within qualitative might be challenging'*. Within this research the term *'credibility'* has been used with the working definition being *'not a static characteristic but rather a continuous process'*. therefore, the understanding of this term, is integral to this research and the findings within it.

Therefore, with this in mind we should make sure that the data we acquire is rich in depth, honesty, and scope of the participants approached, which in this research it is. Participants, come from a range of vocational disciplines as well as teachers from a range of vocational backgrounds, however they all have a commonality, which is teaching or learning Functional Skills Literacy. To this end, appropriate sampling will take place, and the statistical treatment of the data, will remain at the centre of the research.

Ensuring the findings of the research are credible and ensuring the validity of the research is imperative of this paper, to be, taken seriously with scholars both here in the U.K and around the world. The reasoning for this that it is only when we look at something that is happening in educational contexts in a small way, can we then see if the same: issues, constraints or commonalities arise elsewhere. It is only then, that

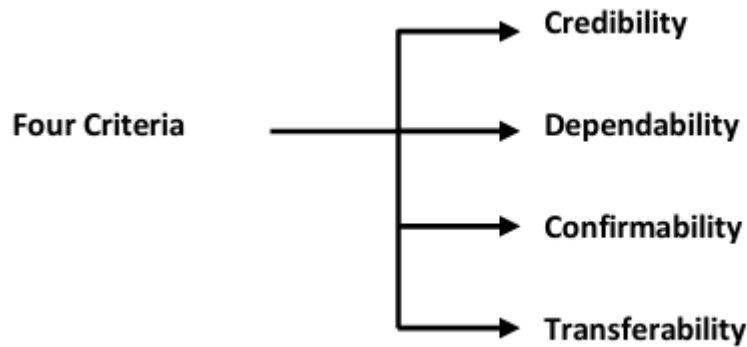


we see, if this issue is widespread and then collectively, we can aspire to elicit change, if this is what is required.

Building on the viewpoint of electing change, using Aristotle's forms of Knowledge as a lens, and using the work of LeCompte and Preissle (1993) stating that '*ontological authenticity being that the research should provide a fresh and more sophisticated understanding of a situation*', which in this thesis is something I aim to do, based on the afore mentioned reasons linked to trustworthiness, and authenticity and credibility. The similarities and differences in philosophical viewpoints relating to research, is integral to justifying and defending the methods selected and where this thesis sits in the wider context of academia/philosophy and the '*paradigm which it sits*' in Coe, (2017) In the words of Kuhn (1970) '*the old and the new paradigms are incommensurable in the sense they offer wholly different ways of understanding the world and there is no higher set of values or logic by which their relative merits can be easily compared objectively*'. Therefore, it would be inept of me, to not discuss both sides of the continuum when justifying the approach taken in this thesis.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises 'multiple elements' or 'evaluation criteria', which they are all used to be measured against. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that there are 4 in total with these being inclusive of 'credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability Cited in Alexander (2019:2).



Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Contrary to this, Elo et al. (2014) suggests the inclusion of 'authenticity'. Therefore, drawing on this notion, all 5 elements will be integral to the working definition and understanding of the term 'trustworthiness' and its meaning within this research. The '5 elements' were considered in planning the questionnaire, conducting interviews, and analysing data. The goal is to quickly build trust with the reader and encourage them to understand the significance of each research step, honouring the participants' voices and views. This research seeks to sufficiently meet each of these five elements, drawing on the works of Elo et al. (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited in Alexander (2019), which are used to guide the thought process and planning at each stage (see chart).

**Table 1.** Checklist for Researchers Attempting to Improve the Trustworthiness of a Content Analysis Study.

Phase of the content analysis study	Questions to check
Preparation phase	<p>Data collection method</p> <p>How do I collect the most suitable data for my content analysis?</p> <p>Is this method the best available to answer the target research question?</p> <p>Should I use either descriptive or semi-structured questions?</p> <p>Self-awareness: what are my skills as a researcher?</p> <p>How do I pre-test my data collection method?</p> <p>Sampling strategy</p> <p>What is the best sampling method for my study?</p> <p>Who are the best informants for my study?</p> <p>What criteria should be used to select the participants?</p> <p>Is my sample appropriate?</p> <p>Is my data well saturated?</p> <p>Selecting the unit of analysis</p> <p>What is the unit of analysis?</p> <p>Is the unit of analysis too narrow or too broad?</p>
Organization phase	<p>Categorization and abstraction</p> <p>How should the concepts or categories be created?</p> <p>Is there still too many concepts?</p> <p>Is there any overlap between categories?</p> <p>Interpretation</p> <p>What is the degree of interpretation in the analysis?</p> <p>How do I ensure that the data accurately represent the information that the participants provided?</p> <p>Representativeness</p> <p>How to I check the trustworthiness of the analysis process?</p> <p>How do I check the representativeness of the data as a whole?</p>
Reporting phase	<p>Reporting results</p> <p>Are the results reported systematically and logically?</p> <p>How are connections between the data and results reported?</p> <p>Is the content and structure of concepts presented in a clear and understandable way?</p> <p>Can the reader evaluate the transferability of the results (are the data, sampling method, and participants described in a detailed manner)?</p> <p>Are quotations used systematically?</p> <p>How well do the categories cover the data?</p> <p>Are there similarities within and differences between categories?</p> <p>Is scientific language used to convey the results?</p> <p>Reporting analysis process</p> <p>Is there a full description of the analysis process?</p> <p>Is the trustworthiness of the content analysis discussed based on some criteria?</p>

Elo et al. (2014)

Furthermore, another consideration here is the results. This being, how can the reader judge the transferability of the results and how they can be applied to another group of participants, groups, or settings (Koch, 1994; Polit & Beck, 2012). Enough time must be spent interpreting these results to support the research's authenticity and credibility.

To conclude, the findings of this study aim to accurately reflect the perspectives of the participants and transparently share the context in which the research was

conducted. Additionally, the participants' viewpoints are presented without bias or preconceived perspective, considering that the researcher is an insider within the organisation, which may introduce potential bias or alternative motivations for conducting the research.

## **Authenticity**

The significance of authenticity in social research is a key focus of this study. The term originates from the works of the Ancient Greeks, particularly Socrates and Aristotle. It is related to Aristotle's (384-322 BC) concept of 'doing good'. This research adopts this philosophical perspective as a guiding principle to ensure that findings are accurate, valid, and authentic.

Creswell (2013) emphasizes that authenticity is crucial in qualitative research, with key validation terms including: trustworthiness, verification, and authenticity. Lehman et al. (2019) highlight further, the necessity of agreeing on 'authenticity' in any research, its meaning and how it can be proven. Furthermore, Dutton (2003) associates' authenticity with being '*real, genuine, and true*', arguing that its meaning can vary but should always reflect what is considered true or real. DiMaggio (1987) support this further by stating that in order for this to be accepted or understood, a level of understanding of the social norms is required.

In this research, authenticity is defined as being 'genuine' and 'true,' as suggested by Trilling (1972:92), meaning "... *what they appear to be or claim to be.*" The findings will reflect the participants' voices, encouraging them to be 'real and genuine' in their views.

In conclusion, authenticity as connection refers to the alignment between an entity and a person, place, or time, as discussed by Lehman et al. (2019). This research has been conducted at a Further Education College across two campuses, involving learners and teachers engaged with Level 1 Functional Skills English. To maintain the ethical principle of authenticity, no additional respondents will be included in this study.

### **Credibility**

To illuminate the findings, the researcher must understand the data's credibility and significance within this research. This is only done when specific actions take place within qualitative research, as this cannot be scrutinised in the same way as quantitative data can be, as often hard facts and figures are used with quantitative data, whereas with qualitative data, it is how the researcher internalises, understands and make correlations to the perspectives and experiences of the participants McLeod (2024). Therefore, it is paramount that a rigorous approach was used when conducting this research to ensure the credibility of it. Furthermore, by ensuring that each participant's view was analysed equally, by using the coding system, this allowed for the '*truth value*' McLeod (2024) to be considered, included and drawn upon. Triangulation is used to ensure this is done. This occurred when the research spent time with the participants, firstly to build a relationship with them and secondly to develop this deeper of them, so that the participants felt at ease and shared willingly.

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These include Dependability (the consistency and stability of the research process and findings), Confirmability (the objectivity and neutrality of the researcher), and Transferability (the applicability and generalizability of the findings to other contexts).

Ontology is *'the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being,'* everything which exists, (Aristotle b384-d322BC). This research uses Aristotle's views, relating to *'being a systematic thinker'* as well as his approach in relation to *grounding our views in the sensible world of experience* (Aristotle, ibid). Staying with this view, this thesis foci, is study of 'human form,' this being human experience from within the Further Education sector in the U.K. Moreover, the main foci being on the 'study of the nature and characteristics of society'- functional skills literacy teachers and learners. Phenomenology compliments the stance of this thesis, as I critically discuss with the participants, their views in relation to their educational journeys and experiences. The main aim here is to illuminate what is working or not for them to enable them to achieve and feel successful, as well as shining a light on their frustrations or successes, with a view to the participants understanding what works for them or not and what changes they might be required to make, to address some of the points which are poignant to them moving forward. Moreover, it is only, when a person, stops, and thinks do they truly look at the situation and in the process of reflection can they begin to address their thoughts feeling and emotions linked to what is happening (Kolb, 1984 and Driscoll, 2007). In this study the work of Gibbs,

(1998) will be used as this links fully to the '*thoughts feelings and emotions*' within the reflection process.

I acknowledge the work of Plato (428-348 BC) and accept that in some fields this would be the approach to take, however I do not believe that the world is dependent on *universal forms*, Plato (428-348 BC) nor do I believe that the knowledge I find is *invariable* Plato (428-348 BC) and cannot be changed. I believe that when we are working with human life, every person is organic, they can grow and change, they can develop and how they develop may be dependent on a range of factors, which is what this thesis intends to explore.

Whilst acknowledging there are several ontological approaches such as: realism, constructivism, positivism and interpretivism Saunders al. (2012). This study aligns itself with the constructivism ontological stance – Constructivism argues *that a person's brain is constantly trying to balance new given information with previously acquired knowledge and experiences*, which is done through social discourse and experience Piaget cited in Aldhabi (2022). Building on from this view, the constructivism philosophical paradigm in research is adopted. This entails gathering information from the participants, allowing them to have a voice, and considerations of their own feelings and emotions, with the use of reflection being used, to guide them bring their thoughts to the fore, with an objective of bringing their views to life. This in turn provides me with an opportunity to apply appropriate research techniques in analysis and seeking to understand these experiences is imperative. The techniques chosen are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.



Epistemology derives from the Greek *episteme*, meaning knowledge, and *logos*, meaning reason or argument therefore we must consider '*how can what is assumed to exist be known*' Hammersley (1992) and Coe et al., (2014) as well as how do we know what we know? In the words of Aristotle's (384-322 BC) '*we can ground our beliefs in the sensible world of experience*, this being the discussions and interactions with the participants themselves challenging the view of Plato (ibid) and his epistemology, being '*we can only uncover, what is already there*' and that new knowledge cannot be found.

Within the field of Epistemology there is a continuum, with interpretivist at one end and positivist at the other. The interpretive/social constructivism epistemological approach can be universally understood to be....

*.... a branch of epistemology which is focused on the assessment of the differences between humans as social actors. The issue of difference is emphasized on the difference between conducting research among people rather than objects such as medicines and computers. In this philosophy, the interpretation of social roles has been presented with respect to their own set of meanings. In addition, we interpret the social roles of others in accordance with our own set of meanings.*

Thakurta and Chetty, 2015

With the positivism approach being that studies should be conducted on a large scale, so that they can gain an understanding of an overall trend of a situation and that scientific methods should be used to gain an understanding of the situation. This approach aims to explore; trends, comparisons, and generality to use numbers and quantitative data, so that they can be used to add meaning (Thompson, 2015).

To support this epistemological viewpoint through the Aristotelian lens of forms and using the interpretivist approach, this research looks at what is happening now, with

a view, to understanding the 'lived experiences' of the participants as this is: ever changing, fluid and malleable, which is dependent on contributing factors. Therefore, the work of Bronfenbrenner's theory (1917), relating to ecological systems and the knowledge, which comes from this, will be used as an anchor, as this can help me interpret the viewpoints of both the learners and the teachers while they are on their journeys, learning literacy or teaching it. This approach is important as I will gain and understanding through social conversations relating to how they feel about literacy and what their emotions are, as well as how these may change depending on when they happen and what is happening in the participants world at specific times. Therefore, timing of the social conversations, will be key, in finding out as much as possible about their journeys and experiences illuminating their thoughts, feeling and emotions at these said times as they may have peaks and troughs in their experiences, and this is something which I am keen to capture, to fully understand their experiences. Moreover, way of understanding and gathering information from the participants is key, as the approach I am taking is one, which interprets their views, through the personal lens. Furthermore, I do not believe that the world is dependent on *universal forms*, Plato (428-348 BC) nor do I believe that the knowledge I find, is *invariable* Plato (428-348 BC). I believe the opposite to this, and that learning from experiences can lead to a deeper understanding and from this, we can explore change. Furthermore, neither do I believe that we can *only uncover what is already there* Plato (428-348 BC), I believe that through investigation and understanding of people, can we then see what is happening for them and we can learn from this and that *physical things such as experiences* closely examined can lead to a greater understanding Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Whilst this thesis does not sit wholly in the political arena, there is a political stance for which this paper is written, and that is that it aims to 'bring to the fore' (Coe, 2017) the views of the learners and the teachers, emphasising their views in society today, with the hope that reflection may take place and changes happen, for all who have a vested interest: teachers learners, stakeholders and society, as we are ever evolving.

Using Aristotle's (384-322 BC) ontological and epistemological stance, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the participants in this study, by understanding their experiences, beliefs about themselves and their abilities, challenges, and frustrations. Understanding epistemology and where my views sit within this field are integral to ensuring the participants views are justified and add meaning in the wider context in educational research.

As this thesis explores the lived experiences of people learning and teaching literacy, I believe that some discussion relating to phenomenology is required as the approaches which I intend to use naturally align themselves with the fundamentals within the theory of phenomenology. Phenomenology is defined as '*casual explanations of the unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions, linking truth to illustration*' (Spielberg and Walter, 2022). These two along with others, built on the works of their forefathers namely, Johann Henrich Lambert, (b1728-d1777), in highlighting his views relating to '*The theory of knowledge – distinguishing truth from illustration and error*', as well as Edmund Husserl, (b1859-d1938) views relating to, '*logical investigations*' within the field of phenomenology, linking to the thoughts, feelings and emotions of people. Using the works of Husserl (ibid) and his views

relating to - people subscribing to the belief of ... '*word watch – Zu den Sachen selbst – To the thing's themselves*'. Therefore, keeping this at the fore, this thesis aims to illuminate the views *from the things* themselves- the participants, as it is only, once we fully understand their views, that we can begin to suggest change or remain with the status quo. The sole purpose of this this investigation, is to uncover the views and perceptions of people being educators and learners today in relation to learning or teaching functional skills literacy.

Coe, 2017 suggests that ... *phenomena are more than the sum of parts and can be understood only holistically*'. Therefore, considering this view, we need to understand the parts of the beings, to analyse their thoughts feelings and emotions, when learning functional skills literacy or teaching it. It would be remis of me, not to acknowledge other perspectives which sit in this field, such as *Plato (428-348 BC), and his views relating to 'Forms'* and how they are invariable and immutable, and dependent on universal abstracts. Immutable being – unchangeable, fixed, or permanent. However, as this research is interested in highlighting an understanding, through lived experiences, therefore acknowledging that these experiences are *fluid* and *not fixed* Aristotle (384-322 BC) is integral to doing justification to the participants in this study and using an alternative approach would be an injustice to them, as Plato (428-348 BC) believed...*you can only uncover what is already there* and this is something which I do not believe, I believe we can learn lots every day in every situation in education and from this new understanding and meaning can be formed.

The inductive reasoning research method will be implemented as I have started with a broad understanding and through observing the students and teachers involved in Functional Skills English, so that by doing this, I can acquire a detailed understanding of a specific matter or subject – this being, Teachers and Learners views on learning Functional Skills Literacy. Once I have understood what is happening for both the students and teachers, I can then decide if there are some patterns or similarities from the participants and I will then form a hypothesis which will then yield some points for discussion and possibly some further exploration.

## **Methodologies**

In this research principles and approaches of empirical research are adopted to illuminate the views of the participants with a view to seek understanding and analysis as to what is working for them whilst learning or teaching functional skills literacy in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. As Functional Skills Literacy curricula was introduced over 2007 over 15 years ago, questions endure as to whether it is still fit for purpose, something already discussed in Chapter One. Calfee, and Chambliss (2005) define empirical research as a *'systematic approach for answering certain types of questions, which is done, by ways of direct and indirect observations linked to a specific phenomenon with the core focus being on 'real life experiences'* Creswell and Creswell (2018). This approach is used, as a way of trying to answer a social human problem, which I believe is present with the Functional Skills Literacy Curriculum today. Drawing from the works of Tyler (1949) and Doll (1993). Doll (1993) argues that that curriculum should be *'rich, relational, recursive and rigours'*,

but is it? Furthermore, Doll (1993) suggests that what is chosen in a curriculum *'is a selection of what is deemed to be worthwhile knowledge'*, for decisions to be made about what is 'worthwhile knowledge', studying people who are learning Functional Skills Literacy or teaching it, should be fundamental in understanding the problem or context, with a view to being, open minded to change or reflection, within this curriculum, to challenge the status quo and promote equality in society.

As mentioned earlier an understanding of phenomenology is imperative, therefore the methods selected are to remain loyal, to what phenomenology is. This study will focus on the *'experiences and consciousness'* of the participants, as it is the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants which is the phenomena being understood Hasa, (2017). The approaches used in this research have been selected to naturally allow *'questions'* to emerge from the participants to understand their views, thoughts feelings and emotions, with a view a view to *'trying to understand it rather than to transform it,'* Cohen et al. (2007). Furthermore, this study seeks to comprehend and interpret the communications of the subjects, *'thorough the eyes of the participants'* (Habermas 1974) as a way of understanding educational: experiences, facts, as well as knowledge linked to workplace expectations, which impact or influences their lived experiences when teaching or learning functional skills literacy, as the true understanding of phenomenology is *'a study which is designed to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of unique participants, Hasa, (2017),* so that we can offer 'complete understanding' of a given educational situation, with a view to drawing some conclusions from it. As I am completing questionnaires – semi structures, this supports the suggestions of the use of the phenomenological approach as interviews are the main method of data

collection, which can then focus on various views from the differing participants. Key to this method, is that the researcher must be skilled in interpreting the information shared from those being researched by the observer.

To fully understand what is happening, critical theory and critical theory in educational research and the meaning of these, it is essential in understanding the context and the problem. Critical theory being described by Cohen et al (2007:26) as '*[the] intention is to not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them.*' This approach is used as a way of uncovering what is already there, and add legitimacy to the views of the researched, as a way of being transformative in society and to give social democracy to all. Critical theory used in research in educational establishments is integral to research and a key point to note, as who decides, how we address or readdress any equality or inequality issues which are present in educational settings and society today, along with who decides what people should be taught, how this is done and why? How is this then used in society and why is it required. Thinking back to chapter one, this is decided by the government and the employers, but are they the best people to be deciding what people should be taught and on what basis are they making their views based on? Bernstein (1971:47) argues, '*how society select, classifies, distributes, transmits, and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public reflects both on the distribution of power and the principles of social control.* Therefore, understanding the social control is important to place this fully in context.

Within this research, I will be using the working definition on critical theory, this being that we only understand educational situations, based on the context in which we

encounter them and how our understanding of them influences our own theoretical knowledge and understanding of them. This will be the lens, in which I will approach this research.

As I said before, this research does not have an overtly political stance, however if the majority voice, naturally has a common theme, then this will be shared as a collective as a way of sharing their views. Therefore, using this approach and hearing the views and voices of all parties involved allows me to fully understand the situation as they see it today. Drawing on the works of Paulo Freire (1921-1997) using his views relating to the point, *'that education cannot be divorced from politics and that the acts of teaching and learning are considered as political acts themselves.'* Therefore, with this view in mind, we should be mindful as educators of the political agenda we directly or indirectly bring into the classroom. Furthermore, Freire (1921-1997) believed that learners can emancipate themselves and that they are pivotal in changing their life chances and experiences but that this must come from within and together with society and education we can change and develop this. As an educator is something which I fundamentally believe in and is why this research is being completed as I believe we can all be liberated with knowledge and support. I do not believe learners to be *'empty vessels,'* I believe that we can co-construct our learning and knowledge together and that when we meet in the middle learners can be liberated and change. It is society and league tables which make students feel like failures however in reality if they have more knowledge today than yesterday, then we have done our jobs well. But interestingly does the literacy teacher feel the same way? Or are their views about what they do based on the pressures which they have to elicit success, progress, and pass exams?



Moreover, the point here is to recognise, the reasoning behind this and to identify what is working for them or not. We have considered, what we need to do to change, so that all that are involved, feel satisfied and have had their voices heard and emancipate them. In order to do this, we must firstly, understand the political agenda, in which the functional skills curriculum is built in the United Kingdom (McLaren, 1995 and Leistyna et al. 1996) *argue that 'it is only when we understand the power behind a curriculum can we truly understand the empowerment of the individuals and the society they are in. therefore, using this viewpoint,* Therefore, It is only when we acknowledge this, can we then begin to understand the ripples in society which may be apparent and the views, which learners may have, relating to their personal journeys whilst they are teaching functional Skills Literacy, or being taught it, in society in modern day Britain. I know, in my career, that the learners who I teach, have changed so much over the last decade for many reasons such as: economic migrants arriving and learners being new to the United Kingdom, as well as parents living with financial constraints and working more hours which takes their focus away from their children. Equally to this, there has been time constraints placed on teachers to educate the learners, as well as inequalities in society, linked to IT access and of late, the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and loss of teaching prior to them arriving in Further Education. To this end, society in education has changed a lot, but has the expectations in the functional skills literacy curriculum changed or is it that those involved in deciding what should make a student employable and what should go into curriculum are just out of date?

**Reflection... Why do we need to reflect?**

Cohen, et al., (2007) further suggest that '*reflection informs action*' this being at the heart of this study. Haberman's' (1972) work known as, hermeneutic interest – with this being '*an understanding of other views and perspectives*' underpins the approach this study will take; however, the work of Smyth (1989) will be used in this study. Both support this view of reflection, and both have a four-stage process with Smyth's (1989) process being:

*Description (what am I doing)*  
*Information (What does it mean?)*  
*Confrontation (How did I come to be like this?)*  
*Reconstruction (How might I do things differently?)*

Smyth, (1989).

### **The Pilot Study**

Using the work of Smyth (1989) and reflection, I decided to conduct a small-scale pilot study, where six candidates were spoken to over coffee and cake. I aim of this, was to find out what points were significant to them and help me prepare for this larger scale study. I wanted to understand their views, relating to their journeys so that the questions asked in the main study, would illuminate their views. Initially the Likert scale cited at Jamieson (2023), was used to find out what their views were relating to themselves on their literacy journeys. I have however, decided to move away from this approach as this did not yield the information which I could easily understand and it felt very 'closed' where the information I was hoping for, should have been the start of the discussion not the end.

Two teachers were participated, and their interpretation of the questions posed, has help me to modify and refine the last version, as, once again I was hoping for this to be more of a conversation however some of the questions, did not allow this natural

flow of conversation therefore these changed also. Moreover, understanding their stance allowed me to tailor the final research to be more specific and focused so that the end products within the research really got to the heart of the significant issue for the teachers and to shine a light on the participants voices, Chandler, Anstey, and Ross (2015)

## **Methods in Research**

### **The Final Study**

The Methods used are a mixed method approach, with, this being where the research uses both a qualitative and quantitative approach to bring the research to life, allowing the researcher '*to explore diverse perspectives and uncover relationships that exist between the intricate layers of our multifaceted problems*' Shorten and Smith (2017), so that we can understand the issues, with phenomena, in a panoramic view from different viewpoints and through a variety of lenses. An **inductive reasoning** research methodological stance is adopted to facilitate this as mentioned above. This choice has been selected based on the formal work of Aristotle (384BC-322BC) linked to **syllogism and logic**, this being, that we start with what we think we know, we then work through a series of logical steps, from the general to the specific and then we form conclusions based on this (Cohen et al. 2007). Systematic reasoning takes place during this time, which allows us to form a view and draw conclusions. A criticism of this approach is that it begins with an *opinion or preconceived notion*, Cohen et al (2007), which can inevitably cause bias to the findings, and that a generalisation can be formed, therefore, this is something, which I must be mindful of. Additionally, a contradiction of this approach is, *scientific reasoning*, and how much can be added here and in what way, can this research be

completed again, using this same approach, and is it credible? Determination to be true to this stance is integral in this research to ensure its validity and credibility once again, therefore, to this end, I must ensure, that we can replicate this research, in the same in the future, and that the approaches which are used can be used again, therefore, they must be transparent. I can present the findings in a sterile way, using charts and numbers however, this is not the approach I have taken, as the participants are not lab rats, who can be poked or prodded, to see cause and effect, and be measured. I must consider their emotions and the effects on them, be sensitive to this and only by careful deduction and interpretation of their individual comments, thoughts, feels and emotions, can this take place, whilst being sensitive to the world they live in and the environments in which the research has taken place (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Drawing on the works of Kerlinger (1970) and his views relating to science, I have adopted the '*dynamic view*' meaning that this is '*an activity*' which is undertaken, so we can learn from it. It is only then, once the '*activity*' has taken place, we can represent it, so that we are true to the findings and understand the meaning of them.

Kara (2015) defines methodology as '*a contextual framework for research, a coherent and logical scheme based on views, beliefs, and values, that guides the choices researchers make*' therefore the methods which are chosen, to shine a light on the views of the participants must be true to this, in conclusion within this research the Qualitative research methods will be used, which are to '*... describe, portray or interpret information such as individual views and discuss commonalities, differences and similarities*' (Cohen, et al, 2007 and Shorten and Smith, 2017) . This will be used with the participants in the following way, as the participant group is

small, therefore understanding each of their views, is paramount for this research to be deemed credible.

The phenomena being studied, will be released to the participants early on, so that they fully understand the purpose of the study and the stance, which I have on it.

The participants will be contacted, three times in a 9-month period (September-June 2023) so that I can understand their journeys and experiences.

### **Knowing who they are - Profiles of the learners.**

A profile of the students which participated in research can be found below. This includes the student pseudonym that age category ethnicity and how many GCSE attempts have been made prior to being placed on the functional skills curriculum who stop it also identifies if they had any support needs at the time however for confidentiality purposes the need has not been disclosed.

<b>Student</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>GCSE English Attempts – Teacher *assessed Covid</b>	<b>Support Needs</b>	<b>Meetings Oct Feb May</b>
Piglet	16	White British	None	Declared	3
Tigger	18	White British	2* 1 in school 1 in college	None declared	3
Pooh	16	White British	1 * 1 in school	Declared	3
Eeyore	18	White British	2 * 1 in school 1 in college	Declared	3
Christopher Robin	19	White British	3* 1 in school	Declared	3

			2 in college		
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<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Highest Qualification and subject area</b>	<b>Current Teaching Responsibilities and level.</b>	<b>Meetings Oct Feb May</b>
Charles Dickens	41-50	White British	Foundation Degree Early Years	Foundation level and GCSE	3
Galbaldon	31-40	White British	B A Hons Sociology	Foundation level and GCSE	3
Jane Austen	41-50	White British	B A Hons English	Foundation level and GCSE	3
Ian Rankin	41-50	Mixed White	B A Hons Art History	Foundation level and GCSE	3
Hardy	51-60	White British	Level 4 in Health and Social Care	Foundation Level	3

### **The Approach!**

A survey was used initially, using metaphors, to gain an understanding of how learners feel about and learning literacy, which was followed up with a discussion, to elaborate on the metaphor chosen. The reasoning for this, was to gain a deeper insight into the views of the learners, and to ascertain how they feel about learning literacy. Following on from this, two different surveys took place simultaneously, one for the teachers and one for the students. The questions within them, were tailored specifically to the stance in which they participate in the study takes place. Microsoft Forms was used to capture the data. Moving on from this, video meeting took place, where the students and teachers shared their experiences with me, as a way of gaining a deeper insight, their world of teaching or learning functional skills literacy. This information was used to create a systematic analysis of the information, as well as amalgamating key issues emerging throughout this study. The use of case

studies and verbatim accounts of the individuals' responses to questions posed has been used, as in the words of Cohen et al, 2007 *'this is the most powerful way for allowing the participants voices to be heard'*. The intention here was to allow for the explaining of the phenomena being studied.

Method	Method description	Participants	Alignment to research questions	Data Analysed
Method 1	Cake and coffee Group meetings- Oct	6 Student participants	RQ 1 RQ 2	October 22
Method 2	Teacher 1:1 Initial zoom meetings – Oct	6 Teacher Participants	RQ 1 RQ 2	November 22
Method 3	1:1 meeting with students – Feb/May	6 Student participants	RQ 1 RQ 2	April 23
Method 4	1:1 Semi Structured interviews – Feb/May	6 Teacher Participants	RQ 1 RQ 2	July 23

Table 1: an overview of the research methods used in this interpretivist synthesis.

In this study the *'descriptive and inferential statistical method'* is used Cohen et al. (2007), which is to *'describe and present data.'* This approach is used to represent any commonalities which are found, and some discussion around *'distance travelled'* is included to bring the case studies of the learners to life and the data will be evaluated. For this method to be accepted, discussion around *'variables'* needs to take place and acknowledgement that these exists. Variable defined in research as *'a construct, in which the researcher is interested in'* Cohen at al., (2007), in this case, respect for the teacher who is educating them and the thought of betrayal when

speaking about their experiences of learning literacy, could be considered the 'variable', and may influence the responses given. Another reason could be '*the direction of the relationship*,' in this case the teacher as the year goes on, as this may change depending on multiple factors. Therefore, acknowledgement of the 'range of factors,' which can influence the outcome, must be taken into consideration, when analysis the data produced and relationships linked to changes being linear or not, is explored.

Trochim (2000) suggests that there are three types of research questions:

- *Descriptive questions - that aim to explore or to describe what is currently taking place.*
- *Relational questions - which seek to determine associations between linked objects.*
- *Causal questions - which determine whether one or more variables lead to specific outcomes*

*cited in Smith, (2020:25)*

**RQ1 – What do Further Education Teachers need to consider when designing curriculum to develop students' literacy skills and prepare them for work in the vocational sector in Further Education?**

**RQ2 – What do teachers need to consider when designing a curriculum to develop students' literacy skills to prepare them for a love of literacy for life?**

These research questions have been written in accordance with Trochim (2000) and are descriptive in nature, are from a relativist viewpoint and are trying to draw out information from the participants. Each questionnaire drew on the work of Trochim



(2000), with questions aiming '*to explore or to describe what is currently taking place*'.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics often sit on the edge of a research project; however, they are integral to it.

The researcher is a student at Sunderland University and as such the ethical approval was sought and gained prior to the commencement of the study and the regulations for conducting educational research have been adhered to.

Furthermore, considerations of the guidelines proposed by British Educational Research Association – BERA (2018) have been integral throughout this research by adhering to the main themes of the research.

BERA (2018:3) principles underpinning the guidelines agreed by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) (2015) which state the following:

- a. Social science is fundamental to a democratic, and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods on perspectives.*
- b. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities.*
- c. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.*
- d. All social scientists should act regarding their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.*
- e. Social science should aim to maximum benefit and minimise harm.*

*BERA, (2018:3)*

I agree with these principles and have worked within them by ensuring their privacy is met, along with the participants which have been chosen to have been from a diverse background including different ethnic groups, ages, and gender. I have also been true to the research, by selecting the most suitable approaches and methods, which best fit, with this type of research, as discussed earlier. By doing this, I can

illuminate the voices of the participants, whilst being true to them and share their lived experiences, this is discussed earlier in this chapter.

Firstly, my organisations ethical considerations were adhered to, and a duty of care offered to all students, should any harm arise from the study (BERA, 2018). The students in this study, will be aged 16-18 therefore, the BERA guidelines, which exist in partnership with the United Nations Convention of Children's Rights, with the best interests of the child being adhered too and no harm has been inflicted on them as being part of this research, approaches as to how this is done is discussed later in this chapter.

BERA, 2018:5 further state that guidance for researchers to help them with their 'conduct principles' is a consideration and suggest five headings, which a researcher should be mindful of, these being:

- *Responsibilities to the participants*
- *Responsibilities to sponsors, clients, and stakeholders in research*
- *Responsibilities of the community of educational researchers*
- *Responsibilities for publication and dissemination*
- *Responsibilities for teachers' wellbeing and development*

*BERA, (2018:5)*

Considering the five 'conduct principles' how I have met my responsibilities to the participants is clearly set out in this chapters, however considerations to the stakeholders is something, which I have not discussed. As this research sits in the field of Social Sciences, using the underpinning views from the Academy for Social Science (2023) who are the '*sectors leading independent voice in the UK*', must be a consideration for this research, as this research sits in the field of F.E.

Acknowledging the work done by the organisation which plays a vital role in education, government, and business, requires current understanding of 'key issues' in the education sector, so that they can guide the government on endemic issues, which are reflective of current practice and can be responsive.

Consideration of the second principle– responsibilities to the community of educational researchers is something which needs discussion. Firstly within this organisation, there are only around 5 people in the research community, which comes from around 800 staff, therefore a tiny percentage, however the research community extends further that this, firstly to my peers on this research journey with me and secondly, to all those researchers globally as it is only when we come together as a community can we envisage our voices are heard. The Quality Assurance Authority for higher Education- QAA (2017) suggest that *community implies something shared between people: a place, connection, experience, identity or a set activities or practices*. This is something which I agree with, therefore for me to be true to the research community, I ensured that it was completed in the set timeframe, to the best of my ability and with integrity, completing this to any lesser standard, would have been a disservice to the participants who gave their time freely and willingly.

Publication and dissemination of research is another principle of working within the research community which requires consideration. Morin-Gonzalez (2017:1) suggests that by doing this it *...helps in increasing the visibility of research outputs, public engagement in science and innovation, and confidence of society in research*. *Effective dissemination and communication are vital to ensure that the conducted*

*research has a social, political, or economic impact'*, which is the aim of this research as this sits in the field of social science- educational research. This research has been shared at the International Practice Focused Research in Education Conference and book of abstract internationally and nationally. The research has also been shared on, LinkedIn and the online community, at Sunderland University at the and at the afore mentioned conference and at the College of West Anglia in the further education department, teacher training, and English department. The participants were made aware from the onset of this research so that they were fully informed of where they may be able to find their voices and use them to bring to life their views and lived experiences. Furthermore, by sharing the findings this '*enables your research to be built upon, giving your data greater intrinsic value, and avoiding unnecessary research duplication. Furthermore, access to datasets for secondary use can benefit those researchers who otherwise lack the resources to meet the costs of collecting new data*' Cambridge University (2023). Moreover, it is only when our findings are shared beyond academic publications, can we begin to address the social disparities which arise, which plague our society, and only then, can we begin to shine a light on the issue and begin the conversation. To conclude, if we share the findings of this research, and allow our voices to be heard, then maybe across the nation everyone will sing in harmony and all the voices will be heard as a chorus, then they may be listened to.

And finally, teachers' wellbeing and development principle – This being how do we ensure that the researcher remains mentally well. In this research I ask the participants to share their lived experiences. I am mindful that, they may become emotional as this may be a provocative subject for them to discuss which may then

lead to them becoming distressed. It is important that I acknowledged that I am there to understand the lived experiences, however if these were negative, it is not my job to fix that experience. I can show empathy, sign post them to support, as discussed later in this chapter, but fundamentally my role is to find out the information and then to share it through my research. Drawing on the works of Holland (2007), *'Emotional responses to fieldwork can serve as a valuable tool to the researcher, delivering deeper, more empathic understanding, analysis, and interpretation*, which is something I agree with. Moncur, (2013) suggests *'...productive fieldwork relationships require "emotional labour and such labour can be draining" as "...empathic relationships may generate distress, and ...being privy to accounts of distressing events may in turn generate distress'*. Therefore, this is something which I am mindful of, and the support mechanisms that are put in place are done as a way of addressing this. To this end, the, Social Research Associations- SRA, (2003:24-25) argues that *...A further obligation is extended to research managers, who "may... have a legal obligation in terms of health and safety regulations to ensure that risk to field researchers is minimised" Therefore by having these safety measures in place'*, is a way of enabling me to discuss any issues in a confidential environment, which I felt are problematic, as a way of 'off-loading' rather than 'internalising' these, remain mentally well and complete the research as a way of [attempting] to minimise the risk of physical and/or mental harm to themselves and to their colleagues from the conduct of research, SRA (2003:25). This research will not include any incidents of when this may have taken place, as this would distract from the focus of the research and seem like a - Dear Deidre session or details of the confessional!

## **What I did and why – The proof is in the pudding!**

The participants views and comments have been anonymized as researchers have the responsibility to protect the participants identify and the researchers have ‘... *the responsibility to ensure they do not disclose identifiable information about participants through various processes designed to anonymise them*’, (Wiles et al 2006:3 cited in Smith, 2020:106). Therefore, making sure a robust system to protect their identity has been integral to adhere to the ethical considerations for the protection of the participants in this instance the pseudonyms used have been selected by the participants themselves and have been used throughout this research.

BERA (2018) states that the aspiration of educational researchers is integral to ensuring credibility and trustworthiness of the research and suggests the following reasons.

*Educational researchers aim to extend knowledge and understanding in all areas of educational activity and from all perspectives, including those of learner’s educators’ policymakers and the public. The association recognises that the community of educational research is multidisciplinary and diverse and its application of research approaches and philosophical positions. Concepts such as ‘data’, ‘reliability’, ‘validity’, ‘credibility’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘subjectivity’, and ‘objectivity’, may therefore be understood and legitimately applied in different ways.*  
BERA (2018:3)

Considering this statement from BERA (2018) which is something I agree with, I must ensure that I am true to these seven concepts when conducting the research, this will be done by self-checking how I gain the information, use it, store it, and present it, as it only then I am able to be true to the participants and their voices .

Furthermore, whilst completing the research I ensure that I allowed academic freedom with the use of the finding, this was done my allowing the participants to

choose their pseudonyms, as discussed earlier, and will be discussed more later in this chapter. I further allowed them to choose a location where we should meet to have the conversations and focus groups, as it was imperative that the participants felt comfortable when sharing with me their lived experiences. This I believed, helped to build 'trust with them along with spending time to explain the research and why this was important to me. Ensuring that they fully understood what the focus is and checking this regularly is a way to remain true to them, as they are level 1 learners, and some have memory problems, therefore repeatedly going through this with them, reminded them of what is being researched and why. This then has allowed me to illuminate their voices, in good conscious that I have gained their knowledge with their consent on each occasion. The same approach was not required for the teachers who participated, as they required a brief reminder of the focus only.

The information has been recorded and stored on password protected devices, in line with GDPR, 2018 regulations and the BERA ethical Guidelines (2018) and the coding for the anonymity and the recordings have not been stored together. The findings have been presented in a report for Sunderland University and will be shared with them only all participants were informed from the outset the purpose of this research and who may have access to it when it is completed (see appendix 3 and 4).

Secondly, consent has been obtained from candidates and the right to withdraw shared, along with acquiring information from the 'sample group' using a transparent model of communication concerning the; 'purpose aims and vision' along with how the research will be 'disseminated' (Hall, 2014), to be as transparent as possible,

with a view to not doing any harm. Furthermore, sensitivity relating to 'socio-economic backgrounds and 'age' considerations will be adhered to so as not to prejudice candidates as they are some of the most vulnerable learners in education do to the social demographic of the students' participants (The Equality Act, 2010). Learners will be implicated in this research by 'case study-lived experiences' inference and anonymity will be used to maintain confidentiality, adhering to General Data Protection Regulations, 2018 guidelines thus valuing individual's privacy and remaining free from prejudice (GDPR, 2018) as afore mentioned. Furthermore, as I have a dual role within this group as 'teacher and researcher' I will make the role of researcher explicit as suggested by BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018). As I work for the organisation, confidentiality for the teachers will be respected as I am their colleague, and this will not be shared with their line manager or senior leaders within the organisation, prior to being anonymized as this research is not being conducted for the organisation I work for. Participant's gender will not be shared as this is not a gender-based study and pseudonyms will be used, these were selected from the participants themselves.

Sensitivity towards the participants has been paramount as these are some of our most vulnerable learners therefore ensuring they felt informed and can ask for support was also part of the gatekeeping expectations, therefore students were offered support whilst being part of the study from the mentor teams. No foreseen distress has been identified however if this did arise, from being part of this study, pastoral support group number was given, as it would be remiss of me to not think that some of the learners might become emotional when talking about their experiences with literacy. An opt out option was shared with all participants, with a



deadline given, which set as, at the point of which the information is synthesised and submitted to the study.

The students were given, focused questions for them to respond to, with a view to these being repeated to them in the discussions and focus groups so that I was confident that they have understood the meaning behind the questions, As the authentic voice, thoughts feelings and emotions of the participants is what this study is aimed at eliciting and illuminating. Once this discussion had taken place then there was a follow up meeting with the students arranged. Their views will be reviewed later in the year to see if their views have changed with the integral aim to be to obtain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences of learning literacy and their journeys.

The students have been selected from their teachers, and they have been asked to select participants, who both engage with English and learners who are disengaged, so that a balanced viewpoint could be obtained. Meeting with the students face to face to discuss my research to ensure they understood what I was trying to stimulate from them is imperative to this research being successful and credible and that they were given the chance to ensure informed consent was given. The opportunity to raise 'silent questions' by reaching out to me on the e-mail which was given to them and discussed as being an experienced lecturer in F.E, this informed my thought process around what might be a barrier to obtaining as much information as possible, therefore was added into the ethical considerations.

The teacher participants have come from the English department across campuses in FE sector. Teachers have been given the chance to opt in the research and information has been shared with them how they can opt out. The teacher participants have had shared with them a brief outline of the research on two occasions. In the first instance shared by their line leader and then secondly by me. The reasoning behind this was so that they knew then line manager gave approval for this so that they could speak freely without any repercussions and then formal written consent was obtained with an opt out option for all participants made available. This information and instructions were clear and unambiguous and detailed as to how they could withdraw from the study without having to justify their decisions, as part of the gatekeeping agreement with Sunderland University.

Two different consent letters were used so that the considerations of those reading and understanding them has been considered, as there are two defined participant groups, (learner/teacher) to ensure that they are as informative as possible for all participants. One has been created at a literacy level of understanding for the participants, as we understand that level 1 learners may have some comprehension difficulties; therefore, it is imperative this literature is produced in a way which they fully understand and can fully consent to. The second one is for the teachers therefore this was clear in explanation and definition however used complex language.

Thirdly, when considering GDPR, 2018 regulations, I ensured that the gate keepers from the 'online world' were approached in relation to storing this research along with my findings. This information has been shared with the participants in the debriefing

session and in paper formats. All participants were made aware that the data from this research will be stored and used for a total of 3 years (GPDR,2018).

And fourthly the risk of potential harm. There was none perceived however if a learner became distressed due their views on their abilities in English, then they were offered support on campus by the mentors. Information was shared with them about no judgements being made about their abilities in English and that it is just an inquiry to see how they learn and what they learn and what needs to change if anything. Learners are reassured that their responses would be taken seriously and would be respected and that if there was a decision for data to be destroyed then no further reference would be made to this information.

The staff also shared information about the study and the reasoning being it. Staff have been offered reassurance that the research is not looking into their teaching abilities at all, or their outcomes, however, some might have become distressed, happy or angered when they were reflective, therefore a 24-hour well-being support line number was given to them when they agreed to be part of the study, in case there may be a need for it.

The researcher in this study adhered to the ethical codes of conduct and acted within the boundaries and guidelines set by the ethical approval committee of Sunderland University. Throughout their interactions with the participants the researcher was mindful off their actions and behaviours and that their interpretation is presented honestly and that a true representation of their lived experiences is expressed.

Within research there is the axiological dimension which involves our choice is from conception interpretation to conclusion. Drawing on the works of Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:28) *Axiology involves defining evaluating an understanding concept of right and wrong behaviour resulting to the research. It considers what value we shall attribute to the different aspects of our research, the participants, the data, and the audience to which we shall report the results of the research'* therefore to be true to this we must consider our own ethical considerations and the '*values that we hold as researchers as well as humans*' as Lewandowski (2021:90) suggests and I agree with.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

#### Prologue

*It was a cold rainy Tuesday morning, and the learners were waiting in the corridor to arrive for the morning's lessons. Some of them were wet as the use of an umbrella to 16-year-old seems to be something of the past. Eventually they come into the classroom ready to begin the day and the lesson begins with a PSE session. During the session, the natural conversation moves towards the attendance of math's and English lessons. The comments which I overhear are such as... "oh no not again, it's so boring in there." "All we ever do is repeat the same work." "I wonder who we are going to be taught by today."*

*This then led me to inquire what is happening in these lessons, and why learners are so reticent to attend them.*

Being an insider researcher, as outlined by Berkovic et al. (2020), involves ethical considerations to ensure research trustworthiness. This role has both advantages

and disadvantages that must be navigated using a moral compass. Key advantages include perspective, equalized relationships, and rapport building, while potential disadvantages are related to objectivity and professionalism. These ethical parameters form the boundaries of my engagement with participants, ensuring justice for their views on teaching FSL1.

Following Berkovic et al. (2020), I established guidelines when preparing questions for participants:

- Avoid assuming participants' thoughts or feelings.
- Remain impartial during interactions.
- Collect rigorous data using replicable methods.
- Acknowledge my privilege, knowing participants prior to research.
- Be transparent about my role as a researcher, not a teacher in this field.

Understanding my position as a researcher is crucial for participant justice. [Greene \(2014\)](#) emphasizes that being an insider researcher involves conducting research within one's own social group. [Chavez \(2008\)](#) differentiates between fully and partially insider researchers. Since I neither teach nor learn FSL, I maintain some distance from this group.

In qualitative research, all components of the study are intricately connected and should function cohesively, much like the gears in a machine. The ability to navigate these interconnections and manage the dynamic nature of research is a skill that requires constant attention and consideration to ensure smooth operation, akin to a "well-oiled machine". Hence, it would be negligent not to include discussions related to power dynamics, as noted by Karissto (2022).

Managing power dynamics is crucial when considering participant personalities. Careful planning ensures effective opinion gathering. Understanding participants' perspectives of me as a colleague and teacher helps prevent perceptions of threat or betrayal. Time is key; relationships with teachers have developed over years, while those with learners are new and require time to build trust. Sensitivity to this process is essential Berger, (2015). It is important to scrutinise the influence of both me and participants on the study, ensuring findings do not serve hidden agendas, such as learners attacking their teacher or teachers using the study for self-promotion or orchestrating the research in a particular way by 'withholding' information as a way of dictating the outcome of the research findings Karissto, (2022).

Another significant role of power relations and dynamics in qualitative research is their potential to influence and drive changes within the sector. In this study, my interaction with the teacher participants reflects a 'studying-sideways' approach Nadar, (2011) as my positionality is one of interconnectedness. We collectively acknowledged the need for change to enhance learner outcomes, fostering self-worth and self-esteem among students.

It's important to recognise that insider-outsider research roles can blur, with neither having a monopoly on advantage or objectivity (Chavez, 2008:476). Clarifying my position is imperative. I acknowledge insider knowledge of the organisation's workings and limited relationships with staff and students involved in this research. This starting point offers more benefits than an outsider researcher and puts me in position of privilege. However, this position of privilege does not go without criticism.

Aguiler (1981), as cited in Greene (2014), suggests that the researcher's focus is too *'narrow, lacks direction, and may lead to a loss of objectivity due to assumptions made by the researcher'*. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize how the research will maintain ethical standards to ensure its success. Adhering to the established process, as previously described, will keep the research on track, address the points of interest raised by the participants, and prevent the formation of bias. Additionally, careful consideration must be given to the methods used to gather participants' views to ensure their voices are accurately represented. For example, at the beginning of session two, a disclaimer should be provided to the participants and the audience, indicating that this is the second cycle of meetings.

During my meetings with all participants, I dedicated time to interacting with the learners outside of vocational teaching sessions to help them feel comfortable during the coffee and cake sessions. Establishing an open and honest relationship with the learners required time and effort but was essential for ensuring they felt at ease, as we were going to spend more time together. Developing resources tailored to the participants' level of understanding was crucial for ensuring comprehension of the questions and appropriate responses. Adaptations to key literature, including Seligman's (2000) work, facilitated processing and allowed participants to respond comfortably within a given timeframe. The use of metaphors and images further supported this process.

Interaction with the teachers was not essential, as I had a collegial relationship with them in the staff room but did not work alongside them in teaching literacy. Previous discussions regarding the pressures placed on them for learner achievement and

retention already reflected my perspective. However, this was not from the viewpoint of a peer fully informed about their literacy teaching expectations. This resulted in a balanced understanding of power relations. The resources used were collegial, with internet sources guiding the teachers. While some were new to Seligman's (2000) work, all had a good literacy level to understand it, and my role was to ensure they grasped the meaning behind his concept of flourishing.

In conclusion, as a partial insider researcher, I maintain objectivity by acquiring all necessary consents like an external researcher. Methodology has been carefully considered to ensure participants' voices are heard and avoid bias. Confidentiality is respected, and findings will not be shared until the thesis submission.

### **Why Analyse Data?**

Data analysis and the importance of this is integral to credible research, as it allows the researcher to categorise, summarise and manipulate data in a way, which draws meanings and conclusions to my work, thus adding credibility and trustworthiness to it Calzon, (2023). To meet the outcomes of the 'unwritten meaning of the data analysis code and expectations' one needs to ensure that they remain true to the data and in this thesis, this is the participants voices. Diverse analytical methods will be used, to ensure that the true word of the participants shines through in the analysis of their views-data and conclusions or meanings will be drawn from this to form a critical discussion of functional skills literacy level 1 teaching and learning.

Drawing on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell, et al, (2017) they all argue that for the data to be analysed and discussion surrounding how the data is



analysed should be integral to the research, so that everyone understands what is happening, why and the meaning behind it (see *Table 1. Establishing trustworthiness*).

<b>Table 1. Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis.</b>	
<b>Phases of Thematic Analysis</b>	<b>Means of Establishing Trustworthiness</b>
<b>Phase 1 Familiarizing yourself with your data</b>	Prolong engagement with data Triangulate different data collection modes Document theoretical and reflective thoughts Document thoughts about potential codes/themes Store raw data in well-organized archives Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
<b>Phase 2 Generating initial codes</b>	Peer debriefing Researcher triangulation Reflexive journaling Use of a coding framework Audit trail of code generation Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings
<b>Phase 3 Searching for themes</b>	Researcher triangulation Diagramming to make sense of theme connections Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
<b>Phase 4 Reviewing themes</b>	Researcher triangulation Themes and subthemes vetted by team members Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
<b>Phase 5 Defining and naming themes</b>	Researcher triangulation Peer debriefing Team consensus on themes Documentation of team meetings regarding themes Documentation of theme naming
<b>Phase 6 Producing the report</b>	Member checking Peer debriefing Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details. Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Themes and codes need to be decided upon, and the codes need to be clear, so that everyone reading this thesis can understand and recognise them, to enable them to interpret the data, and understand the process behind them, to enable them to make sense of the findings. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell, et al, (2017) agree that, for this to take place, the meanings of these should be determined and agreed upon prior to commencement of the analysis of the data. Cooper (2023) further argues that agreeing on the meaning of these themes, is fundamental to the research being successful and meaningful and avoids misunderstandings which could then lead to confusion, ultimately leading to misinterpretation of the data, calling into question the trustworthiness of the data, Nowell, et al. (2017). Building on this, Nowell, et al. 2017:2 argues that '*it is the individual researcher's responsibility to ensure rigor and trustworthiness*'. Therefore, within this chapter, I will set out, what approaches I am taking to ensure the data is transparent and identifiable, as a good researcher should be able to demonstrate how they are transparent and how they have drawn the conclusions from the data which they have and that the research is credible Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin, (2007) and Cote and Turgeon, (2005). Qualitative coding as suggested by Savage (2000) is the process of when the research visits and revisits the data to gain a deeper understanding of this, so that more and more can be analysed from what is found, as the process of reflection occurs. Once this is established using Nowell et al (2017) model, themes and codes arise. Developing and the application of these, are discussed further in this chapter.

Phase 6 – Producing the report as suggested by Nowell et al. (ibid.) is where we are bringing the learners voices alive and that direct quotes should be used to ensure this happens King, (ibid.) this has been used in Chapter 5, to enrich the discussion and these have been taken as extracts from their interviews and have been used in isolation, context for this has been included, the Themes – what's a themes part of this thesis and amplification has been used as a way of showing authenticity and transparency.

In this thesis, qualitative thematic analysis is used to illuminate the voices of the participants in the study. The work of Nowell et al. (ibid) as mentioned previously, is drawn on and has supported my underpinning knowledge of this approach.

Furthermore, I have chosen this approach, to ensure that I am sensitive to the participants voices, can give insightful information to the readers, ensure that it is rich in depth and honesty and is trustworthy to represent the voices of the participants fully. To this end, it is imperative that I acknowledge that there are strengths and weaknesses of each approach therefore, it would be remiss of me, to not acknowledge these, therefore some discussion is given to justify the position I have taken with this data analysis method.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Thematic Analysis**

The advantages of this approach are, they are '*easy to set up, no formal training is required, and it can easily capture the unknown's*' it also allows the novice researcher to be subjective which adds greater meaning to the researcher. It further allows the novice researcher to add personal experience, which is significant to them and their research, as they understand what has been researched most. Another

viewpoint as to why this is advantageous is, that this approach is built without a 'specific set of rules', therefore, as they create their own, it is easy for them to understand and use, which then allows the researcher to decide their codes and enables them to set these up. Furthermore, this allows the researcher to divide the qualitative data up into manageable chunks, so they can explore and have a deeper dive into the data so that it does not become overwhelming, without preconceptions adding authenticity and meaningfulness of the findings.

The disadvantages are that as it is based on phrases, known as phrased-based, this means that it can sometimes not fully understand what is being said, it then means, *'it cannot capture the nature and meaning of the phrases fully'* Medelyan, 2023 an example of this is, when there is a complex sentence like 'I am not coming to your lessons ever again'. This sentence indicates that the student will never attend English again, however we know this is not the case, however capturing the true essence of this is hard using this method. Another viewpoint is *'it can lead to flexibility, but the flexibility can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence, Holloway and Todres, (2003)* which can then muddy the waters and lead to misunderstanding, confusion, and can take the focus away from the objectives of the research. They further suggest that it is *'difficult for a novice researcher to use'* and that the amount of data *'overwhelms the researcher'* which leads to confusion and can cloud them from their original objective Cooper, (2023). Therefore, this is something which I was mindful of and prevention of becoming overwhelmed by obtaining too much data, all at once and attempting to analyse this at the same time was a key consideration using this approach. To mitigate this, I have analysed the data in 'bite size chunks' on a rotational basis so that the objective remains clear,

and the focus is not lost. Reminding myself of the key considerations and statements that learners might make search as the aforementioned 'I'm not going to an English lesson ever again' needed to be considered and not ignored, but additional context was required to understand why the learner has made this statement therefore another conversation may need to take place with the learner to fully understand what they mean by that statement. Furthermore, when working with all the participants I have made sure that we agree with the terms used, the vocabulary, context, and the meaning of the vocabulary as sometimes this can be misunderstood leading to misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

To conclude, to be true to this method, one should follow the guidance as identified by Braun and Clarke, (2006) and Nowell et al, (2017), with clear time for the thought processes to take place prior to deciding the themes. Once this has taken place, consideration of the themes should take place, how they can be merged and organised in a meaningful way and then the codes should be decided upon to add some systematic approach to the qualitative data which has been gained from the research to this end, I will be following the guidance in the Nowell et al., (2017) to develop my themes and codes. Drawing on the work of Creswell (2014) '*a systematic process for coding data in which specific statements are analysed and categorized into themes that represent the phenomenon of interest*' has been used.

### **Inductive Approach to Thematic Analysis**

An inductive approach to thematic analysis has been used, as this is a way of opening the conversation between what I think I know and what I now know using a

*'bottom-up approach' as suggested by Salanda, (2009).* Salanda (2009) further, argues that this approach can carefully and systematically draw out what is being said, within the responses from the participants is a way of gaining a deepening insight into their thoughts, feelings and emotions linked to a specific topic in this case, functional skills literacy. *'Inductive coding is an iterative process' which according to Medelyan, 2016 'gives you a more complete, unbiased look at the themes throughout your data'* therefore enabling me to understand the root cause, affect or impact the data has on the questions being explored.

Intelligent transcription is used which is defined by Salanda, (ibid), as being the process of *'Transcribing every word, but making an interpretation to exclude pauses, status, and filler words and potentially cleaning up the grammar'* whilst allowing the narrative or theory to arise from the data itself and conclusions being drawn from it.

Hierarchical framing was a consideration whilst completing this research, this being, the process of using *'... larger code frames which lets you organize codes based on organizational structure. It also allows for different levels of granularity in your coding'* Medelyan, (2016). However, once I explored this approach further, I determined that this would not be used as this analysed the data in a way which placed views or comments in a place, which meant one aspect was deemed as more significant than the other. As part of this research, I do wish to understand if the organisational structure in this setting, and if this is what is placing pressures, constraints on them which is stopping them from flourishing or if the setting is being supportive. This approach made the data seem closed, layered, and coded the

relationship based on several factors, these being there '*relationship to the code, the sentiments attached to them and the attributes of the theme*' Medelyan (2016). By using this approach, this did not give me the autonomy to bring their voices to life, neither did it allow me the opportunity to, 'double check if the codes used, matched what was naturally occurring as well as considering if additional codes were required. Using this approach allowed me to code the responses directly from the surveys, case studies and interviews which took place whilst being mindful that this approach may be more difficult to use but is less prone to bias than deductive coding, (Medyelan, (2016) and Salanda, (2009).

King (2004) suggests that '*Software can enable the researcher to work efficiently with complex coding schemes and large amounts of text, facilitating depth and sophistication of analyses*. He further suggests that '*computer programs may be helpful to organise and examine large amounts of data, none are capable of the intellectual and conceptualizing processes required to transform data, nor can they make any kind of judgment*'. Therefore, I have chosen to use InVivo coding to analyse the data in this thesis as a systematic approach can be taken.

The use of InVivo Coding is being used to create themes and codes from the conversations which have been had with the participants. Using this approach, this has allowed me to look 'line by line' at the information the participants have given me, whilst '*utilizing the participant's own spoken language and staying as close to their intent and meaning as possible Salanda (2009)*. allowing me to draw out the findings from the datum itself, drawing conclusions as well as, understanding meaning and impact to practice as suggested by Braun and Clarke (ibid). Reflective writing in journals has also been used as a way of working through the coding

process, as my thoughts and feeling evolve, change, merge or break away from each other. As well as how they may relate to one another (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999; Morse & Richards, 2002; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

### **Themes What's a Theme...**

In chapter 1 and 2 extensive research took place drawing on three main aspects, what is the impact on the learner, teachers, and industry as well as how can we work harmoniously in life, in tandem, so that all reach 'eudemonia' state of wellness as suggested by Aristotle (384-322 BC) so that we can prosper and develop as a society, ensuring that modern day needs in relation to employer expectations are met. Likewise, whilst considering this, and understanding that this is a symptom, and not a cause, one must consider how do we work, to enable flourishing for all participants and foster a love of literacy not only for employment but for life.

Phenomenology has previously been discussed in chapter 3 also, relating to the 'thoughts feeling and emotions, which are associated with flourishing, and what the participants might be feeling, whilst teaching or learning literacy over the last 12 months, having a greater understanding of this enabled me to truly consider what questions needed to be included in the coffee and cake sessions and the semi structured interviews, so that the three main themes were closely worked to throughout, these being teacher, learners and industry as afore mentioned in chapter 1 and 2. Without a fundamental concrete understanding of phenomenology, flourishing and theories which support this such as Bronfenbrenner cited in Guy-Evans, 2020 and his community approach, one might approach them in a singular way, however this research has sought to intertwine them, so that they are seen as



holistic elements of the participants in this research so that a deep insight and voice can be used to tell their stories and bring to life there, lived experiences.

Another aspect which arose from Chapter 2 was the requirement of CPD for literacy teachers, as there was some indication that learners were not progressing as a result of poorly trained teachers, therefore, discussions around what CPD has taken place or been offered has also been explored, as a way of gaining a deeper look into what support or opportunities has been made available to enable the teachers to develop, be supported so they too can flourish. Furthermore, as the new Functional Skills Qualification in Literacy, has been brought in, which reinforces phonics, reading and writing, speaking and listening and spellings, how do teachers feel about having the autonomy to be creative in their approach to curriculum delivery, whilst being able to decide which tests students sit and does this motivate and drive teachers more or do, they feel having this autonomy makes them more accountable?

Another finding from the literature in Chapter 2 is the implementation of 'coordinators' along with an increment in contact hours for learners on functional skills qualifications. Therefore, investigations relating to how the coordinators, aid teachers in improving outcomes for learners has taken place, along with exploration into if the teachers have benefited from these strategies as well as if these strategies have enabled learners to flourish or if they have hindered.

Building on from this, learner's motivation level is also another point for consideration from chapter 2 and key findings such as, what is impacting this has been explored further. The findings in Chapter 2, highlighted links to wellness, self-belief, self-esteem, and lack of engagement arose, so the concept of flourishing and what is

done to consider the feelings of the participants to enable them to flourish became an integral part to this study.

To this end, these findings have been an integral consideration, when deciding on the themes and codes selected, as it is only when we truly understand the barriers, can we work with the participants to address them, so that they too feel valued and can flourish, not only in education but fundamentally in life. Themes were decided upon based on the *‘recurrent experience and unifies the nature and basis of the experience into a meaningful whole’*. Furthermore, Aronson (1994) suggests, *these are created when fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often meaningless when viewed alone’ come together*. Therefore, in this thesis I have taken care to consider the themes and how they come together. Drawing on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and using their suggestion that *‘a theme needs to be something which captures the importance in relation to the overall research’* and have *‘the ability to link substantial portions of data together’* DeSantis & Ugarriza, (2000) my themes were decided upon these being:

<b>A community</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Learner</b>	<b>Industry</b>
<b>Approach</b>	Teaching of	Love of literacy	Use of literacy
Teachers	literacy and	And use of	And expectations
Parents	sharing of interest	literacy	for industry
Students			

Drawing on the work of King (2004) and the suggestion that starting with a few defined themes enables the researcher to remain focussed and in control. He further warned that *‘...starting with too many codes can lead to disruption, lack of*

*direction and feeling overwhelmed*'. He further suggests that *'the themes need to be created based on the phenomena under investigation'*. Braun and Clarke (2006) support this suggestion and also give caution to *'throwing themes away and suggest creating miscellaneous themes'* so that the themes which do not appear to fit anywhere on first appearance, may then belong as more data is analysed and the extracts are looked at in greater detail as the research unfolds.

### **Code... What's in a code.**

The four main codes which have arisen are: flourishing, emotions, barriers, and attitude. Within each category the coding which took place include specific aspects which naturally align with the raw emotion (see chart). Drawing on the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC) and his view relating to, *'all things having the potential which they can realise through their actions and interactions'* I sought to draw out what enabled all participants to reach their potential, and the codes were created based on the interactions which took place. The diagram below shows how the themes and codes are connected, with a view to giving clarity of information as Nowel et al. (ibid) suggests, this is a way of having transparency. And a sense of the connections which have formed.

Themes			
<b>A community</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Learner</b>	<b>Industry</b>
<b>Approach</b>	Teaching of	Love of literacy	Use of literacy
Teachers	literacy and	And use of	And expectations
Parents	sharing of interest	literacy	for industry
Students			
Codes			

Flourishing	Emotion	Barriers	Attitude
<p>All comments which related to flourishing and when the participants felt they flourished were coded.</p> <p>Flourishing being when they felt they had developed something in themselves.</p>	<p>Any feelings which arose within the research such as,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Happy</li> <li>- Sad</li> <li>- Confused</li> <li>- Nervous</li> </ul>	<p>Anything points which stopped any participant from flourishing, such as,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ time pressures,</li> <li>❖ lesson length,</li> <li>❖ class size,</li> <li>❖ issues which stopped them doing something.</li> </ul>	<p>This category investigated mindset and related to their raw emotion of doing something if they saw this in a positive or negative way.</p>

Once the codes had been decided I then began drawings correlations between them, and meta-analysis took place. Some commonalities and differences were explored, and these will be discussed more in chapter 5. Here the work of Scott and Usher (2012:19) have been drawn upon with them stating that *‘as well as being 100 perspectival and partial, interpretations are always circular. The interpretation of part of something depends on an interpretation of the whole, but interpreting the whole depends on an interpretation of the parts.* Whilst considering the data and deciding on codes, drawing on the work of King (2004) one should be mindful of the point,

*'There can be as many levels of coding as the researcher finds useful, but too many levels can be counterproductive to the goal of attaining clarity in organizing and interpreting the data (King, 2004).'*

To this end, one should remain focused on the inquiry, this being the wider context of the issues in Functional Skills Literacy and making sure that this remains at the core of the research. For this to take place, one is looking at this from three perspectives, this being: top-down pressures on teachers, results, and outcomes as well as attitude to learning for the learners, as well as support or pressure from their families and staff and employer expectations for industry placed on the learner as well as the employer to meet government expectations. Once this took place, we can see the full circular 360 of the problem at hand and begin to understand each viewpoint and how each has a ripple and how these ripples flow into each other's pond. Arguably, the question remains, is the functional skills literacy curriculum preparing learners for the love of literacy for life and work in the vocational sector? To conclude, all parties need to understand how one links to the other so that an interpretation can occur. In chapter one, a broader discussion of the context and issue was discussed, and this gave a partial oversight and historical stance on the issue, however the primary research gathered, whilst small it gives a contemporary insight into this.

### **Bringing Their Voices Alive!**

As previously mentioned in chapter 3 drawing on the works of Trochim (2000) using correctly framed questions to elicit the responses which are pertinent to this research and align to it, is fundamental so that the research and the validity of it, can be traced

right the way back. The questions posed in round one- September interviews are as follows:

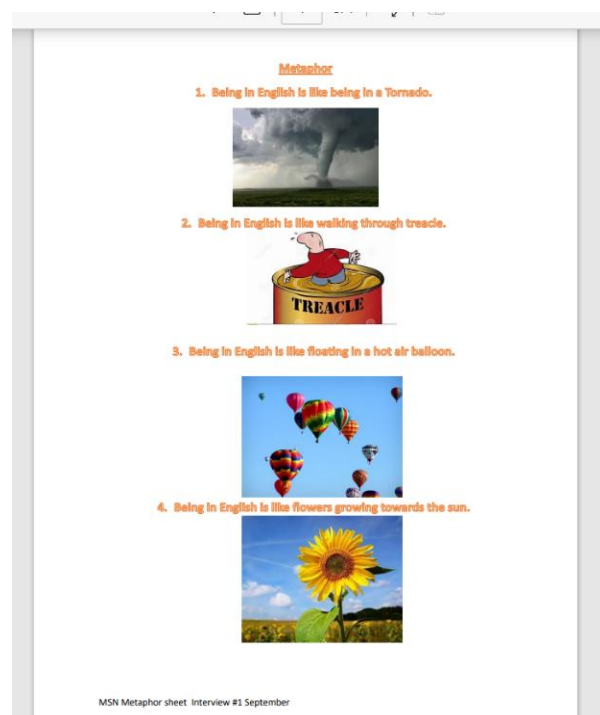
Teacher Questions September 2022 #1	
Question 1	what pressures do you have as the teacher at the beginning of the year?
Question two	what screening takes place prior to them arriving in your lesson?
Question three	can I hold ask do you hold a degree in your subject area?
Question 3	can I ask are you aware there was a 3 million CPD fund made available to be spent
Question 4	nationally in your area and what CPD have you been offered?
Question 5	what do you think helps learners to settle at the beginning of the year?
Question 6	are you aware of the assessment windows that come with the qualification that you teach?

The first four questions were posed as a way of understanding the teacher's journey so that a comparison could be made to the skills and knowledge that the teachers had whilst drawing on the epistemological and ontological stance as set out in chapter 3 and checking the alignment to those. Furthermore, this work draws on the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Seligman (2000) regarding flourishing and how everyone has the ability to flourish '*...all things have potential which they can realise through their actions and interactions. Knowing yourself is the beginning of wisdom.*' Stenhouse (ibid) and his curriculum theory, linking to this being and '*educational journey which everyone is on and a vision of knowledge.*' and Golby (1975) discussions about social changes and if we are keeping abreast of the situations posed to us, both in the education's arena and employment sector and how '*curriculum designers are behind the times.*' Kelly (ibid). and her suggestions that literacy curriculums are required to be overhauled along with Walport and Leunig (2017) claim that '*literacy teachers are lacking skills which are required*' as discussed

at length in chapter one and two. Questions 5 and 6 link primarily to a desire to ascertain the teacher's knowledge about how to engage with their learners and what adaptations do they need to make in order for the learner to flourish Aristotle (ibid) whilst drawing on the works of Bronfenbrenner Ecological systems theory cited in Guy-Evans (2020) and how we all work together to support the individual and the more knowledge we have, linking to academic knowledge, social situation such as home life and involvement, then the greater we can work together to enable the individual, support empower them which ultimately leads them to achieving success and flourishing. By posing the same questions to multiple participants I can gauge different perspectives from multiple sources. Each of the questions were posed in a way where the candidates had as much time as they needed to feel comfortable in answering the questions in as much detail as possible. When a teacher was struggling to give a detailed response, then prompts were used to encourage them to reflect and contribute further.

### **Enabling Participants to be Fully Engaged**

Whilst completing the research the relationship between myself, the researcher and the participants remained professional and true to the research. No bias was placed on the outcomes of the findings as the journey which I thought I would



be on  
had  
some

\*\*\*\*\*

Questionnaire 2 – March 2023

For Question 1 consideration of these emotions will be required. Please take time to think about one which best relates to the way you feel before responding.

Word bank shared.

Irritated / not enthusiastic /happy /sick feeling /bored  
/interested /engaged /inspired/frustrated.

Q5 also requires consideration of your emotions, please chose from the one, which best suits your response.

Word Bank shared.

Happy/Sad/Unphased/Indifferent/Neutral – no real emotion

What is booktok on TikTok?

\* What is BookTok? BookTok is a TikTok subculture where book lovers discuss the books they can't stop talking about. On TikTok, #BookTok has over 61.9 billion views, with some individual videos reaching upwards of 100 thousand likes. This hype isn't exclusive to the network either.

<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/booktok/>

\*\*\*\*\*

differences to what I thought would take place. My ethical considerations, as discussed in Chapter 3 remain central. The learner participants were open, honest and on some occasions, required

more support than originally anticipated. This is why extra stimuli was required such as the visual stimuli sheets for them to choose a metaphor from and word banks for them to draw emotions from. The reason behind this was that without the visual the learners were unable to fully discuss how they felt, so having these gave them a visual to draw upon, whilst being mindful of the '*relationship between teachers and learners, is central to a successful education*' Pring, et al.(2009) therefore them being able to understand and respond is fundamental Using the suggestion from one of the participants in the pilot research, as highlighted in chapter three, emotions, and findings the words to attach to the emotion was a point which these learners found difficult therefore by providing the visual this barrier was overcome.



The learners also decided on their pseudonyms, and an interesting conversation around the way they all chose the characters took place. This group of learners in the first session in Early September 2023, chose characters from AA Milne, Winnie the Pooh and each decided which one of the character's best represented them, as previously discussed in Chapter three. This was not included in the analysis of the research but was interesting to learn about and from the beginning brought their characters to life as once again, choosing a character from a book which they associated with added meaning for them and equally to me. Building on this, I used this approach with the Teacher participants, and they all chose authors which resonated with them. This exercise, whilst not planned for, was integral in building relationships with all participants, it gave a starting point to build a working relationship on and enabled me to see some of the personality behind the participant. The students appeared to be at ease talking about their character from the book.

During the second round of teacher interviews six questions were posed. The underpinning knowledge which led to the development of these questions is flourishing and environments where flourishing can be fostered, with justice = fairness for all being at the core, Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Teacher Questions January 23 #2	
Question 1	Some staff mentioned that the LNG 117 form, which indicates if learners have any differing needs, is shared. Can you tell me about your lived experiences of receiving these forms, if they arrive, when they arrive and what the information is like on them. (LNG117 gives an insight into learner needs).
Question 2	A conversation around optimum class sizes took place in questionnaire 1, can you confirm, how many have remained on role in your class during the second term January-April 2023.

Question 3	A learner has commented that the Learning Support Officers in their class have been a constant and a source of support. Can you confirm, do you have LSOs in your classroom, if so, what are your opinions on them being in the lessons and how do they work with you and your learners to help progress them in literacy.
Question 4	During this term, is there any specific aspects that are the focus for learning for example, during this time, is this when written exams are practiced for examples, Reading, Writing, or Speaking and Listening aspects. Discuss the order in which they take place, if they are not all being taught at the same time, please.
Question 5	What CPD has been offered during this time, or what topics have been discussed over the last 12 weeks in your Friday meetings (please do not break any confidentiality in this question, keep it generic).
Question 6	Do you encourage reading outside of the classroom, by suggesting texts to read and are you aware of the forums like BookTok, which discuss the recent reads and trending texts.

Questions one and two linked highly to understanding of the learner needs as information contained on these forms, should be used to enable together to have a basic knowledge of their participants prior to the lessons, so they can plan meaningful activities for them to participate in, at a level which they can understand. Drawing on Aristotle's (384-322 BC.) works about flourishing and Stenhouse (1975) works on curriculum knowledge therefore, having this information should enable them to provide an environment and lessons which enables them to flourish Dweck (ibid.), but do they have it and do they use it? Furthermore, having this knowledge should enable them to plan outcomes for learners, which scaffolds their self-belief, self-esteem and overall development which ultimately leads to success Vygotsky (1896-1934.). Moreover, understanding the demographic of learner in the class, should enable the teacher to develop skills and strategies which support their learning needs, not only for learning literacy to pass exams, but for them to be able

to use the skills they learn in the classroom for life. All of this is discussed further in Chapter 5 – Findings.

Question three looks heavily at the wider support that the learners have in the lessons. This question was created drawing on the works of Bronfenbrenner as cited in the College of Human Ecology, (2022) about how the wider community can help the person to reach eudemonia= flourish and that by us knowing the learners and them having support from a wider pool of talent, we can enable them to flourish. Furthermore, the relationships with others who support them in literacy is of equal importance as often they are the ones, building relationships with the learners and working harder at raising their aspirations and self-esteem and scaffolding them in skills, more closely on a 1:1 level, Vygotsky (ibid.). The themes, questions and findings will be revisited and amplified later in this chapter and in Chapter 5 – Findings.

Question four relates heavily to the teacher and their knowledge in relation to expectations about the curriculum they are teaching. This knowledge is fundamental in ensuring that lessons are planned with an aim to reach this desired stage in the teaching and learning process. Preparation for summative assessment and curriculum planning and ongoing assessment is integral to this curriculum, Stenhouse (ibid) argues '*education is a matter or process*', there questioning if the teachers understand the process within the curriculum required investigation, as if the teachers who are driving the education are unaware of the expectations, then how can we judge the learners fairly. Pearson, 2019a:7 (see chart) clearly sets out the expectations for the teachers, and discussions with the teachers illuminate their

knowledge and understanding of this. This will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 5- Findings.

## 4 Qualification structures

### Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 1

Learners will need to meet the requirements outlined in the tables below before the qualification can be awarded.

The Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills Qualification in English at Level 1 consists of one internally-set and internally-marked Speaking, listening and communicating assessment, one externally-assessed Reading assessment and one externally-assessed Writing assessment. They are available as paper-based and onscreen, on-demand assessments.

Assessment structure	Duration	Number of marks
Speaking, listening and communicating is assessed through one 3-minute talk and linked question and answer session per learner in groups of three to four and one 10-minute formal discussion together in groups of three to five learners.	10-20 minutes in total	n/a
	10 minutes	
Reading is assessed through a test comprised of controlled response and open response questions.	60 minutes	30
Writing is assessed through a test comprised of two tasks. (42% of marks assesses spelling, punctuation and grammar)	60 minutes	36
<b>Content areas</b>		

Pearson, 2019a:7

Parallel to this, learners were asked if they were aware that they were being taught to pass a test, or if they felt they were being taught to enable them in life. Learners were also asked about their results and when they received the results some deeper understanding of this is sought. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 – Findings. Question 5 links heavily to CPD for teachers and what opportunities have been identified for them. As afore mentioned with the government in the UK investing significantly in the Math's and Literacy agenda lots of opportunities should have been made available for this, but were they? And question 6 relates to every changing

society- the digital era and I was curious to find out, were teachers knowledgeable about this and is this being used as a way of engaging and encouraging learners to use literacy in their own worlds, in a media which is significant to them, as PR question two, relates to literacy and developing the love of this, Therefore by exploring this, and finding out if they were aware of contemporary approaches were they using them or are they behind the times and not remaining contemporary in engaging with learners in modern England. The learners, question 3 – was also posed, linked to these curious points, and is analysed further in this chapter.

In the second round of meetings with the learners they were given six questions to consider. The first one being - *Q1 – tells me how English has been going these last 12 weeks?* The reasoning behind this was to draw on the feeling and emotions once again about how they felt when learning literacy and to digress on some of the responses which have been given from their point of view.

Question 2 relates to *what do the learners understand they have been learning in the lessons*. The reason for this is I was intrigued to find out if there were correlations between the time of the year of the teaching, whether learners were all receiving a simultaneous experience. Furthermore, I was curious about if equal amounts of time are being given too all participants to prepare for the exams. Besides this, I interested in finding out, if they were being taught in parallel. It would be remiss of me, to not consider these points, as the learners came from two campuses and had different teachers and were not all being taught at the same time in the day or the week, so some understanding of uniformity I felt is required.

As mentioned afore, with the teachers question about Booktok and ways of engaging learners, the learners were posed with their question 3, this being - *Q3- Do you think what you learn in your English class helps you develop a love of English for life for example reading writing and poetry for pleasure?* It clearly became evident that some teachers... did promote this and others did not and the enrichment which the learners received was based on the teacher which they had in front of them, this is analysed in greater depth in chapter 5.

Question 4 related to the feelings and emotions learners had when going to literacy lessons. This I felt was important as I had previously heard mutterings, around campus and in the Early Years classes, so I wanted to understand this better, and try to understand what the physiological effects, were on each of the participants and how, this impacted, affected disaffected them in any way and to what extent. Seligman (2000) Maslow (1943) and Aristotle's (384-322 BC) works relating to flourishing was the underpinning drivers behind as if we do not truly understand, acknowledge, and work with the students learning English, we will not be able to change the approach, environment they learn in which can enable them to flourish. Furthermore, with well-being being, central and integral to 'happiness' Seligman (2000) we must consider what might need to be done, as a change to practiced, to aid learners who have physiological symptoms as a way of understanding this better and moving the conversation forward in the mental health arena, and supporting learners in education to be successful and become resilience, so that flourishing happens and success in life occurs.

Question 5 linked to completing exams and summative assessment during the last 12-week period. Plans were shared with me from the participating teachers for this study which clearly had timelines in them. This I used as a starting point to see if the learners were keeping on track. I had limited knowledge previously of the amount of cover teachers which were in the sessions and was suspicious of how they kept the teaching learning and assessment moving forward when cover staff were used. The findings linked to this were unprecedented. Stenhouse (1975) and his knowledge of curriculum and curriculum planning were fundamental in formulating this question along with knowledge of the curriculum expectations, therefore it was interesting to see if learners were receiving personalised learning experiences, and that tests were being set for all, or in a time when the individual was ready. I was further intrigued about '*the little wins*' Seligman (2000) and wanted to understand, were these being discussed, celebrated, and identified or whether it was only the summative assessments, which were celebrated in such a way.

In the third round of meetings for the students, the focus was very heavy on flourishing and identifying success Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Seligman (2000). The reasoning behind this is, that learners in rounds one and two, seemed very lack lustre in being able to identify when success was achieved, what that felt like and how it aided them for their future life and if the love of literacy in any way was taking place. All participants were introduced to the PERMA model Seligman (2000) and the work of Dweck (2000) and positive mindset theory and both sets of information was tailored to students and teachers separately to acknowledge, their level of understanding, to put all at ease. All participants were given four paragraph extracts, which I had written or Chapter 2, from experts in their fields, such as Unwin and

Gregson (2020), Sennet (2011) cited in Gregson, Seligman (2000) and Rogers (1902-1987) cited in McLeod (2014), mainly focussing on what the teachers do to 'inspire and motivate' as well as how this is done and if 'visual aids' are used to bring the learning alive. Another avenue, which was explored this time was 'resilience, grit and gratitude' with the need for 'openness acceptance and empathy' for the learners central to the discussions this time as these builds heavily on both Dweck's (2000) and Seligman's (2000) theories in psychology. These were all used as anchors for the discussion, so that there was clear focus and direction to the final round of meetings. Once again interpretation of this for the students, was changed, so that they could openly comment and share their views.

## **Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion**

This chapter focuses on the findings which have become evident from the research completed. The findings relate to the three rounds of semi-structured interviews, which took place with teachers and students accessing the Functional Skills Level 1 curriculum in English. The findings are presented in a timeline of when they occurred during the primary research, over a 12-month period, with a mixture of verbatim extracts and some statistical analysis being used to draw judgement, conclusions, and recommendations from in readiness for Chapter 6. Meta-analysis has taken place, to form these judgements from using Nvivo. Some, comparative analysis of all the datum will be used to, to identify any commonalities or differences which may be pertinent to the research, from both subgroups of participants teachers and students, with the research questions being pertinent to this analysis, these being:



**RQ1 – What do Further Education Teachers need to consider when designing curriculum to develop students’ literacy skills and prepare them for work in the vocational sector in Further Education?**

**RQ2 – What do teachers need to consider when designing a curriculum to develop students’ literacy skills to prepare them for a love of literacy for life?**

Each round of interviews is analysed individually in the first instance to draw meaning and understanding from, at a peer-on-peer level, then a wider comparative will be made of these findings, with links to the implications of these findings and recommendations, being discussed further in chapter 6. The students in this research had all been part of the governments ‘National Literacy Strategy’ (ibid.) in their younger years, with a protected time of ‘one hour a day to focus on literacy’ being part of their younger days learning about literacy, as a way of raising their aspirations, but did it.

## **Findings**

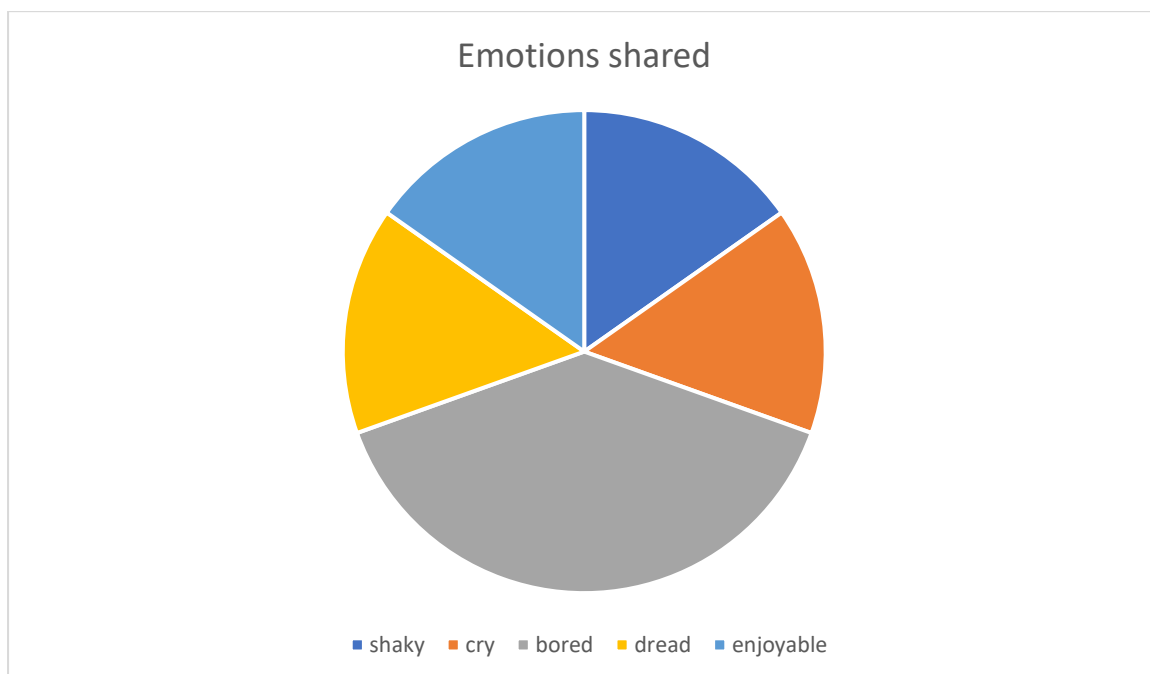
### **The initial meeting – Students thoughts about English**

Questionnaire one in the subcategory group for students is set out to acquire their views on English and Literacy as well as how the teaching had been going over the last twelve weeks, so on entry into college September - December 23. This period encapsulates their initial thoughts and perceptions about the subject, as well as the building of relationships with their peers and teachers. There were five students participating in September 23 and five Teachers.

When students were asked about their views on English and literacy, they shared them openly. Half of the learners said they did not enjoy literacy lessons, finding

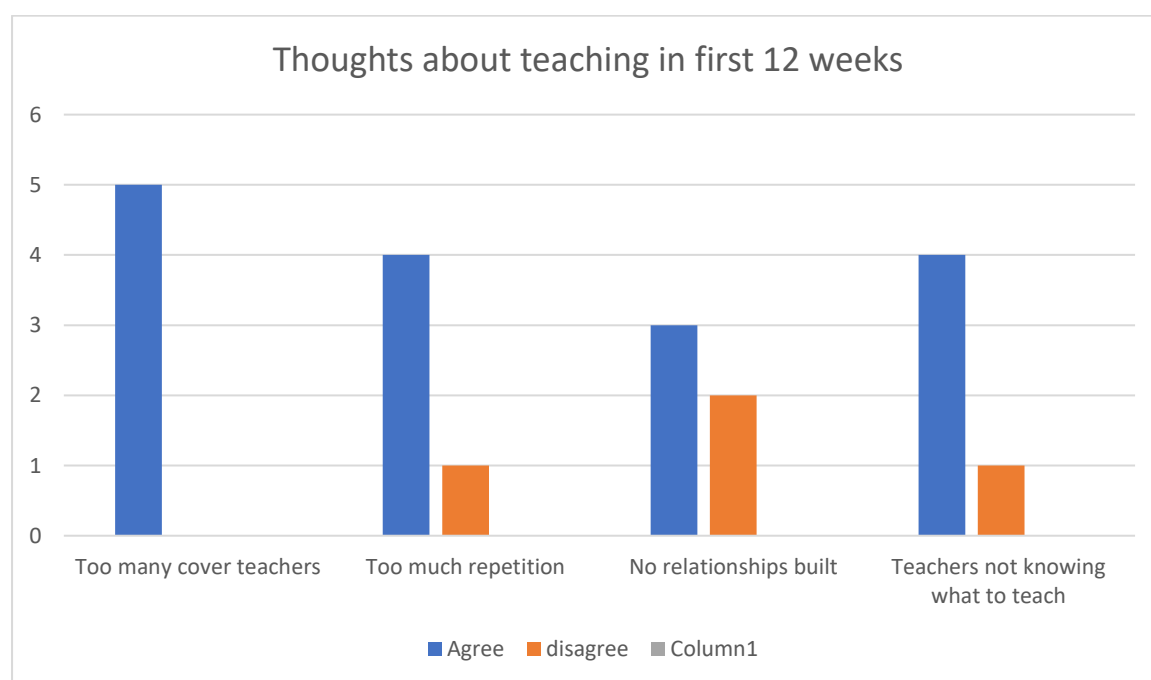
them difficult and involving too much reading. Additionally, some felt criticized by teachers for poor spelling. On the positive side, others saw literacy skills as important for their future careers and enjoyed aspects like poetry and creative writing.

When considering the initial responses from candidates, it was evident that they all understood the importance and significance of English and why they needed to learn it. This demonstrates that the work of Stenhouse (1975) and his '*vision of knowledge*,' which fundamentally links to the '*intentions for society*' is still pertinent and evident today. Students were comfortable talking about what English is, their understanding of English and can make judgements about English. How they felt about their learning and their ability in English also clearly became apparent. Connections to how it made them feel became abundantly clear.



A commonality between them all was that they had too many supply teachers. Four out of the five participants commented on this, unprompted. They freely offered their

views and thoughts about supply teachers and how they believe this affected them in the studies, with 50% sharing, *‘we had 6 supply teachers in 12 weeks, and commented that there is no time to build a relationship or trust with them’*. Another opinion which seemed embedded in the learners is, *‘the regular teachers go to the GCSE classes, we always get the supply, they further shared, because the GCSE learners are better than us, we think we are not as important as them so that is why the college, does not spend as much time with us*. Another common theme was too much repetition in the lesson content, *as the supply teachers never really know where we are up to -Christopher Robin’*.



Interestingly, their thoughts and feelings about cover teachers and the impact they are having on their education as well as their emotions was evident.

Drawing on the works of Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) as mentioned in Chapter 2, being part of a community and having everyone invested in this, I believe is echoed here from the voices of the participants. They do not feel that the College is invested in them, and respect how all parties must work together, to enable them to feel valued and be nurtured into forming those relationships. Furthermore, with no prior

knowledge of the students, no scaffolding Vygotsky, (1896-1934.) can take place, therefore learners become disengaged, dissatisfied, and disruptive, therefore not making a conducive environment for learning, leading to a lack of interest and engagement, and learning lost. Furthermore, drawing on the works of Crain, 2009; Duchesne et al., 2013; Khatib, Sarem and Hamidi, 2013 ... *'Humans can be the best version of themselves when their social and emotional needs are met'*. Clearly here, this is not happening, therefore we are unable to develop the potential in the learners.

Moreover, drawing on the works of Maslow (1937-51) 'children required to feel safe, and secure, along with celebration of their work' with the goal being *'to feel empowered, self-understanding and self-accepting'* Celestine, (2017), these opportunities were lost, as there was not a consistent teacher, therefore these secure relationships could not be nurtured. Furthermore, the opportunity for an environment which is *one of acceptance, genuineness and one that showed empathy* so that the learners can grow in the correct conditions Rogers, (1902-1987) cited in McLeod (2014), has not happened for these learners, during the first 12 weeks of term. This opportunity was lost, as they were unable to build a safe, secure relationship with the teachers as they had so many supply teachers, 12 weeks being a third of their teaching in this academic year.

Arguably, the process of reflection, and self-reflection Dewey, (1933) for the students and the staff, is missing, as having an inconsistent teaching approach does not enable anyone to stop and think. There is no prior to reflect upon, therefore progress for the learner cannot be discussed. No different approaches by the teacher can take place, as they have no prior experience to draw upon with this group of learners,

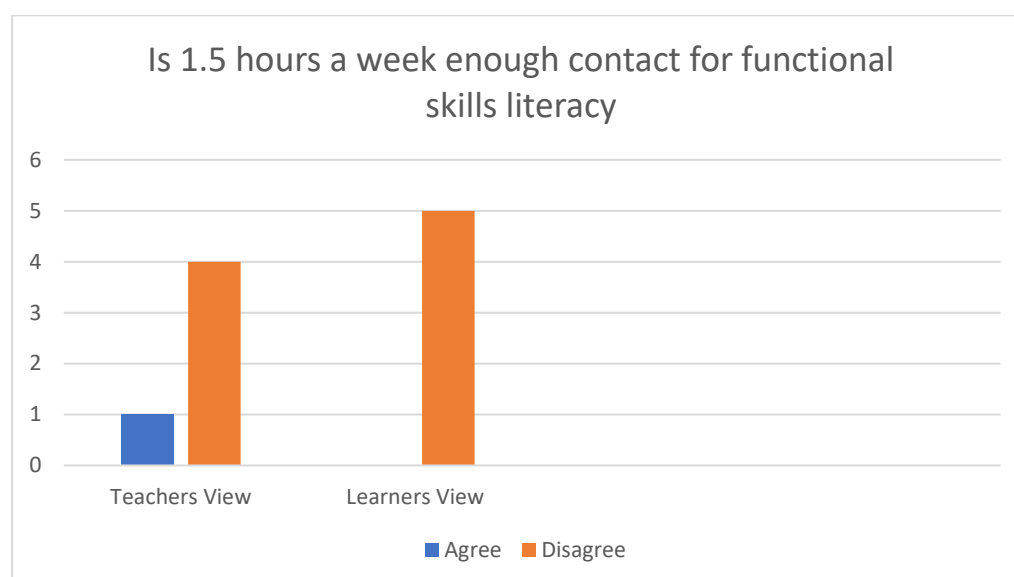
therefore this leads to no changes happening which ultimately can lead to no one flourishing, Seligman (2000) or reaching eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC). One could argue that they developed a '*closed mindset*' Dweck (2000) as they did not think there was any chance of developing new skills or knowledge as there were stuck in this cycle of repetition because of the poor leadership and management linked to staff absence.

Another point of interest which arose from the research is discussion around, The teaching experience. Students commented that '*some teachers never move from the chair in the front of the classroom – Eeyore, 'The teachers often, just read from a PowerPoint, as they do not know what they are teaching or what we are up to – Pooh. As well as this, 'Feedback is very weak, and does not help us prepare for our next steps – Christopher Robin.*

The findings here echo the Ambition report, 2020 claiming that the is '*still lack of learners able to meet the expected levels in literacy and numeracy*', arguably, if there are inconsistent approaches such as, inconsistent teaching, teaching time being lost with repetition and no clarity for the students on learning moving forward, then fundamentally this could be the root cause of the issue, and why learners, make progress but progress can be very slow.

In relation to progress being slow, learners were asked questions on their views in regard to the number of hours of teaching they received. '100% of students shared, that they felt '*we should have more time being taught*'. Eeyore shared- '*we are important too, and we need more time being spent with us.* Christopher Robin

shared 'I find Literacy really hard, so I need more time to practice, but they give us half the time of GCSE learners, how is this fair'.

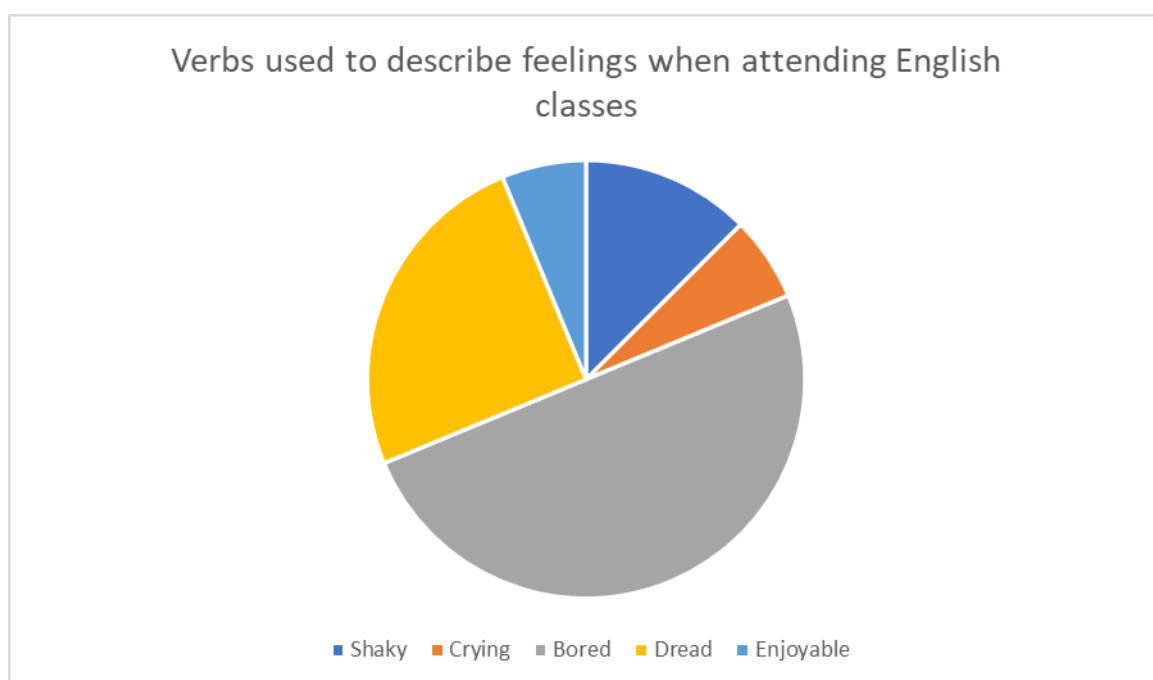


When considering the findings in question 3, it became apparent that learners deemed their contact with English teaching staff a liken to '*the poor relation*' and the emotional impact this had on them oozed through the responses verbally the changes in their body language were present. Often this is presented in anger, as well as a heightened sense of emotional distrust in the organization connected to sentiments of '*why do we bother, and they don't care about us*'. When learners were probed further on this, they clearly argued they should be treated equally and fairly and if English learning was part of the expectations and offer of contract in F.E, then they should be equally to their counter parts- GCSE candidates and receive three hours of contact teaching a week.

Discussions moved on and linked to, 'the government expectations and reaching a grade 4 in literacy'. The learners were all united in this which is 'we should be able to demonstrate our skills for work and not be judged on an exam-based grade'. We should be given, some tests to sit for the job, and some speaking and listening

opportunities, and then the employers should use this to see if we can do the job or not, not a grade from a test.

When considering these responses, it made me understand how detrimental a grading on a person can be perceived by them. They automatically developed a 'closed mindset' Dweck, (2000) on their ability and judgments being made about them. Some had the ability to use Seligman's (2000), view on flourishing, as they acknowledge their strengths, abilities and demonstrated a growth mindset, Dweck (2000) This was evident in their responses and how these can be used to prove a point of competence, when the test condition are posed in a different way, and without prior judgement.



As the research is cyclical, some of the points were revisited, with the findings at the beginning of January 23, yielding a consensus in opinion, with this being that they discuss English lessons, in a more positive, and learners had all begun to discuss English lessons in a more positive way. With a key finding here being 'consistent teachers, and how they could *'see and feel they had made progress'*, with some 70%

*'my confidence in spelling punctuation and grammar, has improved a lot' as well as learners sharing 'I can self-correct now, when I make mistakes, this feels really good – Piglet. Piglet also commented on 'using new articles works for me and we use information that I am interested in, this encourages me to read more at home. Pooh Bear further claims that 'now that the teachers and I get on well, I can confidently use a comma, and understand how they work, this feels great'.*

## Round Two

The theme of developing resilience and grit is something which runs parallel to this study, in terms of can the learners demonstrate they have this and can this be shown in the observation period. Martin Seligman's (2000) believes that all learners have the power to show resilience and can demonstrate grit. Seligman (2000) states that if we show *'grit'* and if we dig deep eventually, we will find happiness/eudaemonia Aristotle (384-322 BC). The findings here demonstrated that *'self-reflection'* Dewey (1933) is ever present when time is set aside. It further supports Bronfenbrenner's, (1917) view relating to community and if we feel part of this community, then we can achieve. Clearly here the relationship which has been built with the learners has played a significant role in their emotions and views about attending English, and no one had anything negative to say about this, only that learning had taken place, and they were feeling better about English. Four of the five candidates alluded to *'time spent helping me'* and *'practicing,'* Dewey (1933). This supports Drew (2021) view, relating to understanding a person's emotional well-being and the significance it plays in a person's attitude to learning and participation. It further supports the work of Bronfenbrenner (1917) and demonstrates that ecological systems are still significant today for a person to prosper. Furthermore, this demonstrates that



Bandura's (1977) social learning is still evident today, with the main factors being '*repetition and motivation.*' Clearly here the environment– the oven – the classroom, in which the learning has taken place, supports this and accumulatively has enabled flourishing to take place Seligman (2000) and eudaimonia to be reached. The teacher here clearly echoed the views aligned to '*the eyes of the young*' as the stimulus given linked clearly to an interest to them, which engaged them and unleashed '*their potential knowledge*' and '*powerful knowledge*' had been shared Young, (2013), not only in the learning environment, but also for them in their lives.

The findings here further challenge the view of Highton et al. (2017) in relating to, '*teachers not being adequately trained*' and '*not developing students effectively*' Walport and Leunig (2017). It is evident here from the learner's voice that the teachers they have are adequately trained and that the teachers were developing the students effectively.

Arguably here, the view of the learners is, that, teaching on GCSE English is prioritised over them, they get the '*supply teacher.*' This could be internalised as this organisation supporting Porters' (2015) view relating to, the '*more significant* focus and that functional skill learners are the poor relation, so anyone can cover. To conclude, how is this quandary overcome? How do we break the perception, which functional skill learners have pertaining to them being 'the poor relation, insignificant and unworthy? How can we change the mindset and dialogue to 'they are worthy, we believe, and we support them.'

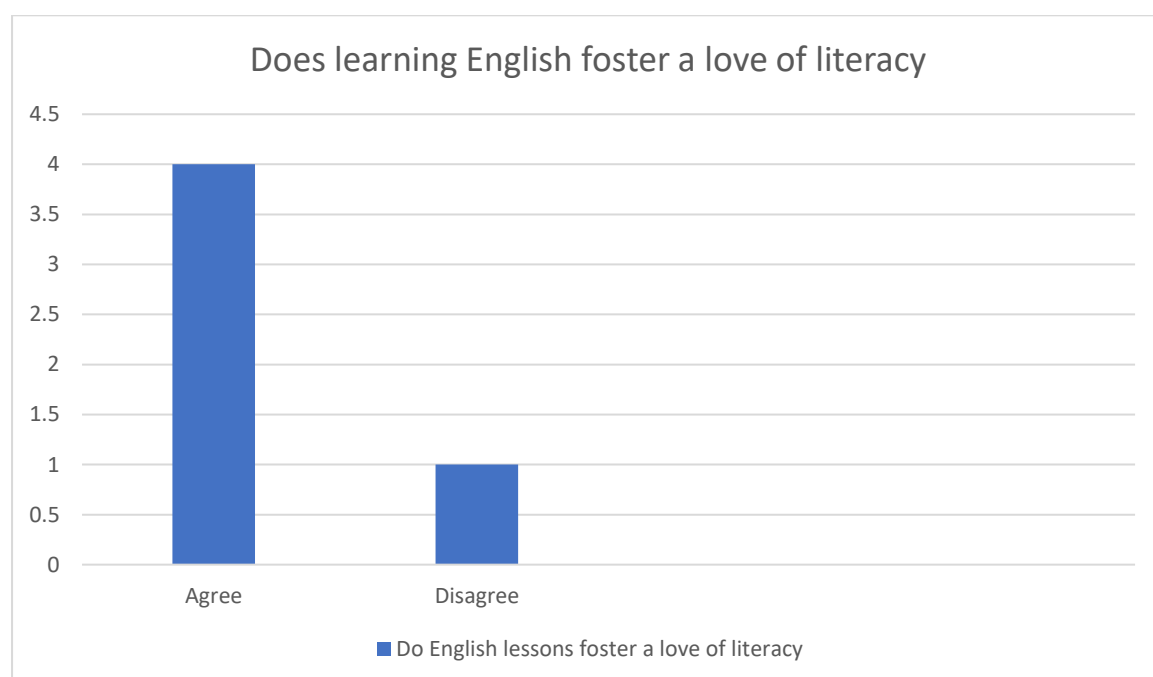
Referring back to 'effective use of time in lessons, the learners shared early on, that this was not evident, however at this point in the research, the learners view had clearly changed. 100% of the learners stated that *'they all knew what they are expected to do in lessons*. Pooh Shared *'the teachers come over and help us in the lessons, and they all know what we are doing, and we always know what the teacher expects, I like this*. Christopher Robin further states *'the teachers are always organised, and I can make the connections now, between what I am learning in class and in the assessments. The teacher, give me time and I do not feel rushed, this is good and helps me to feel calm*. With Eeyore, sharing *'the lessons go so quickly now, I feel like, I cannot get all the work done in time, but the teachers help me to remain calm*.

Clearly here the teachers have used the positive mindset model Dweck, (2000) and demonstrated that if the learners remain open minded and focused then learning can take place. This in turns can relate to a feeling of happiness Seligman, (2000) and fulfilment, virtuous Aristotle (384-322 BC). furthermore, links to preparedness and understanding the significance of curriculum knowledge resonates through the learner voice here and supports Golbys' (1975) and Coughlan's' (2010) views today in relation to *'being aware of the curriculum'* and the ingredients in the cake- the learners, and it is only when we understand them, can they fully develop or rise to the challenge. The learners shared and demonstrated that by clearly understanding the expectations of the curriculum enabled them to feel 'calm, motivated and in control' which enabled them to feel comfortable in themselves. Interestingly here, the teacher here supported Peddiwells' (1939) view linking to the Sabre tooth curriculum as they knew their curriculum, they knew what the expectations were, and they used

appropriate contemporary media to enable the learners to achieve. Moreover, understanding the expectations along with social learning theories as Bandura (ibid) suggested, is evident here, and has been the vehicle in which the learners have achieved success.

### Literacy as a Social Practice

Literacy as a social practice is evident, with learners connecting their own social practices to literacy through reading magazine articles. As the study progressed, 90% of candidates stated it helped them make connections to literacy in their daily lives.



Eeyore stated, *'As my reading confidence has improved, I have made more connections to literacy in my social life, and I now recognize how frequently I use literacy. It has helped me make connections to topics of interest.'* He further mentioned, *'I now share books with my teacher, and we discuss the books I am reading at home'*. Similarly, Christopher Robin noted, *'Learning in class how to research and find topics of interest has heightened my awareness of the skills I use*

*in literacy, enabling me to research anything and utilize my phone for this purpose."*

Piglet expressed', *'Learning to read articles in lessons has motivated me to seek information on my phone and tablet more often. I now understand that if something intrigues me, I can attempt to find the information and learn more about it. It'.*

Additionally, public speaking was discussed, with Pooh stating, *'Speaking in public or with another person has increased my confidence. I now believe in my ability to do this, and I am speaking more frequently. I understand certain information and can use it to articulate my point effectively'.*

Clearly here the research demonstrates that the learning which has taken place has developed the learners broadening their acceptability and understanding of how literacy is used in 'everyday life.' They can make connections to how the learning in the 'classroom' can be used in 'their worlds.' They have been able to self-assess and make correlations themselves into their world and where they will use the skills taught in these sessions as an enabler in their lives. Each one has taken a different aspect of literacy to discuss, which was interesting as it highlighted just how many opportunities were presented to them. Developing skills in speaking confidently, writing appropriately, reading, and using technologies to support this, as well as researching topics of interest to them are but a few which have been discussed. Clearly here a growth mindset Dweck (2000) has been used as well as reflection Gregson et al. (2020) for the learner to see how far they have come, what they have learnt and how this is impactful in their world. In round one of the interviews, the learners could not see this, they were unable to make the connections to their wider worlds, but now they can. They are beginning to understand the importance and significance of literacy not only for learning to pass an exam but how this can enrich

their lives and make them more meaningful, ultimately reaching happiness Seligman (2000) and eudemonia living well Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Interestingly, what did become evident here is that although some of the learners were being taught at the sister campus, they both could see that learning for them had taken place and was impactful on their lives. This has demonstrated that whilst the campuses may have a slightly different approach ultimately underpinning this is the development and flourishing of the students. The teachers on both campuses were deemed as 'good' by the learners, had a '*consistent approach*,' and knew them well. The learners felt settled, as the teacher had been in situ for 12 weeks now.

To conclude, this builds on the aspect of 'community for learning' and it is only when this community is established, that the learners feel 'comfortable and are enabled to learn, develop, and see the benefits of this to their wider community. They feel enabled and that their role in society is significant and that they have something to offer. This clearly supports the work of Dweck (2000) and celebrating success and building on this. Seligman (2000) views linked to flourishing, and it is only when we flourish and feel whole, can we see ourselves. In the words of Aristotle (384-322 BC) '*eudaimonia is the highest human good, the only human good that is desirable for its own sake.*' The learners have seen their worth, and as a result, they understand the role and value which they play in their world and that they are the most important person in it, with the ability to change, develop and adapt as their world unfolds.

We revisited the theme of 'emotions linked to literacy sessions and the learners all indicated positive emotions, with statements such as, '*Happy -I look forward to*

*going, I enjoy the lessons, I know I am going to learn something. I like the discussions which we have in the lessons.* Their whole disposition had changed, and they were animated when discussing this with me.

A significant finding here is consistency. Piglet stated, *'I know the teacher will be present, always prepared and providing ample practice. I leave the lesson feeling that I have learned something and feel content'*. Similarly, Pooh remarked, *'I am aware that the teacher will be there, ready to teach us, and I appreciate the topics we are covering. The teacher informs us beforehand, which I find beneficial.'*

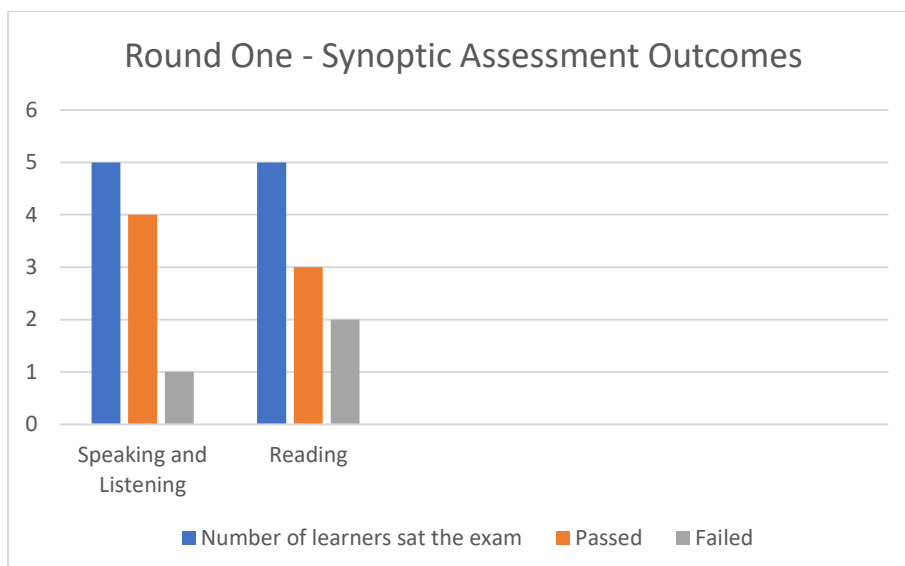
Christopher Robin added, *'I request additional homework outside of class because I understand the importance of doing well in English to help me secure employment'*.

The common word associated with these questions was 'prepared'. Learners clearly liked this and saw this as an expectation in their environment to enable them to learn. This supports minimum teacher standards expectations in the U.K today, but clearly here to the learners, it is imperative to engaging them and having a positive mindset, therefore should not be undervalued ETF, (2014).

The terminology which is shared here is of a positive nature and clearly demonstrates that when we are will to 'change, adapt or be guided' we can grow, supporting Dweck's growth mindset model (2000). Growing enables flourishing to take place Seligman (2000) and the feeling of this being 'identified and noted' is an important part of this finding. If a person, has not felt successful before, they do not know what this feels like, this can be a liken to, Pavlov's operant condition theory, cited in McLeod, (2023), arguably, if they now know what this feels like, and they can associate with it, meaning the virtue of happiness can be reached Aristotle (384-322 BC).

A key message in there is consistency and when consistency is linked to expectations learning takes place. The learners have built a relationship with a key member of the teaching team, and this appears to have enabled them to settle and for learning to take place, this draws on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1917), with the teacher being part of their inner circle- microsystem. Furthermore, when consistent expectations are shared, then enables a learner to feel safe it is only when we feel this way, are we ready to learn Bandura (1977). To conclude, the humanism approach Drew, (2021), is evident here the learners have invested in themselves, they can see what journey they have been on associated with literacy- but more than that, for their lives. They can see how they have developed, how this has been beneficial to them and the feelings which can be associated with this, and how this has influenced their mental well-ness. They have shown 'free will' used it to their advantage and prospered.

Revisiting the topic of assessments is a key part of this research, therefore understanding if learners could see 'the distance they had travelled' is invaluable. When posed with this question, learners were able to confidently share their views. They used words of jubilation, and once again in their disposition, when discussing this, it was evident. Expressions like 'proud, happy, I did it, and relieved' were all used.



Exploring this further, I found that one learner had sat this exam three times - Christopher robin they then shared *'I was confident when I went in this time, as I knew I had practiced extra at home and felt more prepared.'* Confidence and a feeling of confidence became a key point here. All learners had shared that with the help and support of the teacher, they had felt 'confident'. Pooh claimed *'the teacher had practiced with me, and I knew that this had helped me. I knew what I was going to be speaking about. This helped with my anxiety, and I did not cry'*. Piglet shared *"I had only ever sat one exam before, I thought I had done better this time, as I felt more confident and prepared going into this exam. I felt really happy when I knew I had passed"* (see appendix 1).

Drawing findings here, this took me back to Chapter 2 and the work of BIS, (ibid) and how we measure skills amongst young people in preparedness for employment and how computerised assessments were used to draw these conclusions from and make judgements about. Clearly here, the findings from the participants have challenged this notion and that it is only when a person is interacted with in a way in which they find engaging, can the true person shine through. It is only then that the



true skills and knowledge which a person has, becomes evident. Whilst the scores which they have is, level 1 functional literacy, *is below the expectation* for the national average of learners in the U.K, here it is more than the expectations or the outcome, but the '*lifelong learning*' which has been taught in these lessons, which is unmeasurable. The skills which have been taught here are transferable and will remain present in their developing lives as they join the workforce. Therefore, as learners had previously identified, meet me, get to know me, then make a judgement on me, do not just use an indicative score- a grade of a test, to make a judgement about me.

Furthermore, this supports the work of Drew, (ibid) as learners can clearly make connections to their emotions, and how once these are 'in check' they are able to develop. They a state of happiness – eudaimonia, and that as a human being once we know our 'traits' and 'qualities; we can perform and function well, Aristotle (384-322 BC).

To conclude, happiness for the learners can be reached Seligman (ibid) and the learners have been able to see development in themselves. They know what it feels like to 'shine.' It is only when the communities are right can this take place. It is the action which takes place in the community which enables the individuals' actions to well-ness happen and thrive in a community, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, (2000), therefore understanding of the community – The classroom – The oven, is imperative for this to be achieved and it is only then, can the cakes-learners rise. Orchestrating all of this, is a chef-the teacher and it is only when their skills are used appropriately can this occur.

Tigger was the only participant in question 5, which had something negative to say. Tigger discussed *'the teaching assistant which I had, said to me before I went into the exam, I do not want to be here. I do not know why they have asked me to be with you.'* I explored this further and asked him how it made him feel. *Tigger shared: "It made me feel like I am not important and that I am getting in the way of someone's work. It made me feel like they did not want to be there with me, which made me feel worthless."*

This is a significant finding, as clearly here it resonates, that the people in the communities which the learners are in are paramount. They are influential and impactful to the learner; therefore, their words and actions are significantly linked to outcomes for learners relating to perceptions in society. emotional wellness and valuing worth.

By the third meeting, we had built a good rapport, and learners knew the leading question. They eagerly shared their views on learning Literacy without needing any prompts.

### **Round three Learner views April-June 23**

The responses here from the learners all intimated that their views about English lessons and attending them had changed. They all commented with words which were positive such as 'good, enjoyable, engaging and interesting'. This is a significant difference from when we met in September 22.

The learners themselves seemed animated to discuss this and had lots to offer the discussion without be prompted. Students freely offered extensions to their views when posed with these questions. *Piglet shared* 'I now know what is expected of me in the lessons and this view was supported by them all. Support was another key term here, with learners stating, 'support had been offered throughout with several making an association to being supported as being seen-important, cared about, worthy.

When drawing some findings from this, it clearly demonstrates that consistency with teaching staff, especially with the lower-level learners penetrates deeper than anyone might have considered. The views and emotions which they have, linked to consistent teaching, can be linked to learners interpreting this as 'feeling valued, important and worthy'. This in turn, can then lead to flourishing. If the people around the learners, support, believe and nurture them, then internal brain chemistry begins to change. This change is linked to happiness - Happy chemicals are released such as, dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin. Learners like the feeling, they associate the feelings 'self-belief' and self-worth, which ultimately leads to flourishing Seligman (2000) and eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC).

The findings here on in, relate towards flourishing and if the learners could make connections to flourishing, self-belief and growth in oneself Dweck (2000). They encompassed themes associated with reflection Gregson et al. (2020) and the concept of 'looking back' and considering what learning had taken place and if this is something which had enriched their lives moving forward to develop literacy in them, as a social practice.

When considering Literacy as social practice, the learners views were positive, with them accepting and acknowledging that literacy is significant in their lives'. Some comments learners made are, "*I have become more confident when writing texts to my friends now and I now send emails to people. Before, I never sent an email, as I would get my grandad to do this, but now I feel confident to do this myself*" (see appendix 1) – Eeyore. Others shared information such as, "*speaking in banks and doctors with confidence*"- Pooh and '*using literacy in job applications with confidence* – Christopher Robin'.

Clearly here, all learners shared that they could naturally make the connections to literacy being beneficial to them in life and for their futures. They all made connections in different ways as to what they had developed on their personal journeys. The self-belief and self-worth which has been developed here is unmeasurable as it is only the student themselves, that can truly measure the distance they have travelled in their own journeys. '*self-worth is determined mostly by our self-evaluated abilities and our performance in one or more activities that we deem valuable*', Ackerman, 2018. Our views about ourselves and how we feel, influence our behaviours. When they are positive, then we feel good about ourselves and aim high – positive mindset is reached. If they are negative, then they can lead to sabotage, and a closed mindset develops, Dweck (2000). Excellence derives from acts of habit, Durrant (1885-1981), therefore habits need to be built, and habits are built by repetition.

Davis, 2023 claims that *'when we do not feel good about ourselves, it is easy to think that there is something fundamentally wrong about ourselves'*. Therefore, analysing the responses here at a deeper level, the learners participating in this study may have had ten years of their academic experiences feeling, they are 'not good enough and something is wrong with me' and developed habits around this Durrant (1885-1981). It is only when we stop-and think about the impact these ten years may have had on the learner themselves, is it that we can truly measure the distance they have travelled and the inner peace they have now reached.

Interestingly here, Davis (2016) also claims, 'everyone makes mistakes 'but it is how we bounce back from the mistakes, that makes us resilient. Clearly here the learners, have developed 'grit' Seligman (2000), as they have attempted to conquer their fears and happiness has been reached, leading to a virtuous life, as these habits have changed, they can now see the good in their 'new habits', they feel positive about themselves, because of the new habits and eudaimonia is reached Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Teacher which inspires, became another naturally occurring discussion point here. With a query being, 'do teachers inspire and if so how'. Understanding how teachers inspired and how this impacted the learners themselves became significant, with the direct link being towards 'literacy as a social practice'.

The findings here concluded that only one of the teachers shared suggestions of texts which the learners might like to look at outside of the classroom at. Three of the learners did comment on how they had been shown information in the class for

example 'knife crime', that this made them more curious and that they had attempted to find information out about topics which interested them in the online world, but all commented nothing specially.

Teachers were posed the same question 'what do you share which is inspirational' to the learners and linked specially to an online 'book review sharing site- book Tok', using new approaches, for example, the online world and peer on peer discussions relating to literacy and books. mentioned in chapter two. According to Susic, (2023) and Durate, (2023) learners today spend on average 7.5 hours a day on screens'; therefore, this is a huge influencer in their worlds. Offering the suggestion of 'online worlds to promote opportunities to encourage, support and develop any aspect of literacy, I state, is 'a learning environment which has been overlooked and learning experiences lost'.

Learners and teachers were both unaware that this existed, which led to me consider, are the teachers current enough, in their knowledge of how to engage learners in literacy, as no external CPD had taken place, in any capacity. No teachers had mentioned interests themselves, and it became evident, that their CPD linked very much to internal expectations and nothing external was offered or expected of them, concluding to, if we do not nurture our teachers and enable them to flourish, then how can they help the learner grow Seligman (2000), as the teachers are the vehicles which impart knowledge and develop the next generation.

Wider reading demonstrates that there is a plethora of information available to teachers, and learners however, if we are not 'current' then how can we 'keep up to

date'. This accumulatively, means that experiences are lost. There is a wider community, which can influence or develop a learner's interest, however as we have not been the vehicle to demonstrate this, then the opportunity is missed.

To conclude, if the environment- The oven-classroom, in which the learners- cakes - the learners are in, does now change-the temperature- to offer new experiences, then the cakes, cannot rise in their new environment. This leads to flat cakes- learning lost and no growth mindset developed, about how the learner can enrich their worlds with experiences outside of the classroom to their own support literacy development.

Drawing on comments earlier in the research relating to 'aspects which the learners find difficult', naturally allows for the discussion relating to 'looking back, and reflecting-reflection'. In the research, the question posed is directed to elicit the process of 'stopping and thinking' about what they had done and achieved. Work drawn from Seligman (2000) was used as a stimulus here, to encourage learners to truly understand what they were being asked. Seligman's' PERMA model is used here (see appendix 6).

Seligman (ibid) suggests that people have the ability to strengthen their characters, with '*grit, resilience and gratitude*', which will ultimately increase happiness and wellbeing along with creating more meaningful lives, whilst decreasing stress.

Seligman (2000).

Students were asked to consider a 'situation, in literacy lessons, where they had to dig deep and persevere' in order to achieve success. In response to this point, all the learners could give anecdotal accounts. Two shared, '*speaking in class in front of*

*their peers*’ – Pooh and Christopher Robin. Others discussed ‘*compound sentences*’ – Piglet and ‘comma placement’ and lastly ‘handwriting techniques’-Tigger. As a common theme here, all said they ‘*felt happy once they had improved*’.

In conclusion here, it clearly demonstrates, that when ‘grit’ and ‘perseverance’ is expected Seligman (2000) and if a positive mindset approach is adopted in class, then the learners will develop Dweck (2000). The learners can see progress and they are able to ‘self-measure’. The teacher here, uses the art of ‘reflection’

Gregson (2020) as the vehicle to drive the changes, and the learners were allowed access to digital tools to support this when needed. Clearly here, it is the skill of the teacher, which has enabled the learning environment- the oven- classroom to be the correct temperature, to meet the requirements of the cakes- the learners, so that they rise. Understanding the ingredients – the learner, is key here and it is only when we get confident that happiness can be reached. This has been demonstrated, through ‘time, trust and consistent approaches’ can the learner truly flourish Seligman (2000) and eudaimonia – happiness be reached, and a virtuous life be reflected upon, as the learners have seen the development they have made and they have associated an emotion or feelings to it, linked to happiness, success, and achievement.

Environments for learning, also became a key point for discussion as previously discussed in Chapter 1. This being that environments to enable people to flourish are key. Within this part of the research, it explored when teachers have been ‘open and honest’ with learners and how ‘acceptance and empathy from teachers’ influences or impacts learners. It also discussed, how visual aids supports a learners’ understanding of literacy and their views in relation to this.



When learners were asked to consider their environments for learning they shared, that the environments the classrooms – the oven, which they were in, did not contain anything around them or in them which promoted understanding of literacy or did it encourage them to look outside of the classroom. The learners all commented that the classroom boring and that they were in rows and that the environment was not set up to support the learning in the lessons for example when completing speaking and listening tasks, where they are expected to face once another, but how can this be done, if the classroom in in rows? In conclusion to this, A suggestion here is, *if we* change the environment- the oven, to bake the cake- grow the leaner, so that they were able to look at one another when speaking in readiness for their group spoken task.

This I state this is a fundamental flaw of this setting. Learners learn in different ways, and clearly here, the stimulus in the rooms are lacking. Concluding, that this is another example of learning opportunities lost. Whilst seating plans, have a place to deal with behaviour, one should also acknowledge when they are not required, and if this is detrimental to the learners for their development and enrichment of experience, then they should be abandoned.

In addition, when learners were questioned about this, they did refer to the ‘supply teachers’ and that these were used a lot and that now that the ‘regular teacher’ is present they change the setup of the classroom to suit the learning in their lessons, this once again acknowledges the ‘skill of the teacher’ in them being a proficient chef- teacher in their bakery and that the skills they demonstrate is one of ‘reflection

and a knowledge' in regards to suitable environments for learning, so that all learning time is optimised.

Discussions about activities in various environments are relevant to this research. Specifically, whether learners are shown openness, acceptance, and empathy. All the students questioned acknowledged that they have been shown openness, acceptance, and empathy when they have been in English lessons. They all commented that the teacher 'knew them well'. With learners commenting this takes place '*if I have a meltdown*'- Eeyore. Another suggestion made by Piglet is, '*the teacher understands my ability*' as well as well as offering praise and encouragement'. Another suggestion given is '*when I use the wrong words, the teacher helps me find the correct ones*'- Tigger, all of these points demonstrate that the teacher not only teaches the learners but knows and understands them.

Clearly here is demonstrated that the teacher understands the needs of the learners in the class. They can link their teaching practices to openness, acceptance, and empathy and that the learners can see how this is supported in practice. The learners can discuss with me how this makes them feel and how it aids them in overcoming barriers which they have. Fundamentally this demonstrates in this research that the understanding of people's barriers in education is key to promoting an environment where a person can flourish. Understanding how a learner may be older in number (chronological age) than their reading or writing levels indicates is integral to acknowledging how these influences and impacts on their emotional wellness Ashbury et al. (2020) leading to flourishing Seligman (2000). It is only when a learner sees empathy and understanding can they truly believe this, respond to it

and be brave enough to attempt the challenge set which can have lifelong impacts to them in the English arena for them in their lives.

At the beginning of this study, I used visual aids to support the learners, when trying to acquire their views in relation to literacy. This remained a theme in the research and discussions relating to the use of 'visual aids' for learning is explored as suggested by Sennet (2008).

Sennet (2008) claims that learners' brains need to be able to use, '*visual, language and symbol information in parallel to one another*' for learning to take place. If a learner has a visual clue, then this enables learners to connect to it and they can self-assess. The lived experiences of this in this thesis demonstrate what they have learnt because of this approach. The findings linked to this area highlighted that 'video games and puzzles are used often, as well as worksheets. *The teacher also helps us, with the use of whiteboards, where she demonstrates visually how the 'words separate' so we can see how they go together*' as well as gapped handout's. Another use of visual aid shared is, '*the teacher has a copy of the article on the whiteboard, and she works from this, and we have our own, this helps lots*' – Christopher Robin.

Drawing conclusions from question eight findings, this clearly demonstrates that the teachers use visual stimuli as a way of engaging the learner so that they can self-assess and direct their learning in a way which is significant to them. This supports Sennets' view, 2008:277 regarding linking claims that learners' brains need to be able to use, '*visual, language and symbol information in parallel to one another*' for learning to take place. All the learners in this study shared that they liked this

approach and that this helped them build confidence and develop self-esteem when this approach is used. The findings here have ripple effects to the learner with the self-assessing skill being used. This skill is a transferable one, as when the learners rehearse something and acknowledge that this is something which they can use independently this can make huge changes to their lives.

Furthermore, using the art of reflection here Gregson (2020) the learners understand how this approach works, as this indirectly means they can self-assess when experiences like this are offered and can become 'in touch with their feelings and emotions' associated with this. The learners can make judgements on themselves regarding 'flourishing' and how they feel when they have attempted something, ultimately leading to them building their self-esteem and self-worth, to allow the feelings of happiness, success, and achievement to be acknowledged Seligman (2000).

### **Teachers' views Round One of Interviews September-December 2023**

Questionnaire one for teachers' during this time focuses primarily on pressures for the teachers, readiness to teach, knowledge relating to the learners expected in their classes and CPD. Drawing back on the work of Stenhouse (1975) all of these are fundamental parts to the cake, and how having knowledge of the learners - ingredients enables us to create an environment which the cake can be baked in, to allow it to rise and flourish. The inquiry and findings here, link mainly to pressures at the start of the academic year, along with screening of learners, Special Educational Needs knowledge and how they are ready to meet the needs of new learners along

with, how relationships are built. Discussions around and assessment schedules and mandatory expectations are also included.

Drawing on the topic of 'pressures at the start of an academic year' teachers were asked to consider, what these are in literacy lessons. A key finding here is *'getting the students onboard, ready to learn and buy into their learning'*- Galbaldon. Another point of view here, is the screening tools used, and 'initial assessments'- Austin, with discussions pertaining to *'results of these tests being used to set the students, to minimise disruption to ensure swift start to teaching and learning, however arguably this is flawed, as often it takes too long as several are not screened and we are just expected to teach'*. Another view here is discussing relating to, *'knowing the learner's ability prior to arrival along with their capabilities is fundamental to a swift start'*- Banks, as well as views relating to *'number of students expected, so planning can take place efficiently'* however, they also felt, that *'no one looked at the wider picture, or even considers, if there are enough seats in the classroom'*- Dickens. Hardy claimed that *'using ice breakers to understand what works or does not for learners, is the most important part to me, in those first few lessons.*

The responses here to planning for learning link to government expectations on teaching and learning approaches as well as assessments once again. Pring et al. (2009) argues that the *'relationship between teacher and learners is central to a successful education.'* All the teachers in this study echoed this view and the responses given illuminated this. They knew their role, expectations, and limitations at this point in the year. They knew that the environment needed to be modified, altered, or changed to accommodate their new learners to create an effective

environment for learning with focus being placed on 'openness, acceptance, and empathy Rogers (1902-1987).

Eble, (1988) suggest that learners can learn from mixed classes, this is evident here as these teachers are sharing there is no choice, the students they are given are placed in mixed ability groups, so they must have the skills and knowledge to be able to meet the diverse needs of the students to ensure progress take place. The barriers they face with this, is lack of information being shared with them from both internal and external organisations, so that they can engage the learners from the start, and raise their aspirations to engage in the lessons with a standardised approach however, this approach is unable to take place as the tools which are being offered to use, are not fit for purpose as they do not break down specifically what a person's abilities are. Drawing on the works of Piaget (1952) *intelligence changes and grows, along with reasoning and understanding*, therefore if the learners can make correlations to the significance of learning literacy, to meet the aims of their chosen vocational subjects, Luttrell and Parker (2001.) then new learning and knowledge can take place, flourishing happens, Seligman (2000) and eudemonia can be reached Aristotle (384-322 BC).

### **Screening tools to aid learning**

Screening tools and how effectively they are used formed another part to the discussion with teachers. Their thoughts and views relating to how effective they are is fundamental in this research as this is a process which is placed on them from leaders within the organisation.

All the teachers commented on the BKSB screening tools which this setting has chosen to use. Not one of the teachers questioned had anything positive to say

about the tool which they must use, however the dialogue around the use of the tool illuminated lots of reasons as to why they had developed this opinion. Galbaldon claims that *'it roughly assesses their reading and understanding, as well as their grammar, but it does not give us an understanding of how they use this in their own writing. It gives us a general indicator to where the learner is at.* Conversation around 'timing of screening and staff adequately trained became the focus here and yielded a lack of understanding by both students and staff alike. Another point for discussion here, led to communication and that *'communication from one campus to another is very poor and that there is no handover opportunity given. They further commented that they had taught a student the year before, and they knew where they were at, but that learning had been lost over the summer, so when the screening did take place in class, they were screened lower and were made to complete a lower level which disengaged and disheartened the learner.* This statement and learners being placed on 'lower ability courses' *due to lack of handover information* - Banks, is pertinent to this research, as it demonstrates that the 'environment in which the learning-testing is taking place, is incorrect and does not support flourishing Seligman (2000), as the *'learners do not understand the importance of the testing and often do not try their best'* – Austin, meaning that they too are placed in an *incorrect environment for learning, which can lead to disruption and chaos.* Another point here Dickens claims is, *'checking for consistency in assessments'* as they claim that *'not all learners sit a screening test'*- Dickens, therefore there is no parity. Contrary to this suggestion of screening, one teacher- Hardy suggested that *'I get from reading a piece of work which they have written, so take no notice of the test results, and use this to form an opinion on, when they arrive in class'.*

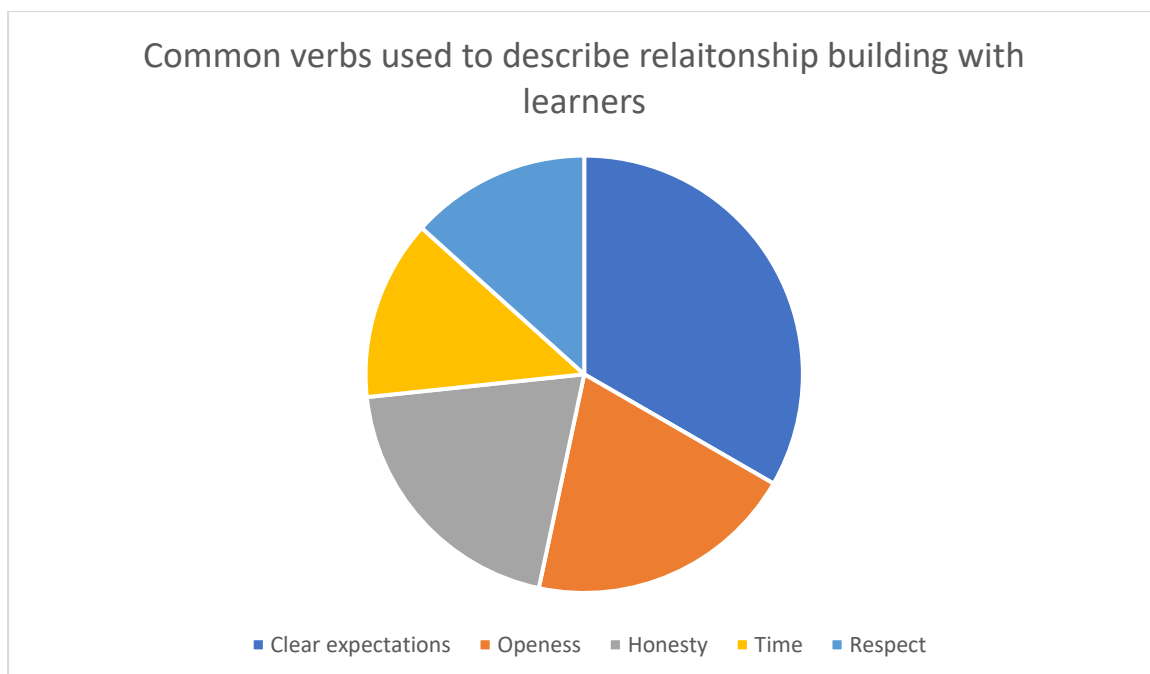
Clearly the consensus here is that the tool is not the most suitable to be used by the staff teaching the learners and that the inconsistent approach and knowledge gained from them caused greater problems than an alternative method which could be used to acquire the same information. They had concerns over the relevance of this to the learners completing the screening and how it will impact them on their educational journey. Using these tools does not place the learners in the centre of the process, Tyler (1949), nor does it support a community approach Bronfenbrenner (1917). drawing on the works of Tyler (1949) and understanding how a student learns and how to move this learning forward is beneficial in making change happen. Critically if we consider the tool which they are being given to use BKSb and they have no understanding of the significance or relevance of it, then how can they engage fully with-it Sennet (2008.) The understanding is abstract to them, which ultimately leads to a closed mindset Dweck (2015), as suggested by teacher 4.

To conclude, clearly here screening should take place, NLS, (1997) but the issue is the consistency of this at this organisation. The lack of sharing and working together as a community is not present, it is rather the contrary working in 'silos' with no prior knowledge or understanding being shared, flourishing, does not take place Seligman (ibid) by using this tool, nor does it enable eudemonia to be reached, Aristotle (ibid.).

The conversation naturally moved to, the importance of learners 'settling to learn' and how this is done by the teachers and an inquiry into what is done took place. Here teachers discussed statements like 'clear expectations, openness and honesty' along with, ensuring teachers are ready for students to learn - Galdalton. Another viewpoint here is '*spending time on building relationships*'- Banks, claiming that this



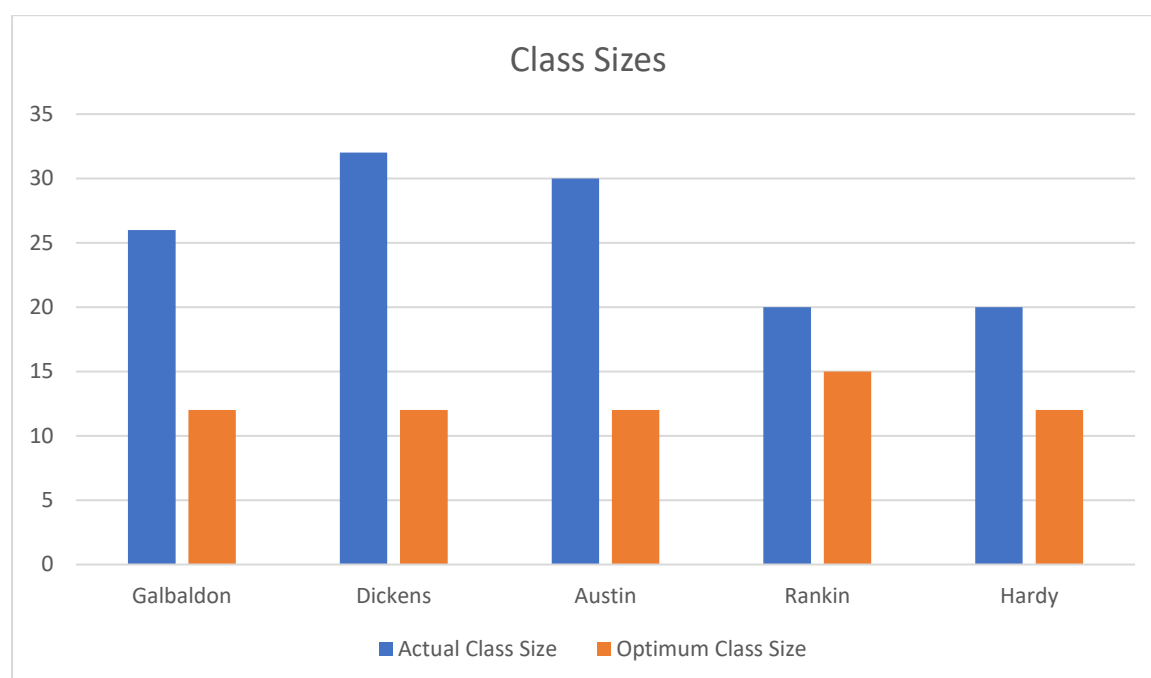
is 'invaluable' and that ensuring '*appropriate behaviour and expectations are set out early on*', helps the year to progress well'. Additionally, here, Austin shared '*making the difference and significance of learning in college known and that all school like behaviours needed to be forgotten about*'. Hardy further supports this view by stating '*allowing the learners to see the human side of you. They claimed that 'if the learners can see that you make mistakes, are human and have a personality, this can make the learning for the rest of the year easier and more partnership like, rather than a hierarchical level of teacher learner.'*



Drawing conclusions from question two, the main conclusions are finding out about the learner, their personalities, ability to learn and interests. Spending time doing this at the beginning of the year meant investment was shown and belief in the learners instilled. This support Bronfenbrenner (1917) views about '*community and the person being integral*' in the process along with Bandura's (1977) linked to '*attention, retention, reproduction and motivation*' as the learners can see that the teachers are invested in by finding out what motives them, so that they can develop tenacity to

believe in themselves and develop a growth mindset, Dweck (2000) along with Tyler's (1949) views linked to his three central factors as mentioned in chapter 2.

Within this question, a sub discussion arose linked to class sizes and the optimum class sizes to teach to enable learners to develop and have some individual time. All the teachers said 12 would be a good group size to have in the time which they had been given to teach to allow for some one-to-one time, and group work, as their knowledge of working with functional skills learners is that they do not like large groups, based on how it makes them feel. Heighton et al. (2017) supports the notion that class sizes in functional skills literacy should remain low, therefore how can the sector ensure this takes place, firstly, if there is a national shortish of English teachers and secondly if they do begin teaching in F.E within 5 years 53% have chosen to leave the sector DfES, (2021:11)



As mentioned earlier, assessment and expectations of teachers to ensure assessments take place, is part of the discussion. Here teachers are asked their views which links to basic expectations in teacher training, relating to assessment of

learning. The findings demonstrated that All teachers had good knowledge of this. They all made statements linking to speaking and listening and this being the main area of focus at the beginning of the year. When questioned further on this, and why reading what not priority, 3 out of the 5 discussed that 'reading takes motivation, and motivation takes time to build'. Speaking and listening happens easily in the classroom environment, so as a team they had all decided that this was the focus for success, prior to Christmas. Interestingly there was some discussion around, who and when assessment windows are set

Gabaldon *shared, 'Assessments windows are set by us as a department as a curriculum team. If we all know what we are aiming for, then we can all support one another.* Findings here linked heavily to teaching taking place and waiting for screening results to be released which were linked to reading and writing abilities, which is why speaking and listening assessments are worked upon as being priority at this time. Rankin supported this view but further claimed that *'this only really happens at the beginning of the year, because then the plan goes out the window because the learners all work at a different pace'*. Furthermore, Claims were made here linked to *'re-testing and having more time for this to take place using this model'* which can benefit the learners. Rankin's view in relation to this is 'testing after Christmas, means *'time is lost'*, and does not believe this is an appropriate model. It allows learners to fall into bad habits early on, as *'no books leave the premise for them to practice'*. Conversely here, one teacher who works at the sister campus claims *'I do not follow the plan, I begin with the reading exam, then focus on speaking and listening. This then gives us more time to work on basic skills'* - Austin.

Drawing conclusions from this question, this has led me to contemplate why is one campus in the same F.E college, taking two different approaches? Does it link to the candidates which they have on either site, is there some kind of difference, which has not been discussed or is the reason because the staff are deployed over both sites? The conclusion of this is, that they have taken this approach as historically, they have staff absences, so if the two sites, are working on slightly differently times frames, then they can support the other. I did consider if this was linked to the needs of the learners.

In conclusion, drawing on the works of Golby et al. (1975) and the '*need for consistency*' is illuminated here as a fundamental problem, this being – there is no consistency when staff are absent. This presents a quandary as how can learning be moved forward systematically for all candidates on both sites. How can this problem be addressed in the most effective way for the benefit of teachers, and the students so that the one fifth of learners on functional skills literacy in this setting OFSTED (ibid) can remain on target to achieve and is the issue here with 'cover teachers' an issue which is endemic in teaching in F.E in England.

Rankin *alluded to 'knowing the learners longer and no knowledge of special educational needs being shared with them prior to teaching'*. This then led me to consider, how do they know who they are receiving in their lessons, and how is the information shared. Rankin, further alluded to an '*imbalance, between in the resources which the learners are given to use, and that the learners themselves had commented on how unsuitable they were, such as photocopies of information for*

*learners with site issues on a grey recyclable paper, as this was part of the college sustainability agenda and there was not white paper.*

Another basic expectation for a teacher is planning for learning. With this in mind teachers were asked to consider how they learn of students with 'additional needs. The findings here demonstrated that, information is shared through a form known as the LNG117 forms. This form contains information pertaining to any additional needs which might have been shared, along with exam access arrangement and normal working practices for the learners. The teachers all said that the LNG117 form, being emailed to them, is the expected mode of sharing this specific information. However, when discussing this further, it quickly became evident that there was not a uniformed approach to ensuring English teachers receive this information and often they did not receive it. This then led them to time consuming hunts for information on electronic systems and four out of five teachers said they did not have the time for this, so they chose to 'try and work it out for themselves.' One of the biggest criticisms of this, is that English teacher perceives that vocational staff do not acknowledge the vast number of learners who they engage with over a week, therefore they have developed a view that vocational staff are not interested, and this is why the information is not shared. All the teachers shared, they did email course directors for the 117 if they did not receive them prior to Christmas, however this often still meant they did not receive them.

A key criticism of the LNG117 form and sharing of knowledge relating to learners who require support is linked to, *'information relating to support needs being shared too late'* – Austin. Which then becomes, impactful to the learners and affects their motivation'. When considering the findings, I am naturally drawn to the works of

Bronfenbrenner (ibid) and communities for learning. Clearly here it demonstrates how the community should have worked to support the learners and that if no '*joined up thinking*' has taken place, then this can '*impactful, influential*' and may affect the outcome for the learners. Significant information about the learners, not being shared at the earliest point possible, is demonstrated here as being '*time lost*' and in turn, this led to a 'demotivation' and made it harder for the teachers in English lesson, engage them. Wolf (ibid) identified that working collaborative is fundamental in educating our learners and a direct effect of this would be 'learners in the U.K would be slipping behind our competitors,' Walport and Leunig (2017) meaning that the impact of this, on our learners, could be life changing and is significant.

### **Teacher Views Round 2 – January- March 2023**

The format for round two interviews was very much built on the findings from round one and naturally led to points which were raised by all participants in the research. Discussions at this stage in the research related to the LNG117 form and the significance of this and the value in receiving this form became pertinent to this discussion. Staff were very passionate and animated about this form and valued this as 'part of their tool kit' to teach the learners well and said without this tool, they were building a house without secure foundations. Teacher views relating to the 'use of this form' and 'value which they hold'. Austin shared, '*the forms are important. The information on them helps us to quickly meet the needs of the learners but getting access to the information which the wider college team does not work with us is time consuming*'. However, all the other teachers had negative connotations association with this form and the value which it held. Galbaldon discussed '*receiving this information is very hit and miss, with discussions relating to access 'being a barrier*

*as well as the wider college staff having little empathy with the literacy teachers and the volume of learners they teach'. Dickens shared, 'my understanding is this should be shared during the first week. Ninety percent of these forms do not arrive. We are left, working in a class, with learners at the beginning of the year, where their anxiety can be high for several reasons, then they come to English and we are unaware of this, so it starts the year of looking like we are unprepared for the learners.*

Timeframes in receiving the documentation in a timely manner were also discussed as being a challenge and acquiring them is likened to 'a battle rather than a union', with delays being *'up to six weeks in receiving them-* Rankin. Hardy discussed that *'I have moved away from waiting for them, and I speak with the learners directly to find out their needs early on and support them this way'.*

Drawing conclusions here, it has become evident that the form is valued, is necessary and supports all, however the inconsistent approach with sharing of the information had 'devalued' its worth, leaving staff to 'muddle through' and make their own assumptions about learners. For this to work effectively for the learners, the staff must be skilled in pedagogy. Understanding how to work with a person, to enable them to flourish is a craft. It is only when a person uses their skills effectively and consciously can no detriment occur to the learner.

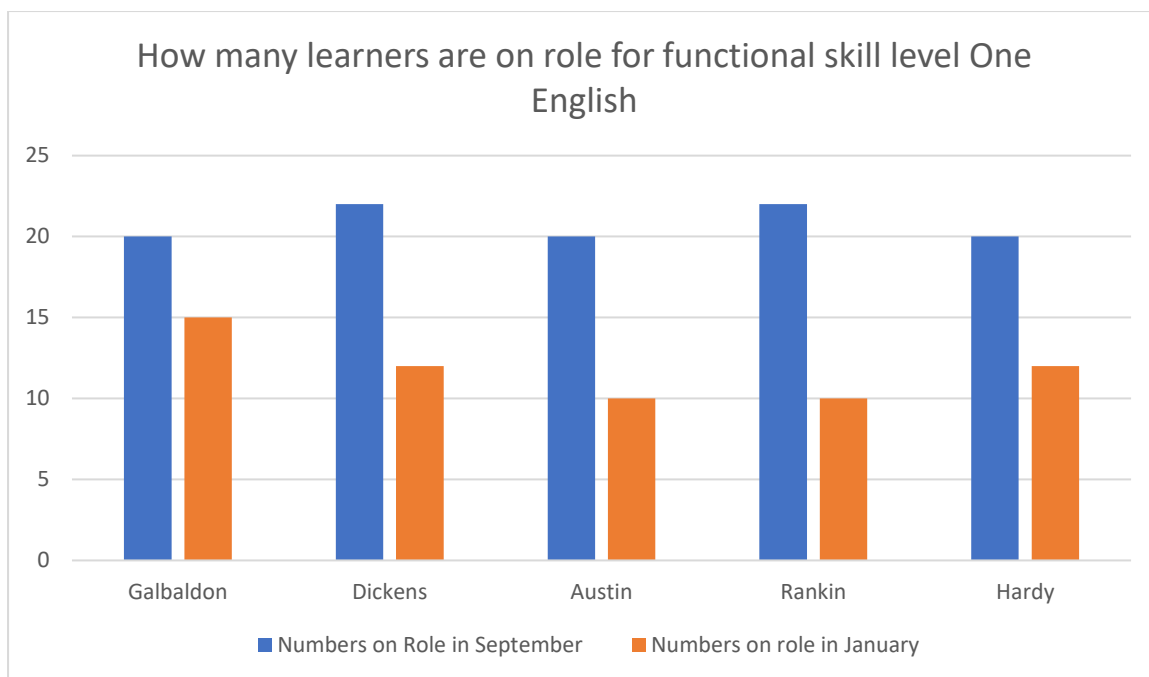
At the beginning of the year, the learner's emotional well-being may be impacted, leading to a heightened state of anxiety, due to this being a new situation (a new class or setting). Therefore, this state of 'well-being' requires nurturing, stroking, and building on. According to Lense (2023) learners will have prior emotions linked to previous experiences – learning literacy, and how it has impacted them emotionally. It is only when we understand this can we truly value how significant our interactions,

and behaviours are with the learners that we can truly understand 'flourishing' and how significant this is in supporting learners in feeling happy, confident, and empowered in their environment and that they are ready to learn from the beginning. If the teachers accept and acknowledge what is holding a learner back, they can be responsive to this. They can nurture this, in the pursuit of happiness Seligman (2000).

This research has demonstrated that English teachers are met with internal barriers right from the beginning of the academic year and that the system which is currently in place is 'broken or ineffective.' If the staff in the English teams, do not receive the support from the wider organisation, then the barriers which they are presented with can be impactful to the learner; learning is lost, and barriers are present leading to resistance from the learner from day one.

Environments for learning continue to be a point of interest and here teachers were asked to consider class sizes. During the conversations in round one, teachers alluded to class sizes and identified that this was a significant issue with them having successful interactions and outcomes with the learners. My findings were that in the last 12 weeks numbers had dropped, and groups had been placed together as a direct response to this.





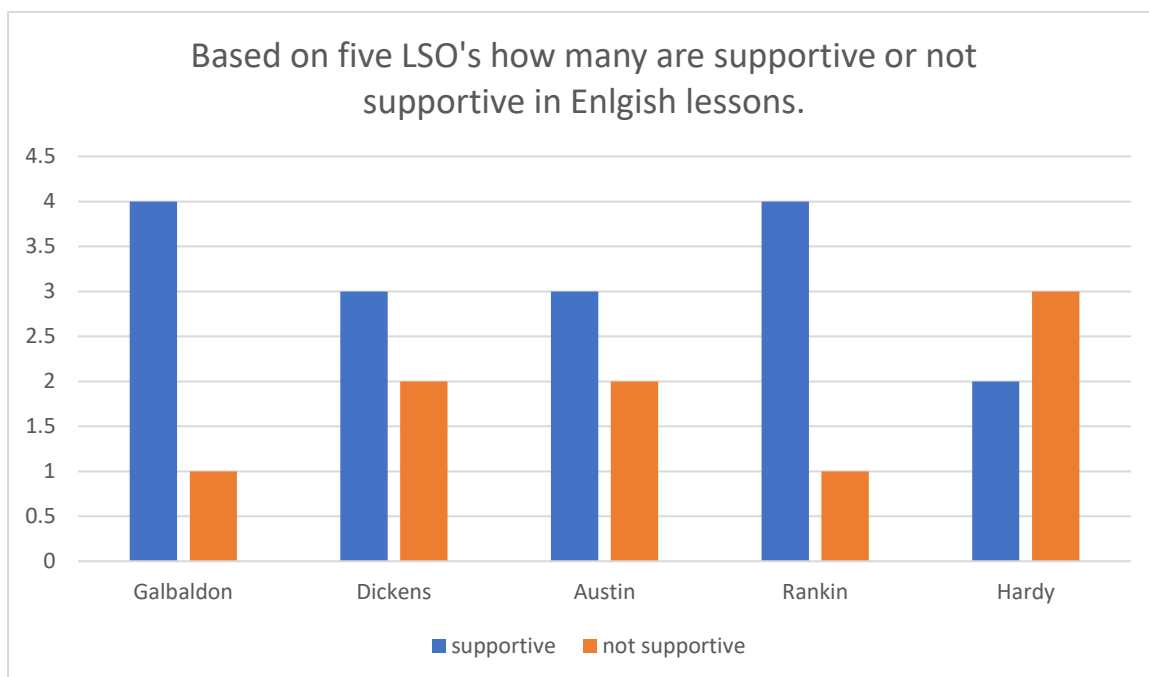
Clearly here, it is demonstrating that the number of learners on functional skill English Level 1, has declined from September 22 to January 23. Attendance and reasons for this are not part of this research. However, what is an optimum class size is, and it would be neglectful of me not to highlight the decline in numbers here as the first part of the academic year concludes.

When considering the question, 'optimum class size' all five of the staff spoke to give a number of between 12-14. The reasons for this were. Gabaldon *'you can have a good debate in a small team with this number of learners.* Dickens shared; *I have fourteen in my group now as they have come together. This is a suitable number, as I can work with them as they all require my time.'* Austin and Hardy both supported this view adding, *'twelve in the group means I can interact with them all in a meaningful way in the time I have been given.* Hardy added, *'They can complete peer work and reviews in small groups, so they do not feel overwhelmed.'*

Clearly here class sizes, expectations for development and achieving successful outcomes are integral to responses given. All staff members refer to 'working with or supporting the learner.' This has illuminated the discussion around collaborating closely with learners on level 1 functional skill English, to empower them, build their confidence and resilience - develop grit Seligman (2000) to enable them to flourish and feel worthy. Staff acknowledge and accept that they require repetition and reinforcement when they find specific areas hard. Equally they are aware that their self-esteem and confidence may be low, so to develop and nurture this, time is required. Time is another barrier here, as with only 1.5 hours to contact a week, there is not a lot of time to support them, therefore if class sizes are bigger this is impactful on the learner and could affect the outcome, not only for them to pass a test, but for them to feel fulfilled and convert the learning in class to meaningful experiences to foster their understanding of literacy for them in their lives.

Continuing with the theme environments for learning, people who are part of these environments became part of the research, mainly this being Learning Support Officers and their role in the classroom, moreover, supporting functional skills literacy. Teachers were asked to consider, if they are beneficial in this environment.

This question developed because of learners referring to them in their round two interviews. They had a mixed response to why they were there and how they were used in the classroom and the view of the learner regarding LSO's.



All staff commented openly about this, the findings did echo the voices of the learners, and the views were mixed. A key finding here was the voice of Dickens sharing. *'In the main the LSOs are proactive, and motivate the learners to join in, however there are some that, just sit there, they do not help, and they do not engage with the learners. This is problematic and causes additional resistance with the learners. LSOs are there to support the learners, but sometimes they arrive with no knowledge of the learners, so they are unable to support highlighting the 'importance of relationships with the learners' to support them in flourishing Seligman (2000).* Another view here is 'LSO's openly sharing with learners, *'I do not like English, and I am not sure why I am in here with you'* – Austin, along with, 'some LSO's only meet the learners in my English lessons, which means they have no relationship with them'- Galbaldon and other sharing, *'there is a mixed bag of people working in these roles, some do the work for them, some do not, therefore I enter them for the exams, thinking they are ready and they fail. This then causes disappointment'*-Hardy. One significant comment here raised by Rankin is *'Some do not understand the learner;*

*therefore, they cannot meet their needs. An example of this, is a non-verbal student learning English. The LSO needs to be the voice for the learner, if they identify they are not understanding the expectations. Often the LSO is not their voice, does not ask the teacher and learning is lost. This is very frustrating as fundamentally the reason they are there'.*

Key findings here illuminate firstly that they are part of their community Bronfenbrenner (1917) and the role they play in it is integral to learner acceptance, perception and working togetherness. If this relationship is not fostered, then this can have long lasting consequences for the learner.

The evidence here suggests that if the LSO support which the learners are given is not supportive of a 'flourishing environment' it is the, LSO's themselves which can be the barrier to the learning taking place which is the opposite of the purpose of them being in the classroom. Fundamentally their views, disposition and attitudes when working with the learners are measurable to the learner themselves. Therefore, identifying 'a skills check' should be done with LSO's relating to professionalism, knowledge and understanding of their role and understanding how to support English teaching is a recommendation.

Staff and learners have echoed their views about consistency and meaningful relationships as being key to learner success throughout this research. However, clearly here this demonstrates that, this is not being supported in the English lessons. The support the English teachers receives is sporadic and reactive rather than planned. The sharing of LSO's and the imbalance of support which learners are

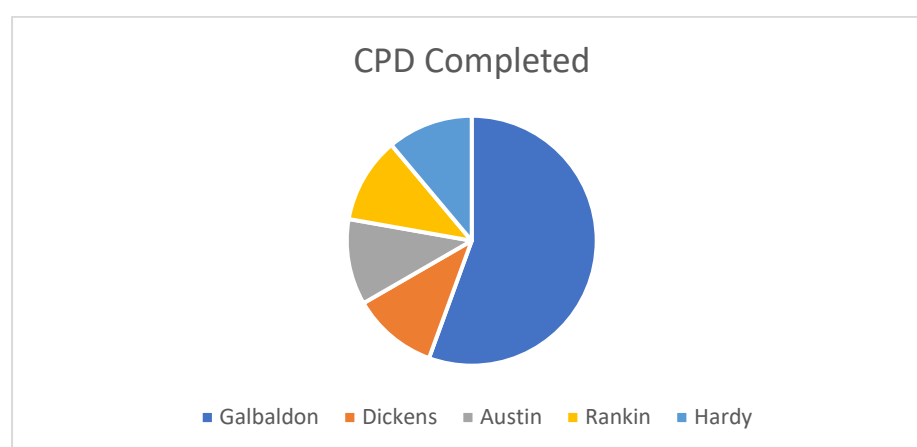
given, is a secondary finding here as often one student can monopolize the support, leaving the other to fend for themselves, concluding the supporting is imbalanced which ultimately can be impactful to the learner both linked to developing skills for life, passing an exam, and reaching eudaimonia – a state of happiness Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Environments for learning and what takes place, still remain central in this study and conversations pertinent to ‘areas of focus’ at this point in the study. All teachers shared they were on the ‘reading and writing part’ of the curriculum. Attendance and how impactful lack of attendance is, became a central theme here linked to ‘success and achievement’. Secondary to this, success early on, is a key indicator here of learners ‘buying in to literacy’ as they noticed that they attended more once they had passed that assessment. All teachers deemed this to be a good model to use moving forward with their delivery planning.

When this was explored further, they accumulatively said, ‘they felt this was because ‘learners could see success and feel success early on’ – flourishing-happiness-eudaimonia, Seligman (ibid) Aristotle (ibid) had been reached. The teachers said’ they could see the learners begin to ‘believe and understand’ the importance of the lessons. The teachers described ‘celebrating with the learners’ and not ‘for the learners,’ supporting Bronfenbrenner’s (1917) theory of community and significant influencers in it.

Discussing further the topic of ‘flourishing’, teachers were asked to consider their role in ensuring that they were meeting the need of the learners and teaching expectations in relation to Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

Interestingly here, only one of the five teachers claimed to have completed CPD during this time externally from the college. This teacher said, *'I have sought my own CPD, as I wish to develop and know that the CPD, which is offered here will not relate to my subject area. The CPD, which is offered links to the whole college strategic plan. The other staff stated they had completed CPD, but it was College set.'*



Drawing conclusions here, it is evident, that the staff at this setting are unaware of the Education and Training Foundation (2023) CPD events to support English teachers and what can be offered to them. Analysing this point further, no CPD has taken place for some staff for the whole 9 months, other than what had been provided for them by the establishment. This is a concern, and I state, is integral to them being contemporary and current in expectations in all parts of pedagogy.

When exploring this further all staff shared 'they are tired or cover extra lessons due to staff shortages' and I deem, this is to be 'the tumour' in the establishment, which is invading all parts of the teachers in literacy which left untreated has enabled staff to stop investing in themselves which ultimately leads to a disconnect with the learners, which does not enable them to flourish Seligman (2000) or reach eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC) in their worlds by developing new skills- the chef to enable the learners to rise in society in environments – the oven- the digital world, which is the

world in which they are now engaged in and will continue to be engaged in as technology advances in their vocational areas to enable them to flourish in life. Often learners are ahead of us in the digital world, so it is integral, we seek CPD to ensure we remain current. The European commission (2023) Digital Skills and Jobs is tackling this this agenda today.

Clearly there is support available, but this has not been taken up by the teachers in this F.E College. When this was explored further comments associated with 'time constraints' were most used. Three teachers shared that they are *'currently we spend all our free time, covering absent teachers, which means when we get time, we must then complete our own work. Once this is done, we are too tired to complete additional training, even though we might have an interest.'*

This has led me to draw conclusions regarding 'cover teachers in F.E' and the need for them to allow the current workforce to be as well equipped to collaborate with our learners as possible. If we do not train the chef- the teacher, then how will they know what new ingredients- the learner they have and how they work or what tools can be used to support the ingredients-learner to develop. How will they understand or know how to change the temperature-oven-classroom so that the cakes-learners can be baked enough so that they can rise-flourish.

### **Round three Teacher Views April to June 23**

Here the teachers were asked to consider the theme of assessment and if learners were assessment ready. Teachers openly shared that *'at this point in the year, we*

*are basically covering everything with learners in the class from the start of the year, it is exhausting'-Dickens.*

This meant that the lessons were very much student focused and were tailored to individual plans for the learners, based on where their needs are. Hardy shared *'class sizes are smaller, so this is easier to manager'. All staff referred to 'the planning at the beginning of the year, has paid off, as this has enabled time to be left, to work with learners who have not passed'. What we can never count on is, the learners' attendance'.*

During this round of interviews, it became evident, that teachers felt 'under pressure' and all illuded to being 'in exam season' and that the basis of every lesson with every learner, was 'completing tests or revision practice'. When we explored this further the main the main reason that they were where they are, is that the learners had either not passed based on 'skill', or that they had not passed based on 'lack of attendance'. Discussing the point of attendance, a little, staff shared that these learners were 'persistent attendance offenders', however the expectations was that right up to the last day, they were expected to prepare them for exams and enter them. Ensuing this further, staff shared that this was 'unjust' to learners who had attended regularly and were working hard to try and pass and that the 'offending learners' would then just arrive and cause havoc in the lessons and take their focus away. Staff shared that most of the 'offending learners' had a 'closed mindset' Dweck (2000) and said that they knew they would not pass, however staff felt they had a duty to enter them in for the exam and these pressures came from above and government expectations. They claim that their opinions were not needed and were not asked for. They shared, they felt, this was another experience of when the



learner 'failed' in English, therefore developing that closed mindset to English even further. To conclude, all staff were very happy to support working with learners who were committed and showed 'grit' and 'resilience' to themselves in developing their skills. Galbaldon and Dickens shared 'They felt frustrated that the learners were 'on a hamster wheel' and at this point the pressure was to 're-enter' the learners to push to a 'pass' when often learners were not ready. More time is needed to focus on core elements to ensure the learners are ready', as they believe this is detrimental to learner well-being. Drawing conclusions from this, I suggest, this does not support a 'virtuous life, or 'flourishing', Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Seligman (2000) as this makes them feel the opposite- that they are not capable and overall is harmful to their self-belief and self-worth. This can ultimately lead to wider issues for the learner which can become hugely detrimental to them. According to the American Psychological Association (APA),

*your self-worth is your evaluation of yourself as a capable and valuable human being deserving of consideration and respect. It is an internal sense of being worthy of love.*

*Cited in Gupta (2023)*

To conclude, the impact that 'repetition of exams' has on learners' self-worth, at this point in the process, is unmeasurable to the teacher, but to the learner is paramount. This has can lead to a lack of trust and ultimately lead to depression Meek (2019) causing long-term life impacts on learners.

Considering the point linked to 'exam expectations and pressures on teachers. Teachers shared they were part of a wider system and why funds are released based on English and maths, the pressure would always be present. Staff did share that on average, about 20% of their cohort did not pass all three exams this year. They deemed this as a 'good year'. Comparing to national statistics by Pearson (2022) claiming 'in reading 77% pass and in writing 56% pass, after numerous attempts therefore placing this establishment within the expectations.

One pertinent point raised here was 'staffing levels' along with 'the knowledge and ability 'of staff to complete standardisation being a casualty of this. This is a key statement – as to ensure the 'processes are robust' this is an expectation, therefore if there are not aptly trained people to be part of the process, then this can lead to a 'lack of trust' being formed from both the learners and the awarding body, which can have huge ramifications for the establishment.

Literacy as a Social Practice from the teacher's viewpoint became the focus now and an interest in understanding if the teachers were aligned to the places learners access literacy from formed part of the discussions. Questions pertinent to where learners access literacy is their worlds, is a fundamental part at this stage in the study. Online book sharing platforms- Book Tok formed, the basis for this discussion. All staff shared, they 'had not heard of Book Tok' therefore, this reinforced the view, that the staff are not engaging in learners in ways which is relevant to them today, with so much digital presence in their lives. This is a missed opportunity for staff and students. Three of the staff did share, they do use naturally occurring resources, such as articles in the press and media as discussion points, however they did also find, that not a lot of learners use their phones, for the 'news or current affairs' only

for knowledge relating to Reality TV stars or Football Teams and they struggle to distinguish what is 'real and fake information. All staff shared, that learners do look at information online, so reading is being reinforced and prompts speaking, however this tends to be more, on topics of interest to the learners often found on social media. Dickens and Hardy did share '*I have the same cohort of learners who are in the same vocational area, so this makes it easier to share information from the media with them, which is vocationally linked. This does strike a chord with them and enables a larger discussion to take place*'. All staff shared, where they can we make naturally occurring links to their industry and teach them skills which they require such as 'letter writing for pricing jobs or inviting parents in for meetings as well as report writing.

## **Environments for Learning**

In this part of the research, four statements were shared with teachers to consider, drawn from the works of Rogers' (ibid), Seligman (ibid), Sennet (ibid) and Unwin (ibid). Teachers were asked to consider the statements and make conscious statements to reflect on if they had experienced this in their environments.

STATEMENT 1 - Rogers (1902-1987) cited in McLeod, 2014, building on the work of Maslow, believes that a person 'can grow' if they are in the correct environments, with fundamental values linking to: 'openness, acceptance, and empathy.

Can you give me some insight into how this is met or not met in your area for learning.

Discussions relating to awareness of a person's 'background' and 'challenges' which they are faced with was shared – Gabaldon, along with, a barrier connected to 'an understanding of not wanting to be in an English lesson' Galbaldon shared that, *I like to demonstrate being flexible for them, for example if they are struggling give them*

*time, reflect in the moment quickly, so that we can overcome the barrier as quickly as possible, even if they are struggling. Remaining calm and relaxed, I feel helps them to join in and demonstrate that I understand them.* Dickens shared, 'Showing them that I require support sometimes with spelling, by using a dictionary in front of them, helps them associate and helps me show them I understand, along with giving them time. Rankin shared, *'if my learners do something well, then we celebrate this together. Something well, does not always mean something is correct and this is important to me'*. Whereas, Hardys view here, relates to time constraints. 'As we only see some of them on an irregular basis, this means we cannot always so them who we are. We have to work with them on the work in the timeframe which we have'. 'If we walk alongside the learner as they go through this process is another way to show empathy and understanding'. Austin claims this is done by offering support. 'I had one learner who had completed this level of functional skills three times. They kept failing on one part of the exam. The writing part was the issues, as the learner had fundamental spelling issues as they were significantly dyslexic. By offering continued support, the learners passed.

Drawing some conclusions here, this takes place. Learners too illuded to this and when teachers do this. This demonstrates that all candidates in the research acknowledge this is taking place, which as previously stated leads to learners flourishing Seligman (2000) and reaching happiness and eudaimonia Aristotle (384-322 BC).

STATEMENT 2 - Seligman (ibid) a leading psychologist in positive psychology states...  
that people have the ability to strengthen their characters, with '*grit, resilience and gratitude*', which will ultimately increase happiness and wellbeing along with creating more meaningful lives, whilst decreasing stress.

Have you witnesses, where learners have developed a strength in character over the time, they have been with you is lesson? Give me some insight into this.

Strength of character and how this is shown in the classroom, is key to this part of the study as this demonstrates resilience. Hardy shared *'giving them a time to develop a voice in a safe space firstly, then listening to their voice, as well as repetition to support their developing skills. Repetition is key here'* also'. Gabaldon also commented on time. Time being, that *'the learner had significant mental health needs and needed time to break down the boundaries slowly'*. An example is one learner took three attempts to get to the exam and pass. We used different strategies and approaches before the assessments, helped them to get to the exam and they passed it. It took time, patience, and consistent approaches, but they worked hard, and they did it". Austin shared *'She has attempted the exam three times and over time her skills have developed. She had to develop a 'click' in her own mind to believe.*

This yielded some interesting points. Learners had acknowledged when this had taken place and staff too identified this, meaning their thinking was aligned with one another which demonstrated concrete experiences Kolb (1984) for both the teachers and learners. The environment – the oven – the community in which, the learning has taken place, has been enabling for the learner Bronfenbrenner (1917). This has led them to them flourishing, accepting they have developed, built their self-belief and self-worth, which has increased their happiness and love for themselves and their ability in life- the cake has risen.

### STATEMENT 3 –

Sennett (2008:27) claims that learners' brains need to be able to use, '*visual, language and symbol information in parallel to one another*' for learning to take place.

Is this evident with the learners which you teach? Does it work for them? Can you give examples of when you have used visual clues, language, and symbols in lessons.

All teachers here shared that they use visual stimuli in their lessons to support their learners. These ranged from, images, to '*tap into their brains*' – Hardy. '*Visual Language is another suggestion made*' by Gabaldon. "*Visual language is something which I have always used, as I am aware that this helps them to decode and understand what is being asked of them in different ways.* With Dickens sharing that they use 'images along with text'.

The findings here clearly demonstrate that the teachers are aware of the learners they have in their classrooms and know how to engage with them to ensure that no learning is lost. They use both visual and language skills to promote learning whenever possible and make connections to them as a way of stimulating the learner and for this to go into their deeper memory. Scaffolding Vygotsky (1896-1934) approaches have been used here, for this to take place. The community which supports the learners 'buys into the approaches used' Bronfenbrenner (1917) so that they are all aiming for the same outcome. To conclude, the learning environment – the oven is working effectively and the cakes- learners are rising, leading to successful outcomes, are flourishing Seligman (2000), and have increased well-being Gupta (2023), which leads to eudaimonia-happiness Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Statement 4 –

Unwin (2009 cited in Gregson 2015:144) suggests that vocational teaching when done well, will '*inspire and motivate, however a more sophisticated pedagogy is required to be able to switch from classroom to workplace to workshop*'.

All staff shared that they felt they could do this and that they did this well. The main theme here, was that they had been teaching a long time and their confidence in their subject area – English was high and knowledge of expectations in industry was good. They all claim this to be because, they are experienced teachers, they know where the naturally occurring links can be made, so use them seamlessly. Rankin shared *'a cohort of the same vocational learners has made this easy to do*. Rankin further suggests, *'that as they go to industry every week, the connections are current and meaningful'*.

Interestingly Hardy makes links to practicing in environments where we feel comfortable as a significant point. *Stating, "I agree with this statement and believe that if we rehearse situations in the classroom then this will enable the learner to switch the skills to the workplace confidently and seamlessly. By allowing the students to do this we can develop their confidence skills in a safe space"*. Austins comments related more to *'new teachers and having a bank of statements and resources to support this agenda. This offers consistency to the students.*

Drawing conclusions from the findings it is evident that the staff are well established and knowledgeable. They are confident in their subject area, so find it easy to relate experiences to wider contexts in vocational areas. One area which they are lacking in, is knowledge of vocational expectations in the wider context as identified by Austin, therefore a recommendation is that staff as part of their internal development should acquire greater knowledge of this, so they can make the connections more pertinent between the workshop-and the classroom.

In conclusion, staff enable flourishing in all parts of their interactions with learners Seligman (2000). They aim for happiness and eudaimonia to be reached Aristotle

(384-322 BC). The communities in which they work, sit in silos of one another, however the English team attempt to engage with the wider vocational staff but there are barriers to this work effectively.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **United Kingdom AD 2021**

This thesis began as the Covid 19 pandemic in the U.K ended. Teachers and learners have just experienced two years of 'disruptive teaching and learning.' The natural feeling in education at this time is 'there is a lot of uplifting to be done' so that students can reach pre-pandemic levels of attainment and achievement both in literacy classes but also in readiness for life.

The learners had to reengage with being back in a classroom and the expectations this brought whilst assimilating themselves back into society in general. This alone posed some unexpected issues and delays identified in 'mental wellness is as well as 'a lack of social interaction in class Asbury et al (2020) and Lee (2020) as being significant. The findings are unexpected and can be perceived as a 'casualty of the pandemic' Department for Education (2021). Ofsted (2022) state '*learners' social skills had dwindled, and they were less confident*' meaning that teachers had to develop this, alongside expectations in English, with learning starting at a greater deficit level than pre-pandemic levels and disrespect for '*their peers and staff was on the increase*'. This made for a turbulent classroom for teachers-the chef to include in the recipe in education to work with learners, so they learn- and the cake rises.



Ofsted (2022) further state,

*In many cases, learners' behaviour was more challenging than usual, particularly that of young learners who had enrolled directly from school. Disruption towards the end of this cohort's education had resulted in more disruptive and juvenile behaviour than previously seen.*

*Ofsted, 2022*

Discussing this on a wider stage, UNICEF, (2022) further claim that for some 'learning will never be recovered' and that the education divide is greater than ever before.

Taking the discussion, outside of the theory classroom and into the practical world. Practical skills required for industry had been found to have increased by young learners, as the government called for the young, to support employment and experience Ofsted (2022) as learners had been invited to work in 'key roles' as the young, were deemed being 'less at risk' of long last impacts of the Covid 19 Pandemic.

This statement is significant, as the learners in this thesis are required to complete work placements in Health and Childcare. The placements had been impacted upon as they were unable to attend, meaning 'key skills' such as speaking were not being developed in industry.

The signs shown in class from teachers, relate to the lack of work experience being deemed as a 'deficit', as this was the tool used, 'to hook the learners' into English and a relationship can be built. This is a significant point, on two levels in this thesis,

one as most of the learners in this study are in the Healthcare or Childcare sector and, two the wider impact on the learner and their wider skill set for life, as using literacy, and seeing this in industry helps to embed the significance of this to them and their wider learning for life. To conclude, teachers today are still being faced with a general 'lethargy' for learning as a long-lasting impact of the pandemic.

At the same time, Teachers were 'bearing the brunt' of the educational crisis on two levels, one personal and two, government expectations. The mental wellness cost on the teachers is evident, with Kim, (2021) stating '*teachers throughout this time thought their wellbeing hadn't been thought about' and that teachers felt utterly let down*'. Baig, (2020) supports this state of mind of teachers at this stage with their findings illuminating the voice of teachers currently being...

*All the teachers agreed that the pressure to consistently put on a brave face for students was exhausting and impacted their own wellbeing at the best of times, but in a time of such uncertainty and stress, it felt impossible.*

*Baig, (2020)*

Consequently, teachers re-entered the classroom feeling, tired, frustrated and confused, and that they felt '*ground down by the barrier put in the way of them being able to do their jobs effectively, as well as feeling 'let down by government leaders and a general lack of respect for the profession'*' Kim (2021).

During the final part of this thesis, the government suggested a way to reengage learners known as 'covid catch-up fund' with extra English lessons being

recommended to try to encourage learners to make up for lost learning was introduced. Learners in this thesis had been offered the 'Catch-up fund tuition'. This fund primarily focused on Maths and English. However, with a tired workforce or a lack of workforce because of the long-term impacts of the pandemic, such as teachers leaving education Ofsted (2022), as well as not enough trained staff to support the need of the community at the time. The catch-up sessions were not accessed by any of the learners in this thesis, so staff were still battling with engagement and 'buy in' from.

As a practitioner researcher I can bring the voices of the participants alive. I gained a deeper insight into the 'lived experiences' of them all and was able to identify the different lenses, in which I studied the participants which gave me a 360-degree view of the teaching and learning which is taking place at this time. I was able to identify the barriers which teachers were faced with along the issues which felt pertinent to the learners. Subsequently, this took me on a journey which was unexpected from the onset and moved into a slightly different direction to one of communities for learning as identified in chapter two. Interestingly, what I did not expect to find was how delicate the 'emotional wellbeing' of learners is at this time and this was on two levels. Firstly, being back in the classroom after the pandemic and feeling that the government had failed them in their educational journeys during this time and secondly, the notion of the 'poor relation' to GCSE learners as discussed in chapter five.

The ontological and epistemological stance, used in that of Aristotle (384-322 BC) as discussed in chapter three. The systematic thinking involved in Aristotle's forms of

knowledge, linked to being a '*systematic thinker*' is the approach used in this thesis. Furthermore, I hold a great personal belief linked to '*studying the human form*' and that we can learn lots when this takes place, when we learn from '*human experience*'.

The ontological stance used is that of '*the constructivism*' as this address my natural interest in '*the human form*' and allows me to '*balance newly given information with previously acquired information*' Saunders et al (2012), as I thought I understood and knew what was taking place in the English environments but did I really. Therefore, the only way this could be resolved was to complete practitioner research by '*using the voice of participants and understand their thoughts feelings and emotions*' and looking at the situation through their eyes and lived experiences. The responses they give provide opportunities to paint a detailed picture of what the participants were going through themselves.

The work of Bronfenbrenner (1917) mainly linked to '*ecological systems*' is used as an '*anchor point*' in this research linked to communities for learning and if the wider communities did support our learners, what teachers knew about this and if the views of others is used to support the learners in English lessons.

The study was a response to a 'snapshot of information' acquired during a lesson at the end of teaching during a childcare lesson. This along with one training session from the head of English, on a rainy autumn evening became the motivation for this study as it is evident that this issue is broader than 'childcare students' however it wasn't until I completed the reading for chapter one, did I understand how

widespread the issue relating to 'lack of literacy skills' is in society but most importantly for the participants in this study. Finally, as I discovered later, the only way this could be done was to involve the voices of the workforce teaching English and those learning functional skills English level 1 in this study to fully understand the issue. By creating a platform for them to discuss their lived experiences in this thesis and to shine a light on the issues they are faced with daily and then impacts it has on their lives. I only hope my accounts have echoed their voices and I have given them justice.

### **Lessons Learnt**

This research in this thesis, is developed based on a cyclical approach whereby all participants were visited three times a year during set windows to discuss their lived experiences of teaching or learning literacy. This involved two different questionnaires, one for learners and the second for teachers.

Round One, was to determine their 'on entry' feelings generally. The thoughts about what they were going to learn this year, as well as any concerns they might have at this stage. This took place in October 2022. Teacher views linked to expectations, pressures and barriers are the key focus at this time.

Round Two focussed more on the journey, February 2023. Where they are at the now and primarily focused on the thoughts feels and expectations which all had placed on them. This expanded further to discussions topics of 'communities for learning' and began to draw in knowledge about the vocational areas too and how the 'knowledge skills and expectations for the learners was met during English

lessons and what teachers did to embed this so that 'learning for life' was taking place.

The teacher views, linked heavily to 'where the learners are now' and where 'they must get them to', as by this stage the staff had learnt about their learners. The teachers knew what challenges they had ahead of them from the learner perspective, but also at this time, they are aware what 'changes may be presented to them' from the government initially and internal expectations such as changes in grade boundaries and knowledge which is expected to be demonstrated when sitting the exams, as this is a 'very fluid situation' and changes year on year.

A significant finding in round two, is that learners are unable to attach an emotion to something which they had done well and did not celebrate this – success, leading to happiness, flourishing Seligman (2000) and Eudaimonia being reached Aristotle (384-322 BC). Learners had all made progress and had passed an exam – speaking and listening, but they did not internalise this in any way. It was if they were 'numb and emotion less'. This was groundbreaking for me the researcher and led my enquiry to consider, why are learners in functional skills level one English, unable to attach and emotion to a point of achievement and why do they not understand the significance of this in their lives. Why is success not being celebrated!

One theory I had, led me to '*wellness, self-belief and a lack of self-esteem*' Ashbury (2020) and Meek (2019), therefore round Three was set up to address this finding with the learners. Reflection took place Gregson et al. (2020) and Gibbs (2022) for me the researcher, to address 'key findings' and respond to that. The findings here had to be addressed and influenced the research questions in round three for all.

Moreover, it is only, when a person, stops, and thinks do they truly look at the situation and in the process of reflection '*can they begin to address their thoughts feeling and emotions linked to what is happening*' Kolb, 1984 and Driscoll, 1990. The work of Gibbs (1988), linked to the significance of '*thoughts feelings and emotions*' in the process of reflection are drawn on here through the thesis.

The teachers lived experience view here, in round two, focusses more on the concept of '*celebration and happiness*' Seligman (2000) as well as 'growth mindset' Dweck (2000) and how we foster this in the learners to increase their self-belief and self-esteem. Furthermore, this addresses the 'communities for learning' also and how information shared by others was responded to in English lessons Bronfenbrenner (1917) and what barriers they faced now.

Round Three focus being on wellness for all, May 2023, was the focus and the topic of 'flourishing' Seligman (2000) was a key factor in this. This is a naturally occurring finding which developed from the interactions in round one and two and took the thesis on a journey linked to communities for learning Bronfenbrenner (1917).

What was unexpected is that the findings from the round one interviews, influenced, and impacted the second, and subsequent points of investigations an 'internal game of tennis' began. The participants crafted the questionnaires by the responses which they gave and I was 'chef' in which I placed all the ingredients together to understand what was happening in their lived experiences to ultimately see if the environment were effective for learning – correct temperatures to bake the cakes and also if the ingredients – the learners, needs had been met or changed in

anyway as a result of the Covid Pandemic and also the diverse communities which reside in Britain; linking to if the environments which they are in – the classrooms and the materials used in them, along with the delivery from the teachers, were developing their skills to be proficient in the workforce as discussed and for life, as discussed in chapter one and two.

One oversight of this thesis is the role of the LSO and how their views would have given another 'lens; in which this problem could have been viewed. They work closely with the learners and as the research continued, the learners openly shared their experiences of this, however, I had little knowledge of how 'valuable or invaluable' the learners felt the LSOs are in their communities for learning and what 'key players' they are for the learner to enable flourishing to take place.

## **Key Findings**

The class sizes for functional skill learners and their needs impact on the outcomes to learners. The teacher's opinions demonstrate that an optimum size would be twelve as this would allow for small group work, good knowledge and understanding of the learners to be developed in literacy. Furthermore, this thesis suggests smaller class sizes, support learners' mental wellness which is impactful to them in life and if this can be addressed in class, then this will support wider flourishing in life Seligman (2000). The curriculum does meet the needs of the learners in relation to functional literacy, as it teaches them skills needed to demonstrate proficiency to enable them to pass a test, along with giving them skills of literacy to broaden their understanding to be used in their life and support Aristotle's model of curriculum planning cited in Smith, (2000).



Drawing on the voice of the learners, if the class sizes were smaller, then they felt that they could really grapple with the complexities of literacy and feel that they would 'fine tune' their skills to enable them to make conscious choices using literacy in their worlds for life. They would have more opportunities to use the art of 'reflection', Gregson, and Duncan, (2020) as there would be greater opportunities to rehearse with guided support from the teacher with fewer students in the room. However, topics of interest for the learners were not included, they did not feel that the curriculum was 'creative, open of innovative, neither was it flexible Stenhouse (1975) rather the opposite, it was linear, narrow, and unimaginative and that links to wider social contexts, which were of interest to the learner were not included, supporting Golby et al, 1975:2 view relating to '*curriculum designers remaining behind the times*' as they have not changed, or adapted education in line with social change, which ultimately why the 'disconnect' has arisen.

The LNG117 form which is used is imperative for a swift start to learning and understanding of the candidates. The lack of sharing of this information hinders relationship building with students and teachers being able to plan effectively to meet the needs of the learners. The impacts can be felt far too long into the term and teaching is lost, concluding that this system is ineffective, for the learner neither does it give a deeper insight to the teacher to be able to plan the teaching and learning experiences in literacy, to meet the individual needs of the learners, in a way which is beneficial to them not only now, but for use in their life thereafter Drew, (2021).

Not having the document soon enough hinders flourishing taking place at the earliest possible point and is detrimental to learners with the consequences being longer

lasting than expected. Learners become disengaged and become problematic in literacy lessons, and do not demonstrate the best version of themselves Crain, 2015. They develop a closed mindset Dweck (2000) quickly, which means teachers are having to work harder from the beginning to engage learners and change their views of themselves to ensure flourishing takes place Seligman (2000).

The BKSBS diagnostic tests which are used to benchmark learners are 'useless as a tool' drawing on the voice of the teachers, the students do not know what they are used for, do not try, often rush and the information does not show their strengths as the results do not give specific information about the learners. The findings from the screening tool does not enable the teacher to plan the curriculum effectively to enable the learning to be tailored to meet the needs of the results of the test for the learner.

Teachers preferred making judgements themselves and think their time could be better spent getting to know the learners than asking them to complete the assessment. Students shared a view of 'meet me don't judge me' based on a score Drew, (2021) as a collective voice when discussing outcomes and achievements Claiming once this had been done, then they could work together to form an opinion about standards of literacy and ability. This approach supports RQ 1 and RQ 2, as if the teacher understands the needs of the learners, makes judgments based on firsthand experiences from them. The teachers can begin to address their strengths and weaknesses both in preparedness for work life whilst fostering a love of literacy for life at the same time. The teacher has the tools – the knowledge of the curriculum, they are able to identify where the strengths are within the learner, use

this to build the relationship then work on challenging the weaknesses, once mutual respect is established by viewing the 'human' and not the 'score' Drew, (2021).

By adopting this approach, learners will internally flourish, and the lessons learnt from this will overflow into their wider lives, happiness will be reached, and flourishing will take place Seligman (2000). The knowledge here is that assessment tools are impactful to the mental wellness of the learners and their perceived opinions of themselves Meek, (2019) linked to eudaimonia- happiness Aristotle (384-322 BC) and flourishing Seligman (2000).

This thesis demonstrates that communication between two campuses managed by one leader is inconsistent and leads to confusion and mixed messages. This leads to learners experiencing a 'similar education' in the organisation but not one which is seamless. There is a disparity between one site and the other which is impactful to learners and gives mixed messages. Learners here were adversely affected as staff at the main campus were prioritised in English. Considering this point further, if one setting cannot coordinate across two campuses, what might this be like, across England and what leadership, do the English teachers receive to ensure all learners on functional skills in England are receiving an 'equal education' other than the outcomes in exam situations? The findings here indicate that the teachers are working from two different recipe sheets, therefore the ingredients in the cakes are not being given an equal way of baking them – helping them to rise, this can be impactful to the learner, stops them from making the connections to literacy which enables them to flourish in life Golby et al. (1975). Learners need to make sense and connections to their worlds Gibbs, (1988) and Kolb, (1984), if the recipe is in the

wrong order due to lack of communication, then the preparation for the cake- the exam, may not be in a way that the learner understands which sets them at a disadvantage Elliott and Norris, (2011), Therefore consideration of the curriculum, order which is should be delivered in should be agreed prior, so that every chance is given to enable learners to develop students literacy skills effectively (RQ-1) with a focus on the wider goal being a love of literacy for life (RQ-2).

A lack of wider reading suggestions or experiences outside of the classroom were missed. Staff did not suggest reading for pleasure from books or in the online world. They did not refer to reading online or promote this as being 'literacy which is meaningful to the learners. This thesis demonstrates that this was a 'learning experience lost' and that every opportunity to promote wider learning experiences should be optimised to broaden the learners understanding of literacy and where it naturally sits in their worlds. Once again here, naturally occurring links to (RQ- 2) were missed, as the learners could have been immersed in an environment of 'new learning exposure in literacy' if only the teacher had the time to enable this. Merriam-Webster, (2022) New Latin word meaning for curriculum is '*course of study*.' Therefore, if the course of study, reflected the societal changes which are present today Peddiwell, (1939) and looked at the work as an '*entire project*' Stenhouse (1975), then these opportunities would not have been lost, Moreover, they could have been used as a 'key learning experiences' and help bridge the gap between education and vocational learning (RQ-1).

The permanent teachers in this thesis are skilled and knowledgeable about their learners and the teaching of literacy. They were all established in their teaching communities and learners identified them as 'consistent' 'reliable' and 'supportive.'

Teachers believed flourishing took place and learners agreed the learners were able to 'self-assess' eventually and could see where progress had been made and towards the end were able to identify when they flourished because of the teaching Seligman (2000). Learners can attach emotion to a task completed and develop a voice to share this with in their communities. This was something that at the beginning of this research they were unable to do. The findings here demonstrate that RQ1 and RQ2 have been achieved. With a consistent knowledgeable teacher Stenhouse (1975), learners can grow and develop skills in themselves. The skills are transferable for them in their vocational areas and in their lives, this enables them flourish and feel enriched Aristotle (384-322 BC).

Learners can develop 'grit' and when they demonstrate this, they go on to do well, both in passing assessments and in developing literacy skills for life. They can feel proud of their achievements and their mental well-being increases, leading to feeling pride and happiness is present demonstrating flourishing has taken place Seligman (2000) when this is nurtured and promoted by people in their communities. This is a skill like any other which requires practice and if they are not in an environment which promotes, practices, and rehearses this, then this is a missed learning experience, which is a significant life lesson – learning about our emotions and feelings about ourselves Ashbury et al. (2020), Meek (2019) and Lee (2020).

### **Original contributions to Knowledge**

Students in Functional literacy deem themselves as the poor relations, with opinions from learners being that all staff see GCSE learners as 'more important' and that their focus and attention should be on them. They perceive themselves as not

worthy, which is impactful to their wellbeing and happiness, not only whilst learning in FE but ramifications of this are transferred into their lives.

Learner's view of the 'poor relation' derives from the GCSE English learners being given regular class teachers, better resources, and more time. A key finding illuminated here is that learners would like 'more teaching time' and that if they had three hours a week, like the GCSE learners, then they will have time to 'rehearse skills' and 'revisit learning' meaning that their outcomes would improve not only in assessments but confidence in life, and happiness- flourishing will be reached Seligman (2000). Stenhouse (1975) suggests that if more time is spent understanding the curriculum, then more learning can take place. This is pertinent here, as the learners are asking for more time, teachers are echoing this view, but it is the financial barriers which the FAVE sector faces which is stopping this from happening and is one which is not responsive to societal needs currently Golby et al (1975).

Too many supply teachers in a brief period are harmful to learners and their view of themselves in F.E when learning literacy. They internalize this as being the 'poor relation' 'less worthy' and 'irrelevant' in education. This inadvertently affects their mental wellbeing therefore hinders flourishing taking place. This can instil negative views on the learners and learners are more likely to develop anxiety and depression as an indirect result of the F.E setting always giving them the supply teacher Meek, (2019). The findings illuminate that supply teachers do not always lead to meaningful experiences and learning is lost or impacted upon. This hinders RQ1 and RQ being met, as there is no new knowledge being shared, so learners are not developing

skills to enable them to be prepared for a workforce neither are they being taught skills which foster a love of literacy for life.

Learners feel like they are on hamster wheels. There is little time to revisit learning with teaching taking place 1.5 hours a week. They are pushed through assessments one after the other to aim for a successful outcome. However, this is impactful to their mental wellbeing Meek, (2019). When learners constantly fail exams then are re-entered when 'not enough time to refine, practice and rehearse is given, this is detrimental in an unmeasurable way to learners, leading to anxiety and depression Meek, (2019). Clearly here, the teachers are not seeing that the curriculum has either too much content in it, which is why the learners are not retaining the information or that it is the pace of which the teaching is taking place is too quick or if more time was given to teach the curriculum at a slower pace success rates would increase and the effect on the learners would not be as detrimental as there would be greater success. Therefore, a review of the content is required to see if it is 'all necessary' or if there are aspects of it which can be 'fine-tuned', so that the learners have time to absorb the information and are subjected to less testing Elliott and Norris (2011). Alternatively, more time is given to teachers to enable them to do a good job as the findings here demonstrate that with consistent teaching, learning does take place, however if this is not happening, then learning is lost, but with more time, the consequences of inconsistent teaching may not be as harmful to the learners as it is presently.

Teaching staff should have wider knowledge of the learners' worlds' and how they can embrace the literacy curriculum in them in a way which is enticing to the learner, such as forums and discussions areas like Book Tok, which is a subculture of

TikTok; Two key influencers here are @edenreidreads (2023) and @jackbenedwards (2023). This is imperative to support learner's links to modern worlds and being able to make connections in a way which engages them in their worlds using contemporary approaches. To enable this to happen, Staff are required to undertake more CPD to keep abreast of the changing world the learners reside in, so they can flourish in a meaningful way to them. As teachers have little or no understanding of where learners find their inspiration for literacy from, there is a disconnect, therefore this placed RQ2 at risk of not being met as they cannot make connections with them linking to developing interests of literacy for their lives.

### **Recommendations to Practice**

An endemic issue is the 18 Functional Skills Literacy Programs which are being taught in the U.K today. These should be reviewed and streamlined, so that there is a consistent syllabus available to teachers. Learner's skills can then be 'refined' and 'practiced' as teachers of English would have rehearsed this previously so their talent would shine through. This in turn would support the wider issue of 'supply teachers' and them being aptly trained in supporting learners wherever they are in the country. By addressing this point, this supports RQ1 as the teachers would have greater knowledge of the curriculum, they would be rehearsed in its knowledge, therefore the teaching should be stronger and the time could be spent refining the skills of the learners, so they achieve knowledge and understanding in the vocational sector in relation to literacy as well as making connections to develop a love of literacy in their lives.



Staff did not undertake CPD in the nine months that this research was being completed. There was no formal monitoring of this and the result of this is that staff were not appraised by the government's fund to develop functional skills teachers post pandemic. Neither were they aware of any changes in the way in which learners are engaging with literacy in the online world Book Tok (2022). Staff attending meaningful CPD can reenergize, which in turn allows them to reconnect with their students. When no meaningful CPD takes place, then this is a lost experience for both the teacher and the student and hinders, RQ1 and RQ2 being met.

If the teachers educating learners today are not current in their practices and approaches then the impact on this on the learners can be 'fundamental and 'missed opportunities arise', with significant impact of this being for them, on them in their lives and developing a sense of 'community' which takes them outside of the classroom and into the 'online world' and use of technology which can enhance their lives and life chances.

LSO's working with learners as part of their community, need to be adequately trained and understand the significance of their role when engaging with the learners at every opportunity. They are required to understand the significance of 'off the cuff comments, or remarks' and how the learners internalise these. This thesis identified that negative comments had negative impacts on learners. Learners developed 'low self-esteem' about themselves, Meek, (2019) and flourishing did not take place. Negative comments or interactions with learners are detrimental to them in an unmeasurable way to their mental health. A robust system for checking that staff is suitably 'engaging with learners' is required. This problem does not sit with

managers alone but is the responsibility of all staff working in F.E as part of the community approach to support learning Bronfenbrenner (1917).

Learners commented on lack of stimulus in the classrooms which they were being taught in and deemed this as a 'negative environment' for them to learn literacy in. they suggest that there should be 'key aspects of literacy' in their classrooms which encourage literacy and support their level of understanding. Tricky words were one suggestion. When learners are taught in rooms which are under stimulated, this runs the risk that they can become disengaged and they are not using their wider skills, which will be required of them in literacy for their lives in their worlds. Literacy is everywhere in life, therefore a subtle reflection of this should be made available as suggested by the findings in this research to empower the learners and make connections to literacy, which is all around us by changing this environment, this would enable learners to effectively meet RQ2 successfully.

Excellence needs to be built. This derives from the wider college community being part of developing literacy for all. Learners should be encouraged to speak well, read when they can and have written work corrected in line with government standards. By adopting this approach and supporting communities for learning – Bronfenbrenner (1917) learners will flourish Seligman (2000) they will be able to see where they have improved in more than one area and their self-esteem and belief will increase Meek (2019) leading to eudaimonia being reached- happiness Aristotle (384-322 BC).

A pertinent issue here is 'lack of staff -leading to tired staff.' This is a tumour in this organisation and the impact of this has spread to the staff who are working tirelessly to keep standards high, attend regularly support learning which leads to learners flourishing. The workforce is tired and feels undervalued and unappreciated. The government needs to address this issue immediately or there will be more staff leaving teaching and the skills which they have developed will be lost for a generation Kim (2021).

### **CPD Benefits everyone.**

As discussed earlier, CPD for teachers, including what is offered, accepted, and completed, has been part of the conversation. However, institutions also need to reflect on their approach to literacy education and consider CPD recommendations for managers.

### **Recommendations for Institutions**

One recommendation is to highlight the need for changes in literacy within Further Education (FE) settings. In 2024, The English Association was established as a national initiative for organisations to learn from each other and connect with others in the sector. Networking and collaboration are crucial for creating a uniform approach for all learners undertaking English qualifications in the FE sector. This paper recommends that members of this organisation join the movement to stay informed about the national landscape, common practices, and shared challenges. Access to this information should help their organisations achieve better outcomes and aims to improve results for learners. Literacy is not only an issue for literacy teachers but for the entire organisation. It is suggested that organisations develop initiatives within their Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) to support the NLS (2024)

manifesto on increasing access to literacy in all forms. Additionally, on an international level, the OECD (2024) PIACC report indicates an increase in the number of learners who do not read or write for pleasure, underscoring the importance of literacy as a social practice. This remains a priority on the government's agenda to improve outcomes for all, and leaders need to address this issue through policy changes. Some suggestions to increase participation in the LRC's role in F.E, where the organisation may need to adapt are as follows:

- Group tutorial time, to promote conversation
- Discussion to support vocational qualification achievement
- Themed drop in support sessions literacy based
- Skills for employability suggestions
- Support with online skills and eLearning.
- Promoting the six-book challenge
- Researching digital book forums, to promote reading e.g. Bok Tok.
- 

Information Literacy.org, (2025)

It would be beneficial to recommend a mentoring programme for new recruits to teaching English in Further Education. The findings indicate that established teachers and learners had positive experiences and effective learning outcomes. Formalising the sharing of this knowledge can enhance the teacher's profile, potentially increasing their self-worth and motivating the next generation of teachers, thus creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning.

## Recommendations for Teachers

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential for teachers. The Society for Education and Training (2025) suggests various self-driven opportunities, including:

- Reading relevant journals like *inTuition*, articles, or books
- Taking training courses, formal qualifications, or professional formation (e.g., QTLS/ATS)
- Engaging in peer reviews, mentoring, or shadowing
- Joining professional networks, communities of practice, special interest groups, and discussion forums
- Attending professional events such as the SET annual conference

SET, (2025)

Arguably, these are all suitable recommendation, however a more suitable suggestion here would be for, teachers is to attend The English Association Conference, which is held annually in partnership with the National Literacy Association, so that teachers, can gain a deeper, inspirational three-dimensional understanding of their subject, where they can become inspired once again and may become energised, from the burn out they are currently experiencing. The guest speakers, here all experts in their fields, may help to raise aspirations within the work force once again for teachers in this organisation as well as networking events where teachers can collaborate with. Arguably this suggestion is not only for the teachers, but also the managers of these settings, as they are the ones, ultimately who have the power to change, timetables, commitments and staff accountability, therefore they should be part of the conversation also. Furthermore, the manager has contact with a wider audience, other managers in the establishment, therefore they can share with them, how and what the 'new thinking' behind literacy as a social practice,

can develop all learners, in all vocational areas, as this is still a fundamental problem in 2025 NLT, (2024).

### **Recommendations for managers CPD.**

With the conclusion of the Covid-19 pandemic, the goal is to enhance learning outcomes globally. It is recommended that the Head of Literacy attend the World Literacy Summit 2025 in Oxford for deeper insights. Starting with the World Literacy Foundation and UK and Europe Annual Report 2024 is advisable. One key suggestion from this report is to appoint Youth Literacy Ambassadors to raise literacy awareness as a social practice. This initiative can foster a community where people share their views on books and trends, supported by staff in their LRCs.

One approach is to collaborate with vocational staff to create a toolkit of social situations where literacy is required. Their expertise can help bridge the gap between vocational and English learning, promoting organisational collaboration and indirectly boosting learner confidence. Additionally, Managers should understand and promote the expectations of CPD for their staff. This begins with understanding current expectations for literacy teachers and providing suggestions to promote CPD in an appealing and informative manner. One resource is the British Council's English agenda, which offers recommendations for managers of literacy teachers. In conclusion, if managers demonstrate an understanding of the sector's challenges, they can lead effectively and support change.

## **Fast Forward AD 2024**

The Covid 19 Pandemic had concluded with a vaccination being offered to all.

Learners were attending regularly and were hungry to be back with their peers. Many had adapted quite well, and their social skills had begun to improve. The learners are rehearsed in being back in the classroom, so teachers had fewer altercations and protests than at the beginning of this research resulting in more time being spent on 'educating the learners and not crowd controlling them.' Teachers have recovered from the unprecedented pressures and expectations of them in their roles. They have wider communities to support their learners in, now they are back in the classroom. Consistent recruitment, retainment and regular attendance still remains a challenge.

Learners' general wellbeing has been judged as 'improved; now they are back in class and have face to face access to their peers. Social skills had improved, and the juvenile behaviour seen in class was becoming less. The learners had attempted their functional skills qualifications whilst being back in the classroom at least once, prior to this research and all learners passed their English qualification if they attended well and 'believed they were worthy' Ackerman (2018) demonstrated 'grit' Seligman (2000) and had 'self-belief' Meek (2019) by the August of 2023.

Learners can flourish, can feel happy with their accomplishments, but this feeling needs to be rehearsed for it to go into the long-term memory. Therefore, celebration of the achievements and connections being made to success still needs to be developed for them, in their lives so that they can truly understand what flourishing is and how happiness is reached Seligman (2000) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) however

when good teaching and learning takes place learners do develop literacy skills to enable them in their world of work (RQ1) and their lives (RQ2).

Teachers can adapt to changing environments to meet the needs of their learners, when information is expedited to them, as every minute counts, as the challenge remains, they must enable a learner to be proficient and exam ready with 1.5 hours contact a week.

Pressures from industry and all stakeholders remain the same for teachers, this being, that the expectations of learners on leaving F.E is that they are proficient in reading, writing, and speaking to enable them to find employment and develop skills for life. CPD, remains a focus for developing teachers and is integral for new qualified teachers known now as Early Career Teachers DfE, 2019 and them being greater trained in be able to address inadequacies in learners and supporting them with barriers to learning.



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## Appendix One Learner Views

### ROUND ONE LEARNER VIEWS

**Question 1** - What are your views about English and Literacy?

Eeyore –

*“They further said, ‘I like audio books and choses to access them at home, so that they can join in with conversations with their friends about certain topics.’ They further stated ‘the teacher goes too quick, she moves from one subject to the next, without giving us chance to think about what we are doing. This is too confusing for me, so I just switch off.’”*

Tigger -

*“I use creative writing and poetry as I love it. I find this is a way of me being able to deal with my depression as it helps me to write down my emotions and get out of my body how I am feeling at the time”.*

Pooh Bear –

*“It stresses me out more as you must think about what it is you've got to do and then I must get it on the paper, and I struggle to get it from my brain to the pen it's like it gets blocked. I know what I want to say and what I want to write but I just can't get it on the paper”.*

Christopher Robin -

*“The more I practice, the better I am at it now. I have spent time doing extra English work, so that I can get better at it.”*

Piglet -

*“I think the language, which is used in English, should be more modern. They should be helping us speak and write using words which are used today, not spending time learning, and reading about old things like Romeo and Juliet. They further said, ‘I think there is too much reading and writing that has to be done’.”*

### Supply Teachers common findings.

Piglet –

*“The college should have their own cover teachers, who know us and should help us to learn more, I just do not think the college cares about us. I have dyslexia and find reading hard, the staff should know this and help me, but I do not feel they do, and with a different teacher arriving every two weeks, they do not have chance to learn about me.”*

*“The teaching has been OK the problem is we have lots of different supply teachers who only use the same PowerPoints and go over and over it again”.*

Pooh-

*“We just said to cover the same things over and over, it is boring, and they often do not know what they are doing or teaching.”*

## **Question 2 – What is the teaching like in your English class?**

**Eeyore –**

*“It has been OK the teachers just keep repeating work and they use the same PowerPoint. They have started to put two classes together now as well which is making it more difficult in session as there are a lot more people in here. This means the teachers help us less, as there are more to get around. There is never a constant expectation or pace in lesson which I find very confusing”.*

**Piglet –**

*“I am currently working on speaking and listening, and we must discuss specific topics. The topics they have given us should be important to us and I do not think they are. There are lots of people in the class now and the abilities in it is very different I think these should be cut down more based on ability. The teacher never leaves the chair”.*

**Christopher Robin –**

*“The teaching is OK but there is a lack of consistent teachers, and we get lots of substitutes in. We often cover the same topics because the cover teachers don't know what else to do and we go over the same PowerPoint. The teachers give us support with speaking and listening and I allow us lots of time to prepare for this for example I selected the topic of ‘knife crime’ out of seven different topics to talk about. The noise from the boys stops her helping me a lot as they are very noisy”.*

## **ROUND TWO OF INTERVIEWS January- March 2023**

### **Question 1 – How has English been going over the last 12 weeks.**

**Chrisopher Robin –**

*“I have struggled a little this term, as my mental health has declined, but I can still see that I have got better at some of my work”.*

**Pooh –**

*“I have also been working on paragraphs and where they should be in my work. I still find this confusing, but I am getting better at it.”*

### **Q3 – Does learning in English lessons foster a love of literacy?**

**Eeyore-**

*“She has shown how to use the immersive reader to help me read information on websites and this is something which I use a lot now. It makes me feel like I can join in the conversation with my friends or really be able to say what I like do dislike about something as I focus on the listening of it, rather than trying to read it first, then understand and then discuss it. Knowing that audio books exist, and immersive reader means I can practice understanding what is being said and I can think more clearly about my response. I do read and I read more now, as I know If I am not sure about a specific part of the book, or find the words difficult to understand, I can use the audio book to help me.”*



**Tigger –**

*They said, “They used to encourage them to read a book and then they would have a class discussion about this. They said that this format and repetition helped me to develop an understanding of reading and poetry as well as using the internet to find information out, a good skill.”*

**Christopher Robin –**

*“I am aware of what I say, when words are not correct and how to self-check using my phone to help with this, even when I am messaging my friends on social media”.*

**Piglet –**

*“Practicing reading in class and writing has made me feel more confident as I now understand how to structure letters correctly and paragraphs for a job application, I like this, and it makes me feel happy”.*

#### **Q4 – Can you tell me what it feels like going into English lessons now?**

**Pooh –**

*“My TA comes with me also and I know that I can ask either of them for help if I need it. I am talking more in class now and I have less nonverbal days in this lesson”.*

**Eeyore –**

*“She has helped me understand how to use my phone for reading and how I can use it to help with my spelling this I think is very good and useful for me”.*

**Tigger –**

*“I do like the lesson more now, even though some of the parts are boring and I don’t need to practice these. I don’t mind going to the lessons now the teacher we have has been with us for a bit she understands me, and I understand the work I must do for her”.*

#### **Q5 – Have you completed any exams during this time?**

**Piglet –**

*“I was so happy when I found out that I had passed and called my mum to tell her. She was happy for me. We went out to celebrate with a nice meal”.*

**Eeyore-**

*“I phoned my nan to tell her they were so happy for me and told me how proud they were of me. I felt proud of myself and felt like I was good at something.”*

### **Round three Learner views April-June 23**

#### **Question One – How has English been going over the last 12 weeks?**

**Q1 – Tell me how has English been going these last 12 weeks? How have you felt when attending English lessons over the last 12 weeks?**

Pooh –

*“When I go into the lessons, I do not feel sick anymore, nor do I shake’. I am happy with the progress I have made in English”.*

Christopher Robin-

*“The extra work which I have asked for and completed, I believe has really helped me to get better at English along with the support from my teacher. I know she wants to help me, and we spend time looking at the extra work which I do at home”.*

Tiger – *“I like this feeling and since she has been working with us, I know I have gotten better at English”.*

**Q3 – Do you think what you learn in English develops a love of English for life for example, reading, writing or poetry for pleasure?**

Eeyore –

*“I know how to set them out and have developed skills like ‘reading my work back and checking, so I do this, and this makes me feel very happy and proud of myself”.*

**Pooh –**

*“My English teacher has helped me overcome the feelings which I have, and I now know, if I just breath, then the feeling in my tummy will go away and I can get the words out of my head”.*

**Piglet-**

*“I have lots of medical people I must communicate with and now, I do this instead of my mum, which I am very happy about, as I am going to be 18 soon, and want to be able to do this myself. I now believe I can and use the digital tools to help me. Before, I had English this year, I did not know they existed. My teacher has taught me so much that can help me in my life, moving forward”.*

**Christopher Robin-**

*“My mum tells me, how confident I have become and how I only talk more at home at English lessons and what is learnt, she can see what I am doing. This has helped me, become so much more confident in so many ways, I speak more, I can write well, and I am confident about this”.*

**Question 5 – Can you describe a situation, where you have found very difficult over the last 12 weeks, but have ‘dug deep’ persevered and then felt like something has been learnt?**

**Christopher Robin –**

*“I now know how to breathe through the panic and keep my place when speaking and do this well. The teacher I worked with, taught me some strategies to use, and this worked, and we practised lots, so that I could build my confidence”.*

**Eeyore –**

*"We took pictures of these on our phones, then attempted them again and self-checked. This worked for me, and I really like this way of learning. I now use them well confidently; I am proud of myself".*

**Tigger –**

*"I had been told over the years, that my handwriting was so illegible that this is what had led the teachers to not being able to understand what I had written".*

**Question 7 – Can you think of an occasion where the teacher has shown you, openness, acceptance, and empathy when teaching you something in English? If so, tell me what this is.**

**Eeyore –**

*"The teachers understand when I need to leave the classroom when I am having difficulties with my emotions and do not ask questions. This makes me feel understood and respected and this then takes the pressure away from me".*

**Piglet -**

*"I liked this it made me feel happy and changed my mind about going to English lessons. I felt comfortable and confident to attend them now, as I knew I would get the help and support which I may require".*

**Tigger –**

*"They were gentle in their approach, and they did not embarrass me at all. They spoke to me on a 1:1 level to help me understand and they gave me time to understand what they had shared with me. Due to my handwriting being quite poor, the teacher struggled to read my work and the spellings, but the teacher would highlight this and discuss this with me, and we would work through this together, so that I could visually see how the word was built to try and self-correct moving forward. I think in the classroom 'tricky words' should be shown so that learners can repetitively see them, and this would help them sink in".*

**Christopher Robin –**

*"Once I became confident talking about my topic within my small group, she then encouraged me to talk to a larger group but not the whole class for my assessment. This I found very helpful".*

## Appendix 2 - Teacher Views

### Teacher's views Round One of Interviews September-December 2023

#### Question 1 – What pressures do you have on you at the beginning of the year?

*Gabaldon commented, “the second pressure which I have is finding out and acknowledging which level of functional skills they are on, as there are five levels in total. Recently the added pressures have been CAD ratings just recently because of covid, so no one really knows where the learners are at. This is a balance which must take place because we must find out where they are at but keep testing them just switches them off.” The third pressure which is placed on us which makes this difficult is the vocational groups can change up to six weeks of teaching, therefore the students are not necessarily in the right place, or the right lesson”.*

Teacher 2 – Banks shared “as we do not know who is arriving, what their ability is, we have mixed ability learners in the class, which means we must teach multiple levels at a time. During the first few weeks this is hard, until we gain an understanding of what level the learner is on.

**Teacher 3** – Dickens further expressed, “the levels then become a secondary issue to this, as working this out changes year on year now, so we are never quite sure what the approach is and if late arrivals turn up, then we are expected to screen them ourselves”.

**Teacher 4** – Austin further said, “another issue is, trying to teach and move learning forward, when new people just arrive with no prior knowledge shared with me in the first six weeks is a problem. The learners are missing out on the initial learning, and team building elements of the class, such as boundary setting and expectations. Often learners end up being the learners who disrupt learning”.

**Teacher 5** – Hardy, additionally said, “they commented that if we can get a person to speak to us, then literacy learning is taking place as one of the fundamental skills, is they need to be able to speak about what they know. They further went on to share, knowing who you are expected to have in your class is an issue, as these changes all the time, and if learners arrive after the first few sessions, then they miss this opportunity and there is no time to revisit this”.

#### Question 2 - What screening takes place prior to them arriving in your lesson?

**Teacher 1** – Gabaldon, shared, “a secondary issue identified here is internally progressing learners. ‘No previous knowledge is shared from previous teachers with the new teachers to support their journey.’ ‘There is no internal assessment evidence shared with the teaching team, just outcomes from assessments, therefore the new teachers do not know where the weaknesses are.’ A suggestion made here is that a handover takes place from one teacher or team to the next so that learning for these learners can move on swiftly”.

**Teacher 2 – Banks** further suggested that “*we should teach them a few lessons at the beginning of the year, then assess their levels, as what we are seeing from the screening tool is not a true reflection*”.

**Teacher 3 – Dickens** shared, another point made here ‘*was no examination certificates are provided, or uploaded onto the college system, therefore they have nothing to go on, on arrival*. They are then placed into the GCSE class until the screening takes place. The thought process behind this was shared by this teacher this being ‘it is easier for them to be taken away from GCSE and make a learner attend a lesson, than not.’

**Teacher 4 – Austin** responded to this question with another views point ‘*passwords and logging onto the system*. Sharing that ‘*if a learner had not completed all the necessary checks and balances on entry to college, then they would not be on the system, which then impacted them being allocated a password and login, which then held the system up.*’ They further commented on ‘*the time of year these were being asked of them, so on entry once their exam results had arrived and felt that this was not the optimum time for this to take place, as they believed, the learner would not understand the significance of the testing on them and their future learning experience*’.

**Teacher 5 – Hardy** shared ‘*I know they must sit them and that there are issues with them with logging in and then the tests are not completed*.

**Question 3 - What do you think helps learners to settle at the beginning of the year?**

**Teacher 1 – Gabaldon** also shared ‘*when I can and I will use, humour, their interests as a way of getting to know them.*’ I share with them the order in which I aim to teach them and set out the standards and expectations in my class for us all to learn.’

**Teacher 4 – Austin** further added, ‘*I spend time talking to them about the extra support, which is available in college to help them, with the extra English lessons and Learning Enhanced Lead sessions which they could attend if they chose. I spend time finding out if they require any exam support, as this is important that it is in place right from the beginning, so that the learners are not disadvantaged*’.

**Question 4 – Are you aware of the assessment windows that come with the qualification that you teach?**

Rankin shared, *another issue identified here, are that the learners do not set out work appropriately, or as directed by the teachers, therefore, when it comes to revising, they cannot link what is in the book, to a topic or subject area, as they have not practiced this, therefore we lose time, repeating expectations.*

Dickens suggested ‘*they all work at different paces. Some will pass, and other will require numerous attempts. An impact on this, is attendance, and when the learners are planned to be in assessments, often they do not attend. As the first round of assessments is in December, learners are still often egocentric and do not stop to consider the impact on others in the group if they fail to attend*’.

**Question 5 - how do you know if learners have additional needs?**

**Austin**, when questioned on this further Austin agreed, that *'often by this time, as the benchmark has been set high, as we do not have this knowledge and they will have sat an exam without the necessary inclusive measures, which demotivates them. We then spend the rest of the time trying to increase their motivation, as they have sat exams, without the correct reasonable adjustments.'*

### **Teacher Views Round 2 – January- March 2023**

#### **Question three – Is having a Learning Support Officer (LSO) in the classroom beneficial? Do they enable the learners to flourish?**

Dickens -*If the learner has never met them before this increases their anxiety. It is like having another learner in the room and I do not think if they have not collaborated with the learner before, they should be with them in an English lesson.*

Austin – *This is not good for the learner and causes issues with their motivation and confidence. When I challenged the learner about this in class they said' Well if the college cannot be bothered to give me the same one, then this means they do not care, so why should I care.*

Gabaldon – *There is a variety; some are good, supportive and encourage the learners, others are not interested, and you question why they have been sent.*

Hardy – *Some just sit and watch and others will actively encourage them to have a go and try to complete the work with them.*

#### **Question 4 – During this time what focus have learners specifically had?**

### **Round three Teacher Views April to June 23**

#### **Question Six**

STATEMENT 1 - Rogers (1902-1987) cited in McLeod, 2014, building on the work of Maslow, believes that a person 'can grow' if they are in the correct environments, with fundamental values linking to: 'openness, acceptance, and empathy.

Can you give me some insight into how this is met or not met in your area for learning.

Dickens - *Acceptance is a key part of my personality and I believe that this is demonstrated in the way which I work with the learners and that sometimes, simple is a way to begin with them then once the confidence is built, we can build on this.*

*Being empathetic and understanding that they find this is difficult is a big part of my role, so acknowledging the small wins, is important to build their confidence.*

Hardy - *Lots of time is lost at the beginning of the year, due to moving of levels and then settling, which impacts on how quickly we move through the teaching and assessing.*

Rankin - *I acknowledge that they have not had the best start in learning English and that I find it difficult and show empathy for this especially when they get frustrated my night all completing something and work with them and their behaviour to change their view and to keep them motivated to try. Having empathy for the learner and showing this to them in my approach and delivery I believe is key in getting them on board, with wanting to learn literacy in college.*

Statement 4 –

Unwin (2009 cited in Gregson 2015:144) suggests that vocational teaching when done well, will *'inspire and motivate, however a more sophisticated pedagogy is required to be able to switch from classroom to workplace to workshop'*.

Austin - *An example of this is, in childcare I know they have to do presentations now as part of their syllabus, so getting them to complete a speaking and listening tasks with others from the same vocational area should be easy for them to complete now as they will have done something similar earlier in the year in the vocational area to stop prior to this knowledge we assumed we were the only ones conducting speaking activities with the learners.*

## Appendix 3 – Participation Consent Forms- Students



### Participation Consent Form – Students

**Study title: Experiences and perceptions – students and staffs view on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

Pseudonym code: \_\_\_\_\_

- I am over the age of 16 (insert box for participant to initial)
- I have read and understood the attached study information  signing below, I consent to participate in this study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time during the study itself.
- I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded, i.e., prior to answering the questions and the information being recorded and stored on my password protected computer.
- I give consent that the information used in my verbal discussions with you can be used as part of this research.
- If a completed questionnaire is used, information from this can be taken from this and used as part of the research.
- When recordings take place, (Zoom/Teams) no names will be used in them, and the information will be stored on a password protected device to protect the data.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Your name, along with your pseudonym code is important to help match your data from two questionnaires. It will not be used for any purpose other than this.)

Witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

### Study Title:

**Experiences and perceptions – students and staffs view on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

### What is the purpose of the study?

To find out what your views (students) about your experiences in learning on functional skills Literacy courses. I would like to know, what your likes or dislikes are about it. What your personal journey have been with literacy and where you might be heading next. Some of the discussion will relate to the main course you are on for example hairdressing/plumbing. Being part of this research will not impact or affect your grades at all. The question I wish to investigate for this study is:

*In what ways does curriculum design need to consider students' literacy skills to prepare them for work in the vocational sector and for life?*

### Who can take part in the study?

Students learning Functional Skills literacy L1 and below.

### Do I have to take part?

*Participation –*

You can choose to participate, and your permission will be asked for.

*How do you protect my information –*

A pseudonym code like Black Cat, will be used for confidentiality. (This will be given to you after you have consented to take part in the study).

*If I change my Mind –*

**You can withdraw at any point during the session without giving a reason and without penalty.** After you have completed the study, you can also withdraw your consent for your data to be included by contacting me via email **within 14 days of participation** of the date of signing the agreement, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

Nothing will happen if you take part only your views will be used for research reasons for me to gain an insight into your views and world on teaching on functional skills literacy courses. You will be met three times a year, in line with the progress reviews of the F, E setting.

Your views will be stored on the password protected computer. The information completed by you on the Microsoft Forms sheet, will be emailed to you. Once completed, this will be sent back to me, and this will be saved using the pseudonym code. The Zoom interview meetings will be saved using the same pseudonym code

and will be analysed for common themes and will be extracts from what you have said. Only I will be able to access the videos and your comments from the zoom interviews. In the report, I will use, your comments to bring your voice and views alive, but your name will not be used. No information will be shared with your English teacher directly, but the managers at the F. E college, will have your views shared with them, from the presentation at the end of the research, but again these will be anonymous.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no foreseen disadvantages or risks to you by your participation in this study.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Being a voice for your peers, or impacting change for other teachers, teaching on these courses.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

If you change your mind about participation, please contact me by email to cancel your participation. If you feel unhappy after the study, please contact me immediately or the Chairperson of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee, whose contact details are given below.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Password protected devices and encrypted accounts and pseudonyms used.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

If suitable, the results may also be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in peer reviewed academic journals as well as shared internally with the English Managers.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

ETF – Sunderland University

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

The University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the study.

### **Contact for further information.**

Supervisory Team

Maggie Gregson - Email [maggie.gregson@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:maggie.gregson@sunderland.ac.uk)

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Phone: 0191 515 3266

## Appendix 4 – Participation Consent Forms Teacher



### Participation Consent Form – Teacher

**Study title: Experiences and perceptions – students and staffs view on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

Pseudonym used: \_\_\_\_\_

- I am over the age of 18 (insert box for participant to initial)
- I have read and understood the attached study information and, by signing below, I consent to participate in this study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time during the study itself.
- I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded, i.e., prior to the questions being responded to and recorded.
- I give consent that the information used in my verbal discussions with you can be used as part of this research.
- If a completed questionnaire is used, information from this can be extracted as part of the research.
- When recordings take place, (Zoom/Teams) no names will be used in them, and the information will be stored on a password protected device to protect the data.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Your name, along with your pseudonym will be used, as this is important to help match your data from two questionnaires. It will not be used for any purpose other than this in my records.)

Witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

**Study Title:**

**Experiences and perceptions – students and staffs view on learning functional skills literacy, a critical discussion.**

**What is the purpose of the study?**

To find out what the staff and students views are, likes or dislikes, about their experiences in learning on functional skills Literacy courses.

**Who can take part in the study?**

Students learning Functional Skills literacy L1 or below.

**Do I have to take part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you change your mind about taking part in the study, **you can withdraw at any point during the session without giving a reason and without penalty.**

After you have completed the study, you can also withdraw your consent for your data to be included by contacting me via email **within 14 days of participation** of the date of signing the agreement.

A pseudonym code such as, Black Cat, will be used to protect your identity. This will be given to you after you have consented to take part in the study. If you decide to withdraw in 14 days period afterwards, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

Nothing will happen if you take part only your views will be used for research reasons for me to gain an insight into your views and world on teaching on functional skills literacy courses.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no foreseen risks to you by your participation in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Being a voice for your peers, or impacting change for other teachers, teaching on these courses.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you change your mind about participation, please contact me by email to cancel your participation. If you feel unhappy after the study, please contact me immediately

or the Chairperson of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee, whose contact details are given below.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Password protected devices on a computer, which is password protected.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results may be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in peer reviewed academic journals for the Education Training Foundation and Sunderland University.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

ETF – Sunderland University

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the study.

**Contact for further information.**

Full Supervisory Team Information

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Phone: 0191 515 3266

## Appendix 5 – Student PERMA MODEL



PERMA the Wellbeing model of Positive Psychology

- When someone asks if you are satisfied with life, this links to our emotions, if they feel good then this can increase their physical health as well as their mental health.
- if we feel better about ourselves this will support our view of the world, and we can feel better about ourselves.
- Inspires us towards creativity and hope, these help us feel positive.



- A state of immersion in the state or the present moment.
- When we truly engage, we can become fully absorbed in the present moment, which we then create momentum.
- Our energy and focus and increase, which means we enter fully into the flow state.



currently are now for you to reach or feel successful?

- This links to who brings constant love and support as this helps us maintain healthy balance and perspective. We are social creatures and depend on one another.
- When we let them into our lives, we can give and take and be part of a bigger picture. Strong relationships around us.
- Can you have better relationships than you



- Our well-being can increase when we have meaningful adults and activities for us to be around and complete.
- A Shared purpose and meaningful activities which get us to think amongst ourselves.
- We must understand what a meaningful activity is,  
so that we can think beyond ourselves.



- What are your goals and ambitions.
- If we feel good about ourselves, we are more likely to share our knowledge and skills with others and can be more motivated to support others around us.
- Little successes need to be acknowledged along with the big successes.

PERMA the Wellbeing model of Positive Psychology -