Dynamic and Personal Prisms in the Acquisition and Development of English:

Reimagining the Pedagogy of Language in Aesthetic Experience

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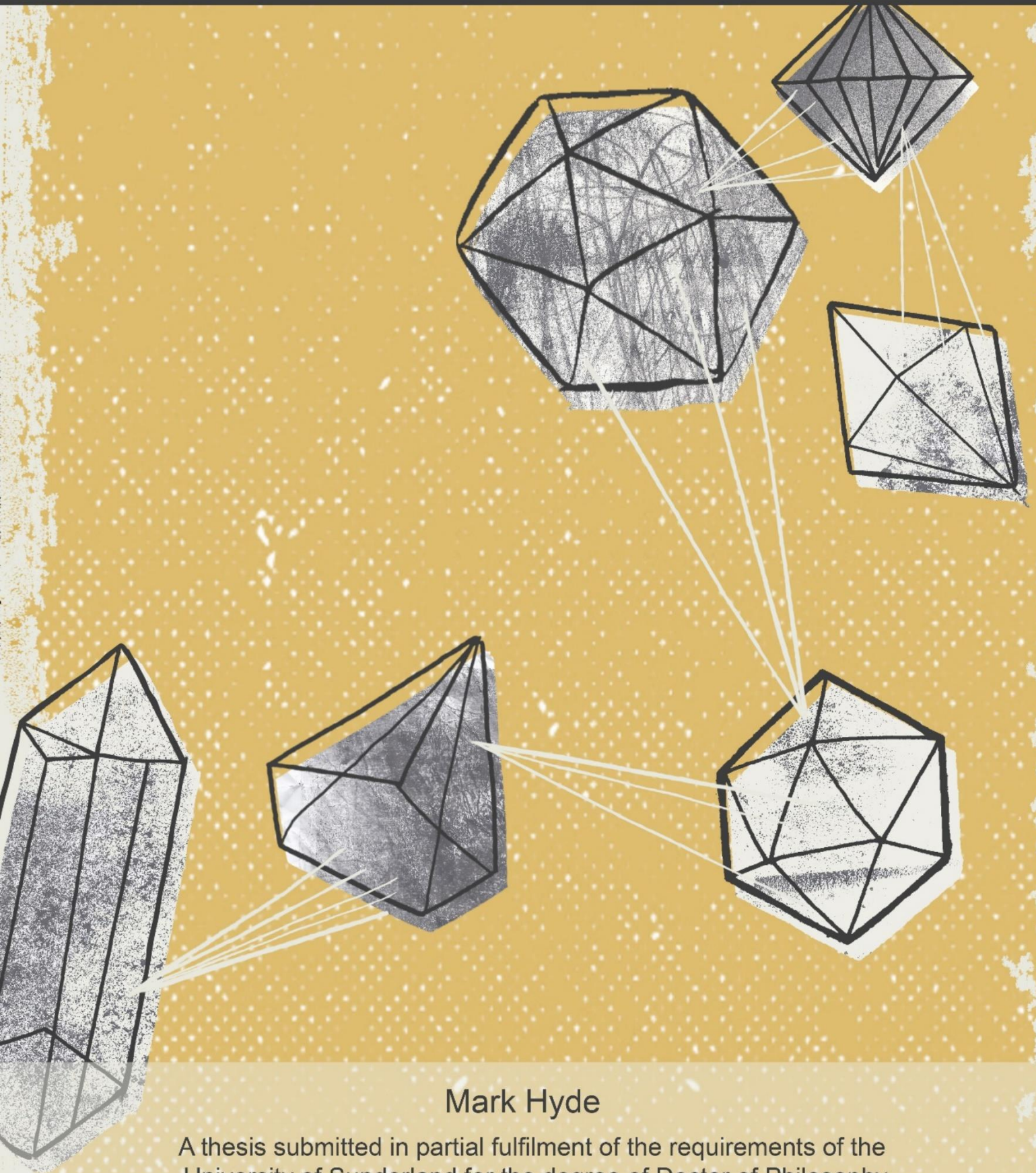PhD   2025

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Sunderland for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2025

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Abstract

Focusing primarily on how curriculum theory and assessment directly impact upon learning, this study explores learners' lived experiences of studying GCSE English Language at a Further Education (FE) college in London. The aim of this research is to deepen understanding of why disengagement with formal modes of the study of English language is so prevalent among learners in FE. Analysing whether student engagement in English language learning can be increased by introducing more socially-situated literacies into vocational learning and language acquisition and development activities, this study also explores the role aesthetic experiences, such as interactions with music or art, might play in reuniting disengaged learners with the lived emotional experience of engaging in education.

This approach to exploring how students respond to the dis-connect between socially-situated literacies and functional literacies is informed by Gadamer's *Fusion of Horizons* (2014). Subsequently, Gadamer's work leads me to discussion of the respective works of Zimmerman (2015), Freire (1970), Dewey (2005, 2011) and Bernstein (1996, 2000).

It is argued that low attendance and disappointing outcomes in GCSE English resits in FE are symptoms of wider issues surrounding a deep-rooted disengagement with the study of language. Data collected and reported in this thesis suggest that learners can engage meaningfully with language when the mode of language they study more closely reflects the realities of their own cultural and social experiences.

Literature on this theme suggests that opinions around language that exist in some educational institutions may contribute to this disenfranchisement. At best, this highlights an excessive reliance on traditional values, but perhaps even more troubling, is the acceptance of a wider and rather elitist ideology regarding the 'correct' use of English. The assumption that there is one 'correct' way to use the English language is often coupled with the assumption that there is only one way in which ability with language can be assessed – through pen and paper examinations.

This study looks beyond and behind the view of what may be considered as 'correct' or 'incorrect' use of the English language. Instead, the focus of this research is upon how encouraging students to use language more appropriate to context, identity, and their socio-cultural environment through aesthetic experience, might assist them in re-connecting with language in an educational context.

Keywords: GCSE English Language; Language Acquisition and Development; Aesthetic Experience; Pedagogy; Curriculum Design and Development; Arts-based Research.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Mother, Myra Hyde. From my Mother I inherited my love of language, writing and music. She also passed onto me the courage to think for myself and to speak up for what I believe in.

She will be forever missed and I hope that she can share this thesis with me, in some way.

Acknowledgments

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my partner, Anna Stiles. Your constant love, support and belief in me has been the driving force behind this study and my research would not have been possible without all that you have done to keep me going. Thank you for believing in me even when I failed to believe in myself. Thank you for contributing your beautiful artwork to this thesis and thank you for being a continual source of inspiration in all that I do.

Thank you to my Dad, Christopher Hyde, for your unwavering encouragement and interest in my work. Your support and belief in me have been a constant throughout my entire life, even at times when I made that difficult for you, especially during my school years when I struggled to find my own way in education. I will be forever grateful.

Thank you to my supervisor, Maggie Gregson, for your outstanding supervision, inspiration and guidance. Your professional direction and your friendship have enabled me to see education, and myself as an educator, in a whole new light and I will never forget all that you have done for me.

Thank you to my colleague and mentor, Michael Smith. You set me on this path and have been my guide and my friend at every turn. I am eternally grateful.

Thank you to the entire SUNCETT team and the University of Sunderland for the exceptional teaching I have received throughout this experience and thank you also for the thought-provoking, inspirational and fun research residentials in Seaburn.

Lastly, I extend my gratitude to the ETF for funding the initial stages of this research study.

Language & Identity

Chapter 1: Language & Identity

1.1 Runnin' & Swimmin'

> "Enough! I can't stand it anymore!"
>
> (Digby Jones, Twitter. Online, 30 July 2021)

During the 2021 Summer Olympic Games, Digby Jones, a member of the House of Lords criticised BBC presenter and ex-professional footballer, Alex Scott, on social media because of the fact that Scott, speaking with a regional East London accent, failed to fully pronounce the letter 'g' when saying words such as running or swimming. The House of Lords member claimed that Scott's accent ruined the coverage of the Olympic Games and vowed not to watch any longer, asking "Can't someone give these people elocution lessons?" before her incorrect use of the English language was "aped by youngsters" who think "that it is very fashionable to go around dropping your 'gs'" (Jones 2021).

Shortly after this, All Saints Academy, a London Secondary School, banned students from using socially-situated terms such as 'like,' 'bare' and 'cuss'. Expressions including, 'Oh my days' and 'That's long,' were also deemed as an insufficiently appropriate use of language. The reasoning behind this restraint on their learner's idiomatic voice was that the decision makers at All Saints Academy wanted their students to be able to express themselves in a more 'proper' way (The Guardian. Online, 30 September 2021).

In both of these instances, the majority of the public spoke out against these actions and in favour of celebrating the diversity of the English Language. This makes it easy to dismiss these recent events as minority acts of snobbery. However, I would suggest that these events are reflective of a far wider, more historic, elitist ideology on how the English Language is perceived and highlights an assumption that there is only one correct way to use language. It also highlights a deep-rooted prejudice that exists around language both in society and, perhaps more worryingly, in education more generally. Failing to recognise the importance of the history of the *Adventure of English* (Bragg, 2004), and also the context in which language is used is pressuring students to reject the historic and rich cultural influences on their language. In the context of this thesis, this raises more serious questions regarding the influence of these prejudices on a learner's identity and the negative impact that the same prejudices may have on a learner's confidence and ability to use language in their personal and vocational-professional lives. To remove freedom and creativity from language education by diminishing the social, cultural and economic circumstances of a person's birth, restricts their access to an endless universe of human ideas and reduces language to socially and culturally limited and limiting horizons of study, which is highly questionable not only for educational reasons but also in the interests of democracy.

Freire (1970, p.107) asserts, that to "steal the words of others" is to "consider them incompetent." For Freire, a central concern is that this assumed incompetence can too easily transfer from organisation to teacher and learner until all parties are indoctrinated in the belief that certain students are collectively "unfit for anything except to receive the teachings of the professionals" (1970, p. 129).

This thesis explores learners' lived experiences of undertaking GCSE English resits in Further Education (FE). It attempts to better understand why disengagement with more formal modes of studying language is so prevalent in the vocational learners that I teach. In this thesis, I analyse what impact more socially-situated literacies (instead of, or alongside functional literacies in the study of language) might have on learner engagement in vocational education contexts. Over the last decade, teaching across both vocational and academic pathways at a large FE institution in London, I have had extensive experiences of working with 16-19-year-old learners who are completely disengaged from studying language in an educational setting but at the same time choose to write, read, recite, and analyse the language that comes from their world. This language may come from music, film, television or simple conversations with friends and family. In any circumstance however, this is the language in which my learners have learned to think and speak. It is embodied in their consciousness. Within its expression they find meaning, and make sense of their respective experiences and realities. Poor attendance and outcomes in GCSE English amongst students in FE are, at least in part, symptoms of wider issues around a disengagement with, and a lack of motivation for studying the mode of language synonymous with the GCSE English Language curriculum. However, my own lived experience of teaching in FE demonstrates that the same students can, and often do, engage with language when the mode of language more closely reflects their social reality and the socio-cultural environments in which they live.

This research examines this apparent disconnect between the experiences and realities of the social and cultural lives of learners and the GCSE English Language curriculum. The majority of learners in FE have already followed an English GCSE study programme when they were at school. Yet, when these learners study GCSE English re-sits in FE, they are often spoon-fed the same curriculum content that they failed to engage with at school and therefore, often at the end of the year they are faced with a similar and all too familiar debilitating result.

In 2019, only 31.9% of students re-sitting an English GCSE in FE achieved a Grade 4 or above. This figure rose to 41.1% in 2020 (TES Magazine. Online, 20 August 2020). It may be argued that this increase was largely due to the implementation of Tutor Assessed Grades (TAGs) that were introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore would likely only signal a temporary rise in results while learners were not physically able to sit exams. Although a crucial statistic which needs to be recognised here is that even when lecturers effectively decided their learners' grades through TAGs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the high-grade pass rate for colleges in London remained at 23%. Much lower than the national average of 42.3%. A further indication of how the widespread disenfranchisement and disengagement with the study of language disproportionally impacts those from more

diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. However, it is perhaps more helpful to comprehend the above statistics by taking a closer look at the FE contexts in which they are situated, namely vocational education in England. The examination results of the learners reported above are in the main young people who have not achieved a Grade 4 or above in their GSCE English Language Study Programme while at school and who have come to study a vocational subject at an FE college. Many of these students already regard themselves as 'failures' in the very language in which they think and speak. Many also carry with them the stigma that they are somehow not as 'intelligent' or as 'academic' as their peers who have managed to achieve a Grade 4 or above and so they turn to study more vocational subjects.

The apparent existence of a divide between vocational and academic pathways in education has been widely accepted for centuries. This separation of vocational and academic education can be traced back to the social, cultural, economic and political stratifications that prevailed in Ancient Greece (Hyland 2017). Similar (if not the same) snobberies, inequalities and prejudices continue to pervade the education system in Britain (and elsewhere). A 2016 report carried out by the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility states that:

> "The inequality between vocational and academic education
> has had a significant impact on the overlooked majority of
> young people on whom our inquiry has focused. It is a long-
> standing and deep-rooted issue that will not be overcome
> easily or soon."

(Select Committee on Social Mobility. Online, April 8 2016)

This serves as a pertinent reminder that those most adversely impacted by Britain's systemic portrayal of vocational learners as having a lesser educational, intellectual and social standing continue to be framed as being less able or inferior. This relegation of vocational education to second-class status does not go unnoticed by vocational teachers, or by the learners themselves. It may also be worth noting that the snobbery around traditional curriculum content, identified in the above discussion, is cited by the same House of Lords Select Committee as they recognise the existence of an "Unspoken snobbery in favour of academic qualifications" (Select Committee on Social Mobility. Online, April 8 2016).

This takes us to questions of the purpose of education itself. Such questions are often cast in relatively binary terms in debates surrounding the extent to which a good education should enable everyone in society to lead a fulfilled life and make a positive contribution to civic life by becoming and being a responsible citizen. This requires an education that gives a learner a greater sense of agency, one that shapes the learner's relationship with the world they live in for the individual and the common good, and one that gives form and meaning to their perception of society. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the purpose of a good education is to enable someone to get a job/ be useful to someone else/ be a compliant and obedient citizen. These binary framings are of course crude and questionable.

Issues surrounding these framings and are considered in the final section of this Chapter and again more critically and in some depth in Chapter 2.

It may be necessary at this point to turn to the design and content of the GCSE English Language curriculum to explore the extent to which its content reflects and respects the social and cultural realties of the demographic to whom (in the context of this thesis) it matters the most - vocational learners.

This thesis raises issues and questions surrounding whether curricula designed to prepare learners for a life of social interactions are not only disregarding, but also diminishing and demeaning the very social and cultural worlds in which these learners exist. It is argued that the curriculum content is signalled as being irrelevant if learners are not attending classes or are exhibiting behaviours that are not conducive to their learning. In these circumstances a learner's poor attendance may, in part, be precisely because of the alienating content embedded at the heart of an English Language Study Programme. A recurring theme in this thesis is that the more a system of education forces alien worlds upon learners in their education, the more learners are likely to retreat into their own worlds. In this way, the distance between teachers and learners caught up in such a system of education grows wider in tandem with the disengagement of learners. As Zimmerman (2015) notes:

> "We only really engage a text or another's viewpoint when we want to know what meaning another's perspective has for us. It is the hope for every teacher that students reading an assigned text will begin to see its relevance for their own lives. If this does not happen then the text will remain a foreign object without meaning."

> (Zimmerman 2015, p. 51)

An objective of this study is not to distort learners' existing perceptions of studying language in FE. Instead, it attempts to bring into view and critically discuss the reasons behind this widespread disenfranchisement and to endeavour to reconnect learners to the power and potential of language on their own terms. This study explores the existence, nature and dynamics of what appears to be an ever-widening gap between vocational and academic education by focusing on the learner's use of everyday language. Furthermore, a broader aim of this study is to look at ways in which the handcuff that tethers learners to a narrow and disengaging curriculum may be unlocked, giving learners more freedom to use familiar language to express themselves and their experiences as they find and use their social and cultural voices to speak out and define how and why they see their place in the world as they do.

Capturing a learner's perspective with respect and fidelity is of paramount importance to the authenticity, credibility, trustworthiness and usefulness of this study. By looking beyond what may be considered as 'correct' or 'incorrect' language, this research explores ways which may allow the learner to have a more prominent role in shaping their education by expressing, and having confidence in,

their own voice, in the confidence that it will be respected, listened to and valued. Finding creative and engaging ways which enable and encourage a learner to study language in a meaningful and valuable way is paramount in all of this. This thesis argues that it is a difficult, if not impossible (even disingenuous), task for teachers to do this in the absence, or in disregard, of the learners' lived experiences, their narrative accounts of those experiences and the meanings they make from them in the world.

When considering the influencing factors surrounding learners' engagement in, as well as the motivation for, studying language, my personal experiences of teaching across both vocational and academic pathways in FE, foregrounds the importance of the following three key points. These are examined in-depth through this study.

1. Relevance. This refers to the relevance of the GCSE English Language curriculum content to the lived experiences of learners. A key concern here is how the educational system or the Awarding Body (AB) which prescribes the curriculum content, and specifies the methods through which that content is to be assessed and examined, justifies how this content is considered to be relevant and inclusive of the learners' worlds. To reappraise current curriculum content based on the learner's lived experience may be viewed by some as an imbalance in favour of the learner. On the other hand, it could be argued that foregrounding the experiences of learners offers opportunities for curriculum designers to eliminate, or at least reduce, potential cultural, economic and social class bias that may have, despite their good intentions, found its way into curriculum content. On the subject of curriculum design, Stenhouse (1975) draws attention to how:

> "The filtering of knowledge through an analysis of objectives gives the school an authority and power over its students by setting arbitrary limits to speculation and by defining arbitrary solutions to unresolved problems of knowledge."

> (Stenhouse 1975, p. 86)

Here, Stenhouse is calling for a greater sensitivity to context and for more creativity and flexibility on the part of ABs and other gatekeepers of access to the award of vocational qualifications regarding decisions made surrounding curriculum content and approaches to assessment in education in general and in vocational education, in particular.

2. Inclusion. The term inclusion points to the importance of giving the learner more 'Agency' to define what an education in language means to them. Stenhouse (1975) reminds us that any curriculum that gives learners a meaningful and useful education must, in part, be created by, for and with the learners, collectively and collaboratively. To dismiss the unique life experiences of learners and their varied socially-situated literacies as irrelevant 'quirks' that cannot be used to assess the acquisition, development and achievement of knowledge and skill in language use and development is to not only diminish the learner, their identity and their culture but also to do a great disservice to the exciting "adventure" of the English Language

itself (Bragg 2004). Stenhouse (1975, p. 86) also reminds us that "one activity is more worthwhile than another if it assigns students active roles in the learning situation rather than passive ones".

The acquisition, use and development of English Language at GCSE level can all too easily become separated from the learner's specialist area of study and vocational education by outdated and unhelpful divisions of labour which no longer (and perhaps never have) been fit for purpose. These issues are explored more fully in Chapter 2.. However, as a precursor to that discussion, English Language GCSE lessons often take place in separate buildings with a different group of learners and on a different day to their vocational studies. In practical sense, this can sever any connection between language and the theory and practice of different forms of life, and ways of knowing in those forms of life or practices. To know this is to know the problem. The consequences of separating theory from practice in the acquisition and development of a craft are just as serious and detrimental in the acquisition and development of the English language. Both are forms of life and involve different ways of knowing, therefore both are acquired and developed in social practice. Bathmaker *et al* (2018, p. 55) go as far as to say that, "policy proposals are intent on creating a binary divide between academic and vocational education pathways".

However, this separation of academic and vocational education may be less of a deliberate intention on the part of the policy community and more of an unintended consequence of current practices of an English Language Study Programme. Nevertheless, the frustrations brought about by this separation continue to trouble practitioners and employers across the FE sector.

3. The Learner Experience. This third consideration, and perhaps the most pertinent in relation to this thesis, looks at those who are alienated by an approach to the study of language which separates theory from practice, thinking from doing, and disconnects the curriculum from the human experience of living. To consider the learner experience also calls for a recognition that the practices surrounding language acquisition and development, also surround the acquisition and development of other practices, including construction trades and other vocational studies. From this standpoint, all forms of practice are socially and culturally constructed. A consequence of a curriculum which is disconnected from human experiences and the wide variety of contexts in which those experiences occur, is that learners feel disenfranchised, disinterested and disengaged as they cannot understand, or see little relevance or coherence, in their curriculum.

At a certain stage of some learner's educational development, failing to engage with the study of language means they run the risk of being branded as 'not academic' or worse still 'not intelligent'. This is a dangerous identification to carry for two reasons;

Firstly, some learners wear this badge as if it's an exemption from having to make any effort in certain educational subjects. Any lesson on a topic that may be considered as academic, excludes the 'not academic' learners as a matter of course and therefore the assumption is made by the learner, an assumption that has the potential to last a lifetime, that they have no need to engage in the lesson, as

attempting to produce meaningful work in an academic subject would be futile. A recent conversation I had with one of my own vocational learners revealed that they chose not to attend English Language GCSE lessons because they had a negative school experience of studying language and terms similar to 'not academic' were used by this learner to explain their experiences which had led to their antipathy towards English lessons. This thesis argues that this harmful and damaging term cuts deep and long and is acting as a barrier to the progression of this learner and many others like them, in situations where ultimately, they have been let down by the educational system in which they participate.

Some learners even use the tag of 'not academic' as a way to 'survive' in a school system that doesn't cater for or recognise their types of intelligence. Freire (1970, p. 20) talks of a "Fear of freedom" that can manifest itself in those who are active within a system but are helpless to influence that system. This perspective leads me to the question of whether some learners are made to feel comfortable in the bracket of being 'not-academic'? Perhaps the passive acceptance by a learner of that phrase (or "moniker") provides a safe-space that ensures failure and therefore removes the pressure of striving for better. This guaranteed failure might also operate to ensure that the fault is not seen to reside in the educational system itself. From this perspective the fault lies in the learner's innate individual ability.

Secondly, some teachers may neglect the learning needs of the 'not-academic' learner in favour of focusing their energies on the learners they feel have more chance of achieving a Grade 4 or above in their exams. I would argue that assessments such as the GCSE English Language pen and paper examination, provide a very limited measure of one particular type of intelligence, form of knowledge or way of knowing. But of course, ability, and indeed skill with language, can manifest itself in a range of ways that are not currently recognised by the GCSE English Language Study Programme's structure. Therefore, terms such as 'not academic' may really mean that a particular learner doesn't exhibit their skill or ability in a way that an AB recognise as valid, and of course does little to reflect the actual intellectual potential of that learner. In my experiences of working in FE I have heard both learners and teachers use the term 'not academic', and in all cases the general expectation is that the learner will not achieve on their Study Programme and therefore their type of intelligence is not valued in an education system which denies some learners access to a meaningful and enlightening education. Locke (2015), while discussing how different types of discourse can act as barriers to learning whilst transitioning through different levels of education, comments that:

> "For other children who have been apprenticed into different kinds of literate practice the transition will not be so easy. In many cases, the school may not be sympathetic to their difficulties."

> (Locke 2015, p. 28)

It is possible that in some way, each of these three factors have influenced the current situation in which many learners coming into FE from school, are completely alienated from the study of language and have no intention of even attempting to follow the English Language GCSE curriculum. In many cases it appears that learners have seemingly given up on the idea that they could achieve a Grade 4 or above, in order to leave FE with a GCSE in English. Although this study analyses all three of the above factors, it predominately focuses on the third, in terms of the nature of the relationship between the vocational learner and the issues raised and discussed in the other two dimensions of education set out above.

1.2 Memoirs of a Not-Academic Learner

"I start to spin the tale, you complain of my diction"

(*Friction* by Television, 1977)

To give this chapter added context, it is important to me to share my own school experience. I personally, have a vivid recollection of feeling let down by an education that failed to recognise, encourage, or nurture my innate love for language. For as long as I can remember, I have always been an avid reader, a keen analyst of lyrical content in music, and an admirer of a wide range of writers and poets. Those who have the skill to use language in a way that evokes strong emotions or adds a touch of magic to the perspectives of the reader/ listener, have always been a great source of inspiration to me.

However, my teenage self who was so enthralled by the virtuosity of language in so many ways, found less interest in some of the more formal aspects of English lessons. I breezed through lessons when we were asked to read or write about situations that interested me, and I achieved good grades in those tasks, but the mechanics of language felt to me like a different subject entirely, one that I did not enjoy understanding so freely. My interest would wane, only to return with great urgency when we were once again asked to be creative with words and produce stories or poems.

Due to my ineptitude in grasping some of the finer points with regards to the classifications of structure that gives form to the English language, I was branded with the educationally fatal tag of being 'not academic'. Any promise I had shown in my ability to write creatively or to understand nuance in the works of classical authors, was not considered to be substantial enough to make up for my lack of understanding of the mere basic parts of speech. Instead of finding ways to engage me with the theoretical aspects of the study of language, and therefore help me to bridge the gap by connecting my love of reading and writing to something with a more advantageous academic outcome, it was easier for my teacher to suggest I'm more adept at sporting or physical subjects, and to therefore focus more attention on the students who understood the inner workings of grammatical form with ease. Of course, I carry no ill will towards my English teachers for any of this. I'm sure they

were doing their best to cope with whatever educational pressures were prevalent in the 1990s.

During my GCSE exam, I decided to write in a style that I felt comfortable with, as I believed that the more comfortable I felt, the better quality of work I could produce. The end result was far from what may be deemed as a classical use of the English language, and it certainly featured an assortment of what I now know to be socially situated literacies: words and phrases from the social climate indigenous to me. My work in these exams was by no means a masterpiece, but to this day I remember some of the themes I wrote about, and I would argue that, at the very least, there was some depth of meaning and intent. The exam board disagreed and I was awarded a GCSE Grade D. Was this disappointing outcome due to my lack of understanding of the structure of language and parts of speech? Was it due to the type of language I chose to use in the exam? Or was it the style I chose to write in? I will never know.

In June 2017, at the age of 34, I re-sat my English GCSE exams. I decided to do this for two reasons:

The first was, having worked in education, as a Lecturer in Plumbing since 2013, and being a witness to the seemingly impossible uphill struggle my learners were going through in trying to cope with their English Language GCSE re-sits alongside their vocational studies, I wanted to walk in their shoes. I had my own school experiences to draw from, of course. But a lot of time had passed since then and I wanted to place myself 'in' their experience. After all, it felt wholly hypocritical of me to encourage my learners to persevere with their academic studies if I had never attempted re-sits for a better GCSE grade myself. If a teacher is to meaningfully model the behaviours that they want their learners to exhibit, then it was my duty/ moral obligation to do so. Hattie (2012, p. 23) reminds us that our, "role as a teacher is to evaluate the effect I have on my students and act on this knowing and understanding".

My second reason for re-sitting my English Language GCSE exams stemmed from my desire to right the wrongs of my teenage experience of being a 'not academic' pupil. Of course, with the benefit of nearly twenty years of additional life experience on my side, the outcome of these exams was different and I achieved a Grade 8. I could finally say that I had a GCSE in English. Of course, it wasn't only the benefit of lived experience that helped me through my GCSE re-sits. I had an excellent teacher this time around. A teacher who found ways to embed structural challenges within the modes of language that I loved to study. A teacher who encouraged me to write in my own style and tell stories from my world. A teacher who ultimately, encouraged me to be confident in my own ability and to trust in my own voice.

However, although the outcome of my belated exam re-sits was improved, I can't help but think back to who I was during my original GCSE attempt and realise that this improvement is not because I now have a deeper interest in language, or even because I'm more adept at descriptive or creative writing. I simply had a better understanding of the type of language skill I would need to exhibit in order to gain

marks, this time around. This naturally leads me to ask questions about whether that makes me a better writer, or a more analytical reader? Or more significantly, does it signal that I am able to use language to prevail in both my social and professional relationships? I would argue that all my successful re-sit proved was that I had demonstrated that I could satisfactorily use the 'standard' language that one section of a vast and diverse society, regard to be 'correct'.

1.3 The New York Punk Scene 1967-1982

"I'm closing the book, on the pages and the text. And I don't really care, what happens next"

(*Going, Going, Gone* by Richard Hell and the Voidoids, 1982)

In 1977 Richard Hell, a young writer and musician recently arriving in New York from Kentucky, walked on stage at CBGBs, a music venue in Manhattan's East Village, with a bass guitar hung loosely around his torso, and to a backdrop of distorted guitar riffs and a cheap sounding drum kit he sung "I belong to the blank generation, and I can take it or leave it each time" (*Blank Generation* 1977). In doing so, he gave some semblance of form to a disorganised and jagged movement, and a scene that had been trying to find its identity, or perhaps reject the notion of identity entirely in the traditional sense of the word, for a long time. This form emerged through the realisation that identity is a concept based on individuality and that any collective of people will each carry, and should each celebrate, their own understanding of what identity is. Because what Richard Hell meant when he sang these words, despite the word 'blank' being cleverly subverted as a play on the mainstream media's instant disregard of 'punks' as a collection of uneducated and unintelligent young men and women, was not that he was 'blank'- devoid of meaningful thought, but that the word 'blank' represented an empty space in the song where each listener could insert their own word which they felt best encapsulated what their generation meant to them, encouraging people to consider their own individual impression of the meaning of their existence and to celebrate autonomy and creativity. A collective consciousness was born. One where everybody's separate and individual identities were seen as something which bound them together, as opposed to acting as a dividing factor. Richard Hell defined a movement by not defining it at all.

Naturally however, Richard Hell was not alone. Musical acts such as The Velvet Underground, The MC5 and Iggy and The Stooges had been playing this style of music for years already, a long time before somebody told them they were playing 'Punk' music. Along with Richard Hell and The Voidoids, came Television, Patti Smith, Dead Boys, New York Dolls, The Cramps, The Ramones, and many more bands who were successful in making meaningful music. Punk was not a broken collection of failed musicians and dropouts, Punk was a collection of individual identities who played music, made art, and wrote books with the autonomous power to do so outside of the constraints or the pressures synonymous with following the constructs and age-old traditions or conventions of the arts. They decried the

classical rules and traditions that deemed there was only one correct way to play an instrument or sing a song. They proved that culturally important contributions do not necessarily always have to come dressed in the same formal attire, and in actual fact, the Punk movement has arguably made some of the most important cultural contributions of the last 60 years, not only to British and American culture, but to culture, independence and identity worldwide: Pussy Riot (2012) memorably harnessed the medium of protest punk to oppose Russian President, Vladimir Putin in the name of freedom, equality and LGBTQI rights, to name but one example. Furthermore, this freedom of expression paved the way for visual artists who are now household names from Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat to Keith Haring and Banksy, musicians such as Debbie Harry, Steven Morrissey and Kurt Cobain, and important literary figures such as Jim Carrol, John Cooper Clarke and Richard Hell, who is now a best-selling author himself. But, perhaps most importantly, this small group of men and women, predominantly based in New York and London, at least at first, were able to use this expression to make sense of the social, economic and political climate in which they lived, and in their own self-discovery, have assisted others in making sense of their own worlds and identities, as well.

Of course, in this movement they were opposed by most mainstream and/ or traditional music circles. In a Rolling Stone (a highly influential and well-known music magazine) album review of The Stooges' eponymous album, Edmund O. Ward (1969) wrote that The Stooges "Don't look all that bright." He claimed that Iggy Pop's vocal is a "blatantly poor imitation early Jagger style" and that they "sound like they've been playing their axes for two months and playing together for one month at most". Ward summarises this review by stating that "Their music is loud, boring, tasteless, unimaginative and childish". But the most pertinent part of this article in relation to this study, is when Ward asserts that "The lyrics are subliterate." The fact that in 2017, Iggy Pop (James Osterberg Jr) was awarded Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Consul general in Miami on behalf of the French government for his contributions to arts and literature, and that he has a keen enough sense of irony to name his first solo album 'The Idiot', are unnecessary to expand upon here. What is worthy of further comment however, is the familiar narrative of elitism that is a frequent corollary of institutions steeped in traditional values, and the implication that there is only one correct way to write, play an instrument, or express yourself, and if you find expression easier or simply more interesting in a slightly less traditional or formal way, you are considered to be incorrect, subliterate or 'not-academic'. Once again, I would suggest that this displays a failure on the part of the institution, or person representing the institution, to recognise the impact that key influences such as social structure, economic environment, and general life experience, has on a person's choice of expression, or interest in engaging in certain modes of language or culture. Of course, I am not qualified to speak for any of the musicians discussed here, but I would speculate that the reason they used socially-situated language in their songs, and typically played their instruments in a more primitive fashion which didn't necessarily align to classical music teachings, was not because they were subliterate, or because could not play their instruments any other way, but rather because they found this style of

expression related more closely to their social realities and their understanding of the world around them and their place in it. Perhaps they were also looking for real, authentic human connection. Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground, an accomplished musician by any standards, famously said that "One chord is fine. Two chords is pushing it. Three chords and you're into jazz" (Rolling Stone 2013). Reed certainly had the ability to play sophisticated and complicated chord structures and could fluently play more than seven instruments, but he chose to write the structure of his music in a more uncomplicated form because, for whatever reason, he was able to apply this simpler form of music more coherently to his perception of the world around him. This fact neither made him a more or less talented musician, and neither did it make him more or less able to communicate with the world at large. It just simply made more sense to him to play that way.

The Punk movement clearly led to a change in culture which can be seen across large parts of the world. Punk has become an identity of its own. Just as certain modes of language represent an identity. But certainly, the Punk movement was not the first collective to challenge the societal norms of traditional arts and culture. Punk musicians themselves cite influences such as poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, and writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burrows. All modern day important cultural figures who themselves were largely expelled from the well-known constitutions of their respective art forms and considered outsiders in their day as they did not follow traditional methods and processes of expression, only to be hailed as geniuses later in life. Indeed, this familiar trend can be seen again in the French Impressionist art movement of the early 1860s. Universally admired artists such as Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Paul Cezanne and Berthe Morisot were rejected from the formal Salons of Paris because their practice represented a departure from long-held traditions in terms of subject matter, process and technique, which challenged everything that the art establishment held as correct. These artists subverted the concept of the Salon to form a space of their own; the Salon Des Refuses (Salon of the Refused), and in 2019, the works of Claude Monet alone accumulated a record breaking $349.9 million in auction at Sotheby's (Art News 2019).

Throughout the ages, many similar examples can be found where history repeats the process of rejecting change, until change rejects history.

1.4 What is the purpose of Education?

> "I'm wasting my vocation, teaching you to write neat, when you're only fit to sweep the streets"

> (*The Hard Way* by The Kinks, 1975)

The question above is one that I cannot answer definitively as education is not a fixed entity that serves one purpose, and indeed the proposed purpose of an education can differ between conflicting organisational structures, government/

political policies, teacher/ organisational policy ethos and, of course, learner aims and past experiences. Discerning the aim or purpose of education is neither straightforward nor simple, and due to the many factors at play, may be difficult to identify with any degree of accuracy. While the potential of contributing factors with enough power (governments/ organisations etc.,) to enact change for the good of education can contradict each other, the most important factor, and the one with the least power to wield, is often disregarded - the learner.

The government's aspirations for education appears to be to make students 'work-ready'. Carr (1995), Bernstein (2000), Coffield (2012), and Biesta (2018), among others, argue that a good education should be much more than that. These respective works draw attention to how an education should be about helping learners to make sense of the world around them and how they perceive their role in that world and therefore, act within that world. Coffield points out that an education should be about helping learners find a sense of identity, self-worth and leading a fulfilled life as opposed to creating an exam factory production line where learners are ready to exhibit standards of identical intelligence that only serve to prove that they are able to recall and repeat/ write what they have been told to think. None of this is to deny or ignore the importance of learners being 'work-ready'.

But terms such as 'employable' and 'work-ready' can be fairly ambiguous concepts that may be difficult to define and their meaning will almost certainly vary in different working environments. 'Employability' can mean much more than just a grade on a certificate as the emphasis on organisational success rates and government set targets may suggest. The wider, holistic factors at play around a learner's development, such as their level of confidence and understanding of their social environment, all surely also contribute to a person being deemed to be 'work ready'. As do the idiosyncrasies unique to their culture and how they are perceived/ positioned within society and culture at large. This thesis discusses how all of these factors are essential to address if we really are to expect our learners to be able to function in a meaningful way, both professionally in their chosen careers, and socially in their personal interactions, post education. If the components discussed above are deemed as important in discussions regarding the purpose of an education, then we have to start with the learner themselves and promote the learner voice to the prominent role that it deserves.

Educator, musician and social commentator, Akala (2018), also contemplates a difficult but pertinent question relating to the overarching 'purpose' of an education and considers the role of employability and producing factory production line learners as opposed to producing knowledge creators, as he asks:

> "… whether education should be a site of power, a place to reproduce the social, societal norms, or a place to be encouraged to question and thus attempt to transcend them and be an active participant in remaking them."

(Akala 2018, p. 74)

Akala foregrounds the potential that education has in encouraging learners, even learners whose motivation for education may be currently abeyant, to not only question their place in society and the societal norms that make up their life experiences, but also to be an agent for change. Taking an active and critical role in transcending and reshaping the socio-cultural world around them. Akala (2018) encourages educators, curriculum designers and policy makers alike to critically consider the following questions:

> "Is state education designed to encourage more Darwins and Newtons, or to create middle-management civil servants and workers? What tensions are brought into being when a child's natural proclivity to question everything in their own unique way comes into contact with a one-size-fits-all mode of education?"

> (Akala 2018, p. 74-75)

The potential failure of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to education is the inability of such a model to acknowledge, nurture and celebrate a learner's unique perspective on the world and the problems they are confronted with, both inside and outside of education. This is a factor at the very heart of this study, and one which is explored in-depth throughout the following chapters.

Another important factor surrounding the question of what makes up the purpose of education is to consider how it is regulated. In my experience, most schools and/ or colleges put great emphasis on the outcome of assessments made by Ofsted. In addition to this, many parents I know will check an educational establishment's most recent Ofsted rating before making important decisions about their children's futures. W the great power the inspectorate possesses in deciding whether an organisation can provide a 'good' education, should also come a great responsibility to be accurate, diverse and fair in their assessment. However, within the educational context in which this study is set, it is only too easy to find clear evidence of how endemic the prejudice around language is, even at the highest level. For example, at Edge Hill University, Cushing (2021), writing a report on Ofsted, tells us:

> "The inspectorate, a workforce made up of majority white inspectors, conduct regular inspections of all state schools in England, producing reports which comment on various aspects of educational provision, including teachers' and students' spoken language."

> (Cushing. Online, November 2021)

This comment brings to light potential prejudice that may stem from a distinct lack of multi-culturalism within the inspectorate personnel. But this prejudice becomes far more explicit in the comments made in an inspection report written by Ofsted themselves:

> "Some adults have weak spoken standard English and grammar. […] Too many staff make errors in their standard

spoken English when they teach. In some cases, this means
that they model bad habits or teach incorrect grammar.
Leaders should make sure that all staff, when they teach, use
correct standard English. Leaders need to ensure consistency
to avoid confusing the children. Staff need to do more to correct
pupils' poor language or vocabulary."

(Ofsted Report of Cranberry Academy, 12 November 2019)

Here again, we see evidence of this mis-guided emphasis on 'correct' and 'in-correct'
language, the strength of the grip and the depths of the elitist prejudice faced by
learners (and staff in this case) when it comes to language development and use.
Cushing's (2021) report goes on to show how:

"…raciolinguistic ideologies are deeply embedded into the
socio-political culture of the inspectorate, and how these
ideologies translate into systems of sonic surveillance in which
the nonstandardised language practices of students and
teachers are heard as impoverished, deficient, and unsuitable
for school."

(Cushing. Online, November 2021)

Yet again we are reminded of how language is not considered to be a form of
expression and a representation and celebration of identity but rather a linear, rigid,
colonial and colonialising concept upon which rules of tradition and 'Standard
English' are the defining factors. Any choice of language that falls outside of these
standards is once more labelled as inferior, deficient and unsuitable. But this
observation on the raciolinguistic ideologies and the obvious socio-political culture
clash between the inspectorate and the learner is a pertinent point and one that is
crucial in establishing the context of the problem that this study explores.

It is not difficult to find examples of the social and cultural prejudice that exist around
language in society. The fact that this prejudice is so apparent in education, and in
education at a government level, as highlighted by our Ofsted inspectorate above,
establishes an educational climate that by its very nature, marginalises learners from
some socio-cultural backgrounds. In this way a system is created where some
learners from certain raciolinguistic, socio-cultural and/ or socio-economic
backgrounds are already at a distinct disadvantage and are far less likely to have fair
access to a meaningful and life-affirming education. Biesta (2018) highlights how this
creates, "insurmountable hierarchies where few could win and many would lose"
(2018, p. 11).

As Bragg (2004) chronicles, language does not stand still but is evolving and
changing all the time. How this evolution looks, he argues, varies depending on
situation, environment and circumstance. In multi-cultural societies, people naturally
adopt different dialects because of the mixture of languages spoken in their social
environment. Even though some educational organisations have excellent ESOL
support structures, these socially-situated languages are not recognised by the

content of curricula or exam structures and are simply labelled as 'in-correct'. In order to not discriminate or disadvantage learners from these societies, this thesis argues that the educational language framing and shaping curricula must include and respect some use of these languages. Freire (1970, p. 66) comments on how education "often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people." Freire places at front and centre stage an important aspect of education in that it should serve the learner as an act of liberation and emancipation.

Of course, this liberating experience would be severely compromised if the learner is made to feel inferior or less intelligent for speaking or writing in a way relevant to their life experience. If a learner's first experience of studying language is to be told that their own language, which reflects their own identity, is in some way lacking or simply 'wrong', then their second and future experiences of studying language are likely to be shrouded in feelings of doubt, isolation, separation and disenfranchisement.

This thesis argues that in reality, there need be no dichotomy between a learner's life experience and their ability to purposely engage with and study language and any imposed dichotomy may be damaging. My own professional experience has taught me that by the time learners reach FE, their ability or enthusiasm to study language is not completely diminished but just abeyant and therefore capable of being re-established. Throughout this study, I endeavour to capture authentic learner experiences of the marginalisation that is a direct consequence of the prejudice that exists around language acquisition and development in education in general, and on GCSE English Language Study Programmes, in particular. I also evaluate the extent to which using socially-situated literacies in language tasks might have a positive impact on learners both in terms of their engagement in the study of language and their understanding of the socio-cultural world around them. Also, this study puts aesthetic experience to work in the study of language to put the emotional experience of learning above preconceived notions of 'right' or 'wrong' ways to use language as a form of expression.

Furthermore, this thesis analyses the role of such concepts as *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005), *Fusion of Horizons* (Gadamer 2014), and Bernstein's (1996) conceptual framework of *Pedagogic Rights* combined with his *Pedagogic Device* and the role they could play in examining the root cause of the frequent disengagement in the study of language in FE. Whilst also measuring how these concepts, alongside others, might play a more prominent role in re-connecting learners with language on their own terms, and once more allow them to meaningfully engage with language in an educational environment.

Literature & Philosophy

Chapter 2: Literature & Philosophy

Chapter 1 makes the case that a good education should be an enhancing and liberating experience for every human being who comes into contact with it, helping each learner to more fully understand themselves, and the world around them. The same chapter notes that the hallmarks of a genuinely enhancing educational experience, encourage the growth of confidence, support a sense of belonging, spark imagination and bring more hopeful futures into view. In addition, it is argued that experiences of good education enable people to lead more fulfilled lives, activate insight, shape identity and nurture the development of character, as well as cultivating the qualities of mind, the virtues and values that enhance the human condition by helping us to be the best person we can be. These include, an ability for independent thought and reflection; a care for clarity and expressiveness in writing and speech; a habit of truthfulness; a commitment to open mindedness; a disposition towards co-operation and collaboration; a sense of fairness and justice; the courage to move beyond the narrow pursuit of self-interest, a genuine commitment to act publicly in the pursuit of the common good, inclusion, tolerance, wise judgement and sound reason (Dunne 2009).

The closing paragraphs of Chapter 1 take us back to its start. We revisit social, economic and cultural factors which fan the flame of the phenomenon of the existence of a long-standing prejudice surrounding how language is used in society, and perhaps more pertinently, how language acquisition and development is taught in education in England. I open Chapter 2 in the same spirit in which I started Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is subdivided into four separate sections. Each section explores how a range of literature and a number of contributions from the discipline of philosophy of education can guide us toward a deeper understanding of the problem which gave impetus to this research and the context in which it emerged.

Before discussing the various theoretical frameworks and concepts which mark the cornerstones of this thesis, it is important to look at some recent and current research being undertaken in the field of language acquisition and development in the FE sector, more widely. This is crucial for two reasons. The first is to allow this literature review to draw upon a wider pool of knowledge and research in the context of the FE sector. The second, is to look ahead as to how this research is distinct and how it differs from research in this field of study conducted in FE in England to date. My intention here is to bring to the fore the unique contributions to knowledge offered in this thesis. A further intention is to point out why this work is crucial in building a more coherent understanding of language acquisition, literacy and development in programmes of GCSE English Language in FE. I hope that this work may also be of interest and use to education leaders and teachers working in GCSE English Language Study Programmes in the schools sector.

I begin with recent research which investigates how the policy development and implementation process, combined with the culture of FE colleges may play a part in widening the disengagement and distance between English Language GCSE resit

learners and a meaningful and emancipatory experience of education. Hussain (2025) draws attention to how well-meaning but inflexible and mis-guided policy imperatives and policy processes do unintentional harm to learners and by extension, to lecturers, managers and senior leaders. The key issue here is to look at how cultural changes to the structure of how FE colleges operate may enable learners more access to meaningfully engage with language acquisition and development activities in FE and also may open up opportunities for teachers to discover more creative ways to engage learners when they are not too tightly bound to an overly restrictive curriculum. Hussain (2025, p. 218) addresses the policy of GCSE resits for all learners who do not achieve a Grade 4 or above in English Language whilst at school. He provides accounts of lived experiences which show that, "the argument for reforming this policy is indisputable". Hussain (2025) then turns to the findings of his research to point out that the dominant policy rationale continues to appear to favouring political and ideological imperatives and diktats over what is educationally desirable (Biesta 2018).

Hussain's (2025) work led me to more examples of research in the same field of investigation. Ruddle's (2024) experimentation mirrors this study in some ways by also recognising the restrictive and exclusionary nature of many of the suggested GCSE English Language texts. To overcome this, Ruddle (2024) offers learners a selection of texts which he has hand-picked from books he has read and enjoyed himself. Although Ruddle reports positive outcomes for learners, it seems that the opportunity for learners to select their own texts and therefore bring their own worlds into the classroom may have been missed.

Mudd (2023) shares interesting and exciting work around the power of oracy in language acquisition and development. For Mudd (2023), stories offer an invaluable method of allowing a learner to freely engage with language without having to become restricted or bound by the mechanics that inherently accompany expression through the written word. Mudd (Online, August 3 2023) highlights, "In the classroom, stories give us a number of opportunities, and can be utilised by teachers to wonderful effect." The emphasis here is not to demean the written word or question its importance, but rather to allow a learner an opportunity to use language in a way which allows the human spirit to shine through in the hope that some of the boundaries learners come into FE with, start to fade away. Mudd (2023) also focuses on the power of using aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention in the form of table-top role-playing games, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*. Through these fantastical experiences, Mudd aims to engender a confidence in using language amongst his learners. Although the use of aesthetic experience binds this study to the works of Mudd (2023), the ways in which aesthetic experience is used in his work and in this thesis differ greatly.

With regards to the methods by which we assess a learner's ability to use language in authentic educational ways I am drawn to the recent research of Smith (2020). This research presents us with alternative methods of assessing language, moving away from what Smith (2020, p. 67) calls "absolute judgements" towards what he describes as a "comparative judgement" model. Through this study, Smith (2020)

calls for a stepping away from approaches to assessing language based upon rigid criterion-referencing and/ or a (rather mechanical) rubric devoid of context towards a method where comparison against other works enables a teacher/ assessor to form a wider and more informed judgement as to the quality of a student's work. Smith refers to comparative judgement as ACJ (adaptive comparative judgement). He points out that:

> "ACJ is not solely reliant on a mark scheme to guide the judgement decision and offers teachers far more agency in considering what a 'quality' item is. This is possible as the comparative nature of the approach provides the judge with a frame of reference on which to base their judgement regardless of the focus."

(Smith 2020, p. 68-69)

Through this exploration of comparative judgement, Smith (2020) is focusing our attention on the importance of experience in the assessment process and how often, especially through the pen and paper examinations of the English Language GCSE Study Programme, the recognition of the learner's experience is lost. This is pertinent to this study and revisited in Chapter 6.

Coffield (2024) provides a striking account of the deep-rooted nature of the problems we face in FE around learner engagement and organisational effectiveness. Coffield (2024) highlights that many of these issues can be traced back to government decisions which have damaged the FE sector. Coffield (2024) advocates for a levelling out of commitment and resources to enable the FE sector as a whole to meet expectations. For Coffield (2024) educational institutions in FE are blamed for the fact that successive governments have not met productivity targets but that in practice, colleges in the sector are not equipped with the means to effectively face the many unresolved challenges, such as the plight of young people from more challenging socio-economic backgrounds, the rise in unemployment and improving standards of teaching and learning on limited budgets and with below par resources. The work of Coffield (2024) frames the problem being investigated in this study in the wider context in which the problem exists, alongside the many cultural, political and organisational factors which exacerbate the problem. These same themes are echoed through the work of Hussain (2025), as discussed above.

Although most of the examples of current research and/ or literature cited and discussed in this study focus on the vital, vivid and evocative nature of experiential learning in different ways, there are a number of key differences which set the pedagogic intervention reported in this thesis apart. Firstly, although we can see other practitioner researchers harnessing the pedagogic power of aesthetic experience, other studies do not use music, film or image to enhance the emotional experience of learning. Furthermore, although Ruddle (2024) recognises the need for widening the scope of literature available to learners studying language, the alternate language offered to learners still comes from the mind and the world of the teacher. This is admirable and Ruddle (2024) reports success when experimenting in

this way. However, the pedagogic interventions reported in this thesis explore the power of language and literature further by allowing learners the freedom, autonomy and confidence to bring their own languages into an educational environment for analysis in collaborative and cooperative dialogue, meaning-making and discussion. In contrast, in the work of Ruddle (2024) this power and decision-making remain in the hands of the teacher. Informed by the work of Bernstein (1996) and Dewey (2011) this study permits and enables the learner's home life into their life in education. In the process, it re-engages learners in the study of language on their own terms, through their own experiences and in their own words.

Returning now to the theoretical frameworks and concepts which give form to this study, the first, and arguably the most important issue to address explores the learner's experience of education and the presence or absence of their access to pedagogic rights which represent the cornerstones of a good education (Bernstein 1996).

2.1 Tension Points

> "Are you locked up in a world that's been planned out for you? Are you feeling like a social tool without a use?"

> (*She* by Green Day, 1995)

Our first experiences of learning can be powerful enough to define our relationship with education, for our entire lives. Our ability to comprehend new concepts involves knowledge and skill that take time, confidence and courage to develop. As students, we are however often hurried into situations where judgements and assessments are made about us in situations where we are ranked and sorted by how well we cope. By arranging groups of students into sets based on levels of competency, organisations also work to ensure we are continually reminded of where we are placed in the hierarchy or pecking order of learning. This is recognised by Bourne (2003) in her assertion that:

> "…naturally occurring differential levels of 'ability' is used to construct pupils as innately bright' or 'slow learners', a concept which enables schools to act as selection and sorting mechanisms, instituting a raft of practices to bring about differential attainment, ranking students hierarchically and justifying an unequal allocation of resources to different groups, masking the resulting social and economic inequalities."

> (Bourne 2003, p. 497)

As with all first impressions, that first experience of education, good or bad, is actually only one encounter amongst thousands. Instead of using those first or early experiences of education to put damaging labels on learners or to organise them into groups that remind the learner of their level of 'competency', or encourage them to

compete and to see themselves as being superior or inferior to each other, this thesis argues that it may be more beneficial to view learners' previous experiences in ways which are grounded in, and value, their lives and lived experiences to date; and which enable and encourage learners to recognise previous boundaries and barriers which prohibited their access to a good education, not as predictors of the trajectories of their lives, but as tension points between past educational achievement and potential attainment in imagined, successful and realisable futures.

Bernstein (1996) describes experiences and boundaries as pedagogical starting points which he positions in a conceptual framework of *Pedagogic Rights*:

> "A condition of experiencing boundaries, be they social, intellectual or personal, not as prisons, or stereotypes, but as tension points condensing the past and opening possible futures."

(Bernstein 1996, p. 6)

In Chapter 1, I describe my own educational struggle and experience of prejudice. My personal experience of being labelled as a 'not-academic' student remained a barrier to me throughout my entire participation in compulsory education. This stereotype repeatedly held me back and restricted what kind of educational experiences I felt I was qualified to enjoy. Bernstein's (1996) work on tension points resonates strongly with me because it takes the focus away from stereotypes of learners and instead encourages teachers and learners to use negative experiences to condense the past, make sense of it, and to imagine new futures. There's a certain power in viewing social, intellectual or personal boundaries, not as prisons or stereotypes but opportunities to bring diminishing past experiences of education, 'out into the public world where ethical judgement can get at it' (Geertz 2000, p. 21). Viewing diminishing experiences of education in this way helps us to move forward into new and more promising futures. Because in doing this, we come to understand that the future doesn't have to be the same as the past and that, it is possible for us to access ideas and meaningfully engage in lived emotional experiences of education which enhance us, not diminish us.

As when I was a full-time learner, most students that I teach are not aware of the existence of *Pedagogic Rights* so social, intellectual and personal barriers and boundaries remain firmly in place throughout their experiences of compulsory schooling. As their teacher, I see it as my responsibility to ensure my students are given the help they need to condense their past school experiences, see them as tension points, and enable and encourage them to once again fully engage and realise their potential through their education. Ensuring that the *Pedagogic Rights* of learners are being upheld and fulfilled is key in doing this.

Bernstein (1996) offers us a framework of three *Pedagogic Rights*, *Enhancement*, *Inclusion*, and *Participation*, together with the conditions that allow for these rights to be fulfilled and the levels on which they exist, as demonstrated in the table below:

Table 1. Bernstein's Pedagogic Rights and the conditions and levels upon which they exist

Rights	Conditions	Levels
Enhancement	Confidence	Individual
Inclusion	Communitas	Social
Participation	Civic discourse	Political

(Bernstein 1996, p. 7)

These rights are examined in more detail later in this chapter. But first, let us consider the importance of these *Pedagogic Rights* and, more significantly, the detrimental effect on the learner if these rights are absent, disrespected or unfulfilled.

Education is often spoken about on a national level. Because of this, we have come to accept that roughly 40% of learners will fail a particular educational programme each year. The danger we face in uncritically accepting this statistic is one of overlooking the reasons why students are failing and how, very often, it is the same demographic of learner who is expected to fall into that 40% margin. From the beginning of a learner's academic journey, certain biases and prejudices, unseen and most likely unspoken, play a part in how each specific learner's experience of education is framed. These biases and prejudices range from the type of educational content a learner is exposed to, the subjects they are allowed to study and how they are expected to study it, what is taught and what is learned in pedagogic practice, the quality of educational opportunities (or lack thereof) presented to the learner, or even simply the learner having access to education in the first place. Each child's and each young person's first years in education infiltrate and influence their expectations and guide them toward certain social groups and ways of thinking about who they are, how they learn, what they learn and how much they are capable of learning. These not so subtle, deeply troubling messages and crude judgements often stay with learners throughout a lifetime of education and can be immensely damaging to their confidence both inside and outside of educational settings. My experience of teaching in FE suggests that these hidden judgements, routinely and casually bestowed on learners, are often incorrect. Bernstein (1996, p. 5) warns us that, "these biases can reach down to drain the very springs of affirmation, motivation and imagination."

Far from the disparaging notion of 'draining the springs' of our learners' hopes and aspirations, an experience of education should rather act as a *Pedagogic Device*, which deeply engages learners and evokes feelings of ambition, self-belief, hope and optimism. However, access to the 'type' of education that can provide a learner with such a robust foundation on which to build their future, is not equally distributed throughout all echelons of our society. Bernstein (1996) observes that:

> "Education can have a crucial role in creating tomorrow's optimism in the context of today's pessimism. But if it is to do this then we must have an analysis of the social biases in

education. These biases lie deep within the very structure of
the educational system's processes of transmission and
acquisition and their social assumptions."

<div align="right">(Bernstein 1996, p. 5)</div>

This statement powerfully highlights how the socio-cultural environment in which a learner lives, may directly impact whether their *Pedagogic Rights* are not only fairly granted but also protected and upheld. In the context of this study, issues surrounding learners' access to their *Pedagogic Rights* raise vital questions about how a learner acquires and develops language and may play a central role in shaping their thinking and their ability to access educational experiences that value learners' pedagogic rights and treats them as universal.

As previously discussed, the first of these *Pedagogic Rights* is *Enhancement.* Bernstein (1996, p.6) tells us that *Enhancement* is: "The right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities." The ability to access independent thought and reflection is, in essence, the very least our learners can expect from their education. The right to be given the means to critically understand themselves, their world and their place in that world, as well as their futures. The *Enhancement* of our learners is not an act of transmitting knowledge and certainty about the world or various educational concepts. After all, the certainty of any given situation is fluid and will change from one mind to another and one way of thinking, to another. The *Enhancement* of our learners is a moral act, one of encouraging our learners to question their position in the world they see around them, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, deepen their understanding of the social structure in which they live and how it is kept in place and give them the courage to challenge the limits that society may have set upon them. As discussed in Chapter 1, a way learner's language is perceived may be a contributing factor to the diminishment of learner confidence and courage. Such negative experiences may in turn operate to hold learners back in life, keep certain doors firmly shut, doors reserved only for more privilege others who speak in what is considered to be a more 'proper' fashion. The *Enhancement* of learner identity and confidence resides in *Pedagogic Devices* which lead to affirmation that the language and previous experiences of learners, amongst their other characteristics, is not something that defines, confines or diminishes them but, on the contrary, when respected, valued and taken seriously can be helpful in shaping a learner's perspective and can pave the way into new life chances and opportunities.

The second *Pedagogic Right* is that of *Inclusion.* My lived experience of teaching in FE has highlighted that for any learner to meaningfully engage with any study programme at all, they first have to feel that they belong on that programme in *Communitas* with others. Bernstein (1996) explains how a feeling of belonging, or inclusion, can empower a learner to take ownership of their education, set their own expectations higher, and encourage them to take more *Agency* in their learning. This term, *Agency,* is a term that is currently widely used by management in the FE college in which I work. All students are expected to take *Agency* in their learning as

a matter of course. However, this raises questions of what *Agency* might look like in practice and what part we, as educators, play in this. It's entirely feasible that learners at the FE college in which I work do not experience a strong enough sense of belonging to feel that they have some sort of say over what they belong to, or that they are simply not aware that they are able to express and exercise their '*Agency*' and even if they were, I fear that it would remain an ambiguous, abstract concept for them. The very ambiguity of the term is perhaps working against the right of inclusion we are trying to fulfil for our learners. This draws attention vividly to the importance of the key ideas, terms and concepts in education, and how clearly we have defined them and how well we understand what they mean.

Bernstein (1996, p.7) comments that *Inclusion* is "the right to be included, socially, intellectually, culturally and personally". In terms of *Agency*, I am particularly drawn to how a learner can express their right to be included in the social, intellectual, cultural and personal elements of their course through their language. The learner's voice can ensure them the right to *Inclusion*. In this sense, perhaps an example of a learner exercising *Agency* is through having the courage to use their voice, or their having a genuine say over what they belong to in educational, social, personal and political contexts. A learner demanding that their thoughts and opinions are heard and taken seriously is unconditionally connected to their right to *Inclusion* being preserved. To answer my own question above: What part do we, as educators, play in this? A first step is that we have to hear, listen to and take seriously the voices of our learners.

However, providing the *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* is a much more complicated process than simply encouraging learners to exercise their voice. This warrants further examination. Bernstein (1996) expands upon the theory of inclusion:

> "Now this right to be included is complex because to be 'included' does not necessarily mean to be absorbed. Thus, the right to be included may also require a right to be separate, to be autonomous."

> (Bernstein 1996, p. 7)

The very term of *Inclusion* might be interpreted to mean that all learners are to be considered as a whole person. The one and the many. One group together, everyone included. However, as Bernstein highlights, the learner's right to be separate and autonomous does constitute, in fact, a part of their right of *Inclusion*. It is not for us to decide or determine what *Inclusion* means to and for each individual learner. Rather it should be taken as their right to be included in a way that serves and helps to fulfil each of them. Inclusion is therefore not about 'absorbing' learners but about empowering and encouraging them to express their autonomy. Of course, this also includes their right to be autonomous and individual with their language and their culture.

The final *Pedagogic Right* is *Participation*. Bernstein (1996) describes this as:

> "The third right is the right to participate. I think one should be
> very clear about the word participation. Participation is not only
> about discourse, about discussion, it is about practice, and a
> practice that must have outcomes. The third right, then, is the
> right to participate in procedures whereby order is
> constructed, maintained and changed. It is the right to
> participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation
> of order."

(Bernstein 1996, p.7)

Here, Bernstein sets out the need for learners to actively participate in all aspects of their programme of study. Of course, their use of language plays a predominant role here again. Note how, for Bernstein, the right to participate concerns practice. I revisit the term 'practice' in more detail in a latter section of this chapter, but in this context, 'practice' refers to how order, protocols and boundaries are set and maintained throughout the learner's entire experience of education. The importance of this aspect of Bernstein's framework lies in the demand it places upon the significance of the learner voice being elevated to the extent that it can directly impact upon key decisions and policy. The power to have impact on these decisions is a political power that Bernstein (1996) describes as *Participation.* Bourne (2003), through the works of Bernstein, helps us to see that *Participation* is:

> "induction into the wider collective, and ideally into an
> understanding of the individual's positioning within, and
> potential contribution to transforming, the social and political."

(Bourne 2003, p.499)

Recognising the necessity for *Participation in* education is paramount in understanding what P/political participation looks like in practice. It does not simply involve giving students a vote on a few arbitrary decisions in order to tick the *Participation* box. Instead, it calls for energetic engagement from the learner together with a genuine response from others. *Participation involves* inspiring the learner to be independent and autonomous in their learning for the benefit of themselves, their identity and their future, while remaining mindful of the collective good. I am aware that this may start to sound like an 'ideal world' scenario and that I have forgotten the pressures of teaching to deadlines and the restrictions we all find in making curricula work for our learners, in practice. I suggest however that the importance of attending to, protecting and maintaining the *Pedagogic Rights* of our learners, combined with an insistence on giving our learners the best educational experience we can provide, is a teacher's priority which supersedes all others. A realistic and achievable priority argues Bourne:

> "Despite the constraints on national curricula and institutional
> structures, there remains space at school and classroom level
> for negotiation between teacher and the set curriculum, and
> between teacher and his or her particular class."

Bourne (2003, p.497) asserts that it is this negotiation that, "impacts on and can transform outcomes for otherwise socially disadvantaged students".

The learner voice is central to this study and as such, this theme is re-visited throughout this thesis. Bernstein gives us a comprehensive insight into the prevalent role a learner must be able to take, alongside their teachers and education managers in collaboration with policy makers, in shaping learning. He also indicates how these three basic *Pedagogic Rights* can allow learners to do so.

Let us now turn to explore another of Bernstein's (1996) theories concerning his discussion of horizontal and vertical discourse:

> "common sense knowledge is expressed in horizontal discourse, which is local, segmental, context dependent, tacit, multi-layered, often contradictory across contexts but not within contexts. In contrast, a vertical discourse takes the form of a coherent, explicit, systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised, or it takes the form of a series of specialised languages."

(Bernstein 1996, pp.170-171)

Horizontal discourse is a mode of language that we obtain through our day to day interactions and by being a part of our respective communities. We don't 'learn' this language as much as we live it. As Bernstein (1996) highlights, it is context dependent, often tacit and multi-layered. Locke (2015) suggests:

> "We 'acquire' rather than 'learn' a discourse because of the subconscious nature of the process, the process of trial and error and the absence of formal instruction"

(Locke 2015, p. 28)

Our horizontal discourse may also be referred to as socially-situated language and is key in assisting our learners in determining their identity and in making sense of the world in which they live. Bernstein (1996) explains that we discuss 'common sense knowledge' using this mode of language but a different discourse is used in education- vertical discourse. Language in education is often clipped and explicit. Basic words in the vocabulary of education such as 'classroom', 'curriculum' and 'textbook', all inherently have a very formal edge to them. The vocabulary of educational language and subjects is structured and often carries hierarchal connotations. It's not only the more recalcitrant learners who recoil and disengage when the vertical discourse of education is used, especially if prior experiences of education have been less than positive. This may be something that we all accept as a matter of course. After all, most of us have probably known nothing else. However, Bourne (2003) invites us to consider what impact this type of discourse may have:

> "School discourses are goal focused, curriculum oriented, sequential and hierarchical, driving towards socially set ends. Thus, within them there is limited opportunity for local classroom negotiation, either for teachers or pupils. This essential characteristic can be masked from all or some participants, or made clear and explicit to all, so all involved can understand it."

> (Bourne 2003, p. 500)

Returning to the subject of *Pedagogic Rights*, it is worthy of comment that the vertical discourse that we use throughout education could stand to be the very confining factor in prohibiting our learners from experiencing and harnessing their own *Pedagogic Rights.* As Bourne points out, how can learners fully engage and explicitly make their voice heard if the discourse of the conversation so drastically conflicts with the horizontal discourse that they are confident in using. This in turn, is more likely to have an adverse effect on learners from more diverse social backgrounds because of the wider social and cultural influences upon the way they speak. Here, Bourne (2003) underscores the need to make learners aware of this discourse conflict and of the importance of finding a means to:

> "develop ways of relating school knowledge to local knowledges, in this way encouraging students both to analyse the world and to understand, and thus potentially work to transform their own position in society."

> (Bourne 2003, p. 496)

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the importance of education acting as a liberating experience. One which opens up the world to our leaners and allows them to be ambitious, confident and hopeful, regarding their futures. It is argued that education should be an experience which is put to work in order to transform and improve a person's position in society. Inclusive learning and equal educational opportunities worthy of their name allow, encourage and enable all learners the opportunities reach their full potential and to take their future into their hands, regardless of background, culture, class and language. However, Bernstein reminds us that:

> "Class cultures act to transform micro differences into macro inequalities and these inequalities raise crucial issues for the relation between democracy and education."

> (Bernstein 1996, p. 11)

This stark reflection on the part that social class and micro differences can play in having a detrimental effect on our learner's experiences of education on a macro scale is at once bleak and deeply troubling. I am compelled therefore to reflect on my own learners' experiences and the consequences of these upon their lives and their

learning. Coming into FE with prior negative experiences of education, it sometimes appears that my students are enrolling onto a college course not because they're not beaten yet and they want a second shot at education, but because society tells them that 'that's where people like you go after school'. The wounds of the past are deep. The scars are apparent. I believe that my moral obligation, as an educator in the FE sector, is to encourage my learners to see that their past experiences are tension points, not as prisons or failures. My intention in this work is to try to turn my students' attention back to education and its endless possibilities through direct experiences, and the nurturing of their *Pedagogic Rights*. To help me to do this, I start with language.

2.2 Fusion of Horizons

> "What a mess, on the ladder of success, where you take one step and miss the whole first rung. Dreams unfulfilled, graduate unskilled"

> (*Bastards of Young* by The Replacements, 1985)

When we consider language education in FE, some might deem it advisable to maintain continuity with the pedagogic approaches widely used in language acquisition and development in schools. On the face of it, there is logic in this method. After all, learners are already acquainted with the kinds of literature they will be expected to analyse. They will have had past experiences of working with this language in an academic environment, and ultimately, they are destined to conclude their first year in FE in the same way as they concluded their final year at school, by sitting an English Language GCSE pen and paper examination.

My experiences of working in FE however, have taught me that if the outcome of GCSE English Language re-sits in FE are disappointing, it is the learners who are criticised, not the pedagogy, nor the content of the curriculum. Assessment judgements concerning the mode of literature that learners are expected to study, against which they are assessed, in relation to language acquisition and development activities in FE, appears to be socially and culturally rigged /fixed. If the learner fails to meaningfully engage with it, the fault lies with them, not the content of the curriculum or the focus of examination questions. This section of Chapter 2 focuses on potential opportunities to use literacies that relate to the learner's social and cultural realities in language education in FE and the possible consequences for our learners if we fail to recognise, value and celebrate their unique prior experiences with language.

This is a complex issue, as Sennett (2009, p. 215) notes, "Resistances themselves come in two sorts: found and made". At this point, I attempt to shed some light on how this situation may be approached. Cope and Kalantzis (2014) warn us of the danger we risk in alienating our learners by not considering how a selected text will work for the learner in the context of the cultural and social realities in which they live:

> "Texts are different because they do different things. So, any literacy pedagogy has to be concerned, not just with the formalities of how texts work, but also with the living social reality of texts-in-use"

> (Cope and Kalantzis 2014, p. 7)

This call to action from Cope and Kalantzis regarding the need for teachers to consider the social background of the text and the reader. This means that we all need to be able to relate some aspect of our own individual social reality to what we read, listen to in music, or watch on television, if we hope to fully engage with the content in a meaningful way. The emphasis here focuses on connecting a text designated for study in an educational environment with the world outside of education. Thereby, encouraging the learner to view education as a part of their day-to-day lives rather than something they have to do which inevitably will involve writing about a topic far-removed from their social reality.

Dewey (2011) rejects the legitimacy of any dichotomy falsely erected between the social world of the learner and the world of their education. He argues that any dichotomy that does exist is false and fabricated and that it is only in the choice of subject matter and pedagogy where the disconnect is formed. Dewey (2011) states that:

> "… the bonds which connect the subject matter of school study with the habits and ideals of the social group are disguised and covered up. The ties are so loosened that it often appears as if there were none; as if subject matter existed simply as knowledge on its own independent behoof, and as if study were the mere act of mastering it for its own sake, irrespective of any social values."

> (Dewey 2011, p. 101)

Here, Dewey expresses concern that the mode of subject matter we use in education often serves to loosen ties with the respective social realties and experiences of our learners to the point where it may appear that no ties exist between the two at all. Study becomes an independent act of learning simply for learning's sake and social ideals continue to exist in the real-world. A world that has profound meaning to the learner but perhaps little or no connection to education. Dewey (2011) affirms that:

> "Failure to bear in mind the difference in subject matter from the respective standpoints of teacher and student is responsible for most of the mistakes made in the use of texts and other expressions of pre-existent knowledge."

> (Dewey 2011, p. 102)

Zimmerman's (2015) work on Hermeneutics concurs with that of Dewey where it draws attention to the importance of there being an intrinsic correlation between a text and the non-educational cultural experiences of a learner:

> "We understand an object, word or fact when it makes sense
> within our own life context and thus speaks to us meaningfully.
> When we understand objects, texts or situations in this way,
> they become part of our inner mental world so that we can
> express them again in our own terms"

(Zimmerman 2015, p. 7)

Here, Zimmerman goes beyond text-based language to highlight the difference between learning something and understanding it by living through it. We can teach our students to commit information to memory and they may succeed in recalling that information during an exam. Indeed, this may be considered effective "teaching" where the only important outcome of education is results. However, this falls short if our educational aims include helping the learner to see the rich significance of their lives and to enhance their natural ability to be curious about the world. In such circumstances, Dewey (2011) cautions:

> "Achievement comes to denote the sort of thing that a well-
> planned machine can do better than a human being can, and
> the main effect of education, the achieving of a life of rich
> significance, drops by the wayside."

(Dewey 2011, p. 130)

We can only really understand a concept, in any context, if it reveals to us something about the significance of our own lives. When we are able to achieve this connection between new content and previous life experience, that content becomes part of what Zimmerman calls our 'inner world', our consciousness. The content then becomes an extension of us and we are thus able to use it to further make sense of our worlds and express new ideas in our own terms.

Zimmerman (2015, p. 51) argues that without first forming this intrinsic link between a text and the consciousness of the reader, the whole learning process may not be possible: "Personal interest in what something means for me in my particular life situation makes understanding possible in the first place." For Zimmerman, a lack of personal interest removes the possibility of understanding, all together. Without meaningful understanding, we reduce education back to the process of asking leaners to remember information in a machine-like manner as Dewey observes above. Thus, paramount importance has to be placed on the selection of the learning content. As we cannot know what literature will speak to a particular learner's 'inner world', it must be the learners who are given more say on this matter, as we encourage them to bring their 'inner world' into their education.

I revisit the discussion of the significance of the learner voice to this study later in this chapter. For now, I would like to continue to explore the cruciality of selecting

appropriate learning material further. Gee (2008) also recognises how a text may be inert and virtually useless as a pedagogic device if it fails to have a social and cultural meaning for the reader:

> "One always and only learns to interpret texts of a certain type in certain ways through having access to, and ample experience in, social settings where texts of that type are read in those ways."

(Gee 2008, p. 53)

In a similar vein to Zimmerman, Gee highlights that learning cannot take place without the learner having considerable experience of the social setting to which the learning content relates. It is interesting that Gee also emphasises how texts are read in different ways in different social settings. Here, Gee invites us to consider how learners from multi-cultural social environments may feel pressured to diminish themselves and demean the rich cultural influences on the way they speak, think and write under the pressure to conform to the vertical discourse currently embedded in the language of pedagogy and assessment in education. And in the process of subjecting themselves to this conformity, a void, or as Dewey describes it, a disconnect is formed between the world of education and the world outside of education. Within this vacuum, alienation from education can begin to grow and freedom of expression and engagement with language is diminished.

Gadamer (2014, p. 415) also draws attention to how any given text 'speaks' a certain language and if that language cannot be fully understood by the reader, it may fail to 'speak' at all: "…no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person."

It is important to note that I am not advocating here that one particular mode of language should supersede and replace another mode of language. Nor am I against or opposed to the categories of classic literature that commonly feature in GCSE English Language curricula. To suggest that all content on an English Language GCSE Study Programme is misguided would be absurd and unreasonable. After all, a text that is relatable, inspiring and life-affirming to one learner may be inert, irrelevant and mundane to the next. Language is a subjective topic and being able to relate to a text eventually comes down to a matter of taste and/ or life experience. In the context of this study, my experience suggests that therein lies a deeper issue. If we accept language to be a completely subjective matter, then how can we expect a classroom of varying individual experiences to all relate to, and find meaning in the same text. To take this argument further, how can a curriculum 'speak' to a diverse nation of learners all being assessed on their ability to comprehend and use the same text in a written GCSE examination. The works of Dewey, Zimmerman and Gee discussed above contest the defeatist notion that this is a futile impossibility.

Gadamer (2014, p. 415) offers further insight on the accessibility of a text by changing the focus from an understanding of the literature to a 'horizon of

interpretation' as he remarks that: "to acquire a horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons." Zimmerman (2016) describes Gadamer's concept of a 'fusion of horizons' as:

> "Fusion of Horizons: This describes the nature of understanding as integrating what is unfamiliar to use into our own familiar context, so when we understand something we fuse someone else's viewpoint with our own and in this encounter we are transformed because it broadens our mind."

> (Zimmerman. Online, July 2022)

This concept of a fusion of horizons is a recurring source of inspiration and interest to this study. It deals with taking something that is unfamiliar to a learner and putting it into a familiar context to 'fuse' the viewpoint or situation of the text/ author with that of the learner. This suggests that no human being thinks on a horizon that is completely unique and that we share common ground in that we share the condition of being human and at the same time we are unique in the ways in which we experience being human in the contexts of our lives. We are all therefore capable of meaningfully engaging with a range of literature as long as some part of the literature relates to our experiences and our own familiar context. When we come to understand that something unfamiliar can be purposeful and have significance to the life we know outside of learning, this opens up worlds of literature, meaning and the potential for transformational experiences through education. Of course, these transformational learning experiences place demands upon both the student and the teacher. We can find ourselves in a symbiotic state of educational unity (*Communitas*) in situations and contexts where all parties concerned can grow and learn from each other.

When considering the potential power that the life changing, transformational learning experiences discussed above may have on our learners, I am drawn back to Dewey (2005) and his concept of *'Heightened Vitality'*:

> "Experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events."

> (Dewey 2005, p. 18)

This explanation of experience is one where the learner can free themselves from feeling trapped in their inner world and bring that world forth to recognise a more interactive and 'alert commerce' with the world around them. Experience leading to a *Heightened Vitality* in our learners is again intrinsically linked to how well the experience speaks to the learner about their life. For an experience to successfully lead to a *Heightened Vitality*, it must penetrate the world, objects and events familiar

to the learner, and allow them the space to make interpretations in a way that links the experience directly back to their world.

Gadamer (2014, p. 415) also reminds us that the interpretation of any given text cannot simply be incorrect, as the very nature of interpretation is that it is subjective and relies on the reader of the text fusing their life experiences, in some way, to the language used: "There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct 'in itself', precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself". Again, as we attempt to use learning material to 'fuse' our learner's 'horizons' to a wider social and cultural context, we must be mindful that any interpretation is simply a mirror of our learner's worlds and how they perceive their sociocultural environments. As such, learners should be encouraged to explore the significance in any text, even when their perception of significance varies greatly from the perceptions of other learners and/ or those of the teachers. Biesta (2018, p. 15) urges teachers to remember that: "The educational gesture must remain hesitant and gentle."

I am aware that the argument I present above may generate some level of discomfort in some political, social, cultural and educational circles. However, if we are to unlock and open up the metaphorical doors of the classroom and break down the social, cultural, intellectual and personal boundaries imposed upon some groups of learners by current approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in order to spark their interest in a world of language that exists in, and resonates with, the social and cultural lives of these learners, in their conversations with friends and family, or their musical influences, then things will have to change. I do not underestimate this troublesome discomfort that this argument may raise. For example, some may fear that the medium or mode of literature being studied fails to represent what may be widely considered as classic or high art/ culture. Some may not even consider such texts worthy of study. However, any curriculum content which claims to be educational, must be robust enough to connect with the experiences of learners from all walks of life and be capable of opening up familiar and new ideas and concepts which allow all learners to flourish and grow. Others may argue that the language/ 'texts' the learner chooses to study may not qualify as 'literature' at all.

In the face of these objections Dewey (2011) does not flinch or retreat. Instead, he reaffirms that it is the duty of education to:

> "… balance the various elements in the social environment,
> and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to
> escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was
> born, and to come into living contact with a broader
> environment."

> (Dewey 2011, p. 130)

To these concerns, I offer two responses;

Firstly, there is a wide range of compelling, thought-provoking and stimulating literature available to us that currently is not utilised in many GCSE English

Language curricula. My experiences of teaching in FE have taught me that this content often comes directly from the world of the learner and sometimes for that very reason is overlooked and deemed irrelevant or below the expected standard of literacy. To return to Dewey (2011, p. 160), some educational curricula have, "the tendency to treat interest as something purely private, without intrinsic connection with the material studied." This apparent disconnect between the socio-cultural world, the world our students know, and the world they experience in education can only become a barrier to learning and growth if we treat our learner's interests as something private to them which has no relation to how they develop as a learner and is curiously considered to be irrelevant.

Secondly, the term 'literature' itself is deserving of a brief examination. All literature is in some way a work of art. However, the word 'literature', at least in my experience of the word, normally brings to mind names such as Proust, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Brontë. All phenomenal authors who have produced life-affirming and life-changing works. These authors have produced literature that has in itself changed hearts, minds and worlds (including my own). However, the question of how we define literature as a work of art worthy of study for any particular group of learners is open to debate. Gadamer (2014, p. 107) argues that: "the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it".

Here, Gadamer asks whether a work of art ceases to be art, purely on an individual level, if the viewer, reader, or listener fails to connect with it. Perhaps any artefact is only a truly functioning work of art when somebody interacts with it and gains an experience from that interaction. In this sense, classical literature may not always be the best source of language to assess students' learning and language development. Indeed, what we may class as the best mode of language to assess learners against will differ from person to person, identity to identity. This means that the term 'literature' does not necessarily have be reserved only for these great and iconic works of already globally esteemed writers and artists. Gadamer (2014) draws attention to how:

> "The concept of literature is far wider than that of the literary work of art. All written texts share in the mode of being literature… as it is essentially bound by language. Literature in the broadest sense is bounded only by what can be said, for everything that can be said can be written".

> (Gadamer 2014, p. 162)

Here, Gadamer asserts that anything that can be said has a claim to be classed as literature for the simple reason that if it can be said, it can be written. This makes a clear distinction between what we may consider to be a literary work of art and literature. In this case, literature is any coherent combination of words, thoughts, signs and symbols committed to paper, paint, marble, architecture, music, dance, film, etc. However, when we choose to work with the term literature in this context, this does not necessarily deem it to be a literary work of high art. The question of what value these works have as learning materials remains open.

It is worth reiterating that in my experience, and in the context of this study, one of the key reasons for continuous poor GCSE English attendance and outcomes in FE is learners' almost complete lack of enthusiasm for, and engagement with, the study of language. I continue to argue that before we ask learners to unpack and analyse great works of literary art that may have little or no bearing on their social context and cultural experiences of life, we first must focus on engaging them with the study of language on their own terms and through a literature that they can directly relate to in their encounters with life both inside and outside of education. When analysing the 'usefulness' of any given material, it is important to remember that student engagement is paramount. Dewey (2011) asserts that:

> "In the first place, as long as any topic makes an immediate appeal, it is not necessary to ask what it is good for (…) The proof of a good is found in the fact that the pupil responds; his response is use. His response to the material shows that the subject functions in his life."

(Dewey 2011, p. 133)

Any learner on any programme of study needs to be stimulated and engaged by the course content. If they are not, the best outcome is likely to be that they will go through the motions of the learning process in the hope they will do just enough to walk away with a certificate. Worse still, they cease to engage with the course and education in its entirety. A concern which stems from my own personal experience of teaching in FE across both academic and vocational pathways, is that too often my learners are lacking this stimulus in the study of language. A colleague of mine who has taught GCSE English for many years likens our approach to language education in FE to dissecting a butterfly to assess the wings, head and tail separately. We discuss the delicate beauty of the wings and marvel at all of the exquisite colours but fail to appreciate the beauty of the butterfly as a whole and the purpose and meaning of the species existing in and with the world. I am also drawn to another metaphor employed by Pullman (2003) when he refers to the basis of many educational curricula:

> "the world is full of stories, full of true nourishment for the heart and the mind and the imagination; and this true nourishment is lying all around our children, untouched, and they're being force-fed on ashes and sawdust and potato-peelings."

(Pullman 2003, p.15)

Pullman urges teachers, not to search the universe of literature high and low to find the perfect language material/ tasks for our learners. They have the stories, they have the literature. What they already know about language and how they use and understand language to navigate their worlds is literature worthy of study. Yet, in some well-meaning but perhaps mis-guided curriculum plans, a fear of the new and the unknown remains. As Dewey (2001) demonstrates:

> "what is distinctively individual in a young person is brushed aside, or regarded as a source of mischief or anarchy. Conformity is made equivalent to uniformity. Consequently, there are induced lack of interest in the novel, aversion to progress, and dread of the uncertain and the unknown."

(Dewey 2011, p. 31)

To return to Pullman's culinary metaphor above, Biesta (2018, p. 11) argues that our learners are fed on, "An educational 'diet'- perhaps effective in terms of what can be measured but not very nourishing." Once again, we are drawn back to the educational emphasis being fixed on measuring outcomes, and working towards a qualification on a limited and narrow 'diet' of subject matter. One which is less concerned with both the individual and collective lived emotional experience of learning. Dewey (2011, p. 163) concurs, that in education, the emphasis is "put on the authority of the book and teacher, and individual variation is disregarded."

The notion of our academic aims being fixated on outcomes and what can be easily measured is of concern to many educational thinkers. A rather dystopian view of education is presented to us in the form of Gee's (1996) commodity theory:

> "'literacy = functional literacy = skills necessary to function in "today's job market" = market economy = the market = the economy...Literacy is measured out and quantified, like time, work and money [...] We match jobs with "literacy skills" and skills with "economic needs". Literacy, thus, becomes intertranslatable with time, work, money, part of "the economy" ...a commodity that can be measured, and thence bought and sold'"

(Gee, 1996: p. 122-123)

Gee's commodity theory portrays education as an almost factory-like process whereby students are trained to perform very specific functions. They are expected to contribute to society in a way which their education decides suitable for that 'sort' of learner.

The economic needs of the region/ country are positioned as paramount and learners are certificated and 'slotted' into society where they become mere cogs in the economic machine. The artistic skills and aesthetic experiences of a learner, including their linguistic abilities, are merely bought and sold like any other 'commodity'. This concept removes us so far from the liberating and life affirming experience of education that we strive for. Gee's concerns are echoed by others. For example, Coffield (2012) paints a similarly antiutopian picture:

> "People become valuable as 'human capital' or 'human resources', not as citizens with human rights who are capable of showing each other respect and understanding. They are encouraged to develop new skills to serve the purposes of

others, not new ways of understanding themselves and
changing their world."

(Coffield 2012, p. 18)

The recurring theme in both of the above contributions to the discourse, is the fear
that the 'human' element of education is being diminished and, in its place, there
develops an increasing emphasis on a 'human being as a resource'. Note how the
attention shifts from the importance of building and nurturing human capital, to
human as capital. A bleak outlook where education is useful only in serving
economic interests. Learners are confined and limited to prospects, destined to be
useful to others, limited and trained to perform a particular task or job. The concept
of the enhancement, inclusion empowerment and enlightenment of the human spirit
to understand and change worlds through education, is gone – or at best, is an
afterthought.

This brings me back full circle to the appreciation of how subjectivity, when it comes
to learning materials in language acquisition and development activities in FE, is of a
predominant importance. For, without this subjectivity, we may find ourselves
reducing and diminishing learner identity in ways which encourage them to reject
their culture and language, and all of the important and rich cultural influences that
flow through it, forcing them to conform to the demands of the vertical discourse
currently embedded in students' experiences of education. Thereby creating a
separation between the social and educational lives of our learners. Dewey (2011, p.
195) warns us that, "This isolation renders school knowledge inapplicable to life and
so infertile to character." Furthermore, by encouraging our learners to express
themselves and study a mode of literacy that they know and use confidently, we are
giving our learners a more intrinsic role in the educational process. Biesta (2016)
comments that:

> "… any education worthy of its name should *always* contribute
> to processes of subjectification that allow those educated to
> become more autonomous and independent in their thinking
> and acting."

(Biesta 2016, p. 20)

A widened and more comprehensive use and appreciation of socially situated
literacies in language education may or may not be the defining factor in tackling the
lack of motivation for studying language in FE. However, my argument is that failing
to recognise what Dewey (2011, p. 14) calls the, "unconscious influence of the
environment", can only stand to further alienate and disaffect learners who often
come into FE already feeling alienated and disaffected by school experiences that
made them, their sociocultural worlds, and their language, feel inferior and irrelevant.
If we are to deliver an education that truly serves learners with a life-affirming
experience that helps them to understand their culture, their social standing, and
leads to personal improvement, one that is sympathetic to the emotional experience
of learning, then we have to respect and celebrate these very cultures and social

experiences that our learners carry with them. As seen throughout this section of Chapter 2, it is hard to conceive that education is even a possibility without a learner understanding of how and why the learning content exists in the first place. If a learner has any life experiences at all, which of course they all do, then there is a type of language or literature that will speak to them, and they themselves are better placed than anyone else to bring forward the stories and literacies of their world. Or, as Zimmerman (2015, p. 40) more succinctly puts it: "The reason we understand anything at all is because we already stand *in* it."

2.3 The Academic vs The Vocational

"Here comes two of you, which one will you choose?"

(*Beginning to see the light* by The Velvet Underground, 1968)

The main point I want to make at the start of this section of Chapter 2, is that thinking and talking it terms of, "this *versus* that", is not always as helpful as it looks. For example, although it has now become widely accepted to think and talk of academic and vocational education as being not only separate but also radically different, academic and vocational education pathways in FE in England inevitably involve the development of different kinds of knowledge, including practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Here I argue that in both of these forms of knowledge, the acquisition and development of language plays a vital part - we need a language to think in, to put ideas into action and to make things in the world.

The works of Aristotle (384-322 BC), offer a helpful classification system which enables us to identify different forms of knowledge and consider their relationship to each other. For Aristotle, the appropriateness of any form of knowledge depends on the purpose it serves (telos). Carr (1995) points out that:

> "The most important of these distinctions is not between theory and practice but between two forms of human action – *praxis* and *poiesis* – a distinction which can only be rendered in English by our much less precise notions of doing something and making something."

(Carr 1995, p. 68)

These are discussed in greater detail below.

A distinct divide between the academic and the vocational continues to sever links between Study Programmes in FE. Although the intention of Study Programmes is to develop vocational education alongside the study of GCSE English and maths, the creation of an arbitrary divide between what is considered to be academic and vocational education, is causing frustration to practitioners, employers and learners, alike. As discussed in Chapter 1, I have had personal experiences of being labelled as a person more suitable for a vocational education. For me, this gave 'academic' subjects an exclusive, elitist and exclusionary quality and it was made clear to me

that I was not expected to be one of that elite. The elitism and exclusivity that has now firmly attached itself to academic subjects, exists both in education and in society, more generally. Coughlin (2015), echoes a familiar remark that many of us may have heard through conversations with people across all of the stratifications of society when he remarks: "As the saying goes, vocational education is a great thing… for other people's children" (BBC News. Online, 16 December 2015).

Many educational policy makers, teachers, students and even parents readily accept that a certain stigma flows through vocational subjects as they are classed as 'inferior' or 'second best' to academic programmes. My argument here is that this stigma is unhelpful, unnecessary, limiting, and ultimately, detrimental to learners and good educational practice. Hyland (2021) signals how damaging the academic/ vocational divide is to accomplishing a full and enriching English language education for our learners:

> "A perennial problem in English education is caused by the vocational/ academic divide within which vocational and manual pursuits are routinely subordinated to academic and intellectual activities."

> (Hyland. Online, March 2022)

Here, Hyland refers to how more practical based subjects (the learning of a construction trade, for example) are subordinated to academic or more intellectually respected subjects (the learning of an academic trade, for example research, theorising, philosophising). In my experience of working in FE, this is certainly the case. Enrolling on a construction-based course is seen by some as a consolation prize. Construction is regarded as a route that the less 'clever' or less intellectually gifted students should take as a means to make ends meet in their lives post-education. A minimalist *training* in the following of rules and techniques and nothing more. As discussed above, the stigma around vocational education is all too readily recognised by teachers and, what is perhaps more troubling and damaging, by learners themselves. Hyland (24 March 2022, Online) concludes that the problems caused by this unnatural dichotomy of educational practices run deep and that: "radical initiatives will be needed to overcome the long-standing vocational/ academic divide in the English system."

It is important here to explore what the word 'vocational' actually means. Dewey (2011, p. 174) offers this definition: "A vocation signifies any form of continuous activity which renders service to others and engages personal powers in behalf of the accomplishment of results." I suggest that this definition of 'vocational' could stand to represent almost any occupation imaginable – it's all vocational. If we consider employment that would require an education which would certainly be described as 'academic', such as that of being a Surgeon, Lawyer, Nuclear Physician or a Pilot, they would all unquestionably connect with Dewey's definition of the vocational. They all involve activities that render services to others to accomplish results. Furthermore, all of these callings in life require practical skill to be backed up by theoretical knowledge. Again, relying purely on Dewey's definition of what

'vocational' is and framing forms of knowledge and concepts of practice in this way, may render the academic and vocational binary divide both incoherent and meaningless. Sennett (2009) agrees that a craft can be considered as a vocation, or to put it another way, a vocational worker can be labelled a craftsman. He offers this insight:

> "Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the
> desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftmanship cuts a far
> wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer
> programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves
> when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship."

(Sennett 2009, p. 9)

Nonetheless, our society continues to view strictly more practical activities as vocational and therefore inferior, a lesser form of knowledge to intellectual or academic pursuits. Sennett (2009, p. 266) highlights that beyond education many employers still: "equate manual routine to mindless labour." Dewey (2011, p. 174) suggests that class plays a significant role in maintaining a divide between different forms of knowledge. He suggests that intellectual ideas and concepts are: "reserved for those who have leisure at command- the leisure due to superior economic resources", and that such academic considerations in the hands of the lower classes "might even be dangerous to the interests of the controlling class, arousing discontent or ambitions "beyond the station."" The social class framing factor at work here and the prejudices therein, may well be a part of the reason that a vocational education continues to be regarded as a lesser form of knowledge. However, to find the root of this divide, we must look much further back into history.

Practical knowledge and practical activity are, of course, as one. A human being cannot perform any practical task successfully without the knowledge of how and why to do so safely, correctly and to the highest of standards ('knowing that', 'knowing how', 'knowing why' and 'knowing and continually pursuing good practice').

However, the framing of knowledge and practice in binary terms as two separate entities can be traced back to differences in Plato and Aristotle's theories of experience and reason. As Dewey (2011, p. 144) confirms: "The history so far as conscious statement is concerned takes us back to the conceptions of experience and of reason formulated by Plato and Aristotle." Both of these eminent philosophers agreed that experience was a separate entity to reason. For Plato, experience was variable and taken to being to do with the body and practical concerns and therefore regarded as a more primitive form of 'being'. Whereas reason was concerned with knowledge and existed on a more existential plain. Dewey (2011) affirms that both Plato and Aristotle, at least in his early works, believed that:

> "… experience always involved lack, need, desire; it was never
> self-sufficing. Rational knowing on the other hand, was
> complete and comprehensive within itself. Hence the practical

life was in a condition of perpetual flux, while intellectual
knowledge concerned eternal truth."

<div align="right">(Dewey 2011, p. 144)</div>

This downgrading of physical experience to intellectual reason, or practical to theory, then continues through the ages. Again, Dewey (2011) tells us that these ideologies are just as prominent in the middle ages and mediaeval philosophy continued to hold these values as true:

> "Medieval philosophy continued and reinforced the tradition. To know reality meant to be in relation to the supreme reality, or God, and to enjoy the eternal bliss of that relation. Contemplation of supreme reality was the ultimate end of man to which action is subordinate. Experience had to do with mundane, profane, and secular affairs, practically necessary indeed, but of little import in comparison with supernatural objects of knowledge."

<div align="right">(Dewey 2011, p. 145)</div>

When we equate Dewey's analysis of the medieval philosophic concept of experience and knowledge with the force and power of the Greek philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, we can begin to understand the colossal influence inferred by the academic over the vocational. These tenets, set in the stone of Ancient Greece, adopt an eternal and imposing presence.

However, it may be partly back in the world of these Greek philosophers where we are able to find another perspective. Carr (1995, p. 67) expresses this view on the subject of the academic and vocational divide: "It is a way articulating two different forms of socially embedded human activities, each with its own intellectual commitments and moral demands." Carr (1995) goes on to tell us that these two forms of socially embedded human activities were described by Aristotle as *praxis* and *poiesis*. *Praxis* is defined by Dunne (2009) as:

> "Conduct in a public space with others in which a person, without ulterior purpose and with a view to no object detachable from himself acts in such a way as to realise excellences that he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life"

<div align="right">(Dunne 2009, p. 10)</div>

This definition offers an ethical view of *praxis* being an action that is carried out solely because it is the right thing to do in a social sphere which will be of benefit to human kind. Carr (1995) extends a definition of praxis as an academic practice:

> "The end of a practice is not to produce an object or artefact but to realise some morally worthwhile 'good' (…) the 'good' for

the sake of which a practice is pursued cannot be 'made', it can only be 'done'. 'Practice' is a form of 'doing action'"

(Carr 1995, p. 67)

Here, Carr illustrates praxis as ethical practice and the emphasis clearly points towards praxis as a 'doing action' in which nothing is 'made', only actions can be 'done'. This suggests that praxis is a mode of practice around theory and reasoning, more comfortably aligned with the ethical and moral pursuits informed by wise judgement. The pursuit of a morally worthwhile action that does not result in the production of an object or artefact.

Poiesis on the other hand is described by Carr (1995) as:

"'making action' - is action whose end is to bring some specific product or artefact into existence. Because the end of poiesis is an object which is known prior to action, it is guided by a form of knowledge which Aristotle called techne."

(Carr 1995, p. 67)

As opposed to *praxis*, the emphasis here is placed upon the bringing of a product or artefact into existence. Poiesis is 'making action' and is guided by what Aristotle called techne which has clear etymological links to what we would call technique or skill, the essential attribute of the skilled craftworker. As such, it is sensible to align poiesis with the vocational.

With both of these definitions we may come to partially understand the way in which knowledge and action (or academic and vocational) activities were divided and compartmentalised by Aristotle. Although, we have yet to explore another form of Aristotelian knowledge: phronesis. Carr (1995) tells us that:

"For Aristotle, phronesis is the supreme intellectual virtue and an indispensable feature of practice (…) Without practical wisdom, deliberation degenerates into an intellectual exercise, and 'good practice' becomes indistinguishable from instrumental cleverness. The man who lacks phronesis may be technically accountable, but he can never be morally answerable."

(Carr 1995, p. 71)

Initially, we may read the term *phronesis* as a more elaborate form of *poiesis*, but *phronesis* was regarded by Aristotle as the supreme intellectual virtue. Sitting above all other forms of Aristotelian intellect, phronesis acts as a bridge between praxis and poesis by combining practical wisdom with the desire to be morally accountable and intellectually reasoned. Indeed, Carr (1995) expands on the theory of phronesis by introducing us to Aristotle's *phronimos*:

> "The phronimos - the man of practical wisdom - Is the man who
> sees the particularities of his practical situation in the light of
> their ethical significance and acts consistently on this basis."

<div align="right">(Carr 1995, p. 71)</div>

The *phronimos,* while being practically adept and technically accountable, is also constantly aware of the ethical significance of their surroundings and they act consistently towards the goal of being morally answerable. Furthermore, the *phronimos* avoids 'instrumental cleverness' in favour doing a job well for its own sake and to the highest standards, doing right by their intellectual virtue. It may be suggested that this venerable account of the *phronimos* bridges the gap between the academic and the vocational by drawing a line of connection between practical wisdom and intellectual pursuit, whilst also placing emphasis on upholding the moral virtues which accompany something in this world, demanding that whatever we are engaged in is done in a manner that realises a 'worthwhile good' for its own sake, and for the sake of others, thereby opening up a new perspective on the relationship between these different forms of knowledge. From this perspective, we find that both the academic and the vocational are in the end, essentially forms of practice and as such, any unhelpful fabrications of damaging fissures between different forms of knowledge and arbitrary divisions of labour are rendered useless and unnecessary.

To label, include and frame all forms of knowledge, and the processes involved in the acquisition and development of knowledge, in a coherent concept 'practice' is a more helpful and more realistic way to explain the relationship between the academic and the vocational as one, eclipsing any divide. However, this requires an attempt to define practice, here. Carr (1995, p.64) notes that: "a definitive feature of an educational practice is that it is an ethical activity undertaken in pursuit of educationally worthwhile ends." Carr points towards the human element of education in that the practice, and processes within that practice, must be worthwhile. Indeed, if education does not equate to worthwhile ends, then what does the qualification (regardless of level of study and/ or final grade awarded) even mean? What is the purpose (*telos*) of education? Dunne (2005) offers the following and highly accessible definition of practice:

> "A practice is a coherent and invariably quite complex set of
> activities and tasks that has evolved cooperatively over time. It
> is alive in the community who are its insiders (i.e. it's genuine
> practitioners) and it stays alive only so long as they sustain a
> commitment to creatively develop and extend it- sometimes by
> shifts which at the time may seem dramatic and even
> subversive".

<div align="right">(Dunne 2005, p. 153)</div>

Here, Dunne presents us with the idea that 'practice' is a living and breathing phenomenon, an organism that lives directly through those who engage in it within a community at large. By its very nature of being 'alive' practice evolves and changes

in ways that may sometimes seem subversive or contradictory to its original reason or purpose. However, if a practice is not allowed to evolve by inviting and welcoming challenge and change it will cease to 'live' and become ritualistic and a dormant dogma/ diktat. A fossilised practice may then become an alienating factor in which young people contributing to modern day processes and ways of living will fail to engage. To continue with the analogy of a practice being alive and evolving in and around us and our communities, Carr (1995) states that:

> "… our present concept of an educational practice has its
> origins within the conceptual structures of a form of life which
> has long since disappeared and, hence, that it can only be
> made fully intelligible by understanding it as a survival from a
> social context very different from our own".

> (Carr 1995, p. 66)

The admission that practice needs to evolve with its insiders, its current practitioners, resonates closely with Dunne's definition, above. Carr cautions that any practice will only be relatable as a relic from the past, if modern day forms of knowledge and ways of working are not able to influence the way the practice is taught and advanced in education. This returns us to earlier discussions above concerning the importance of opening up the ways in which we approach language acquisition and the development of craft in FE. This demands the inclusion, celebration and evolution of the modern-day processes, technologies, aesthetic and cultural experiences embedded in modern life and the acquisition and development of the practice and language of a craft today.

In other words, allowing the socially situated literacies of the learner a more prominent role in the teaching and learning of language. However, this same principle applies directly to an education in plumbing, as well. Of course, any education surrounding the practices and processes indigenous to plumbing which fails to recognise or include modern day plumbing systems, components and industry ways of working is a plumbing education that is not fit for purpose. Whether we consider modern day plumbing applications or modern-day ways of using words and expressing ourselves as a human being alive in the world, educational practice must evolve with the social climate in which our learners live. If the goal of our educational practice is to provide learners a worthwhile education, encouraging and enabling them to lead a fulfilled life, then teachers' understanding of all of the forms of knowledge involved in the acquisition and development of practice need to be fit for purpose. The usefulness of understanding past or present concepts of practice must not be forgotten or lightly dismissed. However, as the world around us changes, so must our practice. Carr (1995) concludes that:

> "practice is itself always particular and has to take account of
> the changing conditions under which it has to operate. (…)
> What any ethical principle means always has to be understood
> in terms of its relevance to a particular situation, just as the
> meaning of a particular situation always has to be understood

in terms of the relevant ethical principles that are being applied."

While it's worthwhile for us to consider what practice is, it is also important to understand that these are not rules that should dictate the conduct of practice. Each practitioner must consider the ethical principles of the particular situation they are working within and apply those ethical principles for the benefit of the learner and the wider public good. Indeed, to explore the relationship between a body of knowledge and the ethical principles relevant to the situation in which the knowledge exists, and therefore how each practitioner individually applies learning activities, may be considered as a living and breathing practice.

The various definitions and explanations, presented above demand that practice should be worthwhile, coherent, alive in a community of practitioners, evolutionary, sometimes subversive, attuned to the various ethical demands of the social environment and relevant. Reflecting on the adjectives above, I see no comprehensible or logical reason why they might speak more clearly to an academic education above a vocational education, or vice versa. Therefore, I argue that it is acceptable, appropriate and necessary to consider that all forms of learning and knowledge are inextricably linked and bonded together as 'practice'. If we accept this, then according to the definitions of practice discussed above, any divide constructed between an academic and a vocational education is false.

Carr (1995) reveals how at some point throughout history this divide served some sort of function in legitimising arbitrary divisions of labour between practice, theory and research. However, today it only stands as an extremely damaging and detrimental socially and politically constructed fabrication that serves to exclude most teachers from the research and improvement of educational practice and confuses and alienates learners across FE and in the workplace. If we agree that any form of education that imparts knowledge, has the power enrich a learner and to help them to comprehend the instrumental value of their existence, then it follows that all forms of education are equal in terms of purpose, and therefore, any divide between the academic and the vocational is incompatible with educational principles and values and therefore, meaningless.

Before I draw this section of the chapter to a close, I briefly explore a theory that, in some way, draws together our explorations of practice and brings the learner voice into focus. When discussing the reasoning behind practice, Aristotle highlights the difference between practical/ technical reasoning and deliberative reasoning. Carr (1995) tells us that:

"The formal structure of deliberative reasoning is that of the practical syllogism, where the major premise is a practical principle stating what in general ought to be done (…) and the minor premise asserts a particular instance falling under this major premise."

A very brief analysis of deliberative reasoning may be worthy of consideration when exploring the widespread disengagement in language education in FE, and may also serve as a path to the final section of Chapter 2. To examine this further it is necessary to identify a major premise and a minor premise. With our focus on English Language GCSE re-sit examinations in FE, we might assume that to achieve a level of competency in literacy, a major premise could be that all students should be able to exhibit knowledge and skill in analysing and understanding explicit and implicit meanings in a text. The minor premise might be that Charles Dickens is a classical, captivating and brilliant writer. Therefore, from these two 'truisms', we might conclude that to be able to achieve an English Language GCSE Grade 4 or above, all students should be able to exhibit skill in analysing and understanding explicit and implicit meanings in a text written by Charles Dickens. However, the Charles Dickens excerpt, as accomplished as it may be, may exist in a context and social environment that makes it difficult for learners to fully comprehend the text on both an explicit and an implicit level.

This is not to suggest that deliberative reasoning has no place in shaping our practice. Rather, this example is used to place more emphasis on the vital role the learner voice must play in evaluating and enhancing educational practice. Although the genius of Charles Dickens is indisputable, the potential for my learners to see the world of Charles Dickens with clarity and understanding, is open to question. As Carr (1995, p. 71) concludes: "It is for this reason that Aristotle insists that collective deliberation by the many is always preferable to the isolated deliberation of the individual."

2.4 Domesticating Reality

> "When they've tortured and scared you for twenty odd years, then they expect you to pick a career"

> (*Working Class Hero* by John Lennon/ Plastic Ono Band, 1970)

Freire (1970, p. 48) identifies a fault in the design of many curricula in terms of their propensity to "domesticate reality." This concept of a 'tamed' or 'safe' reality that forms the focus and content of the development of learning materials and informs curriculum planning in programmes of language acquisition and development in FE, is important in the context of this study. As I discuss in Chapter 3 with reference to the ontological and epistemological positions underpinning this thesis, reality is taken to be socially constructed, not one objective or fixed idea detached from human experience that can be easily defined or confined, let alone tamed. I argue that in the social world of human experience, reality is something unique and different to each of us and constructed by us in both individual and collective ways. While the English Language GCSE curriculum is steeped in literature that may stand as a fair reflection of reality for some, others are left confused by the utter detachment they feel from the material they are asked to study, read, analyse and write about. These experiences of disengagement and detachment can manifest themselves in students as feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. These often stem from a student's inability to relate to a text that has nothing to do with their lived experiences or the socio-cultural environment in which they exist. Freire (1970) cautions us that harm can be done to a learner's engagement in any form of study if they are asked to use:

> "… contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity."

> (Freire 1970, p. 44)

In the past academic year, I had an account of experience from an English Language GCSE learner who was asked to analyse a text. The text supplied to them contained an account of a young British tourist's experiences of travelling and camping around France. This text may serve some as an escapist fantasy of travelling foreign lands armed with nothing but a tent and a backpack. Better still, for others it may evoke memories of their own family holidays of travelling in France and experiencing the many different cultures of Europe. But for this learner, in an FE college in London, the text had little meaning or impact. Curious as to why the content had failed to produce the desired response, I opened up a dialogue with the wider group of students. I learned that most of the group did not, and never had, owned a passport and had therefore never left the country. The few that had travelled abroad had not done so to experience the thrill of an adventure in a foreign land but rather to visit family. Some learners in this group claimed that they had barely left the London Borough in which they lived, let alone left the country. Of course, after hearing the comments that this group had to share, the question of why

these learners failed to relate to this paper, disintegrated. It was clearly impossible for them to understand why the camping trip across France evoked so many varying emotions to the author of the text because the very notion of travelling to France just for a fun adventure was as alien to these learners as space travel. As Freire (1970, p. 66) points out, education: " …often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people." The only hope for me as the teacher who is tasked with the delivery of such texts to these groups of leaners is to explain the author's experiences as best I could, and justify why the author had reacted in such ways to the events that occurred in the text and therefore, suggest to the students how they might respond if (or when) they are confronted with a similar task in their English Language GCSE examination. The preparation of these learners for their upcoming GCSE examinations was, understandably, a priority for me as their teacher so this was the approach I took. But this approach neither felt like innovative teaching and learning nor did it help to engage the class with the text. Instead, it felt more like a colonisation of the learners' experiences and a signal to them that they and their lives where somehow socially and culturally in deficit. As their teacher I was merely 'filling' the students with information which when instrumentally committed to a piece of paper, would amount to an acceptable response in the eyes of a GCSE examiner. This draws me back to Freire (1970) who claims that the teaching of alien, or even alienating, learning material:

> "… turns them into 'containers', into 'receptacles' to be 'filled'
> by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles,
> the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles
> are permitted themselves to be filled, the better students they
> are."

(Freire 1970, p. 45)

This bleak but unfortunately familiar depiction of teaching and learning is both salutary and sobering. But it is the experiences and lives of the learners who, in circumstances such as these, are devalued and disconnected from their direct lived experience and the human and enhancing encounter inherent in a good education. The paradox here is that the life-affirming, enhancing and enlightening powers of education, and are turned off. Learners are relegated into something inanimate, they are reduced to receptacles. Freire (1970, p. 45) draws attention to how: "it is the people themselves who are filed away through lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) mis-guided system." It is this mis-guided system that this study explores in detail. The assumption made by, perhaps well-meaning, but mis-guided Awarding Body writers of curriculum specifications and examinations, is that one sample of a text has the potential to resonate with all GCSE leaners from various socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. A further assumption is therefore that all students have an equal opportunity to connect and engage with the text in ways which enable them exhibit their skill in their command and use of language to a standard which enables them to pass their English Language GCSE. These sweeping and demeaning assumptions border upon arrogance and are tantamount to a universalising and colonising gaze. In the grip of this colonising

gaze, the worlds, cultures, lives and experiences of some groups of learners are discounted and dismissed as being inferior and of little or no value. The experiences of these learners are dismantled by the consuming power of the culture of a dominant and privileged social class whose experiences are expected to be genuflected to and regurgitated by learners who have little or no connection with that social class and its culture in the realities of their day-to- day lives.

The assumption that any person should be expected and able to relate to any text simply because they live on the same planet as the person or situation portrayed in the text is not only alien but damaging to many learners. Freire (1970, p. 48) points to a marked difference between a person existing 'in the world' and 'with the world': "…the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others." This assumption then potentially constructs barriers to learning that create disengagement and resistance in some groups of learners and impedes the ultimate objective of, not only gaining a qualification through their encounters with a good education, but also of developing and enabling a learner to grow up in ways which enable them to lead a fulfilled life in and with the world and with others by helping them to the build qualities of mind and character.

I return now to my discussion of the case described above regarding the French travel essay in which a group of FE learners failed to find meaning. This example of language education in FE raises further concerns, in the context of this study, regarding how the GCSE English system may be considered to be laden with social class bias. Considering the French travel essay, it is reasonable to argue that learners who may have come from a more restricted or less privileged socio-economic background are at a distinct disadvantage to learners from a middle-class background who have had multiple first-hand, direct, vibrant and recent lived experiences of European travel and are therefore naturally better placed to understand the author's point of view and thus find it easier to respond by relating their own experiences to those of the author. This raises questions concerning the reasons why Awarding Bodies or curriculum designers and planners choose such material in the first place. It is also both reasonable and feasible to suggest that they draw from their own personal lived experiences, in that they themselves may have had many similar experiences to those described in the French travel essay, and are therefore not required to venture out of their comfort zone in relating and responding to such material. Therefore, learning/ examination content remains relatable only to those who already have had these advantages, those who have had such experiences, or to those accustomed to the benefits of a privileged upbringing in a family with significant disposable income. Or to borrow Freire's (1970) phrase that stands as the sub-heading of this section of Chapter 2, to 'domesticate' learning content to fit in with more advantaged traditional middle-class British themes.

Freire (1970), whilst analysing the unfair and unbalanced education system of Brazil, refers to the poorer classes of Brazil's Favelas as, 'The Oppressed'. Throughout this study I have contemplated whether the word 'oppressed' would be suitable to use when discussing learners involved in language acquisition education in today's FE

system. 'Oppression' and 'violence' are words that may scare some. However, Freire (1970) highlights that:

> "Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects."

(Freire 1970, p. 45)

Here, I am compelled to question, according to my own lived experience of working in FE, how often, if at all, learners are invited into the process of inquiry when it comes to their own education. Freire notes how the means of prohibiting this engagement are irrelevant. If it is suitable to assume that preventing access into inquiry is oppression, then it may also be fair to say that restricting access to inquiry by assuming that those in authority know best, is also a form of oppression.

Historically, language has been used as a divisive device to separate classes or to draw a line of distinction between the 'well-educated' and the 'less well educated' who may have had a humbler, or even a troubling experience of education. Bragg (2004) takes us back to the sixteenth century to explain that the basic mechanics of the spelling of the words in common use today were designed on a class biased system and that the English language is therefore riddled with traps intentionally designed to trip up those who have not had the privilege of a comprehensive English Language education:

> "'… rhyme' on the other hand was awarded its 'h' just because rhythm' had one. On a similar principle or whim, an 'l' was inserted into 'could' because it was still present - as a silent 'l' - in 'should' and would'. In the sixteenth century this became a fad designed to winnow out the under-educated, stump children and fox foreigners."

(Bragg 2004, p. 100)

Throwing silent letters into words like 'could' as a sneaky ploy to weed out the under-educated today seems like a dreadful thing to do, but one might argue that we still use language to put people in a similar sort of societal hierarchy by judging them based on accents and on the various historical, social and cultural influences upon the way they speak and the social environments in which they live. Bragg (2004) emphasises the snobbery and elitism that runs through the heart of the English language:

> "'Speak as we speak or you will show that you are inferior' has been a refrain of the controlling elite throughout languages, I would guess, and there is a mountain of proof for this seemingly inevitable element - ownership - in the development of English."

(Bragg 2004, p. 124)

Of course, the very notion of any kind of 'ownership' over the English language is not only highly questionable but preposterous. The English language is a fluid and ever evolving form of expression. It is not now, nor has it ever been, set. Bragg (2004, p. 175) concludes that "Language leaps out of mouths regardless of class, sex, age, or education: it sees something that needs to be said or saved in a word and it pounces."

I am aware however, that the concept of labelling learners resitting an English Language GCSE in FE as being 'oppressed' by this bias, may be contentious and even extreme. Whether we employ the use of the word "oppression" along with all of its connotations or not, Freire (1970) guides us to safer ground when he recommends methods of overcoming a limited and limiting educational curriculum by highlighting the importance of the learner voice:

> " … the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions (…) this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people."

> (Freire 1970, p. 97)

In my experience of FE colleges, in general, the learner voice is a widely used term and a theme that is discussed regularly. However, I often wonder what impact learner voice policies have in terms of actually improving the education we offer our learners. In most FE institutions, every term, learners are asked to complete a learner voice survey. These surveys mainly cover topics such as: 'Did your college induction include these events…?' or 'Is your coursework marked and returned by your tutor within 3 weeks?'. My intention here is not to question the good intentions or the importance of the questions above, but rather to consider the questions we are not asking. It appears that unless a teacher has enough awareness to take it upon themselves to discuss curriculum themes, learning materials and/ or methods of learning with their students, these questions remain unasked indefinitely. I argue that the omission to consult learners about these key educational topics has the potential to do irreparable harm to any learner's experience of education and ultimately, reduce their levels of engagement. Freire (1970) states that:

> "Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed."

> (Freire 1970, p. 67)

Here, Freire points out that the failure to bring learners, to some extent, in to such key debates during the educational planning process, may be a part of the root cause of such widespread disengagement and disenfranchisement in an educational

plan. Such as that of the GCSE English Language resit programme in FE. Dunne (2009, p. 20) bolsters Freire's view by stating: "that to resolve the problem and to deepen the conversation with one's partners become one and the same thing." However, I suggest that it is not just having input from the learner that makes the difference. As discussed previously, the college in which I work and other FE colleges alike, do have a robust policy regarding capturing the learner voice. To use a metaphor, I consider the learner voice to be a key. An important instrument indeed, but any key not put to use becomes an ineffective object - a redundant mechanism. To have enough faith and trust in the learner voice to actually act and to implement change according to their feedback, is when the key ceases to be ineffective and starts be useful to unlock the doors of possible futures previously boarded and barred for my learners. Again, Freire (1970, p. 64) forcefully signals how any dialogue that is generally ignored can have the opposite effect to that which was desired and in turn operates only to create further detachment: "Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation."

This consideration takes me to another of Freire's (1970) concepts. The concept of the teacher-student identity:

> "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow."

> (Freire 1970, p. 53)

This process in which all parties grow through learning is one which goes hand-in-hand when we open up a genuine dialogue with our learners and when have enough courage and faith in them to act upon what they say. A teacher may be an expert in a certain field but no teacher, regardless of how many years of experience they have, can instinctively know what it is like to be each of the individual students in the class who are staring back at them. If we believe that the relationship between teacher and student only exists on a teacher-of-the-students/ student-of-the-teacher level, then we must perceive teachers to be almost superhuman in their ability to consistently make the right educational decisions on behalf of many different personalities, multiple times per day. Indeed, it would be a task that would require superhuman abilities. The teacher-student is open and willing to learn about their student's individual personalities and act in favour of both the individual and collective lived emotional experience of learning. Without dialogue and, importantly, faith in those who we have dialogue with, the teacher-student cannot prevail. Stenhouse (1975, p. 91) echoes this sentiment by insisting that teachers should be: "open to the worlds of the learner and not afraid to step outside of their own world for the benefit of the learning process." I find it noteworthy that Stenhouse uses the word

'afraid', here. Certainly, to step out of the comfort of our own words and worlds and into the words and worlds of our learners can be a daunting task for any educator. But if we are to meaningfully reach our learners, we cannot assume/ presume that we know how they should think and feel in any given situation. Smith (1982) comments that:

> "As we can have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected by conceiving what we ourselves should feel like in a situation."

(Smith 1982, p. 9)

A wise and insightful reminder of how we are all indeed different and that we therefore experience different feelings and emotions from one another in various ways, in various situations. However, these words, taken from 'The Theory of Moral Sentiment', were originally published in 1759. Of course, I could have found a wide selection of similar statements that were said in far more recent times, but this comment serves as an indication that for hundreds of years human beings have discussed the significance of relating to others through a collective consciousness rather than projecting our own perceptions onto others. Yet in education, we often still omit the voices of those who matter most - the learners. Dunne (2009) offers us insight into how an education based upon behavioural analysis and the crude assessment of learning outcomes can be a futile task if teachers and learners are not 'living through' the problem they face with and alongside each other. He warns us that there exists:

> "… work in the pedagogic situation which cannot simply be made the object of analysis but must rather be lived through - a kind of subsoil which nourishes the fruits of explicit purposes but which is not itself a fruit."

(Dunne 2009, p. 5)

It is this 'sub-soil' in which this study is concerned. A curriculum that centres objectives around the 'fruit' as an outcome, and disregards the fertile cultural, linguistic and social traditions that our learners carry with them in their education, is a curriculum that ignores the sub-soil in which learning and educational unity and growth actually take place. In my experience of working in FE, the orchard of the English Language GCSE curriculum appears to be prolific in producing very little fertile learning material for the learners that I teach. Dunne (2009) continues:

"It is as if action can be resolved into analysis- that the problems of the first-person agent can be solved from the perspective of the third-person analyst. As a form of action, then, teaching is no longer seen as embedded in particular contexts or within cultural, linguistic, religious, or political traditions which may be at work in all kinds of tacit and nuanced ways in teachers and pupils as persons."

(Dunne 2009, p. 5)

The multiple barriers to learning that must be overcome by learners in the GCSE English Language re-sit programme in FE in order to prove that they can competently use language, is a striking example of the third-person analyst attempting to solve the problems of the first-person agent. Well-meaning third-person analysts (policy makers) make decisions about how to make GCSE English re-sits work in FE but seemingly consistently fail to ask the one group of people who could shed new light on the issue, the first-person agents (the learners). Or, to simplify, the first-person agent must be included in solving the problems of the first-person agent. Freire (1970, p. 22) offers a parallel opinion to that of Dunne when he asserts the importance of: "… a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for" any group of learners and because the very nature of human beings is ever evolving, our pedagogy must evolve, too: "in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade."

Of course, the aim of this section of Chapter 2 is in not meant to accuse any educators or curriculum planners of intentionally neglecting their learner's needs. But rather to bring to light how much we, as educators, question whether the learning material we have planned for our lessons and curricula is fit for the students who we are to educate, and how often we have meaningful dialogue with our learners about this. Stenhouse (1975, p. 143) advises us that "It is not enough that teachers' work is studied: they need to study it themselves", so that we can know how to adapt and improve it.

Ultimately, this takes us full circle back to whether or not the way policy professionals, curriculum designers, Awarding Bodies, education leaders and teachers currently approach language acquisition and development in FE, is providing FE learners with a full, enriching and life-affirming experience of education, or just dictating 'knowledge' to students in the hope that they can regurgitate on demand. As this chapter draws to a conclusion, and we start to look ahead toward the methodological approaches of this research, it is fitting to place some final emphasis on how paramount learner inclusion is to this study. Freire (1970, p. 66) argues that: "Authentic education is not carried out by 'A for B' or by 'A *about* B', but rather by 'A' *with* 'B', mediated by the world- a world which impresses and challenges both parties." It is through dialogue between *'A' with 'B'* that this study explores the distinct disengagement with the study of language that remains so prevalent amongst the learners that I teach. Through this dialogue, the words and worlds of my learners are explored to seek out points of resistance, and thereby

come to know the problem at the heart of this research in deeper and more profound ways.

Method & Methodology
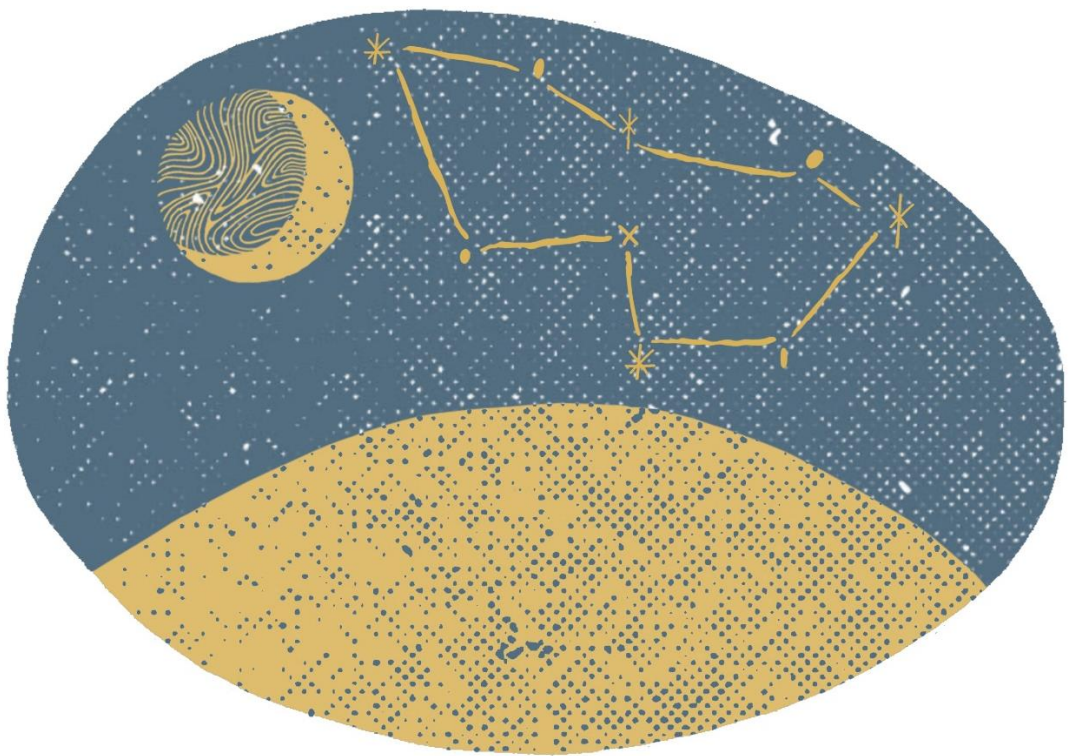
Chapter 3: Method & Methodology

As this thesis moves into its third chapter, attention now turns toward the Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological positions underpinning this research. Concepts of perception, experience, knowledge and imbalances of power are explored in order to articulate and justify the research paradigms framing this study. Justifications are therefore provided in some detail to support the methodological decisions I have made and my reasons for making them.

As an aim of this study is to explore the potential influences that culture and aesthetic experience play in language acquisition and language development activities in vocational education contexts in the FE sector in England, it seems fitting to start this chapter with a story borrowed from the world of music. The song that gives us this narrative is written by Mike Skinner of The Streets and it is the last song from a concept album in which the narrative follows a relationship break-up, a falling out with friends, and a mislaid £1,000. It is thought to be largely autobiographical.

3.1 Experience & Perception

> **"**But can you rely on anyone in this world?"

> (*Empty Cans by The Streets*, 2004)

In *The Streets'* 2004 song *Empty Cans* we are presented with a dismal story of missing money, a broken television, paranoia, mistrust, violence and anti-social behaviour. The protagonist, we'll call him Mike, is cast as a man short on patience who has, in desperation, turned to drink and a self-imposed isolation from all of the people in his life due to the fact that £1,000 of his money has gone missing.

Early on, the scene is set: our protagonist's obstinate and accusatory tone introduces the listener to a desperate domestic scene. The narrator is surrounded by empty cans, a situation in which he finds himself entirely without responsibility or fault. But this isn't a simple story of a desperate and destitute individual. Instead, we are presented with a complex, paranoid character convinced that those closest to him have conspired against him and are now delighting in his demise. He suspects his friends of being the parties responsible for the missing money, and this accentuates his long-held belief that no one really cares about him. Friends reach out to offer support. A friend named Scott volunteers to fix his broken television as a gesture of good-will at a time when he needs it most, but Mike rebuffs the offer with anger. Secretly, Mike suspects that Scott is the most likely of his friends to have taken the money.

In an attempt to make himself feel better, Mike calls a domestic electronics company and arranges a television repair. The engineer collects the television as planned but the scene turns ugly when the engineer states that they can't fix the television. Mike assumes that the engineer wants additional payment due to the fact that they had

claimed that something has fallen inside the casing of the appliance, which they would have to remove before the repair could be made. But he doesn't wait to hear the full explanation from the engineer. Instead, incandescent with paranoia, he believes that this is just another in a long line of people who are maliciously positioned against him and whose primary motivation is to elicit his hard-earned money from him. As such, a fight ensues. Mike comes off worse. Retiring to his living room with his still broken television, his wounded pride and his physical injuries, Mike slumps onto the sofa and opens another beer as he sinks to his lowest point in our story so far.

At this juncture in this bleak account of our protagonist, Mike starts to reflect on his own behaviour. He thinks about his friends and starts to regret some of his own actions. Actions which have, in part, contributed to the despair of his current situation. At that moment, he receives another communication from Scott in the form of a text message. Scott enquires whether he had managed to get his television fixed and then, upon learning that he had not, offers for a second time to come and have a look at it himself as he reassures Mike that he wants to do the right thing by his friends. This time, Mike reluctantly agrees. Scott starts to remove the casing of the appliance, just as the engineer had suggested would be necessary. One by one, he removes the fifteen screws holding the television casing together as Mike stands by and watches. As the final screws are released from their position, Scott confirms that indeed something has slipped and fallen down within the inner panel of the television, and whatever it was would need to be removed. Mike, in his pessimistic state, claims that it's probably just a bill that he will then need to pay. Scott's hand dives into the casing, at which point he stops, smiles, and shakes his head whilst looking at Mike. Scott invites him to take a look behind the casing. Mike, accepting the invitation, does as requested, only to find, sitting snuggly within the confines of his television casing, the envelope containing the missing £1,000 that had triggered his downward spiral into paranoia, depression, alcoholism and violence.

Sometime later, the song takes us to a place where Mike has a house full of happy friends. The mystery of the missing money has been resolved and the cracks that had shattered friendships have been repaired. We leave the scene with a different Mike to the one we met at the start of our story. This Mike feels happy and confident that he knows the 'truth' of his situation. But most importantly, he feels that he has learned something about himself and about life.

So, as our story concludes, the question is how is any of this relevant to my study, and more to the point, how is it relevant to the methodology which underpins this thesis? Well, what this story's protagonist, Mike, failed to recognise throughout this attack of depression and isolation, was the importance of learning about the experiences and perceptions of others, interpreting those experiences, taking them seriously, comparing them with our own, systematically analysing and constructing meaning from the experiences, perceptions/ multiple realities of all concerned and finally reporting the meanings we have made of these social phenomena in a transparent and trustworthy way. Mike was completely fixated on what he believed to be a fact, namely that someone had stolen money from him. This 'fact' or 'truth' was

arrived at too soon and decided upon solely according to his own assumptions. Assumptions which he had made based upon what he believed the situation to be, arriving at judgements purely from his own experiences of events. The emphasis here lies in how different this situation might have been if Mike had listened to his friends and reflected on their experiences and perspectives of events, sooner. Scott and the other people who exist in Mike's social group, might have seen events differently and even without bringing about the ultimate resolution of finding the missing money itself, could have offered valuable insights that might have encouraged Mike to see the situation from a different perspective, keep an open mind, and therefore, learn more about the nature of the situation in which he found himself. Of course, the same goes for the television repair engineer. Although seemingly a complete stranger to the environment in which this story exists, this character represents a valuable perspective and a unique experience whom, if they had been given the time and space to share their experience, might have helped to shed a new light on proceedings at a much sooner point in time, leading to a more advanced understanding of Mike's problem and how it might be addressed. In essence, the lyrics of *Empty Cans*, present us with an aesthetic experience in the form of a story, devoid of the perspectives and shared experiences of all of those whose actions are reported in that story, it will only ever be fragmented and partial, and ultimately leave us unable to comprehend the bigger picture.

Of course, this is just a story. And the protagonist of this story, in his obstinacy, has the right to conduct his social life with or without the perspectives of others. It is however worth our while at this point, to briefly explore how we listeners to, or readers of, this story can understand the events that took place within it. We make sense of and draw meaning from experience in very different ways depending upon what we take to be real in relation to the form and nature of the social world and how we can know it – what we take to be true - our own ontological and epistemological positions, as this will serve as a fitting pathway into the next part of Chapter 3. In the first instance, we might look at this story from a positivist ontological perspective. If we were to do this we would most likely label Mike as in poor mental health and utterly delusional. His sheer refusal to look outside of his own experience and then to voluntarily plunge himself into self-harming behaviours such as alcohol abuse and violent interactions with strangers, would invite the positivist ontological observer to take these events at face value and therefore assume that he is beyond reason and/ or mentally unwell. This would be, after all, an outcome a positivist psychologist might quantify in terms of degrees of delusion, levels of neuroses and states of paranoia. On the other hand, we could look at this story from a constructivist-interpretivist ontological position. If we were to adopt this perspective, we might ask questions which would be designed to help us to understand how our protagonist found himself in this situation in the first place and then ask questions that might help us to understand his reaction to various events. From a constructivist-interpretive point of view we might try to understand Mike's lived experience and learn about the past and present events of his life. We might then consider, how those past events have led to depression, his feelings of victimisation, a deepening sense of injustice and isolation and how these are fuelling his habitual reactions of uncertainty and

suspicion. Furthermore, from a constructivist perspective we might acknowledge that Mike's actions are a result of what he believed to be a betrayal. As such, we might apply our own experiences of friendship to build a more comprehensive picture of Mike's state of mind. Finally, we might try to help him through our understanding of his situation and we would recognise that in the end, he found courage in his decision to let friends back into his life and in his ability to change his mind about what he once believed to be true.

In the context of this study, the perspectives and experiences of those who are living through the process of working towards an English Language GCSE in FE are of paramount importance. For this reason, this study adopts a constructivist ontological position and an interpretivist-pragmatic epistemological approach to knowing phenomena in the social world. I expand on this in more detail in a latter part of this chapter, but first, in order to build a more complete understanding of the approach adopted in this study, I also further explore concepts of ontology, epistemology and methodology informing the conduct of this research.

3.2 Ontology, Epistemology & Methodology

> "I've been right and I've been wrong, now I'm back to where I started from. Never looked over reality's shoulder"

> (*Reality* by David Bowie, 2003)

At a later point in this chapter, I set out the approaches and assumptions I have made in order to locate this study within a research paradigm that enables me to form a base of evidence in gathering the experiences of learners studying English language and taking part in language acquisition and development activities in programmes of vocational education within the FE sector. Locating a research paradigm is a process that requires the practitioner-researcher to ask themselves a series of questions and then make assumptions based on the responses to those questions in order to conduct a systematic and disciplined enquiry which is both balanced and critical (Coe *et al* 2021).

3.2.1 Ontology

Coe *et al* (2021) set out these questions in the form of four building blocks which they invite educational researchers to consider in the following order; Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology and Methods. Ontology is the first building block in the sequence of conducting educational research where the central question requires the researcher to arrive at a judgment regarding the form and nature of the social world. Coe *et al* (2021, p.16) set out a range of ontological positions on "a continuum from left to right from realism to constructivism." On the left side of this continuum a realist ontology takes the view that an objective truth exists and that reality can be defined by uncovering this truth. Realists believe that an objective truth can be established through a form of scientific rationality which exists beyond people's experiences or accounts which are considered to be too variable and too subjective

to matter. Coe *et al* (2021, p.16) explain that, "In realism there is a singular objective reality that exists independent of individuals' perceptions of it". This ontological position is historically based in what is often described as scientific research and has been used almost exclusively in studies concerning the natural sciences (Scott and Usher, 1996). However, research in the social sciences, including research in education, has also adopted this ontological assumption, as Carr (1995) notes:

> "… educational scientists believe that objective scientific inquiry
> can yield true knowledge about education in much the same
> way that it yields true knowledge about nature."

(Carr 1995, p. 112)

On the other hand, on the right-hand side of the continuum, as Coe *et al* (2021) point out, we find a constructivist ontology. Constructivism opposes realist assumptions by demanding that there is no one definable, objective reality but instead reality is constantly in flux and is shaped by a range of factors including location, situation, individuals and individual experience. Coe *et al* (2021, p. 16) state that "under constructivism, reality is neither objective nor singular, but multiple realities are constructed by individuals." A constructivist ontology moves away from the pursuit of a singular truth or objectivity and moves towards an increased emphasis on the importance of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in human experience. From this position, the form and nature of the social world cannot be defined objectively as it is not fixed but instead, dependent on circumstances, interpretations and experiences. Furthermore, constructivism admits the importance of context, the effects that locality have on reality and how every individual's version of reality is constructed and construed in the social realm through interactions with other human beings and the world around them.

The first task for the researcher is to address the question of the extent to which they align their ontological position in terms of realist or constructivist perspectives.

3.2.2 Epistemology

The second building block Coe *et al* (2021) invite educational researchers to consider relates to epistemology and this presents us with our second question of how can what is assumed to exist be known. This is closely linked to the ontological question set out above, as Scott and Usher (1996, p.11) point out: "Epistemological and ontological questions are related since claims about what exists in the world imply claims about how what exists may be known." Using the continuum offered by Coe *et al* (2021) again as a focusing device, on the left-hand side of epistemology we find positivism. A positivist epistemology aligns itself with a realist ontology and thus seeks to pursue certainty through scientific measurement. Coe *et al* (2021) affirm that:

> "Existing within a realist ontology, positivism sees it as possible to achieve direct knowledge of the world through direct observation or measurement of the phenomena being investigated."

> (Coe *et al* 2021, p. 16)

The assumptions behind a positivist epistemology pursue *determinacy* and *rationality* and seek to establish certainty, leaving no capacity for competing or contradictory explanations (Scott and Usher, 1996). As with realism, positivism has traditionally been widely used in research studies concerning the natural sciences as the setting out of hypothesis and logical rules to make knowledge claims is easier to do without having to attend to the subjectivities and complexities that the admission of accounts of human experience into the conduct of educational research presents. Although again, realist/ positivist approaches have also been widely used in research studies concerning the social sciences to date, but the ground is beginning to shift toward other ways of knowing the social world and the human beings who live in it.

Returning to the continuum offered by Coe *et al* (2021), on the right -hand side of the building block of epistemology we find interpretivism. Just as realism aligns with positivism, a constructivist ontology aligns with an interpretivist epistemology. Under interpretivism, direct and absolute knowledge of the social world is seen as impossible because knowledge of the social world is not seen as set, objective or final but rather constantly developing and changing depending on the context and experiences of individuals and their respective social interactions. Coe *et al* (2021) provide this description:

> "Interpretivism does not see direct knowledge as possible; it is the accounts and observations of the world that provide indirect indications of phenomena, and thus knowledge is developed through a process of interpretation."

> (Coe *et al* 2021, p. 16)

Interpretivism can also be referred to as a hermeneutical epistemology, especially with regards to the social sciences. Scott and Usher (1996), when analysing the works of Gadamer (1975), highlight that the:

> "Hermeneutical/ interpretive epistemology in social and educational research focuses on social practices. It assumes that all human action is meaningful and hence has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practice."

> (Scott and Usher 1996, p. 18)

Gadamer's (1975) work on hermeneutics draws attention to the emphasis interpretivism places on human interaction and the context in which that interaction takes place. Interpretivists search for the meaning in human interaction, as opposed to positivists who attempt to apply clear and objective universal deductive logic. In

contrast, interpretivists welcome the diversity and subjectivity of the social phenomena manifest in the contexts in which they are investigating them. For interpretivists, all knowledge is perspective-bound, partial and relative to the context and the lived experiences of those taking part in the action reported in the research (Scott and Usher, 1996).

To make a final point on interpretivism, Gadamer (1975) presents us with a *'Hermeneutic Circle'* in which all knowledge is derived from perspectives and interpretations and as such, knowledge formation is circular and cyclical. To illustrate this concept, Scott and Usher use this metaphor:

> "…think of what happens when you read a book – the meaning of the book depends on the meaning of each of its chapters (the parts), yet each chapter's meaning depends on the meaning of the whole book (…) Knowledge-formation is therefore conceived as circular, iterative, spiral – not linear and cumulative as portrayed in positivist/ empiricist epistemology."

> (Scott and Usher 1996, p. 19)

This brings the juxtaposition between a positivist and interpretivist/ hermeneutical epistemology to light and further indicates how the beliefs and social practices of those who take part in research, and the social contexts in which the research takes place, all influence research findings and therefore, from an interpretivist stance, finding direct or fixed knowledge-claims in the context of this study is neither desirable nor possible.

The next task for the researcher is to address the question on whether they align their epistemological position towards positivist or hermeneutic-interpretivist ways of knowing the social world.

3.2.3 Methodology

The third building block that brings us to our next question regards Methodology. The question here involves deciding what procedure or logic should be followed in the conduct of educational research. Continuing to employ the continuum offered by Coe *et al* (2021) as a focusing device, we find on the left-hand side, positioned under a realist ontology and positivist epistemology is a nomothetic experimental research methodology (Coe *et al* 2021), which requires deductive logic. Essentially, research methods are employed that deduce solutions. The nature of a deductive logic or methodology usually aligns itself with a research study that starts out with a hypothesis and employs methods in a controlled environment which tests that hypothesis. Coe *et al* (2021) describe nomothetic methodology as:

> "Questions and/ or hypotheses are stated in propositional form and subjected to empirical test to verify them, possible confounding conditions are carefully controlled (manipulated) to prevent the outcome from being improperly influenced."

(Coe *et al* 2021, p. 18)

On the right side of the continuum, aligning with a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology is a dialectical/ hermeneutical methodology (Coe *et al* 2021). This requires an inductive logic or methodology which involves using methods that enable the researcher to build pictures or stories of the research participants' experiences of the situation under investigation. This then enables the researcher to compare these pictures or stories and look for patterns, themes and consistencies. The aim of an inductive methodology is not to find the ultimate solution or to make an unquestionable knowledge-claim, but rather to attempt to get to know the situation under investigation in a more coherent and authentic way than is currently known. Again, a definition is offered by Coe *et al*:

> "The variable and personal nature of social constructions suggest that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator(s) and respondent(s)."

(Coe *et al* 2021, p. 18)

Dialogue with research participants is therefore essential to an inductive methodology. Stories of experiences can be reviewed and compared to gain a more comprehensive picture. Unlike deductive methodology, where methods that elicit an undesirable or unexpected response may be eliminated, all experiences and exchanges are considered to be important in shaping a more complete and informed understanding of social phenomena and the situations in which they occur.

As such, the third task for the researcher is to address the question of the extent to which they align their methodological position to the application of deductive or inductive logic.

The fourth and final of the building blocks is related to the methods to be employed in the research. The question turns to what techniques of data collection should be used. Once the three questions above regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology have been answered and assumptions have been made explicit, locating a research paradigm is made easier and then appropriate methods can be decided upon. In the final section of this chapter, I present my research methods in detail. However, before they are discussed, I explore my own responses to the questions set out above and thereby explain the basis on which the paradigmatic questions specific to my study are addressed.

3.3 Locating a Research Paradigm

> "Stand in the place where you live. Think about direction, wonder why you haven't before"
>
> (*Stand* by R.E.M, 1989)

Building on the work of Kuhn (1970) and Coe *et al* (2021), we can further explore how a paradigm in educational research is derived from a combination of assumptions that are made according to how the researcher perceives the social world, and from which a structure for how that social world can be known and studied. Coe et al (2021) offer this definition:

> "A paradigm represents a person's conception of the world, its nature and their position in it, as well as a multitude of potential relationships with that world and its constituent parts."
>
> (Coe et al 2021, p. 18)

According to Kuhn (1970, p. 75) a paradigm is, "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a given scientific community." As researchers, we carry with us past experiences and socio-cultural influences that ultimately define the research paradigm that we use as a framework upon which our studies in educational research are built. Ultimately, assumptions we make with regards to the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions set out in the previous section of this chapter, contribute to and construct our paradigmatic position. Coe et al (2021) note that:

> "Proponents of any given paradigm can summarise their beliefs relative to their responses to those ontological, epistemological, methodological and methods questions identified."
>
> (Coe et al 2021, p. 17)

The paradigms upon which studies in educational research are built are also heavily influenced by historical research standards, environment and culture (Scott and Usher 1996). Historically, a positivist-empiricist paradigmatic position has been widely used in research of both the natural and the social sciences. The underpinning assumptions are that this paradigmatic position can lead to certainties or 'truths' regarding the situation being investigated and therefore outcomes can be objectively defined with precision and clarity. Scott and Usher (1996, p.15) highlight that, "a tendency of positivist/ empiricist epistemology is to present scientists and scientific research as *rationalistic*". However, as Kuhn (1970) reminds us, rationality is shaped by many different elements including the research problem or question, the subject or subjects of the research, and the research environment and underlying social factors including religion and culture. In more recent times, some research communities have moved away from the positivist-empiricist paradigm in search of a research framework that recognises, and even embraces, the nuanced and

unpredictable nature of the social sciences. Kuhn (1970) calls this a 'paradigm shift'. Scott and Usher (1996) illustrate that at this point there emerged a need to:

> "… rethink the strong belief in the cumulative 'progress' of knowledge and of research as a matter of getting closer and closer to a single determinate 'truth.'"

> (Scott and Usher 1996, p. 18)

The single determinate 'truth' referred to here is a research outcome that may be deemed to be possible or desirable when the research study is based upon the testing of a hypothesis regarding an aspect of the natural sciences, but may be considered to be an ontic fallacy (Braun and Clarke 2022), or at least overly simplistic, when the research topic involves the social sciences including all of the nuances and subjectivities that are inevitable in any kind of human interaction. In light of this, some researchers moved towards a hermeneutic-interpretive paradigm. This paradigm embraces the idea that rationality is not one fixed concept and that indeed what is rational in one community of people may be seen as irrational in another. Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 2), in their work on the concept of arts-based research, comment that, "The clean methodological ideal is what some scholars want to achieve… we should save some space in our mental lives for the ambiguous." At the opposite end of the positivist-empiricist continuum, Coe *et al* (2021) position a hermeneutic-interpretivist paradigm which does not resist ambiguity but embraces varying interpretations of experience and reality to work towards achieving a more comprehensive picture of the problem through systematic analysis and comparison of different and contrasting opinions, where a single determinate truth is not the aim. From this perspective, direction or logic of the research may be thought of as starting from a particular situation, an individual case or a small number of cases, with the intention of moving incrementally towards what may be plausibly inferred to be more general themes or cases which illuminate and reflect the wider picture of the problem being investigated. Bassey (1998) offers us the concept of a 'fuzzy generalisation' to describe a research outcome that moves away from defining what *is,* and moves towards what *may* be. Bassey's terminology and methodology may not satisfy the positivists who seek definite 'truths'. However, Bassey's work provides us with a recognition that research in the social sciences and indeed research in education, is always context dependent. Although 'fuzzy generalisations', are less absolute than a single determinate 'truth', they can provide teachers and policy makers with possible ways to address complex, enduring and long-standing problems in education. The work of Bassey (1998) also helps us to see how 'solutions' to educational problems have to be tailored to meet the demands of the particular context in which they are to be applied.

These competing/ conflicting approaches to research have historically caused some unrest in research communities and led to what some have branded 'The Paradigm Wars.' Hammersley (1992) refers to these contrasting paradigmatic ideals as "… conflicts between incommensurable paradigms in which philosophical terms have been used as weapons" (cited in Coe et al 2021, p.19). These 'conflicts' stem from

the fact that on one side of the continuum, exists the positivist-empiricist ideals that research across all fields, the natural and social sciences, frame how they should be carried out with a focus on the aim of producing tangible and indisputable 'truths' about the research subject(s). On the other hand, at the other end of the continuum, the hermeneutical-interpretivist researcher claims that indisputable 'truths' are impossible to achieve in circumstances where religion, culture, the social environment and the unpredictability of human experience and behaviour amongst a range of other factors, all have a distinct influence on the findings of the research. Wiliam (2019), whilst reflecting on research in education, points out that:

> "…the problems that teachers need to solve are just much harder. Physics works because protons and electrons don't have good days and bad days; they behave consistently, and predictably. As soon as humans are part of the picture, things get a lot more complicated."

> (TES. Online, 28 January 2023)

Barone and Eisner (2012) cut through the 'Paradigm Wars' and bring us back to the purpose which the paradigm serves - to allow us as researchers, and allow research subjects, to be able to explore and experience the world in different ways in order to learn more about the problems we face in our modern education system:

> "One can say that we are more interested in paradigm proliferation than paradigm reductionism. We do not believe that there is one road to Rome; there are many, and it is through the exploration of alternative routes- some of which will undoubtedly lead to dead ends, that we exploit our human capacity to experience the world in different ways."

> (Barone and Eisner 2012, p. 10)

Locating a research paradigm does not and should not be a based on a fixed ideal in which a researcher refuses to accept that we may have to challenge and change our position and blur the lines between paradigms as and when it is necessary for the benefit of gathering meaningful and useful data. Blind faith in any one paradigm, Barone and Eisner (2012) argue, will ultimately limit the researcher's ability to gather a varied set of data in line with the demands of the research study undertaken. Coe *et al* (2021) remind us that:

> "it is important to focus on the process of enquiry and not to isolate thoughts to just one paradigm or another. Instead be prepared to question and explore those 'shady' areas between research paradigms where the boundaries shift."

> (Coe *et al* 2021, p. 19)

As I argue above, paradigms shape and define a researcher's approaches to enquiry and remaining open to paradigm shifts, not having a closed mind or being locked in a paradigmatic position is important.

In the first section of this chapter, I state my ontological and epistemological assumptions in order to clarify how these assumptions assist this study in making new 'fuzzy generalisations' about language acquisition and development activities and the experiences of learners on an GCSE English resit programme in FE.

For further clarity on this study's paradigmatic stance, it may be helpful to revisit the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions set out in the previous section of this chapter. The first of which is the ontological question of what is the form and nature of the social world? The assumptions I make on this question align with the constructivist view that there is no one fixed version of reality but that reality is changeable, individualistic and always experience and context dependent. Coe *et al* (2021, p. 18) state that a constructivist ontology affirms: "There are multiple realities with the mind playing a central role by determining categories and shaping or constructing realities." As this study's methods are largely dialectical in nature, it is imperative that I embrace the differing perceptions of reality that my research participants hold. The second question was the epistemological question of how can what is assumed to exist be known? As this study is shaped by subjectivity, intersubjectivity and the varied narrative accounts of experiences of learners and teachers in FE, the assumptions I make on this question align with the interpretivist stance that we can only know what is thought to exist in an interpretive and transactional manner where I value the varied and diverse perspectives of the research subjects and my thinking moves across and in the action. I accept that direct knowledge of any aspect of social science is not possible. I also acknowledge that knowledge is developed and interpreted through accounts of lived experience and observations. Regarding the building of 'fuzzy generalisations' mentioned previously, Coe *et al* (2021, p.18) note that in a study with an interpretivist epistemology, "The investigator and the object of the investigation are interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds." However, as mentioned previously, I'm more inclined to align this study's epistemological approach to an interpretivist-pragmatic stance, for the reason that we live in an objective world, and this objective world that we interact with each day cannot and should not be denied or ignored. For me, an interpretivist epistemological approach does not disregard the existence of the physical world but rather embraces the fact that the diversity of perception lies in how we experience the same physical world around us. For this reason, to make clear that I accept a form of physical reality that we live in, I align my epistemological view to an interpretivist-pragmatic approach. The third question surrounds methodology and the procedure or logic to be followed. As my approach to this study is grounded in human experience and dialectical in nature, my methodological assumptions align with the inductive position that social interactions and experiences are variable and therefore generalisations can only be made through interactions between the researcher and the research subject(s). Furthermore, my methodology adopts a hermeneutical position in that research findings that are unexpected or conflicting with the aim of this enquiry are not eliminated but instead, ambiguity is embraced in creating a more informed consensus (Coe *et al* 2021). Armstrong and Moore (2004) emphasise that nuance,

irregularity and unanticipated data are useful in building a comprehensive picture of a research subject where the methodological aim is to:

> " … carry out the evaluation of a particular intervention which has an identifiable focus and purpose, but which does not predetermine outcomes, or discard those that are unexpected"

> (Armstrong and Moore 2004, p. 2)

Now that I have set out and discussed and (hopefully) justified my own assumptions in relation to these ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. I also provide justifications for other decisions made in the conduct of this research. Firstly, as discussed in Chapters 1 & 2 of this thesis, the learner voice is of central importance in this study in contributing to the building and shaping of a more comprehensive picture of the experiences of using language and the language development of vocational learners in FE. As such, I must be mindful that the issue under investigation, why learners are so disengaged with the study of English language, is not a problem that can exist independently of, or be explained without reference to, the learners themselves and their life experiences. The very issue of disengagement exists in and of the learners. That is why a positivist approach that denies the subjectivity of reality and human experience is unsuitable for this study. Carr (1995) reserves his strongest criticism of positivists, as follows:

> "For the Positivist, then, educational inquiries are simply scientific inquiries designed to improve the rationality of education by purging it of any dependency on irrational dogma or subjective belief."

> (Carr 1995, p. 112)

Scott and Usher (1996, p. 12) remind us that according to positivist-empiricist assumptions, "There is a clear distinction or separation between subjects and objects, the 'subjective' knower and the 'objective' world." However, my own personal experiences of education, and my experiences of working with learners in FE for over a decade lead me to understand that there is no dichotomy between 'subjects' and 'objects'. Each individual shapes their own world and idea of reality according to experience and thus the world is not an objective concept separated from the individual, it is an extension of the individual as it grows and changes in line with each individual's changing perceptions and lived experiences. Furthermore, I am concerned that a positivist-empiricist approach to this study would be detrimental to how the findings of this study may be used to inform future decisions or impede this study's potential to add value to the continuing conversation of FE students' disengagement in the study of language in FE. Carr (1995) cautions that positivism is not only unsuitable for certain types of educational research, but can actually be harmful:

> "Positivism has transformed social theorising into a purely technical activity in which the potential of human reason to generate theories of enlightened action cannot be taken

seriously. No longer a form of reflexive thinking aimed at improving the nature and conduct of social life, social inquiry has become a value-free science offering solutions to instrumental problems about how to achieve given practical ends."

(Carr 1995, p.112)

To provide a further justification for the assumptions that inform the research paradigm employed in this study, it is necessary to revisit the term *determinacy*. Unlike some research studies concerning the natural sciences, determinacy is not the aim of this study. This study builds the experiences and the perspectives of vocational learners on a GCSE English resit programme in FE. The aim is to construct a body of evidence that can be useful in reaching 'fuzzy generalisations' about how language acquisition and development is taught and learned in FE, while also exploring a number of arts-based aesthetic approaches to studying language in FE. In opposition to the positivist goal of determinacy, Scott and Usher (1996) highlight how:

"… our knowledge of the social world, and in particular, the way we understand education, can only be secured if we take account of the views and perspectives of the social actors that are central to the activities we wish to describe."

(Scott and Usher 1996, p. 2)

Essentially, this study and the data collected for this study are qualitative in nature, and therefore a constructivist-interpretivist-pragmatic-hermeneutical approach is the appropriate paradigm upon which to build my methodology, always cognisant that the lines that separate paradigms are not set in stone and may be blurred if, or when, a paradigm shift is beneficial to the comprehensive collection and/ or analysis of data.

Whilst always remembering that every paradigm has its potential pitfalls and limitations, Scott and Usher draw attention to how the social actors that are central to research activities, cannot be denied, ignored or excluded and that the social actors in a study include not only the researched, but also the researcher. Ricoeur (1991) observes how, "The social actor always offers a view of the past mediated through their present understanding projected into the future" (Cited in Scott and Usher 1996, p. 3). The main line of criticism directed at the hermeneutic-interpretivist paradigm is that, if the researcher is undeniably a social actor in the research process, then there is the potential that the past life experiences of the researcher will influence their findings and a subconscious bias may sway their interpretations of, and responses to, data.

Scott and Usher (1996, p. 21) confirm that researchers in the hermeneutic-interpretivist paradigm form a part of the background against which the research is set. However, drawing from the works of Kuhn (1970), they go on to argue that this is also the case for the positivist-empiricist researcher and affirm that, "the notion of the

individual researcher standing outside the world in order to understand it properly, seems highly questionable." Not only does this draw attention to the fact that all researchers sit within the research themselves, but also that it would be 'highly questionable' for any researcher to try to remain in a completely detached position from the world they are studying and of which they are part. Gadamer (1975) underscores how it is impossible to understand anything without prejudice because the very process of forming an understanding requires a prior meaning upon which the understanding can be projected. Scott and Usher (1996, p. 21) add that, "This initial projection is from the subject's situatedness, from the subject's standpoint in history, society and culture." It is our situatedness and our pre-understandings, formed by our contact with the world and the people in our lives, that some see as the risk factors in influencing the study towards pre-conceived ideals about how our research findings might look. However, Gadamer (1975) opposes this view and suggests that it is impossible for the researcher of any field to escape from '*pre-understandings'* and that actually it is through these pre-understandings that we are able to make sense of qualitative data and better come to know the problem we are investigating. Scott and Usher (1996, p. 21), discussing this theory of Gadamer's highlight:

> "… one's pre-understandings, far from being closed prejudices
> or biases (as they are thought of in positivist/ empiricist
> epistemology), actually make one more open-minded because,
> in the process of interpretation and understanding, they are put
> at risk, tested and modified through the encounter with what
> one is trying to understand."

(Scott and Usher 1996, p.21)

What Scott and Usher take us back to here is Gadamer's theory of a '*Fusion of Horizons*', as discussed in Chapter 2. As no individual's '*horizon*' is unique, we all carry with us our pre-conceptions and pre-understandings of the world but it is by recognising this and allowing our own experiences to be challenged, modified and tested that we find the '*fusion*' between our minds and the minds of others. In this fusion, we are able to interpret information and form a greater understanding of the research subject, using our own preconceptions not as closed prejudices but rather as a way to remain impartial and open-minded. Essentially, it is not about attempting to erase or hide our pre-conceptions, but rather being prepared to have our pre-conceptions challenged and tested, in and through dialogue with others.

Before moving on to the fourth and final section of this chapter, a description of my exploration in locating a paradigm would not be complete without some mention of the Critical Theory paradigm. The Critical Theorist does not assume that determinacy or one fixed objective knowledge is possible. Critical Theory also subscribes to the notion that all and every perspective is valid and valuable in building a deeper understanding of any given problem, especially in the social sciences. Clearly, Critical Theory opposes the positivist-empiricist perspective and aligns more closely with the hermeneutic-interpretivist world view. However, where it

differs from the hermeneutic-interpretivist paradigm is in its claim to be '*emancipatory*' (Habermas 1972)*.* Essentially, the main focus of the hermeneutic-interpretivist framework is based on constructing a more comprehensive 'picture' of the research subject to reach 'fuzzy generalisations' and inform current understanding. In contrast, Critical Theory constructs a more comprehensive picture of a situation in order to generate change. The Critical Theory approach is commonly applied in situations where communities are oppressed by a more powerful organisation, governing body or system, and the emancipatory element features because the oppressed are typically not encouraged to critically examine and challenge oppression and the forces that oppress them. Scott and Usher (1996, p. 22) describe this as, "unmasking ideologies". They also note how researchers and research subjects in a Critical Theory paradigm are encouraged to enact change and act "individually and collectively to change the conditions of life" (Scott and Usher 1996, p. 23).

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of oppression related to the work of Freire (1970), *The Pedagogy of The Oppressed* and its relevance to the experiences of learners in the GCSE resit system in FE. I am aware now, as I was then, that the oppressive forces that Freire focuses his work on are somewhat different to the experiences of learners in FE, so I am hesitant to use words such as '*oppression*' and '*emancipation*', carelessly. However, where the Critical Theory paradigm resonates with my study is in its ambition to enact change. In Chapter 5, I analyse a range of research findings that I have gathered through dialogue with my research participants. In these findings, students offer opinions regarding how we teach and assess the learning of language in FE. They also offer some suggestions, again from their experiences and perspectives, on how we might do things differently. Although I'm aware that neither myself, nor the students and teachers participating in this study, are in a position to enact any of these changes directly, it is my hope that this research might at least contribute to the many discussions that are already taking place around how language acquisition and development in FE might be adapted to better meet the needs of learners. McNiff and Lomax (2004, p. 14) point out that action-focused research carried out by front-line practitioners is intended to: "… investigate what is happening in their particular situation and try to improve it. They not only observe and describe what is happening; they also take action."

3.4 Methods

"None of this was written in stone, there is nothing we're forbidden to know"

(*People's Faces* by Kae Tempest, 2019)

In this final section of Chapter 3, I outline the selection of methods used in order to build a base of evidence from which to make 'fuzzy generalisations' and better understand the experiences of learners in FE. Before doing this, it may be helpful to list my research questions;

1. What are learners' lived experiences of studying language on their vocational and GCSE study programmes in Further Education (FE) and how do these experiences influence their level of engagement?

2. What role can socially-situated literacies, or language from the learner's socio-cultural realities play in embedding and deepening learners' engagement in the study and development of language?

3. How do learners' experiences of elitist prescriptivism in language acquisition and development in FE, and in education in general, influence their engagement in the study of language?

4. What role might aesthetic experiences, such as music, film or imagery, play in engaging learners in language acquisition and development activities, and in the emotional experience of learning?

In order to respond to the questions above, it is imperative that I use the techniques and procedures that are ethical and that most directly address the aims of the study. As Coe *et al* (2021, p. 17) confirm, the processes used should be, "…techniques and procedures which allow the researcher to gather data that are appropriate to answer the research question(s)." With learner participants taking a central role in this research, this enquiry is designed with specific consideration towards the wellbeing of learners and informed participant consent. From the outset and throughout this thesis all participants, teachers and learners, are fully briefed on the requirements of this study and all participants are volunteers. No specific learners were asked or coerced into joining this study. All learners who took part in this study chose to do so. Pseudonyms are used for all research participants to protect identities and learner participants chose their own pseudonyms (teacher participants went simply by Teacher A and Teacher B). A Research Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix Item 1) was shared with all learners who expressed an interest in taking part in this study. The Research Participant Information Sheet was accompanied by an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix Item 1) which all participants (or the participant's parents, depending on the age of the learner) signed to state that they were happy to take part in the study. It was made explicitly clear to all participants that they retained and reserved the right to leave the study at any time without needing to provide a reason for wanting to leave the study. In this way, participation in this research continues to be voluntary through all phases of the research. Furthermore, as a researcher, I remain sensitive to issues of power, making sure participants do not feel coerced into providing particular responses or make any contributions that do not reflect their own feelings. I also remain mindful of ethics surrounding storytelling. Learner participants' stories form the very heart of this study and this research uses stories and storytelling as a pedagogic device to enhance the experience of education and help people connect with ideas. The stories are both trustworthy and authentic as they come from direct accounts of people's personal experiences and they are treated with the upmost respect throughout the entire study.

A further comment on ethics is required in order to demonstrate my role in allowing freedom of thought and speech whilst ensuring that no parties are at risk of being offended or diminished by the content shared in group discussions. It was made explicitly clear to all learner participants from the outset of this study that no language which may be harmful or offensive to others is permitted in group discussions so as to maintain an open and safe space for personal and collective growth. All research participants took this principle seriously with maturity and consideration for others. However, there were some exceptions. In one instance, a learner participant expressed some questionable and potentially offensive views. It is important to note that the participants' responses reported in this study are verbatim (*sic* as they were said at the time). Any comments that could be regarded as offensive, hurtful of hateful were dealt with care, sensitivity and in the moment. It is important to note however, how in individual and collective ways, this led to a striking example of democracy in action. This incident forms the Illustrative Case Study at the start of Chapter 5. Another incident came from a learner participant who quoted a text which used the term 'man' instead of 'person'. This potentially posed a question around gendered language but it was not acted upon due to the fact that the learner was quoting another text verbatim. This quote is also shared in Chapter 5. Throughout this research, I remain mindful of the importance of maintaining an open and inclusive learning environment, in much the same way as I, and other educators do as an integral part of a teachers' educational practice when facilitating the learning of students in the classroom. The aim of this study is not to censor the language of young people whose expression of their existence in the language of their cultural and of their home life has been diminished and supressed for much of their lives. Any language that may be potentially hurtful or offensive is of course challenged at the time in appropriate, careful and thoughtful ways as it would and should be in any educational environment. However, first learners need to be enabled to find the courage and confidence to express their thoughts and feelings in the first place in order to bring them out into public discussion, and collective scrutiny - out into the open, where democracy and reason can get at it (Geertz 2000).

For the purposes of this study, learners provided pictures as part of a task which explored aesthetic experience through image. One learner decided to produce their own images by taking pictures of a patch of grass outside their home. Permission to use these images for this research is implied by submission of this artefact as coursework. All other images contributed by learners are stock images available online and are referenced as such.

For clarity and reassurance, all research methods are informed by the University of Sunderland's robust ethics approval processes. Research methods are also informed by the ways in which I address the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions, as set out in the previous section of this chapter.

At this point, a brief description of how research methods align with the continuum discussed in the second section of Chapter 3, may be useful. At the left-hand side of the continuum, aligned with the realist/ positivist/ deductive assumptions are conclusive methods which promote prediction and control. On right-hand side of the

continuum, aligned with the constructivist/ interpretivist/ inductive assumptions are more holistic methods where the emphasis is upon understanding and interpretation (Coe et al 2021, p. 18). Just as my theoretical position sits at the constructivist/ interpretivist side of the continuum, the research methods adopted by this study are interpretive in nature. Coe *et al (*2021) offer this description of interpretive methods:

> "Over time, everyone formulates more informed and sophisticated constructions and becomes more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions."

> (Coe et al 2021, p. 18)

Revisiting my research questions set out above and considering that two of the four questions are concerned with deepening understanding of the learners' experience, and the remaining two questions focus on explorations with different literacies, aesthetic experiences and arts in the study of language, the decision to use interpretive methods to gather data was an easy one to make.

Before discussing my research methods, and to make my methodological decisions clear, I present a very brief outline of my research participants. As this study collects qualitative data, the sample size is relatively small. Case Studies are drawn from three student groups, with two or three students in each group. I have labelled these as Group A, Group B and Group C. Alongside this, there is another group, Group D, made up of two GCSE English teachers. Therefore, the total research population count is eleven, as I include myself in this number as the researcher. All research participants taking part in this study are male. I had purposefully hoped to sample a mixed-gender group of learner participants. However, I ended up with a naturalistic sample as the only participants who came forward were male. As the nature of this study was voluntary, an all-male research group was a natural outcome which I did not interfere with. However, of the two teacher participants, a mixed-gender group was achieved.

Across these different groups, I carry out the qualitative research methods as described below and compare the findings with the ultimate aim of exploring human experience and discovering new insights and understandings surrounding language acquisition and development in FE. In the course of this study, 16 Focus Group sessions take place. Each alternate Focus Group is followed by a Writing Task which is used as a pedagogic intervention. Five Semi-Structured interviews take place at the mid-way point of data collection and an Illustrative Case Study is offered in the final stages of data collection to focus in on one learner participant's experiences with studying language and in taking part in this research, in more detail. Field notes and observations are logged in a Reflexive Journal throughout the study. A timeline detailing the data collection schedule is provided in the appendices for reference (see Appendix Item 2). Before discussing research methods in more detail, it is important to briefly note again that any research participants names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms and the use of these pseudonyms in this thesis has been agreed with participants.

3.4.1 Focus Groups

Focus groups take the forms of collective and collaborative sessions when I meet either Group A, B, C or D and discuss engagement in and encounters with language. Before any Focus group meetings took place, a Focus Group Information Sheet was shared with all learner participants to offer guidelines for participation and to give participants an idea of what to expect in each Focus Group session (see Appendix Item 3). When meeting with the student groups (Groups A, B & C), the aim of the discussion is to explore both their historic and recent experiences of studying and/ or using language to capture their thoughts, opinions and reflections in a safe and non-judgemental environment. As the facilitator of these discussions, I try to steer the topic towards using language in education and ask questions about the research participants' levels of engagement or enjoyment in the language tasks they are currently being asked to carry out in lessons, whilst also asking them if or how they would like these tasks to change. Although I prepare some set questions for each of these focus groups, I allow the participants autonomy in taking the discussion in the direction they feel is most suitable and I build on their responses to write relevant questions for the following sessions. In this way, the focus groups become an on-going process in which each session connects to the last and becomes a continuation of the previous discussion. Focus Group D sessions are similar in format. However, as this group is made up of teachers instead of students, I steer the discussion towards gathering their experiences of teaching language in FE and ask for their reflections on what they believe works well for them and their learners and what, in their opinion, should be done differently. Again, I approach each of these sessions with prepared questions but encourage my teacher participants to be autonomous in changing the direction of the discussion, as they see necessary. Although autonomy is encouraged in all of these focus group discussions, I remain mindful of the need to facilitate the conversation in such a way as to maintain a focus on what it really means to each participant to educate, or be educated in the use of the English language. It is the crucial and underlying topic that sometimes needs to be reintroduced into the conversation. Dewey (2011, p. 133) reminds us, "In the multitude of educations education is forgotten." All focus groups are audibly recorded, transcribed and shared with the relevant participants for review.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured Interviews are similar in theme to the focus groups. However, the key difference here is that, for the purposes of collecting varied and unique responses, I carry out the semi-structured interviews individually. A similar line of narrative is followed but away from the collaboration of the focus groups, these sessions offer each participant the opportunity to speak freely about their individual relationships with language. As with the focus groups, I start the conversation with some pre-planned questions but encourage the participant to lead the conversation to see where it takes us. The goal here is to allow each participant the opportunity to explore and celebrate their subjectivity without the influence of their peers. Participant subjectivity is crucial to this study because to get to know this problem

more deeply, an understanding of the problem from each unique perspective, is necessary. Sartre (2016) tells us that subjectivity is:

> "… subjectivity is to live your own being, and to live what you are in a society - because we know no other state of man, he is precisely a social being, a social being who, at the same time, lives the whole of society from his own point of view. I think that any individual, or any group, or any ensemble, is an incarnation of the total society, since they have to live what they are."

(Sartre 2016, p. 73)

This expansive definition of subjectivity, and how embedded subjectivity resides in the social, aptly encapsulates what I hope to achieve in these semi-structured interviews. The point of view of each participant is guided by their view and position in society. As they each share their reflections and experiences with language, their socio-cultural experiences are mirrored in their responses and their individual relationships with language both within and outside of education are discussed to build a more comprehensive picture of where the line between willing and active engagement and disenfranchisement is drawn, in the study of language. Again, all semi-structured interviews are recorded, transcribed and shared with the individual participants for review.

3.4.3 Illustrative Case Study

A case study of one learner is employed as a method of building a deeper and more rounded base of evidence and to bring one of the anonymous learner research participants to life. This case study brings a learner into the light more fully as an illustrative example of the learners in this study and to explore the process of bringing a learner into education and lighting the fire of inquiry within them. Specifically, this case study, presented at the start of Chapter 5, explores a critical incident which occurs during the data collection process when aesthetic experience leads one particular learner down an unintentional pathway.

3.4.4 Language Activities

The language activities that are employed as research methods in this study are two-fold; the first focuses on alternative types of literature and the second focuses on using aesthetic experiences to encourage understanding and engagement.

Firstly, this study uses language activities to explore whether socially-situated literacies could be used instead of, or alongside, more formal, functional literacies in some language acquisition and development activities in FE. These activities stem directly from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews detailed previously, in that I devise GCSE English Language style activities, such as PEE (Point, Evidence, Explanation) or language evaluation tasks, based on the language of my participants' choosing. The physical work then completed by the participants can be compared to similar PEE/ language evaluation tasks set in their GCSE English Language lessons to provide an opportunity to gauge how much difference, if any,

the freedom of analysing and expressing themselves through a literacy of the learner's own choosing has had upon their level of motivation, their enthusiasm to complete and discuss the work, and what impact this has had on the quality of the work they have submitted. Dewey (2011), when discussing the components that make for a truly transformational experience of education, states that:

> "The learning in school should be continuous with that out of school. There should be a free interplay between the two. This is possible only when there are numerous points of contact between the social interests of the one and of the other."

(Dewey 2011, p. 195)

These socially-situated language tasks are designed to remove, reduce or weaken any dichotomy that may exist between the expression through language that these learners may enjoy outside of education compared to the way language is used, taught and assessed, within education.

The other form of language activity used as a research method in this study comes from the world of arts-based research. These activities involve exposing the research participants to music, poetry, image and film to evoke an emotional response to language development in education in order to promote engagement and understanding. Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 10) justify their work in the field of arts-based research by stating: "Our essential argument is that the promotion of human understanding is made possible through the acquisition and utilisation of different forms of representation." It is these different forms of representation that this study exploits in order to offer research participants a more heuristic approach to expressing themselves through language and redefining how they interact with language in an educational setting. Furthermore, the intention of this study in employing arts-based research methods is to create a wider source of data that can be compared and analysed. After all, using language is an art form in its own right and just as with any other art form, nuance, subjectivity and individuality play a significant part in how it is used for expression. Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 8) highlight that: "for highly nuanced and expressive renderings of human affairs, the arts are of primary importance." Much the same as the language activities where socially-situated literacies are used, activities using aesthetic experiences present learner participants with familiar GCSE English Language techniques and encourage them to write about their experiences of the song, poem, image or film they have interacted with.

The aim of both strands of language activities set out above is to provide me with opportunities to triangulate the physical work completed by the research participants with their responses and reflections in the focus group and semi-structured interview discussions. Thereby, creating a comparative cycle between their dialogical responses and their motivation to take part in English language activities. Including analysis of the change, if any, of the quality of the work produced.

As this Chapter draws to a close, and we start to look ahead to Chapter 4, in which the data analysis methods employed by this study are explored in detail, I briefly return to the topic of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as these are key concepts in defining the methods selected for use in this study, and in how these methods are collated and analysed. The common aim of the methods employed in this study and the analysis of data they generate targets a more dialectical approach to widening student engagement and offers learners an opportunity to be their own 'type' of learner, not simply to passively allow themselves to 'be educated'. By exercising and expressing their voice, their shared voices, their emotions, their shared emotions and their valid individual and collective social experiences, participants in the study can assert what education means to them. Embracing subjectivity and intersubjectivity are key aims of this research, as these are the concepts which define our own character from the character of others. Or, to return to Sartre (2016, p. 37), "… subjectivity, moreover, is simply our proper being, that is, the obligation on us to have to be our being, and not simply passively to be."

Finding My Way

Chapter 4: Finding My Way

Chapter 3 concludes with considerations on what it means to embrace human experience, its subjectivity and intersubjectivity. It also discusses the importance of adopting a pragmatic position in relation to what is assumed to be the form and nature of the social world and how what is assumed to exist in the social world can be known. As this thesis moves into its fourth chapter, the narrative accounts of experience provided by research participants are consolidated through the use of a systematic and trustworthy, thematic approach to data analysis. In addition, in Chapter 3, pragmatic methods of collecting and analysing data are explained and data collection methods are justified. As this study focuses on the collection of qualitative data, selected methods of analysis are aligned with the process of gathering accounts of experience. The role of aesthetic experiences in the learning process and the part aesthetic experience plays in the acquisition and development of useful and meaningful knowledge are also discussed. Having outlined a constructivist ontological position and an interpretivist-pragmatic-hermeneutic epistemological stance in the previous chapter, I am mindful of the need to ensure that data analysis methods employed in this study and discussed in this Chapter are consistent with the research paradigm I have justified in the previous one.

4.1 Thematic Analysis Models

> "Ever since I've been thinking, I wondered why things were so. But no matter how hard I contemplate, puzzles will never go."
>
> (*Puzzles* by The Yardbirds, 1967)

The very nature of the varying experiences that combine to build a bank of qualitative data mean that complexities, ambiguities and confusions when analysing data are likely to arise. Because of this, a systematic and transparent approach to data analysis must be used to uphold trustworthiness in the processes involved in interpreting the data. This is crucial to any qualitative research study (Nowell *et al* 2017). For this study, many data analysis methods were considered during the early stages of data collection. Methods such as Grounded Theory and Content Analysis were examined and contemplated but eventually rejected due to the fact that the ultimate aim of many of these models of data analysis is concerned with the quantifying of data, which does not align with the capturing and analysis of the lived experiences of research participants, which is a central aim of this study. Quantitatively numbering data and statistically analysing data to elicit findings points toward a more realist ontology-positivist epistemology in the pursuit of certainty and assertions of truth. This stands in stark contrast to the complex, subtle 'messy' and interpretivist nature of the qualitative data sets which give form to this research study. A frequency table is employed to support and form a part of the data analysis process in this study. It is important to note however that my purpose in using this frequency table is simply to capture the recurrence of themes and sub-themes to

enable patters and connections in the data to come into view and to help me to reflect on the prevalence of those emerging patterns and connections and refine the focus of future research meetings and learner participant activities accordingly. To reiterate my intentions here, it is not to use the frequency table as a means of determining where the roots of the research problem being explored may exist. In terms of any kind of cause-effect relationship, a further concern regarding the use of Grounded Theory is that it is premised upon the argument in favour of a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) with regards to the views of the researcher. In Chapter 3, I discuss in some detail how my own preconceptions as a researcher are impossible to ignore which renders the ideal of a *tabula rasa* disingenuous to say the least. This discussion is resumed in a latter part of this chapter in which I explore how my own preconceptions, instead of being seen as a source of bias or a risk of contamination of the data, could be used in ways which ensure that I remain open to new ideas, unexpected findings and differing perspectives as suggested by Gadamer's (1970) concept of a Fusion of Horizons.

The conclusion of my considerations, as discussed above, and therefore the most suitable data analysis method to use in this study, is that of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as the purpose of this model is to ensure that the processes of data analysis are as systematic, transparent, credible, authentic and as trustworthy, as possible. Thematic Analysis offers an approach to data analysis as a method that can be used to generate knowledge grounded in human experience (Sadelowski, 2004). With human experience and the unique perspectives of learners embedded at the very core of this study, thematic analysis is considered to be the most appropriate method to adopt to enable the processes underpinning the analysis of data to most transparently and systematically work towards achieving the aims of this research. As with any coming together of human beings, the research participants who are taking part in this study bring with them a rich and varied collection of perspectives which are contrasting and often conflicting. Also, as this study explores the lived experiences of a relatively small group of learners and teachers in FE to gather particular accounts of experience, thematic analysis as a data analysis model can help to address the issue of extent to which the particular cases reported in this study may be plausibly inferred to be more generally the case. In view of the above, methods of data analysis must be able to clearly highlight parallels, conflicts and puzzles in the data in order to provide a transparent account of the investigation while also ensuring that the study remains open to any unexpected findings. Nowell *et al* (2017) note that:

> "… thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights."

> (Nowell *et al* 2017, p. 2)

Nowell *et al* (2017) offer a systematic and pragmatic approach to thematic analysis by breaking down the process of this data analysis model into six phases. The

method of applying thematic analysis that is engaged for data analysis purposes in this study draws from various thematic analysis models; in particular, inspiration is taken from the six phases presented by Nowell *et al* (2017) and the reflexive thematic analysis model first outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). The first section of this Chapter aims to bring transparency and clarity to the study in terms of the approach adopted in the analysis of data. With this in mind, I begin by providing an overview of each of these two models of thematic analysis. I then go on to explain how those methods are drawn upon in this study in order to ensure the approach to data analysis used does justice to the contributions of all research participants while also maintaining a clear focus on producing systematic and trustworthy research outcomes.

To begin with, I provide an outline of the six phases of thematic analysis as per Nowell *et al* (2017). I then explain how they contribute to a transparent method of arriving at trustworthy, justifiable, credible and useful findings and conclusions.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data (Nowell *et al*, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 3, the research methods central to this study include focus groups, semi-structured interviews and the explorations of using aesthetic experiences to promote understanding through different forms of representation and to deepen my own understanding of ways of reuniting disengaged learners with their education in ways which spark interest, ignite imagination and heighten the vitality of their experiences of education in the present and into the future. An individual case study is also employed and discussed in Chapter 5. This serves to give a personal and individual account of how an educational system has failed sections of the very society it was designed to enrich and highlight the pedagogic work that aesthetic experience can do. As per the thematic analysis model set out by Nowell *et al* (2017), the first phase of thematic analysis is the repeated reading and analysing of the data until any meanings that may not have been apparent at first sight start to come into view. At this stage, findings are also shared with research participants to strengthen the authenticity and fidelity of my interpretations of the accounts of experience which they shared with me. Here, I offer opportunity to confirm/ challenge the authenticity of the way in which their accounts are analysed and the meanings that I have made from them. Nowell *et al* (2017, p. 5) highlight that: "To become immersed in the data involves the repeated reading of the data in an active way searching for meanings and patterns."

Phase 2: Generating initial codes (Nowell *et al*, 2017). In this phase, the process of *interacting* with the data begins and a structure starts to become established, as the data are first coded independently by myself and my Multiple Coders (MCs), we then meet to collectively discuss and distil subthemes and themes. My purpose here is to ensure that I am not only looking for what I expect to find having conducted the body of the literature review in Chapter 2. In order to do this, it is important that the MCs contributing to the data analysis are not familiar with the body of literature discussed in Chapter 2. It is also important to note that in the collective stage of the data analysis process, the contributions of the Multiple Coders are discussed first and that the subthemes and themes identified in the data by me are always discussed after

those of the MCs. I do this in order to ensure that I am not only "seeing" what I am looking for or expect to find. In short, I am not the only person "seeing" phenomena in the data. This explanation is offered in order to reassure those who read this research that the process of data analysis is conducted with integrity, trustworthiness and fidelity.

Following the collective analysis of the data with the Multiple Coders, for the purposes of this thesis, data categories and themes are linked, as more fully discussed in Chapter 5, with reference to concepts and philosophical ideas introduced and discussed in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. What this means in practice is that I analyse data with reference to recurring sub-themes and themes identified by me and by the MCs who contributed to the process of data analysis. Bernstein's (1996) framework of *Pedagogic Rights* and his *Pedagogic Device* are discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to recurring sub-themes and themes in the data. Similarly, other concepts explored in Chapter 2, such as Gadamer's (1970) *Fusion of Horizons* and Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality*, are also discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to recurring sub-themes and themes in the data. In this way, recurring themes in the data remain directly related to the focus of this research study and the research questions which underpin it. Furthermore, concepts from the discipline of psychology such as motivation and engagement are connected within the boundaries of the literature that this study is built upon. However, this is a more complex process and much care and further explanation are needed. This is provided in the following Chapter and revisited in Chapter 6.

Phase 3: Searching for themes (Nowell *et al*, 2017). During this third phase of analysis, Nowell *et al* begin the further distillation of data and start a diagramming process in which data that appear to have a comparable meaning or intent can be grouped together in a spider diagram or a similar form of representation. Another aspect of this third phase is note taking in a notepad /research diary. Here, Nowell *et al* recommend that the researcher uses a notepad to document the various stages, feelings, experiences, ideas and barriers that occur during any data analysis process. The notepad becomes data of its own and is a way for the researcher to look back at their own processes to both ensure that the analysis of data remains aligned with the purpose of the study and to navigate their way through complex coding and/ or theming puzzles so that they can both recall and justify the decisions they made in the process of analysing the data.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes, researcher triangulation (Nowell *et al*, 2017). Here, data themes and sub-themes are reviewed and refined by researchers and the raw data are revisited once again to promote consistency and a robust approach to theme and sub-theme generation. Nowell *et al* (2017) highlight that this phase of the data analysis process is most useful when carried out by a 'team' of researchers to ensure that different perspectives and ways of interpreting the data are considered. This method also ensures that the researcher is not simply 'finding' the concepts hidden within the data that most conveniently align to their own opinions, theories or experiences. As such, as discussed previously, this study applies a 'Multiple Coders'

method of data analysis that is discussed again further and in more depth in the following section of this Chapter.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes (Nowell *et al*, 2017). Following on from Phase 4, researchers bring together associated data sets and mutually agree themes and sub-themes. Researcher meetings and debriefing sessions are documented and final themes are visualised through diagrams. The very nature of qualitative data means that this stage of the analysis process can be complex and confusing but all forms of data collected for this study are essential in building an overall picture and the approach to thematic analysis adopted for this study is carried out in such a way as to allow the data to tell its own story. As Nowell *et al* (2017) highlight:

> "The volume, complexity, and varied formats of qualitative data (e.g., audio recordings, transcriptions, documents, and field notes) often lack consistent structure; however, all are useful and imperative for conducting a comprehensive analysis."

> (Nowell *et al* 2017, p. 6)

Phase 6: Producing the report (Nowell *et al*, 2017). This final phase of Nowell *et al's* thematic analysis model consists of writing a detailed report containing "Thick descriptions" (Nowell *et al* 2017, p. 5) of the findings from the research study and analysis of the data collected. Nowell *et al* (2017) also highlight here that, to promote the integrity of the study, it is imperative to provide reasoning of all theoretical, methodological and analytical decisions made throughout the duration of the study. The report must justify the methodology and the research paradigm upon which the study is built and be presented in such a way as to let the data take its rightful place, at the front and centre of the research study. An in-depth account of the data analysis outcomes and experiences of the research participants related to this study can be found throughout Chapters 5 and 6.

As discussed previously, the method reported by Nowell *et al* (2017) and the method of applying thematic analysis is a model that greatly influenced the final approach to data collection employed by this study. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2022) provide us with an analogous and comparable set of guidelines which may be followed to ensure that the process of thematic analysis is conducted carefully and systematically throughout the data analysis stages of the study. Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 4) highlight that thematic analysis, "as method offers you a set of tools – concepts, techniques, practices, and guidelines – to organise, interrogate and interpret a dataset." As the aim of Chapter 4 of this thesis is to provide a transparent and comprehensive account of how the data collected for this study are analysed, discussed below is a brief account of Braun and Clarke's (2022) model of reflexive thematic analysis. The final section of Chapter 4 then offers an explanation and justification of how these phases, in tandem with the pragmatic approach to thematic analysis adopted by Nowell *et al (*2017), are combined to provide this study with a systematic approach to data analysis.

However, focusing purely on the six phases of thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2022), this model appears to be almost identical to that of Nowell *et al* (2017). Without my own explanation attached to each phase (as I did above with the Nowell *et al* 2017 model), below is an outline of each of the six phases offered by Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 35–36):

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset

Phase 2: Coding

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

Phase 6: Writing up

As discussed above, aside from the different language used and very minor alterations in processes, Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis are not far removed from those of Nowell *et al*. However, Braun and Clarke's (2022) considerations around, and definitions of, the role that reflexivity plays in qualitative research are what align this study so closely with their approach to thematic analysis.

Reflexivity within this research study means turning the lens back onto the researcher in order to remain aware of, and take responsibility for, how my own personal experiences, situatedness and preconceptions of how language is taught, will inevitably have some impact on how questions are put to participants, how research activities are designed, and how data are interpreted (Berger 2015). As discussed in the third section of Chapter 3, my own knowledge and experiences of the research subject cannot remain independent from the production of knowledge generated within this study. Braun and Clarke (2022) offer this definition of reflexivity:

> "Good qualitative research does not just involve embracing subjectivity, it requires us to interrogate it. Reflexivity is the term most widely used to capture both the researchers' generative role in the research, and their insight into, and articulation around, this role."

> (Braun and Clarke 2022, p. 13)

I emphasise here that reflexivity plays an important role in my approach to data analysis within this study for two main reasons. Firstly, keeping reflexivity at the forefront of my mind as I analyse data and work with the Multiple Coders to interpret data sets ensures that I remain aware of how my own experiences of studying and teaching language shape this study. I am also aware that, through reflexivity, my own experiences do not distort my interpretations of data in unreasonable or unjustifiable ways or ways that pull the data into a particular shape or direction. I acknowledge the need to ensure that my own experiences establish and maintain an open environment in which unexpected outcomes are embraced and the

interpretation of data sets admits and honours new, different and unexpected perspectives. Ultimately, this means that data are not analysed or presented in such a way as to enable me to skew my own narrative on findings but rather to let the data sets tell their own story. As Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 14) remind us, "Who you are and what you bring to the research shapes and informs your research, inevitably, through what you do and don't notice." In other words, my past experiences and who I am inevitably inform and shape the direction of this study, but through collaboration with other coders and by maintaining a reflexive approach to data analysis, the data sets and participant narrative accounts are what tell the story. Secondly, reflexivity is central to the data collection and analysis of this research in order to encourage regular reflection on the ontological and epistemological assumptions upon which this study is built. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, regarding the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this research, this study utilises a constructivist-interpretivist-pragmatic-hermeneutical research paradigm. Putting this to work with reflexivity means that I remain mindful of the limitations and imperatives that this research paradigm imposes upon the findings and conclusions that it draws, just as any other paradigm would have some impact and, in some way, shape the knowledge produced by a research study. Reflexivity ensures that the practical action I undertake throughout the processes of data collection and analysis phases of this study clearly and coherently align to the ontological and epistemological assumptions and theory which frame this study.

Braun and Clarke (2022) present us with three strands of reflexivity; personal reflexivity, functional reflexivity and disciplinary reflexivity. According to Braun and Clarke (2202), personal reflexivity relates to how the researcher's own values and experiences shape the production of knowledge, functional reflexivity regards the impact made by methods and research design, and finally, disciplinary reflexivity relates to the impact made by academic disciplines. Throughout this study I systematically reflect on my research paradigm, the choices I make for the kinds of research activities my participants engage in, the types of aesthetic experiences I use as prompts for my learner participants to write about and think upon, how I am perceived by the research participants, and indeed my own expectations for the study. All of these factors, and more, contribute to the identification of subthemes and themes and the production of knowledge. Reflexivity is therefore key to upholding the usefulness and trustworthiness of the outcomes of data analysis and in doing the data reported in this study justice.

Reflexivity, and how it is used within this research, goes beyond simple reflection and the notion of being a reflexive researcher aligns well with the intention of this study, which is to pursue trustworthiness, authenticity and transparency. Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight that:

> "A reflexive researcher is someone who is thoughtful and (self)
> questioning, identifying and then interrogating their positions,
> values, choices and practices within the research process, and
> the influence of these on knowledge generated; someone
> seeking awareness and new possibilities."

(Braun and Clarke 2022, p. 15)

As discussed above, this study does not seek to find certainty or absolute truth. Rather, the intention is to interpret data in such a way as to let the data sets speak for themselves. In the context of this study, reflexivity means that the findings of my research as detailed within this thesis are not a final analysis on how language acquisition and development activities should present to learners in Further Education. Instead, I offer a set of perspectives. Perspectives combined to build 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey 1998) to suggest possible ways in which the long-standing, enduring problems we face in education might be addressed. Reflexivity also requires that I remain mindful that the nature of the problems with which this research is concerned are numerous, complex and ever-changing (Braun and Clarke 2022).

A reflexive journal documenting this study, updated by myself on a regular basis, records the activities and steps taken in my approach to data collection and analysis. My journal is employed in this study simply as a place to record thoughts, activities, changes of mind, highs, lows, successes, judgements and decisions made, as well as wrong turns taken, pitfalls and reflections. This research journal has very practical uses in that it allows me to look back at my data analysis processes, which is a helpful way of overcoming problems and recognising trends and making meaning. It also has reflexive qualities in that it assists me in interrogating my own assumptions, decisions and interpretations, throughout the research process. The journal is also shared with the Multiple Coders involved in this study who are then able to offer their perspectives, ensuring the process remains balanced, transparent, open and clear.

What reflexive thematic analysis offers my study in particular is its flexibility. Researchers move forwards and backwards in the six phases of thematic analysis, as outlined above, with the freedom to revisit data sets multiple times with multiple coders, opening up opportunities for a range of subjective accounts and perspectives which allow the data to be viewed from a number of angles. As gathering multiple perspectives and accounts of lived experience are at the very core of this study, reflexive thematic analysis provides a systematic method which enables the data to remain at the forefront of the study whilst also ensuring that the knowledge produced is trustworthy, authentic and interpreted systematically and with transparency.

However, my approach to thematic analysis is unique to this study. Although heavily influenced by the six-phase model presented by Nowell *et al* (2017) and Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis model, I have adapted both to ensure that the method for data analysis used is the one that will let the data shape the outcome. Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 10) agree that, "Simply and rigidly following the phases of reflexive (Thematic Analysis) TA as a series of 'steps' will not guarantee a good

analysis." As such, the six phases set out above serve as approaches to thematic analysis which are, for the purposes of this research, used alongside methods designed specifically with this study in mind. The approach to reflexive thematic analysis which is used by this study is outlined in detail in both the following and the final sections of this chapter. To contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the data collected in this study are analysed, Chapter 5 returns to this discussion in a way that connects and extends them to concepts, theories and ideas introduced and initially discussed in Chapter 2, in relation to the extent to which these are supported or contested in the data. However, at this stage, Chapter 2 concepts, theories and ideas need to be set aside for now in the interests of ensuring that coding is conducted in this study in a transparent, collaborative and open-minded way. This is neither a straightforward nor an easy thing for me to do. Having written Chapter 2 it is almost inevitable that I will hear the voices, recognise the shadows and see the conceptual frameworks and ideas of the authors contributing to my literature review. That is why, as discussed above, the Multiple Coders who assisted me throughout the data analysis process play such a crucial role. And that is why I must allow my MCs to code and explain the points of interest that they have identified in the datum in each data set before I offer my own interpretations.

At this point I took some wrong turns. These are noted in my research journal/ data code book. Easy mistakes to make and hard lessons to learn! I revisit and discuss the connections between the conceptual frameworks/ literature underpinning this study and the findings of this study in some detail in Chapter 5. However, the next section of this chapter discusses the trials and the pitfalls that I encountered along the path while racing ahead to make those connections and seeking to let the data paint its own picture through the reflexive thematic analysis process.

4.2 Losing & Finding My Way

> "Pay attention to the open sky, you never know what will be coming down"

> (*For a Dancer* by Jackson Browne, 1974)

The above lyric reminds me once again of the need to ground my interpretations and coding of the data semantically by using the actual words and phrases used by the learners and teachers who participated in this research, in order to see patterns and to identify recurring thoughts, feelings and metaphors that are important to learners and therefore of interest in bringing clusters of sub-themes and subsequently themes into view.

This section of Chapter 4 reports how the process of coding data was conducted. The first stage of coding begins with the identification of points of interest in the words, thoughts and feelings expressed by participants in the research. My intention here is to encourage and enable my Multiple Coders to simply identify points of interest in the data independently of me and of each other without 'overthinking' why they think these points are of interest. This is so that the MCs and I can then meet

afterwards to collectively and systematically work through data sets to try to identify and interpret the meaning and significance of different points of interest and explore where we have identified the same words or phrases etc. and to try to make connections and draw meanings from these. As discussed above, as my MCs have not read Chapter 2 of this thesis they can provide me with checks and balances to help to re-assure me (and you the reader) that I am not just finding/ seeing what I was looking for in the first place.

However, the process of working with Multiple Coders, at least in the context of this study, is one which requires more explanation. Throughout the next section of this Chapter, I discuss in detail how I worked with the MCs to collectively make sense of, and find meaning within, the data sets. But first, finding the right Multiple Coders was a task in itself. I wanted to be careful not to find coders who would potentially just see what I have seen so I sought to recruit two coders from vastly different backgrounds. The MCs who kindly agreed to take part in this study are from contrasting professions. One of the coders currently works in education, in the same FE college as I do, and we have worked together for over a decade. I thought it important that one of the coders should have a directly relevant professional insight into the problem being explored and be able to relate their own professional experiences to the stories and the experiences shared by the learner participants, but I did not want to limit the coding process purely to educators. As such, the other coder, my partner with whom I live, works in the graphic arts industry and has no experience of working in education but a keen interest in the modern-day experiences of young people in education and in social matters, generally. Both coders are in their late thirties to early forties and I have known each of them personally for some time, one for just over a decade and the other for twenty years. We had discussed my research previously but in a limited fashion, and not to the extent where I would have shared my thoughts and feelings regarding the data sets, so they came into this process without having any rigid, preconceived ideas of what they might find and certainly without my thoughts on the data being known to them.

I decided to share a comprehensive range of the data set with my MCs, including transcriptions from focus groups and semi-structured interviews, plus different examples of student work that had been completed specifically for this study. Of the three groups of learner participants who took part in this study (three learner cohorts, each cohort made up of between two to three learners), I only shared the transcriptions and written work of one group. Sharing all transcriptions collected would have been to ask too much and would have taken advantage of the generously gifted time that my MCs had kindly agreed to invest in this research. The data belonging to the group of these three particular learners was by far the most comprehensive data set I had collected of all three learner participant groups. This group of three learners had been a part of this research study for two academic years and we had collectively built an extensive data set. The other 2 learner groups only took part for one academic year respectively, so their data sets are somewhat smaller. So, with MCs recruited and ready to help, I shared the selected transcripts. However, it would not have been right of me to send my MCs pages and pages of data without first setting the scene. I told them about my research and thoroughly

explained my research questions but was careful not to provide any indication of what I personally had begun to see emerging from the data sets. What I did provide was some back story to the learner participants whose unique and varied accounts of experience make up the data sets which give life to this study.

The text box on the following page details the information I sent to my MCs just before I sent them the transcripts of focus groups, semi-structured interviews and examples of the learners' work to read through. This was done in order to provide some context and an idea of who the people behind the 'words on the page' were. Beneath that, at the bottom of the text box, is learner feedback from the very first reflective Mentimeter (an interactive digital learning tool) activity I did with my learner participants (see Figure 1). This activity asked learners to anonymously describe their feelings about studying the English language, in as few words as possible:

Research Participants

The purpose of this information is to share with you an account of the student research participants who took part in this study in order to give you some context as to who these learners are and how they felt about the study of the English language before our first Focus Group.

The student participants who contributed to this research, who come from a range of socio-cultural backgrounds and are studying across multiple curriculum areas, were asked to take part for various reasons. Some had a desire to share their past and present experiences of studying language in education, some wanted to voice their opinions on what we (as educators and as representatives of an educational system) should do differently, some were just curious to find out more as they had never really been asked the types of questions I was asking, before. However, all of the student participants who took part in this study had one thing in common-they were all disengaged and disenfranchised by the study of language and language acquisition and development activities in Further Education (FE). For a variety of reasons, a sense of diminishment attached itself to all of the research participants who contributed to this study, as it does to so many English Language GCSE re-sit learners in FE.

What started out as a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews quickly started to feel like an intervention. These learners wanted to share and seemed to find our sessions in some way therapeutic, many of them said as much to me after the meetings. The first task that I asked the group to carry out was to sum up their past experiences of studying the English language in education in as few words as possible. Words such as isolated, alienated, pointless and discriminated against, came back. The full list of the responses is copied below for reference.

The task was designed simply as a warm-up activity to get the learners' mindset to an appropriate place before we started our focus group discussion but so insightful were the responses, it became the inspiration for one of our earlier discussions in itself. These learners told me that this was the first time they felt they were being truly listened to, that their opinion mattered, and that this was not some sort of 'tick-box' exercise.

As the sessions went on, all of the student participants grew in confidence and found their voice. They grew bolder in sharing their unique, context driven, subjective and intersubjective perspectives. Their narrative accounts of experience that make up the transcripts and interviews will pick up the story from here.

Figure 1. Learner reflections from our first group meeting in which I asked learner participants to describe how they feel about their experiences of studying language in as few words as possible.
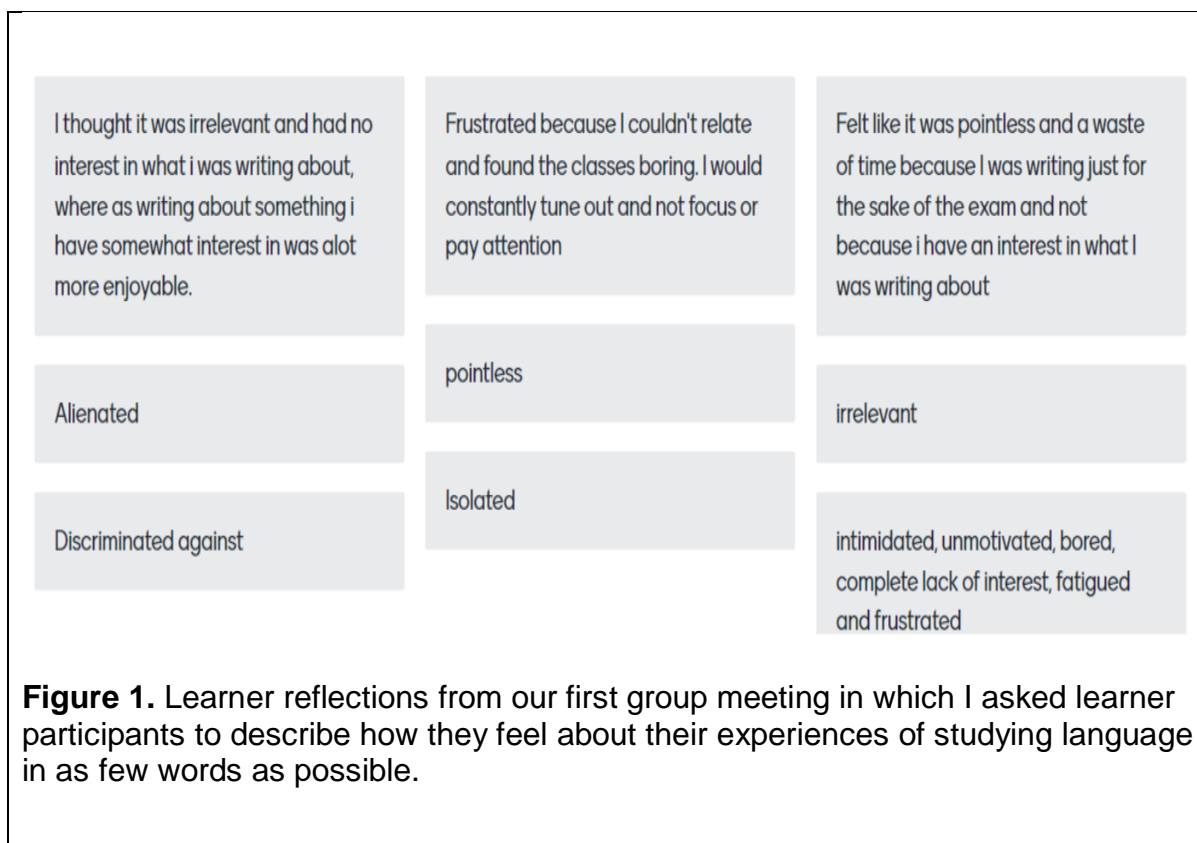
Before I started to hold meetings with these learners for the purposes of this research, they had all been in some sort of trouble at the college in which they are enrolled as learners and in which I work. Their behavioural issues were never very troubling but more reckless acts borne out of frustration and a desire to connect with an education that felt as if it was slipping away from them. Outside of college life, all of these learners would be considered to be socio-economically disadvantaged and would never have had access to the different kinds of educational support external to the educational institute of which they were a student, that more financially advantaged learners may have access to. But what they do have is light in their eyes, a keenness of wit when they want or need it, and fire in their hearts during discussions about something which they feel passionately about. They wanted to take part in my research. They wanted to share their stories and be heard. Some voiced that throughout their entire experience of education so far, the one consistency they encountered, was that nobody ever listened to them. When I first met some of these learner participants in an English GCSE class in September 2022, I asked the whole group how many of them wanted to study on an English Language GCSE programme that coming academic year. From a class of eighteen, three or four reluctant hands were raised to shoulder height but the rest remained static. Therefore, very first task I ran with this group was an open group discussion where they were encouraged to share why they feel so reluctant to re-sit their English Language GCSE, share their past experiences of studying language and use the time as an open forum to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. At the end of this session I vowed to work as hard as I possibly could to change the way these

young learners perceived the study of language and to try to create a safe and open space in which learners can explore what language truly means to them. In return, they pledged to give the study of the English language another try. It was directly after this session that I mentioned that I was conducting some research into how language is taught in FE and invited the group to join, if they felt it might be of interest to them. Four of the group joined without the slightest hesitation. My research study had officially come to life. And sure enough, the antecedent data collected for this study, explored in Chapter 5, contains multiple accounts of diminished learners who were feeling beaten down by poor experiences of education. In fact, it took multiple interviews and focus group meetings before these learners were ready to look beyond past experiences and to explore new and potentially exciting futures in education and in how they interact with language, more generally.

When sharing the transcripts and learner work data sets with my Multiple Coders, I was keen to hear their thoughts and feelings. But I had already read through the data sets several times myself and it was here that I hit a bump in the road of my data analysis journey. Upon reading the data again and again, I heard echoes of the literature that formed the inspiration for Chapter 2 of this thesis on so many occasions that I found it hard to resist racing to align the learner comments in the datum to the key literature that this study was built on. Although I did manage to resist outwardly, as I did not want to influence the MC's interpretations and I wanted them to read the data through their eyes and interpret it in their own ways, I did race ahead, writing a part of Chapter 4 about how the literature from Chapter 2 speaks through the words of my research participants. This, I had to move to Chapter 5 as I did not want to jump ahead of the natural process of data analysis and I also did not want to focus too heavily on connecting learner contributions to literature or to jump to judgement too soon, and in the process of doing so, risk losing the journey that these learner participants have been on, or the value of seeing that journey through the fresh perspectives of my Multiple Coders.

The meetings that I had with my MCs proved to be the positive action that I needed to get me back on track and slow me down from jumping to premature findings and connections. My MCs were conscientious and meticulous in their reading of the data sets, studying the types of words used and bringing the stories of my learners to life. They brought new sub-themes into focus that I had missed. Some key examples of this include the sub-theme 'Trust', and how that element of trust, that runs throughout our meetings, which I had missed, perhaps taken for granted, had enhanced the learners' ability to 'think'. The concept of 'Courage' was another code that I had missed, brought into sight by my MCs. The sub-theme, 'The courage to listen to another perspective and change their minds' was exhibited by one learner participant in particular who had voiced a contentious political opinion and was politely challenged by another member of the group. The courage was seen in this learner's ability to climb down from his assertion and change his perspective based on the fresh information shared by his peers. He found the courage to change his mind. This incident is discussed more fully in Chapter 5 through an illustrative case study. Another sub-theme brought into focus by my MCs was the concept of

'Learners starting to use research interviews as pedagogical experiences'. Once this sub-theme was mentioned by a Multiple Coder it struck me as so obvious I wondered how I missed it. Perhaps I had been so 'within' the process and so integral to the process of co-creating the data sets that I had missed that my learner participants had started to learn in new and unexpected ways, through our research meetings. Learn about themselves, learn about their world, learn about language and learn about who they want to be in the future. I had seen elements of this and coded different learning experiences myself prior to this, but this was the first time I saw the bigger picture and the personal growth that these learner participants were experiencing through our focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

The meetings I had with my MCs were insightful, enlightening and at the same time, reassuring. Reassuring in the sense that, largely, the MCs had seen in the data much of what I had seen myself. The vast majority of our initial codes and sub-themes overlapped and we had come to the same conclusions on the meaning of many of the stories told by learners. Although, my intention here is not suggest that the process from here on out was smooth. Other challenges awaited us as codes jumped from one theme to another and then a sub-theme became a theme and then seemed to align better with other codes we had found.

The sub-theme 'Trust' in particular proved to be challenging to align to one theme. The reason for this was because the trust that learners were demonstrating in their meetings with me, and in the process in general, was manifesting in several ways. Some learner comments that exhibited an openness and willingness to share personal feelings and emotions, or personal experiences that had been in some way pivotal in shaping who they were, suggested a level of trust in me and in the process. Trust in this sense aligned well with the theme labelled Engagement/ Right to be Heard. However, some learner comments that my MCs highlighted as examples of 'Trust' were seen more as learners exhibiting an enhanced ability to 'think' due to the safe space which our focus group meetings had begun to cultivate. This aligned the sub-theme of 'Trust' in between Understanding/ Independence and Political/ Participation. This sub-theme eventually settled under the theme labelled Political/ Participation as it was agreed between myself and my MCs that whenever examples of trust were exhibited by learner participants, the act of participation followed. Another example of a sub-theme jumping from one theme to another was initially coded as 'Broadening Minds'. This sub-theme was exhibited by learners when they were engaging in new and exciting topics and manifested verbally in focus group and/ or semi-structured interviews and also through their writing. This sub-theme originally sat beneath the theme of Energy/ Awakening as when learner comments indicated a broadening of their mind, it felt like an awakening of something within them. However, as we continued to work through the data, it was suggested by a Multiple Coder that all of the instances of learner comments indicating a broadening of their minds accompanied an encounter with the thoughts and/ or feelings of someone else, whether it be through one of their peers, the written/ spoken word, music, song lyrics or an image. Because of this, we collectively decided to move this sub-theme to sit under the theme labelled Fusion. Questions of this nature continued to spark discussion and debate with other sub-themes. The theme 'Fusion' itself

started life in this study as a sub-theme that sat under the theme of Energy/ Awakening but it appeared so many times and seemed to link to so many other initial codes and/ or sub-themes that it was eventually promoted to sit as the seventh theme and sub-themes such as 'Integrating the unfamiliar', 'Learners being able to relate to new concepts' and 'Learning from each other' were moved to sit under this new theme.

With the initial codes I had already found myself in the background, the additional codes and sub-themes put forward by my Multiple Coders and the seemingly constant flow of codes/ sub-themes from one theme to another, I found myself in a state of confusion and stasis. I decided at this point, to some extent, to start again. As mentioned above, this is why a reflexive approach to thematic analysis is an integral element to my thematic analysis and data coding process as it allows me to jump back and forth through the stages of analysis to ensure that I am doing the data justice by letting the data paint its own picture, and not moving forward until I have explored all perceivable avenues (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As such, I put everything I had to one side, took out a fresh, blank piece of A2 paper, and with the help of my MCs, constructed a spider diagram (see Appendix Item 4) of sub-themes and themes on the basis of what my MCs had seen in the data. This spider diagram superseded one which we had collectively built earlier on which had become practically unreadable (see Appendix Item 5). We now all felt we had a much clearer picture of the data and more clarity in how to group the various sub-themes we had created and align them to themes. Although the sub-themes and themes I had myself seen in the data sets mostly aligned with the perspectives of my MCs, they were nevertheless ignored for now. This was a chance for me to allow my MCs to make sense of the data through their perspectives and my own themes and sub-themes would sit alongside this work at a later stage. The Multiple Coders and myself eventually decided on seven themes. Those themes were:

1. Understanding/ Independence
2. Engagement/ Right to be Heard
3. Political/ Participation
4. Energy/ Awakening
5. Fusion
6. Disillusionment/ Diminished
7. Praxis

Below is an exhaustive list of the themes and the sub-themes which sat within them, as per the input of the multiple coders.

Understanding/ Independence:

Critical understanding, the realisation of new possibilities, independent thought, self-reflection, challenging assumptions, confidence and understanding themselves, their world, their place in the world and their possible futures, learners being aware of their own experiences, the feeling of being enhanced by study content and the

realisation that this has been lacking and learners in a safe space of trust which is enhancing their ability to 'think'.

A final sub-theme here was learners showing a desire to use education as a stepping stone to new, bright and exciting futures, where they have shared hopes, aspirations and ambitions.

Engagement/ Right to be Heard:

Engagement, learners taking ownership of their education and taking Agency. Expressing their right to be included in the social, intellectual, cultural and personal elements of their course through their language. The insistence that the voice of the learner is heard, that their right to be autonomous with language is recognised and examples of learners expressing that they are enjoying what they do and who they are doing it with. Providing a different environment from school. Trust. Learners relating when the learning content speaks to their lives. Learners insisting that they have curriculum input, learners wanting to subvert the learning content and take ownership. A need for choice. Learners insisting that they can express themselves through their own language and learners feeling validated that their voice is being heard through the interview process.

Political/ Participation:

Civic discourse, power, control, and examples of learners expressing their right to have a say in what they are expected to do and the need for a justification of why they are supposed to do it. The notion that their actions and words matter and make a difference and active participation, both in a study programme and in political and social matters that are happening around them. A need for relatable content. Relatability is key to learner participation; the learning content has to be relevant to their lives. Random vs relevant. A desire for parity and fairness and recognition that language is a facet of their identity. Engaging in politics. Learners growing in confidence by spending time in research meetings and discussing difficult topics and learners participating and learning because it's their own music.

Energy/ Awakening:

Aesthetic experiences, motivation, emancipation, energy, the feeling of being freed from an inner world, active commerce with the world, interpretation of self, interpretation of the world, interpretation of objects, sudden understanding or realisation and the concept of relating art or language to personal experience. Learners starting to use research interviews as pedagogic experiences. Learners having an emotional reaction to aesthetic experience. Learners responding to the fact that texts are just words but music is alive, learners understanding their identity and their world through the research meetings and music serving as a gateway into language.

Fusion:

Learners being able to relate to new concepts, learners being able to relate to concepts that may have at one point seemed out of reach, interpretation of

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knowledge, integrating the unfamiliar, fusing with a different perspective, transformative encounters, broadening minds, educational unity, learning from each other and personal growth. Learners being able to see a new perspective, learners becoming more open-minded and learners changing perspectives through aesthetic experiences.

Disillusionment/ Diminished:

Learners expressing feelings of being squashed, isolated, diminished, excluded, intimidated, irrelevant, alienated, pointless, fatigued, frustrated and the perception of feeling separated from education. Learners know what they are supposed to feel but there's a disconnect. Learners expressing that the exam experience defines entire educational experience. Learners are afraid. Learners experiencing self-doubt, learners feeling labelled by past experiences and learners disillusioned by curriculum content. Learners use the word 'they' to refer to education. Learners using the word 'forced' showing how disconnected the GCSE English exam is to learners' lives. Learners are hurt by past experiences and learners feeling suppressed as opposed to empowered.

Praxis:

A sense of induction into the wider collective, the desire to relate to one another, the desire to relate to education, a sense of togetherness. The courage to listen to another perspective and change their minds. Learners exhibiting qualitative qualities, such as the desire to relate and finding a safe space to do so. Praxis: learners acting "in such a way as to realise excellences that they have come to appreciate in their community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life".

When these themes and sub-themes were arranged and the work of the Multiple Coders was complete, I created an Initial Data Coding & Frequency Table (See Appendix Item 6). This table listed all 99 codes that I and my MCs had found in the data and numbered the amount of times each code appeared, alongside the sections of the data where those codes could be found (for example, *Interviews with David*). Creating this table was an extremely helpful and pragmatic part of the process for me and it was crucial in my efforts to consolidate my understanding of the data and to 'hear' the stories my learners had told me. But this was not the only benefit. Next to each code/ sub-theme, I pasted two to five examples of what learners had said which relates to each specific code. Doing this gave me clarity on the data I had collected and gave me confidence in the sub-themes and themes that we had drawn together but more importantly, it gave me confidence that we had analysed the data in such a way as to let the data sets speak for themselves and allow my learners' stories to be the narrative of this study.

As this research study focuses on gathering qualitative data through accounts of experience and participant interaction with aesthetic experiences, the majority of the data collected are transcriptions of conversations through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Much of the contributions the research participants have made start to take the form of stories. Stories of their past and experiences of interacting

with language in education which then undergo a thorough narrative analysis, ensuring that these stories are retold through this study in the same spirit in which they were shared. As such, the vast range of opinions, feelings, reflections and experiences that the research participants have shared through their words and their language, are separated into the themes listed above in order to endeavour to ensure that all data collected have been understood in the spirit in which my learners intended it to be, so it can be used in a transparent way to produce meaningful and useful knowledge. Nowell *et al* (2017) define a theme as:

> "… an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole".

(Nowell *et al* 2017, p. 9)

Themes used for separating the data collected in this study in a coherent way were decided upon with input from the Multiple Coders who assisted me with data analysis, and are separated in this way to highlight different sections of, and inflections in, the data in which we found interest. As discussed above, before deciding on any themes, the data sets are categorised, colour coded and points of interest were discussed in depth. Themes were born from a recurring word, a recurring feeling, a recurring expression. Even sometimes what participants are not talking about. However, for the sake of clarity, a more straightforward, succinct and concise account of the reflexive thematic analysis process unique to this research study is offered in the final section of this chapter.

Before moving into the third section of Chapter 4, which focuses on analysing language, it is pertinent that I make some reference to the teacher participants who have made such vital contributions to the data sets which make up this research study.

The approach to analysing the transcripts from the interviews held with teacher participants followed much the same method used when analysing learner participant transcripts in that the data sets were initially coded and then broken down into themes and sub-themes. Teacher participant transcripts were not shared with Multiple Coders as these interviews took a much more straightforward approach. With learner participant focus group and semi-structured interview meetings, I had prompt questions and/ or aesthetic experiences to share with the group to trigger discussion and debate but with teacher participants, my line of questioning was of a much more direct nature and invited them to share their thoughts and feelings regarding our approach to teaching language and carrying out language acquisition and development activities in FE. As such, their responses were of a more direct nature than some of the more unpredictable learner responses or reactions. This is not to downplay the importance of the input received from teacher participants. The two teachers who took part shared insightful and important perspectives that enhance the findings of this study. Those findings are shared and discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

4.3 Analysing Language

"A word is just a feeling you undertook"

(*Prove it* by Television, 1977)

Braun and Clarke (2022) insist that it is crucial for researchers to approach the analysis of language collected in data sets in a mindful way so as to ensure that clear and legitimate claims about the data can be made. To this point, two approaches to how language may be conceptualised and/ or analysed are put forward: experiential and critical.

An experiential approach to studying language is defined by Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 164) as researchers using language as, "a tool for communicating meaning – the words we collect from participants communicate something about their thoughts, feelings and beliefs". In essence, an experiential approach to analysing language means that language is seen as a vehicle for travelling through the vast landscape of a person's lived experience. As with all accounts of prior experience, it is understood that some details may have been forgotten and other details may be re-lived through the, "lens of the present" (Braun and Clarke 2022, p. 164). Nevertheless, the language used by research participants present us with a window into their worlds, their socio-cultural norms and their unique, individual way of seeing the world. An experiential approach to language analysis allows us to use these accounts of experience to let the data tell a story. Others may have contrasting experiences and alternative views depending on their own lived experiences but that does not detract from the ways in which the participants taking part in this research use language in such a way as to best convey their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Braun and Clarke 2022).

On the other side of the coin to an experiential approach to language analysis, we have critical analysis. Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 164) state that the critical analysis approach foregrounds that, "language isn't simply a conduit or a communication tool, but a social practice, one of the main ways in which humans and societies create meaning and realities." Here we see that language is seen as something more active. Language does not simply reflect the past experiences and create windows into the lives of others, it creates its own meaning and realities. We are no longer looking through the language to what lies beneath it, but using the language as a base upon which to build new perspectives and to create new horizons.

Whilst deliberating about this study's approach to analysing language, I have had some difficulty in deciding whether the language shared by participants is viewed through an experiential or a critical qualitative lens. Clearly, this study is more aligned to an experiential approach to analysing language. After all, the concept of building stories through individual accounts of lived experience and encouraging research participants to use language to create a 'window' into their worlds and offer us opportunities to see language education through their eyes is at the very core of the aim and purpose of this study. Although, after much deliberation and reading, I conclude that both experiential and critical qualitative approaches are used to some

extent and how they are used is dependent on the type of data being analysed. However, I am aware that it may not be helpful, for the sake of clarity, to sit in a grey area between two opposing concepts, so below is a more detailed explanation as to why I have come to this conclusion.

As discussed above, this research aligns easily and neatly with an experiential approach to analysing language. The majority of the data collected and analysed for this study take the form of transcriptions from focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews carried out with research participants. In these meetings, participants are asked to share their past and present experiences of carrying out language acquisition and development activities in education (and in Further Education specifically) and offer insights into how those experiences made them feel and how they shaped their interactions with language both inside and outside of education. When analysing this data, the focus is very much on interpreting their words in such a way as to allow myself and the Multiple Coders opportunities to 'see' into their worlds, let the data tell their story, and understand how studying language has impacted them through their own unique and individual socio-cultural lens. Thus, an experiential approach to language analysis is judged to be the most appropriate fit for this study.

When considering the thought process explained above, it seems that no further deliberation is necessary. However, when contemplating that this would mean that conceptualising language through a critical qualitative lens would therefore not be relevant to this study, I felt somewhat uneasy, as though something had been overlooked. This is because different types of data have been collected and analysed in this study, and that data comes in the form of the written work produced by research participants during the various language acquisition and development activities which participants have completed. Participants have undertaken these tasks in order to assess how language tasks used for educational purposes may potentially vary from the routine tasks we set our learners on English Language GCSE Study Programmes currently, as we seek to promote a wider learner engagement and promote a more comprehensive learner experience. These language tasks are designed in order to allow learner participants a means of expressing themselves freely, outside of the restrictions and conventions of a study programme. We have used various aesthetic experiences as starting points to trigger interest, evoke emotion and a make a connection with language through participants' accounts of experience. The outcomes of these tasks are explored in more detail in Chapter 5. These have been rich and insightful as participants have come to realisations about themselves, the language they use and the world around them. In all cases, this realisation has occurred by using words as a means of expressing themselves. In these instances, language ceases to be simply a 'window' into these learner participants' worlds and becomes a social practice by which they re-create themselves and their realities. Language has the power to both reflect and create realities. New connections are made and new meanings are found as they unlock their own power to use words to define themselves and their worlds. Language becomes the phenomena we find when we look through the window of these learners' experiences as Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* cross over with

Gadamer's *Fusion of Horizons* (2014) and both come together to meet Dewey's *Heightened Vitality* (2005). Connections that are explored more fully in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

This is the point where an experiential approach to the analysis of language turns more naturally to a critical qualitative approach and it is crucial that I and the Multiple Coders remain mindful of this throughout the data analysis phase of this study so that the data can continue to tell their own story and legitimate and justifiable claims about the data sets collected can be made.

As a final thought in this section of Chapter 4, Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight another feature of language analysis which is worthy of note: the difference between semantic and latent meaning. Put simply, semantic meaning lies at the surface of what is being said. This is information that has been explicitly conveyed with its purpose and meaning clear. At the other end of this spectrum sits latent meaning. Latent meaning is underlying information that is not necessarily explicitly said but rather it is implied and the meaning may be present on a more conceptual level (Braun and Clarke 2022, p. 10). All thematic analysis must have a focus on language and a concern for meaning. However, that does not mean choosing only to analyse semantic or latent data but rather being aware of where each part of the data sits on the continuum from which meaning in the data is derived in order to achieve a greater level of transparency and a more trustworthy and authentic account of what the data is saying.

Thematic analysis is a creative, subjective process and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it is flexible in that it allows each researcher the freedom to settle on the mode of thematic analysis that will get the most out of the data and produce credible, reliable and useful outcomes. And so, the concepts listed above, such as experiential and critical qualitative conceptualisations of language, or semantic and latent meaning, are not discussed in order to align this study to a fixed method of meaning making in the way that the study's research paradigm was aligned to the aims of the study, as set out in Chapter 3, but rather to highlight that a complete and thorough analysis of research methods and analytical concepts has taken place in order to find the method of thematic analysis most appropriate to this research study and the types of data collected. As we move into the final section of Chapter 4, for the sake of clarity, a complete and detailed breakdown of the method of reflexive thematic analysis used in this study, is explained.

4.4 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

"Look into the place where you've been forever"

(*Reflections* by Ty Segall, 2024)

In this final section of Chapter 4, my own approach to carrying out a systematic and robust analysis of qualitative data, aligned with the process of gathering accounts of experience and experimentation with aesthetic experiences in the learning process,

is outlined in detail. This final section of Chapter 4 is not designed to be a repeat of the second section of this chapter, where I described my reflexive thematic analysis processes with all the trials and tribulations unique to this study, included. This final explanation runs through my process in chronological order, omitting all of the bumps along the way for the sake of clarity and to offer a more concise and straightforward account of my reflexive thematic analysis process. Before this, to maintain a transparency in my own decision making and thought process, I briefly re-visit my role in the data analysis process, both as a researcher and as a research participant. In doing so, I hope to more clearly define why the specific process of thematic analysis explained here is judged to be the most appropriate and suitable method of data analysis employed in this research.

When deciding on the different sub-themes and themes in which to group and sort the various data sets collected for this research study, I have remained conscious that researcher subjectivity plays a key role in how the data is interpreted. As opposed to seeing this as a potential threat to the validity or credibility the of findings, I have embraced my active role as researcher and continue to be mindful of the fact that my own experiences of studying and teaching language in FE will inevitably shape the way in which I 'digest' the various accounts of experiences shared by research participants. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 55) remind us that researcher subjectivity, "… is a strength, rather than a weakness or a source of bias". Although some may draw autoethnographic connections to how my own lived experiences have shaped my approach to this research and data analysis, this study is not an autoethnography and therefore, the perspectives and interpretations of others are useful in creating a more comprehensive understanding of the data. This reasoning provides a justification for why I have adopted a Multiple Coders method for understanding and making-meaning in the data, as discussed in detail in the second section of this chapter and briefly re-visited below.

A final point to discuss before I lay out my final approach to thematic analysis, concerns the use of a notepad/ codebook. As discussed previously, I had kept a notepad with me at all stages of the data collection and analysis process to document everything that was happening. This notebook, which I now refer to as my Reflexive Journal (Braun & Clarke (2022), has been pivotal in allowing me to stay on track and work methodically as I have navigated my way through the multiple transcriptions and student work that makes up the data sets collected for this study. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that reflexive journals are especially useful for prompting researchers to keep revisiting questions, such as how my own preconceptions and/ or life experiences relate to the research topic and how I might be perceived by research participants. Remaining mindful of questions such as these has helped me to remain vigilant in ensuring that I am not applying my own personal bias when reviewing the range of data sets.

Entries in my own reflexive journal are diverse and varied. I have logged all sorts of events that have occurred throughout the data analysis process from when I recruited three more research participants because I was becoming concerned about the sample size when three learners left my study at the end of the academic year,

to logging unexpected findings and/ or conversations with Multiple Coders that shed new light on accounts of experience shared by participants. This journal is filled with experiences from all of the 7 phases of reflexive thematic analysis that I employed in this study. Those phases are outlined below.

Phase 1: The first phase of analysis, unsurprisingly, mirrors that of phase 1 as set out by both Nowell *et al* (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2022). This phase focuses on familiarisation of the data. During this phase I read and re-read the various transcriptions from focus groups and semi-structured interviews, several times. The written work produced by student participants for the purposes of this study is examined in the same way. Interestingly, the more I read these transcriptions and examples of student work, the more I found sitting 'within' the data as more meaning and patterns became apparent. When reading these data, I was not looking for anything in particular, I was simply reading and highlighting anything that I found interesting. At this stage, I was not even necessarily concerned with why everything I was highlighting was interesting to me, this is the focus of a later phase. Familiarisation was the first priority. However, at this stage, I did start to list various codes and some early sub-themes that were emerging from the data set as I read and re-read the data transcriptions. These codes were purely preliminary codes as I started to make sense of various sections of the data according to my own understanding and they were not shared with the Multiple Coders so as to ensure that what I was seeing in the data did not influence their interpretations, even on a subconscious level.

Phase 2: In this phase, I introduced the Multiple Coders to the data sets. As discussed in detail above, bringing MCs into the data analysis stages of this study was used as a method of understanding and discovering meaning in the data beyond my own perspective and also a way to ensure that my own preconceptions and lived experiences did not narrow my vision and restrict my vision or understanding of the accounts of experience shared by research participants. As discussed earlier on in this Chapter, bringing in MCs with different social and professional life experiences was key in order to bring a wide range of perspectives and interpretations into the process, thus opening the data up to wider meaning and understanding.

Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 44) insist that researchers should ask themselves the following questions when analysing data:

- Why might I be reacting to the data in this way?
- What ideas does my interpretation rely on?
- What different ways could I make sense of the data?

By employing a Multiple Coders method, I was able gain insights into and respond to these questions from differing perspectives. Perspectives that were able to literally and metaphorically "see" the data sets in a different light because of their own lived experiences and the unique way in which they interpreted the data. Therefore, meaning-making and discovery within the data was not limited to my own

interpretation but rather a collective experience which allowed the data to paint its own picture.

As my Multiple Coders started to interact with the data sets, my own interpretations and highlighted sections of interest are not shared with them so as not to plant my own ideas and understanding into their subconscious. My MCs then replicated the process I undertook in phase 1, the process of familiarisation. My MCs also highlighted any parts of the data in which they found of interest. Again, specifying what is particularly of interest about what has been highlighted does not need to be explained at this stage.

Phase 3: This is the part of the process where the Multiple Coders and myself sat down together to discuss findings. Here, the three of us who had individually reviewed the transcriptions and learner work collected for this study, met to discuss what we highlighted as particular points of interest.

We did this by going through each transcript or example of learner work, one piece of data at a time from transcript 1A, through the data set. Of course, this is done over a period of months and consisted of multiple meetings. To go through all of the data sets in one sitting would not have been feasible. As we worked to dissect each transcription, we collectively discussed what we found to be of interest or what stood out to us and we discovered where our points of interest aligned. The first point of interest that we all highlighted to be in some way important becomes code 1 (C1). Then we head back to the data set and continue to compare notes. The next point of interest we all noticed becomes code 2 (C2), and so on.

As this process started to take shape, intention and meaning behind what research participants had shared started to emerge and patterns previously hidden within the data started to come into view. At this point, to ensure that no meaning or points of interest were lost, I produced a frequency table (see Appendix Item 6). The production and incremental building of the frequency table allowed me to keep track of all of the various meanings and perspectives that I and the Multiple Coders were finding in the data. The final column of the frequency table highlights which research participants had interacted with each particular code we had created and/ or in which we found a particular interest. Sometimes only one participant said something once, but more often, multiple participants said interacted with similar codes multiple times. All of this information was logged in the frequency table, which allowed me to better understand if a comment was a fleeting remark that others did not seem to pick up on or whether what was being said was something that returned to their thought process frequently and was widely agreed with by peers. It may be worth mentioning that the names used for learners in this column of the frequency table are the pseudonyms that they selected for themselves when they agreed to be part of the research.

Phase 4: Once Phase 3 was complete, the Multiple Coders and I recognised almost one hundred points of interest all listed as codes/ sub-themes (99 codes/ sub-themes in total). The task now was to group all of these individual codes or sub-themes and align them with different themes. To do this, I began colour coding each

of the participant comments of interest in order to highlight what quality the learner was expressing in that moment. At this part of the process, I was again hearing echoes or seeing glimpses of the literature that I explored in Chapter 2 but, at this stage, these concepts were still set aside to ensure that I remained open to the views and opinions of my Multiple Coders and I did not jump to judgment too quickly. This provided me with the opportunity to see the links between the participant comments/ experiences and the literature which informed this study, but not to act upon these links at an early stage of analysis, as this may have risked missing the perspectives of all coders involved in the process. How the data codes started to align themselves to themes has already been briefly discussed in the second section of this chapter, but in the interests of clarity it is outlined in more detail again here.

In instances where a participant comment was aligned with the expression of forming a more critical understanding, the realisation of new possibilities, independent thought, self-reflection, challenging assumptions, confidence or forming a more rounded understanding themselves, these codes, or sub-themes, were all coded in green and these sub-themes started off under the preliminary theme of 'Learners Understanding Their Place in the World', but then with further input and perspectives shared by Multiple Coders, this eventually became the theme of 'Understanding/ Independence'. Similarly, learner participant comments that expressed their right to be included in the social, intellectual, cultural and personal elements of their course or referenced their right to be autonomous with language or examples of learners expressing that they are enjoying their education were all coded in navy blue and after multiple coder input, were grouped together into a theme named 'Engagement/ The Right to be Heard'. Comments regarding civic discourse, power, control, and examples of learners expressing their right to have a say in what they are expected to do took on the colour code of light blue and came together under the theme of 'Political/ Participation', and so on and so forth. This all took place across many months and through discussion with Multiple Coders.

This process continued until all seven themes (as listed in the second section of this chapter) were established.

Phase 5: Moving into Phase 5 of this process, the emphasis is on ensuring that I put myself in a position to tell the full story of the data by ensuring that the themes listed above were the best way to group the data sets in order to produce authentic, trustworthy, credible, justifiable transparent and useful outcomes. In the context of this study, this part of the process does not end here and Chapter 5 continues from this place as a starting point as themes undergo further work. However, to ensure that the process remained rigorous and that I did not become overly transfixed on how the data looked in the frequency table, I produced a spider diagram (see Appendix Item 4) to offer a different perspective on the participant comments.

For the purposes of this study, I drew three spider diagrams. The first of these was created when preliminarily scribbling down codes and then further built upon with multiple coders and then a second spider diagram was produced to make sense of all 99 codes and their respective grouping into themes. The spider diagram simply

groups the sub-themes and themes together to bring the themes to life and to represent them in a visual way. This was a crucial part of the process and one which gave me more confidence that the sub-themes were appropriately grouped and aligned together in a way that would do the data justice and let the story come together through the words and thoughts of my learner participants.

Phase 6: This is the penultimate part of the process. In Phase 6, all research participants and I met for the final time and I shared with them the frequency table and the final spider diagram that I had produced when analysing the data that they had shared (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The final Spider Diagram containing all codes produced by myself and my Multiple Coders during data analysis

This meeting was a transparent and honest space where I asked learner participants for their open and candid reflections on whether they felt that I and the Multiple Coders had understood the data correctly. The mutual trust that I and the research participants had developed throughout this process was invaluable to this final phase and the conversation continued until all parties had expressed that they were happy that the interpretations I took away with me painted an authentic and trustworthy reflection of the views and opinions of all research participants.

Phase 7: As with both the thematic analysis models provided by Nowell *et al* (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2022), the last phase concerns the writing up of the data. For

the purposes of this study, the report which comprehensively details both the research findings and recommendations can be found across Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

My intention in providing this second and final account of my approach to reflexive thematic analysis is to maintain clarity and transparency with regards to my process. The first account of the process, in the second section of this chapter, focuses heavily on the trials I faced and pitfalls I encountered, whereas it is my hope that this second account of my process gives a clearer and more succinct picture of my intentions. In summary, I hope that this second explanation shows that the above process was carefully designed and decided upon in order to ensure that the data which has been collected for this study can produce trustworthy and meaningful outcomes and shed new light on the deep-rooted problem with which this study is concerned, but also to let the data tell its own story. But beyond that, I also endeavour to create an environment in which learners can express their experiences in literal, linguistic terms. To re-visit Chapter 1 briefly, opening up new channels for language and literacies to be expressed freely and without fear of judgement is one of the core principles of this research and it is of paramount importance to this study that data collection sessions with participants reflected and upheld this ethos.

In order to bring this chapter to an end, whilst also laying the foreground for Chapter 5, I'd like to share a story of a teacher named Mr Harsh from Eisner's (2002, p. 58 - 61) book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind.* In this story, Mr Harsh is carrying out a lesson with a group of art students with the aim of the session being to help his learners recognise how the practical world around them can be experienced in different ways. To do this, Mr Harsh carries out the simple and mundane task of pouring cream into a cup of coffee. Whilst pouring the cream into the cup of coffee, Mr Harsh points out that the act is a practical one. However, when the cream is poured into transparent cup of coffee, Mr Harsh notes how the cream seems to explode into the cup, forming cloud-like formations as it slowly mixes with the coffee, transforming this mundane practical task into an aesthetic experience unique to each different perspective. Capitalising on the learners' engagement with this visual experience, Mr Harsh then drops a small amount of red dye into a cup of water in front of each learner in his class, as he sets them the task of creating a literary or poetic response to the aesthetic experience of the red dye exploring the cup of water.

Here, Eisner (2002) goes on to share a learner's response to the task which was both profound and inspiring but I'll leave the story of Mr Harsh here and return to how this relates to the data collection and analysis process of this study. Whilst telling this story, Eisner (2002, p. 59) reminds us that the underlying point here is that, "perceptual attitude is a choice, that there is more than one way to see". Indeed, perception is individual and when exploring aesthetic experiences in education there is no single right answer. After years of being told that their responses to the literature and language extracts of an English Language GCSE curriculum were incorrect, the learners I teach can find difficulty in moving from seeing to expressing. Throughout the entire data collection and analysis process of this study I have

worked to create a space in which learners can express themselves freely without fear of offering an 'incorrect' answer to a brief and the moral stamina these learners have exhibited is remarkable. Far from feeling defeated by their diminishing experiences of education, these learners were keen to explore the language that comes from their socio-cultural worlds and, as the process progressed, to engage in conversations about politics and philosophy. Early on in the process I was keen to steer the conversation back to language but soon understood that these learners were embracing the freedom of the educational space we had collectively created. As the data collection process developed I realised that language is much greater than words. As Eisner (2002, p. 230) reflects: "Meaning is not limited to what words can express".

As discussed in Chapter 3, any research participants names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms and the use of these pseudonyms in this thesis has been agreed with participants.

Words & Worlds

Chapter 5: Words & Worlds

Chapter 4 discusses the approach adopted in this thesis to data collection and analysis in detail, in order to outline the methods of interpreting data adopted to ensure that the voices and actions of all research participants are used to set the scene and paint an authentic picture of the findings of this research study. This chapter examines key findings distilled from each theme, as in relation to the data sets collected from research participants. Chapter 4 ends with a short story from Elliot Eisner's (2002) "Mr Harsh", Chapter 5 begins in the same storytelling vein. In the textbox below, a case study of a learner participant of this study, David, is explored. I'm using this case study to explore a critical incident (which happened when I and my research participants were roughly halfway through the data collection process), not only to underscore the power of aesthetic experience in opening up new avenues of thought and enlightenment to learners, but also in highlighting how aesthetic experience can unintentionally lead to less than democratic experiences.

5.1 Beyond the Intention of Aesthetic Experience

"The war on the West"

(David, *Focus Group 6B*)

David: Plumbing and GCSE English re-sit student

David comes from a socio-economically disadvantaged London borough. Growing up in what David describes as a "concrete jungle" comes with challenging experiences but nevertheless David is proud of his neighbourhood and proud of the many connections with friends and families that he has established in his local area, since childhood. David never blames his background or his experiences growing up in this part of London on any of the boundaries, barriers and disappointments in his life. Instead he regards his ability to thrive in such an environment a part of his power and a testament to his character.

When it comes to education, David has many disappointing experiences to share. David says that his school years were wasted. He speaks of never really finding his feet. He remembers how most of his teachers failed to engage him in his own education. This was not because his mind is closed to learning. David recalls how he pursued new learning opportunities throughout his school years, joining the lunchtime origami club and taking a keen extra-curricular interest in animals, wildlife and the natural world. He describes how structured classroom lessons on Mathematics, Geography, and in particular the English Language, did not spark his natural curiosity or instil in him a love for engaging in new ideas.

Upon entering Further Education, David recalls how he starts to grow into his new educational environment. After breezing through his Level 2 Diploma in Plumbing, David applies for a place on the brand-new T-Level Study Programme. He tells me how he wants to explore Building Services Engineering in a more expansive way and enter a level of study that he had not previously undertaken.

David was accepted on this programme despite the fact that he had not yet achieved a GCSE Grade 4 or above in English Language, as he had shown such an aptitude for learning on his previous Plumbing Study Programme.

When I started to collect data for this research study, I asked if any of my learners were interested in participating. David was the first to step forward, enthusiastically wanting to know more about what I was doing and why I was doing it.

David's interest in my research came from the fact that he knew he had an innate interest in language, engaging in language everyday through the music he loves and through his own idiomatic voice, through which he communicates effectively with his family and friends. He recollects how he knew that he loved learning, so the fact that he had experienced such negative encounters with learning language in education had left him confused and with a somewhat dented confidence in his ability to 'appropriately understand' language and this led to a gradual but ever-deepening disengagement with formal education. As David puts it, "You're going to school to get it out of the way and then you go and live your normal day-to-day life".

As with all my research participants, I invite David to write down his experiences with studying language so far and his frustration is immediately apparent. He writes… "I personally left school without any GCSEs and the reason for this (in my head) was the fact that I couldn't express on paper "How RoMEO PorTRAyeD hiS LoVe FoR JuliET".

David spelled the words out in a mixture of capital and lower-case letters to illustrate his confusion and frustration with the demands of the English Language curriculum and paper-based style exams. He goes on to say…, "And you're burnt out and you're stressed and it all boils down to this one point". His frustration with the curricula he was asked to engage with in school is deep-rooted and David often ends up back at Romeo and Juliet which he seems to see as a representation of his frustration, "Waffle about Romeo and Juliet and use personification and similes here, there and everywhere, when it's not what's in my head".

Despite David's fresh start in Further Education and his significant progress with his plumbing studies, GCSE English Language classes continue to be a part of David's week which holds little to no value for him. David tells me that, "I've never got on with English in school and when I'm coming to college, and I've got to try again and, uh…", before adding, "there's just no point in even trying. You know?"

However, in the course of our research meetings, something starts to change. David starts, for the first time, to link his natural love for, and interest in language, to his life inside of education. In an early focus group meeting, I encourage all of my research participants to read something before our next meet. Anything they like. Whether it was a chapter of a book, a blog, a transcript to a podcast, lyrics to a song, anything the students wanted as long as they committed to reading something. For David, this is the first glimmer of light which serves as the beginning of a breakthrough in how he views language and his ability to engage with language. David picks a book he already owns called, "*As a Man Thinketh*". He tells me this, "Well, I mean the book itself has educated me. I agree with that a hundred percent, but this isn't what I was doing in school, my choice, this is by choice. Because I've had a personal piqued interest in this, so I've got the motivation and it's not even an effort to want to read through this and learn the language or just read the book and learn what's in it".

David's account of his experiences of reading a chapter of a book he already owned and probably would have read at some point anyway may seem fairly insignificant. However, it is the fact that he could discuss the ideas he learned from this book in an educational setting with a teacher and his peers which changes everything for him. Suddenly his language matters. His voice matters. He has concepts and thoughts to share. His peers will hear his words. They will comment on his thoughts and he will listen to and comment on their thoughts. He might change his mind. They might change their minds.

This opens up a new world and new experiences for David. He engages in language through reading constantly. He brings in new texts to discuss, new ideas and new thoughts to share at each meeting. David finds that the most accessible language comes to him through song. He brings in song lyrics to discuss and share with his peers, always enjoying making links between the song lyrics and his own lived experiences. When discussing some lyrics written by the rap artist, Dave, David makes the observation that, "The language used is language that we know, that we're aware of and you can dissect and understand the meaning behind it. Yeah, 100%. You know, ironically the first comment on the video on YouTube is, "I'd rather study Dave than Shakespeare". Someone said that!"

Here David reveals that although he is now more enthused to discuss language he is still clearly not letting go of his dissatisfaction with Shakespeare.

From this point on, David's interest in new ideas and new avenues through which he can explore language and meaning broadens substantially. I was repeatedly impressed with his enthusiasm for language and learning. But then, the power of aesthetic experience, and the subjective freedom which is inherently linked to such learning experiences, throws a spanner in the works. The following incident provided me with a first-hand experience of how the power of aesthetic experience in rousing minds to life can be used not only for good but also for twisting minds and thoughts with manipulative intentions.

Roughly halfway through our data collection journey, myself and research participants David and Timothy get together for a routine focus group meeting in order to discuss new language, ideas and concepts that they had discovered through experimentation with aesthetic experience. By now, because of the obvious personal growth in confidence I had seen in all research participants, I had come to join these meetings with full confidence that they would all bring something positive and meaningful to the table for collective discussion. However, this time I see how aesthetic experiences can lead to a darker place and a dangerous space. As David starts this meeting, he is keen to share the language he had been engaging with since our last meeting. I am expecting more song lyrics or ideas of inspiration and emancipation, as per David's previous input, but this time, I am faced with ideas of, "The war on the West". To my consternation, David has been watching YouTube videos and reading media snippets by right-wing commentator, Douglas Murray. The aspect of the content of the YouTube videos and media which interests David specifically is their insistence that British people should be proud of being British and stop apologising for the wrong doings of the British Empire (Murray 2022).

David tells me that, "We're feeling guilty for stuff that happened years ago that we didn't even do, like we weren't there. It's just what's happened in civilization". He goes on to say that, "there seems to be this guilt on Western civilizations that we should be paying reprimands and we should hate ourselves… we're teaching our kids to feel guilty for being what you've inherited and the problem with that is the West has done amazing things for the world. Britain was the first place to abolish slavery. But we're the first ones apologising for it and things like that".

David has never shown even the slightest inclination towards these kinds of ideas before. To say that I was shocked is an understatement. I am quickly beginning to understand that any kind of aesthetic experience leads to access to other aesthetic experiences, the architecture of discovery has at least two edges. The freedom that rouses a mind to life can also open up opportunities for less than virtuous ideas to creep in and twist the argument, especially when the sources appear educated and articulate. David acknowledges that this is a controversial topic. The important thing to remember is that he brings these ideas to the meeting in the same spirit in which he had brought other ideas to previous meetings, for debate, discussion and to share and shape his understanding with his peers.

I am the first to respond to David. I suggest some further reading from perspectives on the other side of this debate, particularly with regards to the comments made on slavery. I recommended a Book titled, *Natives* by Akala (2018) which would offer a broader view on the history of slavery and on the on-going impact of some of the actions from our nation's past. But beyond this, what is really striking, is David's behaviour after he had shared these views. David listens. He pays attention. He thinks hard and he thinks carefully. He weighs up counter arguments. He keeps an open mind. He does not dismiss different perspectives out of hand. He does not get angry or aggressive. He is prepared to change his mind. He is prepared to adjust his own thinking. He respects the

views of others in the group and he listens intently when first myself, and then another learner participant, Timothy, speak.

Timothy goes on to share that he had been engaging in language through the songs of John Lennon, and as it was close to Christmas time, the song 'Happy Xmas (War is Over)', in particular. Timothy discusses the words in this song and what they mean to him. He then talks about war in general, which he links back to the comments that David had shared. Again, the previous work we had done on sharing and respecting subjective opinions through aesthetic experience plays a crucial role as David is able to understand Timothy's point of view, take on a new perspective, and adjust his own perspective accordingly. When Timothy finishes speaking, David comments, "Timothy had his Christmas song which wouldn't occur to him at any other time other than a time that war is going on which just took us into a whole entire conversation learning stuff from each other".

Before adding, "Yeah. I'm really appreciating this as a medium to express my views and take part in the research that you're conducting and I genuinely believe that me and Timothy taking an interest in stuff and expressing our views and learning from all of human history, learning all of the information that we learned so on and so forth, this is new information being born because it's current day perspectives. This is just happening. And the brains and the attitude and perspectives are changing naturally and my overall point is I do think about this stuff and comprehend it a lot but thinking in your head and just thinking about it is different to having a medium to express it because if I wanted to genuinely talk about this stuff that I'm interested in, this language but without touching on everything, I couldn't just go to my friends and start pulling out philosophical conversation."

David had encountered and engaged with the views of some right-wing political figures. However, the open and creative space which we had collectively created through this research study meant that he did not have to harbour these views in secret and share them only in an echo chamber with like-minded people. He felt safe and was brave enough to bring those views to a space where they could be challenged and discussed openly. He told us of his experiences in engaging in this type of media and listened respectfully to our responses and ultimately, by listening to Timothy and the differing perspective he shared, he had the courage to change his mind.

This case study links us directly to how education should serve as an emancipatory, democratising, mind-making and mind-altering (Eisner 2002) experience for all learners. David's mind was opened to potentially hateful and harmful ideas through his engagement with aesthetic experience. However, subsequently when he talked about this with a group of his peers who had also had an emancipatory and democratising experience of education, he started to see the flaws of the political argument that he had thought seemed so plausible in the beginning. That took courage and it happened because his mind was open to personal growth. He found the courage to change his mind.

Both David and Timothy went from strength to strength as they continued to take part in this research study. Both continued to engage in language in thoughtful and meaningful ways and both made some powerful transformative revelations about how they now relate to language. These are discussed throughout this Chapter.

My intention in opening Chapter 5 with this case study is to highlight how aesthetic experience, when purposefully employed as a pedagogic device, can do valuable pedagogic, emancipatory and democratising work. Evidence from this study indicates that incidents such as these help these learners by creating conditions in which they can directly encounter *Communitas* in an educational context worthy of the name (Bernstein 1996). This sense of *Communitas* was encountered in the presence of other people who were able to see, and who were willing to help others to see, political propaganda for what it really is. David shared some controversial content but it was not used against him by others as a source of ridicule or as a trigger for anyone to diminish or bully him for his ideas. Instead, this incident was regarded as an opportunity to hold these ideas up to the light by openly discussing competing ideas and perspectives and learning from each other. Aesthetic experience has been a key focus of almost all of my encounters with research participants throughout this study. It has done some powerful and impactful pedagogic work, as discussed throughout this Chapter. On this occasion, it also led us down an unintentional and unexpected path which turned out to be a profound and deeply educational experience. In honest and open communication, and in the embodiment and enactment of clear lines of respect for others, we created conditions in which we could thrive individually and collectively in making sense of the world. Born from the bedrock of the ethos upon which this study is built, this particular unexpected path proved to be an unexpected but powerful learning journey in itself.

5.2 Findings by Theme

"I'm just writing and I don't have to worry about anything"

(Richard, *Focus Group 3D*)

This section of Chapter 5 explores findings which came into view under each theme throughout the process of data analysis, as outlined in detail in Chapter 4. Before findings are discussed in full, it is necessary to briefly revisit theme names. As I read and re-read the data provided by my student participants, I heard echoes of the concepts and themes identified and discussed in the Literature Review that I carried out in Chapter 2. At first, I saw this in a somewhat foggy way. Then gradually, the more I read, the more these ideas and concepts started shifting into sharper focus. Whilst working with my Multiple Coders, I resisted the urge to make any direct links between the data sets and the literature upon which study is built, so as not to

influence the way in which the data appeared to my Multiple Coders. It was of paramount importance that their perspectives and reflections remained free from my own thoughts and opinions regarding what I saw in the data. As this thesis moves into its fifth chapter, I have made some minor word changes to the titles of the themes, as outlined in Chapter 4. The reason for this is simply to more accurately and authentically name, highlight and reflect the links between the data collected and the concepts from the Literature Review as presented in Chapter 2. It is apparent through how minor the word changes are that my Multiple Coders were also seeing themes from the literature review, without ever having read it. It is important to note that none of the sub-themes or codes, as created by me and my Multiple Coders, have or will change name. Neither will sub-themes move to sit beneath different themes, only some minor word changes to the titles of some themes have been made.

In Chapter 4, I present a list of all seven themes created to make sense of the data collected for this study. Those themes were:

1. Understanding/ Independence
2. Engagement/ Right to be Heard
3. Political/ Participation
4. Energy/ Awakening
5. Fusion
6. Disillusionment/ Diminishment
7. Praxis

After I made the edits described and discussed above, the same seven themes now read as:

1. Understanding/ Enhancement
2. Inclusion/ Right to be Heard
3. Political/ Participation/ Agency
4. Energy/ Heightened Vitality
5. Fusion of Horizons
6. Disillusionment/ Oppression
7. Communitas

My logic and reasoning behind the minor changes made above are discussed in more detail when the findings of the relevant theme are shared. The extent to which I was seeing themes from the Literature Review in the data sets was so great that, when the work I did with my Multiple Coders was complete, I then created another spider diagram (see Figure 3) which directly linked the seven themes to my literature review. Although I continue to use the spider diagram I co-created alongside my Multiple Coders as the primary source of reference for the identification of themes and sub-themes in the data, this spider diagram illustrates the extent to which some of the concepts from the Literature Review emerge in the sub-themes and codes.

Figure 3 (handwritten spider diagram — main nodes): ENHANCEMENT, INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION, FUSION OF HORIZONS, HEIGHTENED VITALITY, OPPRESSION, COMMUNITAS. Central axis labelled ENGAGEMENT and MOTIVATION. Labelled "DATA DIAGRAM 2/3".

Figure 3. Spider Diagram linking all codes created by myself and my Multiple Coders directly to themes from the literature review of Chapter 2

Theming the data in a way that directly aligns to the Literature Review I carried out in Chapter 2 is a way to ensure that the data remains directly related to this research study whilst also creating an analytical environment where abstract themes such as motivation, disenfranchisement and engagement can be defined within the boundaries of the literature upon which this study is built. As such, Bernstein's (1996) three *Pedagogic Rights; Enhancement, Inclusion* and *Participation* contribute to the names of themes used in this study. Alongside other key concepts from the Literature Review, other themes include links to Gadamer's (2014) *Fusion of Horizons,* Dewey's (2011) *Heightened Vitality,* Freire's (1970) *Oppression* and finally, Bernstein's (1996) *Communitas.* What this means in essence, is that the works of the above authors are helpful in contributing to the development of a coherent conceptual framework which make sense of all of the data that have been collected for this study in a highly meaningful way. The practical examples, critical incidents and case study make new and useful contributions to knowledge where they show us what Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device*; Dewey's *Democratic Education* and *Heightened Vitality* (2005); Freire's (1970) pursuit of *Democratic and Emancipatory Education*; and Gadamer's (2014) *Fusion of Horizons* might look like in practice in vocational education in 2025.

The first themes to be discussed are themes 1, 2 and 3. I have decided to discuss these themes first as they were the first links to the literature review which started to reveal themselves in the data, but also because links to Bernstein's *Pedagogic*

*Right*s have been so prevalent through the process of data analysis. As previously stated, this study uses Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right*s as a conceptual framework from which to work, including the use of Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Device* as a guiding pedagogic principle. A simple but useful table outlining Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights*, including the conditions necessary to realise these rights in practice and the levels on which they can be seen in practice is included in Chapter 2. I present Bernstein's conceptual framework again below (see Table 1) for ease of reference, as we briefly re-visit some of the key guiding concepts explored in that chapter and discuss how these rights have evolved as themes with conditions and levels as sub-themes in this study.

Rights	*Conditions*	*Levels*
Enhancement	Confidence	Individual
Inclusion	Communitas	Social
Participation	Civic discourse	Political

Table 1: Bernstein's Pedagogic Rights with their conditions and the levels upon which they exist

(Bernstein 1996, p. 7)

Bernstein's *Pedagogic Right*s have been pivotal in the formation of this study. However, this conceptual framework is just that, a framework – a focusing device and Bernstein does not go beyond the idea of his conceptual framework of *Pedagogic Right*s combined with his *Pedagogic Device* to offer some simple ideas regarding how we might enact these *Pedagogic Right*s for our learners, in practice. In contemplating this, I realise that Bernstein's intention was for us educators to find our own way of ensuring that our learners have access to their *Pedagogic Right*s in the contexts in which we work. Through this study, I offer my own lived experience on how these *Pedagogic Right*s were established in my own practice as I put aesthetic experience to work for pedagogic purposes. It is important to point out that this thesis is not intended to be a recipe, a blueprint or an instructional manual about how to put Bernstein's *Pedagogic Right*s and *Pedagogic Device* into practice in vocational education. My intention here is for this thesis to offer some practical examples, insights and descriptions into how I saw those *Pedagogic Right*s and the *Pedagogic Device* come to life in the actions and accounts of the learners who participated in this study with me. I am trying to express and represent my own experiences as a teacher and a researcher, alongside the experiences of my learners. I am trying to convey to you, the reader, how that led me and my learners to experience a sense of *Heightened Vitality* in the classroom that we shared (Dewey 2005). I am trying to give you the reader a sense of what that *Heightened Vitality* feels like in lived experience – my own and that of my learners. I want to place the above alongside a discussion of Gadamer's (2014) *Fusions of Horizons* in action, together with other outcomes which are discussed throughout this chapter. This was not always easy, it led to difficulties and took us down unexpected paths, an example is offered in the text box at the start of this chapter. However, we found our way. Bernstein invites teachers and others to put his conceptual framework to work in

order to try it out and amend/ develop it in the real world. That is where the analysis of the findings of this study begins.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Understanding/ Enhancement

Finding 1: Engagement in individual and collective aesthetic experience, evokes critical thinking; increases learner confidence; enhances perception and releases imagination regarding the realisation of new possibilities for the future, not only in the pursuit of personal goals and self-interest but also in the interests of the greater good.

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes of this study, learner research participants exhibited an increasing capacity to think critically and for themselves when engaging with aesthetic experience. In early interviews, participants would look to me for some sort of affirmation when they dared to share a subjective opinion or response but as research meetings progressed, my approval, and sometimes it felt even my presence, was not necessary. Learners became more able to think critically and felt a greater level of confidence in their subjective opinion, the more they were asked questions which had no fixed answer. These learners reported that they had rarely been asked for their opinion before. The questions they faced in education mostly required them to repeat some sort of knowledge which had been shared with (or perhaps more accurately transmitted to) them. Such transmissions of information did little to encourage, inspire or connect learners with what that knowledge meant for them in their own lives. When discussing the current GCSE English Language assessment method of paper-based exams, research participant David shares this view:

> "But I still think that that's a dangerous way of using language
> because what do you pass as enhancement? Because me
> going from a C to a B, on paper is enhancement, but am I
> genuinely enhanced? Or am I only enhanced in terms of getting
> a B?"

(David, *Focus Group 5B*)

Note how David uses the term *enhancement* to refer to himself, recognising the need (and the *Pedagogic Right)* to be enhanced by his experiences of education. Here he makes links to my Literature Review that are impossible to miss. But David goes further than making a simple connection to Bernstein's *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement.* David is exercising *agency* in expressing his criticism of an educational system which he feels not only let him down but also diminished him by regarding him and his capacity to use language as being somewhat in deficit or inferior. The same educational system which branded him as unable to adequately use language and rendered him powerless in his confidence and capacity to reject the label. Here, David is illustrating the depth of his understanding of the injustices done to him and the breadth of his understanding of what we mean when we speak of "good" education. He very perceptively and critically draws attention to his understanding that getting a higher grade on an exam does not necessarily mean

that a person has been enhanced through their experiences of education or that they have had an emancipatory experience of education. Far from it. David's accounts of his experiences of education signal the diminishment of him as a person and the oppression and adverse and pernicious impact of a "hidden pedagogy" at work within the educational system.

More and more, participants in the study are able to show a depth of critical understanding on a range of topics. Timothy (Focus Group 5B) discussing language in general comments that, "language isn't static, right. Language is always changing over time. You may say one thing to me now that might not be the same thing five years later." Billy, while discussing homelessness shares this reflection:

> "Everyday people walk past the homeless on the street but no one knows what everyone's thinking. A kid walking past could seem confused however a teenager may see this as motivation to succeed. Adults may walk past without a thought but some may have a level of empathy and consideration. However, we can only imagine how the homeless across the streets feel and think every day".

> (Billy, *Learner Writing Task 2*)

The more learners are asked to discuss topics from a range of themes, the more they are able to look beyond the immediacy of their own lives and experiences and perceive ideas and concepts with a wider and deeper, critical understanding. In turn, the more this becomes the common practice of our research meetings, the more these learners are able to imagine enhanced futures for themselves (Bernstein 1996, Greene 1995) both in relation to their education and beyond. Timothy (Focus Group 2B) starts to reflect on what education should mean and shares his thoughts with the group. He reflects that, "education should be a place where creativity, learning, and potential are unlocked, a world full of possibilities for young people". The idea of a world full of possibilities is starting to cohere and come into sharper focus for this group of learners. This links directly to Bernstein's *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement*. In a later focus group meeting, the same learner notes,

> "I'm doing the traineeship but I don't have the adequate GCSE grades you get what I mean? So, you got two options. You can go back to feeling sad or put my head down and do the exams, but I don't want to re-sit them again and still do English and maths etc, but you can either sit down and cry or I could get up and actually do something about it."

> (Timothy, *Focus Group 5B*)

Here, Timothy is sharing how he feels shackled and restricted by the entry requirements of his traineeship. However, he is also starting to show his commitment to exercising his *agency*, a desire to change his future and enhance his situation. He now has the vision and confidence that he is able to do so and realises that others

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should be able to, as well. When asked through a learner writing task to reflect on their experiences of this study, David shares:

> "I sincerely hope with all of my heart that some insight is taken
> from my experience and applied to our education system in
> some capacity so that some young kid who isn't doing too well
> at their state school isn't negatively scrutinised because he has
> no interest in rigid and out-dated learning programmes."

(David, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Through the learner comments above and in the context of this study, we can see that the desperate need for the *Pedagogic Right of Enhancement* to relate to a learner's experiences in education contexts. *Enhancement* needs to mean so much more than the narrow and simplistic concept of 'enhancement' relating to instrumental extra-curricular activities framed in terms of outcomes, that do not go beyond a simple improvement in grade but begin to move toward an awareness of the importance of/ willingness to commit to/ engage in *praxis*.

Data from this study suggest that learners in vocational education settings (who have often been severely diminished by their experiences of the school system) need to have access to *Enhancement as a Pedagogic Right.* They need to have opportunities to learn in conditions where they are encouraged and enabled to give themselves permission to bring their own lives, their own lived experiences, their own socio-cultural worlds and their unique and individual hopes and aspirations for their futures, into the classroom and to be able to share these with their peers and their tutors in ways which harness the power of aesthetic experience in heightening human vitality and expressing experience using a variety of media and forms of expression including, music, poetry, visual arts and other creative industries. A finding of this thesis is that learners in vocational education contexts need and have access to their *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* through an education system that makes it clear that their lives, their understandings and their opinions matter. No matter how humble the circumstances of a person's birth, they have the right to learn and the right to *Enhancement* in their education. In this sense, this involves being asked and enabled to recreate knowledge, represent knowledge and express and represent experience in their own words and in their own light, not just simply regurgitating or repeating what others (very far removed from their lives and circumstances) have said and written in the past. In my experiences of working with these learner participants in this research study, I have come to see at first-hand how Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* can be realised in conditions which consistently encourage learners to critically analyse their lived experience in relation to a range of different subjects and a variety of competing discourses, in circumstances where they are able to actively listen to the thoughts and opinions of their peers and by giving them the time and space to discuss their own responses to the thoughts and opinions of others, with others. Data from this study reveal that when these learners have had access to places and spaces in which the conditions of *Confidence, Communitas* and *Civic discourse* are realised in practice, their very understanding of what the *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* means and feels like in experience and in human action has evolved and is being realised in practice.

Finding 2: The individual and collective 'lived through' nature of learners' experiences of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* in engagement with aesthetic experience, strengthens their capacity to release imagination and 'to think' deeply, carefully, critically for themselves for longer and beyond the walls of the classroom.

This finding was entirely recognised and brought into play by one of my Multiple Coders. They coded these sub-themes as, "The feeling of being enhanced by study content, the realisation that this has been lacking" and, "Learners in a safe space of trust which is enhancing their ability to 'think'". In both instances, the word *Enhanced* was used. Again, my Multiple Coders have not read Chapter 2 of this thesis. In addition, as one of them does not work in the education sector, it is highly unlikely that they would be familiar with Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights*, as a conceptual framework. However, data in this study suggest that the pedagogic work done by aesthetic experience in this study is individually and collectively enhancing these learners. Once again, the Literature Review that gave form to this study continues to come into view through the themes and subthemes found in the data, even for my Multiple Coders.

What this Multiple Coder noticed was the subtle changes happening in learner participants, over the course of the study. As the meetings and exploration of aesthetic experiences progressed, so did their levels of trust. This 'trust' was noticed in two ways. Firstly, in the way they were showing an increasing trust in me as their tutor. Secondly, data in the study also indicate that the learners are beginning to increasingly trust their peers supported by the conditions of the 'learning environment' created by the research study. At the end of each meeting, I always ask my learner participants how they feel about the discussion they have just had. On one of these occasions, David shares:

> "You've given me a bit of a platform to be able to express and think. Because if this was just another normal night, I was going to be eating pizza staring at the telly. Your brain doesn't go here on a normal day. So, it's giving me a place to be able to think and try and comprehend and even understand myself and what I'm going through and why and whatnot and that just doesn't happen".

> (David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

In response to the same question from another meeting, Timothy comments, "It's been good because it's made me, I guess without even realising it, it's made me think more in-depth about stuff".

This enhanced ability to 'think', which was developed in a safe space of trust resonates with the work of Bernstein (1996), and supports his emphasis on the absolute necessity of purposefully putting his *Pedagogic Device* to work in creating conditions in which learners' *Pedagogic Rights* can be realised and enacted.

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Through conversations with the Multiple Coder who brought these comments to light and coded this data, we discovered that these comments directly led to learners starting to question the learning content they had been asked to study throughout their lives to date, in education. David in particular began to realise that a large amount of study content he had encountered through formal education had failed to engage him. He reflects that:

> "I don't take notice of its significance, if you know what I mean? Because I wouldn't have thought that it was bad, studying stuff I didn't like until we had our meetings."

(David, *Focus Group 2B*)

When I asked David to explain more, he went on to share:

> "In school, in that professional environment (…) with the teacher telling me to study this, learn this. I wasn't interested, but I had to do it to get my GCSE and that is what I mean by that. And I didn't realise this, its significance. It's like, why was I learning Shakespeare in school when language is so different today? If you know what I'm saying?"

(David, *Focus Group 2B*)

Once again, David's comments illustrate the disillusionment he feels at being forced to study what he regards as outdated curricula that lack relevance or meaning to him. Here, David's data support arguments surrounding the importance of Bernstein's (1996) conceptual framework and the centrality of his *Pedagogic Rights* and his *Pedagogic Device.* However, beyond this, data from participant's in this study signpost the energy, vitality and spirit in which these data were produced. For example, data from learner comments and learner observations make clear links between Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device* and Dewey's (2005) positioning of *Heightened Vitality* in aesthetic experience. As discussed in Chapter 2 Dewey (2005, p. 18) notes that when we see aesthetic *experience* in terms of *heightened vitality*, "it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events."

David's comments above regarding understanding himself and understanding what he's going through, alongside Timothy's remark that engaging with aesthetic experiences enables him to think more deeply than before about his previous experiences of education thereby links Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* to Dewey's (2005) identification of *Heightened Vitality* inherent in aesthetic experience. In the context of this study, once I realised the Pedagogic *Right of Enhancement*, in my own pedagogic practice, *Heightened Vitality* followed naturally.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Inclusion/ Right to be Heard

Finding 1: Learners 'living through' the experience of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* to be *Included* in their study programme and having their voice heard, enables them to be authentically "present" in the classroom with others, increasing their sense of belonging (having a right to be there) and feelings of enjoyment in their education in a spirit of *Communitas.*

Glimpses of this finding originated from a place of frustration for many of the learner participants in this study. Learners felt excluded from certain aspects of the study content prevalent in English Language GCSE curricula, as opposed to being included. This comment displays learner participant MI's frustration:

> "So, what we learned about ain't relevant to us now. We can't relate to it. That's the main part, relating to it. How can we write about something and be passionate about it if we don't know nothing about it or can't relate to it, even a little bit?"

> (MI, *Focus Group 1B*)

The theme of learners needing to find a way to relate to the learning content on a personal level appears repeatedly throughout the data sets. In the same meeting, MI's comment above is promptly backed up by a research participant who goes by the pseudonym of Spud, as he notes that:

> "If it's something we can relate to, you can put more emotions into it. And instead of having to think and like plan it out, if you know what you want to say, you can just say it".

> (Spud, *Focus Group 1B*)

In another interview, learner participant Timothy makes a similar point to those previously made by Spud and MI. However, Timothy notably mentions the word 'joy'. Through this comment, this learner is insisting that his education be something that enriches him and that he enjoys. A part of his life which fulfils him, rather than a shallow and even empty didactic experience which puts memory and recall above enjoyment:

> "… because a lot of stuff feels like we're doing it because we're being forced to do it, you don't really have a choice. And so even if you enjoy it, it can literally take the joy out of something."

> (Timothy, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

The frustration of participants with the learning content is repeatedly referred to in their contributions. For these learners, the excerpts and texts which they have been previously asked to study again and again throughout their experience of education have left them feeling a sense of alienation and a separation of their experiences

from language and language development. In a separate interview which followed a similar line of conversation, learner participant Billy, shares:

> "… whereas in GCSE English it's just a random topic, no one has any interest in it. You're just writing about it because you have to, whereas we actually have stuff to say about the topic I was talking about."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 3B*)

This comment from Billy signifies a shift that was evident across data from multiple participants. The frustration was still there but their insistence that they too had something meaningful and significant to say, started to emerge. Increasingly, learners wanted to discuss their own language and began to question the more formal language of the English Language GCSE curriculum and exams. Participants in this research study started to show a certain sense of ownership and level of pride in their own language and started to insist that their right to be autonomous with language was recognised. Spud's frustration displayed above is still apparent, but he starts to find the courage to demand learning content that is more relatable to him and his lived experience:

> "Now it's all Shakespeare language. You're not going to know what it is. If it's something that happened in the past 20 years, it's more relatable to you and you understand the way they speak and what the words mean."

> (Spud, *Focus Group 1B*)

Spud responds well to writing tasks that allow him to use a text which features more socially-structured language, more modern texts, or language that can be drawn from aesthetic experiences, such as through song or modern poetry. Another research participant echoes Spud's comments above in a different interview, as he highlights:

> "I don't see why, it's like, we're not there. We're in the 2000s. I get it's part of the history side of English that we have to look at but I just don't see how it can be relevant today to today's kind of learning or writing activities and all that kind of stuff."

> (Richard, *Focus Group 2D*)

Richard is one of the more emotionally reserved research participants. But he is keen to take part in this research study and he is desperate to achieve a Grade 4 in his English Language GCSE exam as this was his third attempt and he had invested so much of himself into the process. In a later interview, after he had completed some writing tasks for this study which were based on socially-situated language sources, he reflects:

> "So, I find it much easier to write what I want to write rather than something that's coming in from wherever, where I have

no clue of what it is. So, yeah because I usually struggle with that".

<div align="right">(Richard, Focus Group 3D)</div>

Again, as with Billy's comment above, the frustration evolves and we start to see glimmers of hope and confidence coming through when these learners start to realise that they can write meaningful work when they are included socially, culturally and emotionally in their education, through their language. These learners begin to insist that their right to be autonomous with language is recognised. Another learner participant named Street, talks of the importance of allowing learners space to find their feet as they reconnect with language, while insisting that he wants to write but feels restricted by current study content and the language used:

> "By letting us write what we would like to write, yeah. It's like giving us a bit of space to write what we want to write. That's what we're talking about."

<div align="right">(Street, Focus Group 1D)</div>

In another separate interview, learner participant David, suggests that language development and literacy curricula should evolve to show how the same sorts of learning content, such as identifying language features for example, appear in more modern texts and more modern ways of using language:

> "So, like the English GCSE course, and all this language personification, the formal stuff that we we're talking about, if you can take, take it out of modern-day pieces and show that it's happening everywhere instead of showing us the old stuff and how it's supposed to be. Does that make sense?"

<div align="right">(David, Focus Group 1A)</div>

For the purposes of this study and through the use of aesthetic experience, introducing different types of literacies into GCSE English Language style learning activities was an easy task. I started by suggesting some study content which I thought would be a suitable alternative. I chose to introduce the lyrics of songs by the rap artist Dave, and the Beatles' John Lennon. Studying the language of these songs proved to be an enjoyable and enlightening experience. Learners showed a greater sense of enthusiasm and produced some impressive written work. However, although I had grown to know these learners fairly well through our research meetings, I was misguided in thinking that I would fully understand how to enact the pedagogic right of *Inclusion* through language sources of my own choice. In terms of weaving the *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* into the very fabric of this research study, the real results came when I asked learner participants to select the language they would like to work with for themselves. Most of the language which learners selected derived from songs in the form of song lyrics. Some came from books and some from online content, but this was a turning point, both in this study and for me as an educator. The palpable sense of *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005) and the *wide*

awake (Greene 1995) outlook which this generated from learner participants is not to be underestimated.

Learner participant comments which followed language activities now completely juxtaposed with their previous statements, discussed above. In the first instance, most of the initial reactions echoed sentiments of what Timothy had highlighted as lacking in previous writing tasks; the element of joy. Billy comments:

> "But I felt it was a lot more enjoyable. I don't find writing and reading that enjoyable but I felt it was a lot more enjoyable."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 3B*)

For this learner, writing about the literacies of his own life, in Billy's case the language source came from a song by a rapper named Lil' Baby, introduced an element of enjoyment back into the writing process. Enjoyment which had been lacking through most of Billy's education, if it had ever existed in that realm for him at all. Other learner participants experienced a similar emotional reaction to this task. Richard (Focus Group 3D) reflects, "Usually it's not something I'd do, I wouldn't really do that kind of stuff, but it was pretty fun, I can't lie. It was pretty fun". Whilst in the same meeting, learner participant, Street, comments, "It was nice to do, it was fun to do".

After the initial comments which included words such as 'fun', a word which sparks a new sense of hope and aspirational thinking into the process, learner thoughts turned towards what might have been if they were given opportunities to use their own unique voice and language in their education at an earlier stage. Learner participant, David, selects an excerpt from a book as his first 'self-selected' source of language. When discussing how he felt using that particular book as study material, he highlights:

> "Yeah. All day long. I've been reading the book, I know what the book's about, I'm interested in it. I'd like to get my opinion on the book across, like yeah, great. I'll be able to write all day long."

> (David, *Focus Group 2B*)

In a later meeting, David (Focus Group 4B), goes on to reflect that, "Everyone can relate to something, if you compare it to a personal experience". A comment which directly links Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* to Gadamer's (2014) theory of a *Fusion of Horizons*. However, this connection is explored more fully later in this chapter.

Learner participant, Billy, reflects on using the literacies of his own world, which are in this case taken from the music he loves:

> "I have looked at English language as a subject differently
> since starting these meetings with Mark. I now understand how
> relevance and emotions can help enjoy writing."

> (Billy, *Learner Writing Task 2*)

For Billy, using a different mode of language as a prompt to think and write enabled him to see the whole notion of studying English Language in FE from a different perspective. In an early focus group meeting, learner participant Timothy comments, "Yeah if you give me a text from the 1700s my brain would just say "words" and just skim over it". But in a later writing task where Timothy has had a chance to work with the literacies of his own world and a chance to express himself using his own language and then reflect upon how that felt, he shares a more detailed and introspective thought:

> "I do believe something in our education system needs to
> change. There are many people like me who have been made
> to feel as though they're not smart simply because they don't
> relate to the current education model. This research project has
> highlighted that people are more likely to excel in an
> environment they genuinely connect with, rather than one they
> are forced to navigate just to make the grade".

> (Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Still the notion of frustration lingers, but here Timothy displays and impressive amount of confidence and articulately insists that the education system that he has experienced must change and that his voice should be heard. This comment from Timothy, and indeed other similar comments discussed above, supports the work of Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* as well as signalling a cultivation of an awareness of/ commitment to *Praxis*. Furthermore, Timothy is demanding his *Pedagogic Right* to have the power (*agency*) to have some impact on decisions made and to change how education looks in FE. A political power which resonates both with Bernstein's (1996) *Communitas* and *Civic discourse.* The distance travelled by this learner once he has accessed and realised his *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion*, is worthy of note.

These valuable and insightful learner comments all reflect the power of the spark (*Heightened Vitality*) that can be ignited in any learner. For these learners, being able to access their *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* was not a tokenistic gesture. When each of the learner participants who took part in this research study began this journey with me, they were all sceptical. Their body language alone suggested that they believed that this would be another 'tick-box' exercise that might serve some purpose to me but would change nothing for them. As soon as they realised that their opinions were of genuine interest and that the language they brought into meetings with them was not dismissed as inadequate or not 'good' enough, they felt included and their comments and input change drastically. This can be seen across multiple participants above, supporting Bernstein's insistence of prioritising the

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imperative nature of the *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion*. Perhaps for the first time in their life, their education speaks directly to them and they undoubtedly feel that they are a legitimate part of it. This appeared to start a chain reaction of wanting to share language examples and understand each other's worlds through language, which created a unique sense of togetherness and understanding (*Communitas*). This in turn, inspires these learner participants to demand that their voice be heard and enact a political power on what a language education worthy of the name means. This reaction resonates with Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* but it also links *Inclusion* directly to *Communitas*. Communitas was once positioned under this theme as a code/ sub-theme. However, it jumped out of the data so often and there seemed to be so much that contributed to it, it became a theme in its own right. The theme which it became started life as an increased awareness of the importance of *Praxis* but was subsequently renamed as *Communitas.* This theme is discussed more fully later in this chapter. However, in the context of this study, data from learner work, data from learner observation and data from learner comments reveal that enacting Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Inclusion* through including learners in their education on a social, intellectual, cultural and personal level, leads to learners' willingness and confidence to subvert curriculum content, take ownership and agency of their education and have their own language recognised as relevant. In turn, data suggest that this directly sparks Bernstein's (1996) concept of *Communitas*. Which Bourne (2003, p. 499) defines as an, "induction into the wider collective, and ideally into an understanding of the individual's positioning within, and potential contribution to transforming, the social and political." Before moving on to discuss the findings inherent in the next theme, I want to briefly revisit the same writing task carried out by Timothy, as discussed above. Timothy, practising his right of *Inclusion* and demanding some political power writes a comment we would be unwise to ignore, "This isn't right, and I believe it's time for a change, starting with the GCSE system".

5.2.3 Theme 3: Political/ Participation/ Agency

Finding 1: Allowing learners to actively participate in selecting curriculum content dissolves the dichotomy of learner's lives inside and outside of education (Dewey 2011).

A central aim of this research, from the very outset, is to value and prioritise the learner voice. As I discuss in Chapter 1, my lived experience of teaching in the Further Education sector has shown me that the learner voice is often only respected in superficial ways, through learner voice surveys and student union meetings which, although well-intentioned, rarely lead to practical change. From the first meeting I held with my learner participants, I tried to show them that I would act upon what they say and empower them to shape the avenues which this research would explore. Upon asking learners to participate in this research by telling me what types of language they would like to explore, the concept of relevance in study material was said by every participant and was impossible to miss. Learner participant, Billy (Focus Group 3B) shares, "I think you're always more motivated to do something that you actually have an interest in and something that actually means something

and has relevancy." In the same meeting, I asked Billy how he felt after completing a GCSE English Language style activity using a language source of his own choice rather than one selected for him. Again, the pivotal factor here is his ability to relate to his own source of literature. He reflects:

> "It's so much different because in GCSE English language, it was just very random and it was nothing relevant to us. Whereas what I was writing about, that's a lot more relevant in the 'new world'. And to people specifically, and a lot of people can actually relate to that."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 3B*)

This juxtaposes with a reflection Billy shares in a later meeting when I asked him how he thought he had done in his recent GCSE English Language exam:

> "I kind of struggled because… I don't know, it was alright, but I was just writing but I felt like I was just writing for the sake of writing. I don't know how to explain it but I didn't feel like there was much meaning behind anything I was writing."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 7B*)

In a separate meeting, learner participant, MI (Focus Group 1B), echoes this sentiment while he reflects on what kind of study material he would like to see included in his English Language lessons, "In the blink of an eye I'm going to pick one up that I can relate to because again I can write a lot more." Here, MI talks about writing a lot more. This was a recurring theme for MI and I grew to understand that his emphasis on the amount he writes comes from the fact that some prior study material he has been issued with has left him unable to think of a single word he can write on the subject, leading teachers to the incorrect assumption that he was lazy or obstinate when actually he was just unable to connect with the text. Therefore, he now relates the ability to produce a large amount of writing to his ability to successfully connect with the content.

Learner participant, David, once again references his disliking of Shakespearian study material, which his experiences of studying have clearly done some damage to him, when the subject of relevancy was raised by other learners, "So when everyone's being tested to write about Romeo and Juliet, collectively, I don't want to participate in that." Note how, once again, David uses the word 'participate', directly but unconsciously referencing Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and reflecting his desire to be able to actively enact his right to participate in his own education. A conversation around the potential damage done to learners is explored more fully later in this Chapter when Theme 6: Disillusionment/ Oppression is discussed, but as a further comment on that topic now, Timothy talks candidly about how he feels as a GCSE learner when he couldn't find a way to properly understand or engage with learning content, as he highlights:

> "But if it's not really available or useful to everyone you can feel
> left out or could be choked up by that pressure and a lot of
> people, when we're young, we're stressing a lot about the
> exams and GCSEs and stuff."

<div align="right">(Timothy, Semi-Structured Interview 1)</div>

Circling back to the comment made by Billy which was the first comment shared in the discussion around Theme 3, learner comments about the importance of 'relevance' in study material and the dead-end they encounter when faced with 'random' texts occurred so many times throughout the data sets that it became its own sub-theme which sat within the overarching theme of Political/ Participation/ Agency. Returning to Billy, he gives us an honest and transparent reflection of his feelings in a particular GCSE English Language class, as he recalls:

> "It was just random. I had no… it wasn't relevant to anything.
> There was nothing to write about and like, have an interest in,
> so there was no motivation to write about it. It was just… that's
> what was given to us. We had to write about it. Like yeah, I
> don't know how to explain it but it was just irrelevant."

<div align="right">(Billy, Focus Group 3B)</div>

Learner participants sharing that their inability to engage with or find meaning in some of the study materials given to them over the years was often misconstrued by teachers as wilful ignorance and/ or signs of poor behaviour, as shown through MI's experiences discussed previously. Their inability to actively participate in their education was seen as their failing, as 'bad' learners', but seemingly never was it considered that these learners were experiencing the injustice of not having their *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation* properly enacted. In the context of this study, as soon as I actively listen to their voice and allow these learners to fully participate in their education through their own language, a shift in their outlook occurs. Returning to Billy, after a session where we explored language through a different lens, he reflects that:

> "Yeah, for example, if we were studying that, say we had that
> as an extract. I mean, we were listening to the song and then
> we were highlighting everything, there was a meaning behind
> everything. Everything he was saying, there was a meaning to
> it, and there was some sort of English language behind it.
> There was a lot of alliteration, metaphors and stuff like that."

<div align="right">(Billy, Focus Group 5B)</div>

Here, Billy is successfully displaying his ability to comprehend GCSE English Language devices and techniques when the learning content 'speaks' to him. But what really stands out here is how enthused Billy becomes. He went from barely being able to face another English Language lesson to keenly discussing language and enjoying sharing what it means to him. In a separate meeting, Timothy exhibits

how his genuine interest in the study content helps him to engage in the language used:

> "I think it's something that really maybe stop and think and that's why I wrote about it. And I think as far as why I'm intrigued is because it's something that I was genuinely interested in."

<div align="right">(Timothy, Focus Group 3B)</div>

As we practise doing these kinds of tasks with the language and the literacies of these learners' own worlds, more and more the separation between their lives inside of education and their lives outside of education begins to fade. Learner participant, David, discussing some study content after a session where we explored language through a song lyric which he selected, reflects:

> "It was a personal… what's the word… a personal understanding. You know when you learn a new skill and you pick up a little knack, and it's your knack, and you're really good at it. It's like a personal resonation. Like I've had a personal connection to this quote."

<div align="right">(David, Focus Group 2B)</div>

Through these comments we start to see Dewey's (2011) interplay of learning both inside and outside of education. To re-visit Chapter 2 briefly, Dewey (2011, p. 195) reminds us that this connection is, "possible only when there are numerous points of contact between the social interests of the one and of the other." Through this study, these learners' *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation* was acknowledged and enacted by recognising their own unique ways of engaging with language and treating their language as equal in value to any other. This in turn dissolves the separation these learners feel between their personal, social lives and their educational lives, which had existed throughout most of their experience of education. When this happened, learners feel valued and become enthused to discuss language and learn from their peers' unique language choices.

Data from learner comments, learner observation and the learner work collected in this study strongly resonate with the works of Bernstein (1996) and Dewey (2011) by suggesting that actively listening to the learner voice and introducing the language of these learners' worlds into lessons as study content, enacts the *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation* (Bernstein 1996), which in turn creates an interplay between the lives of learners inside and outside of education (Dewey 2011). Dewey (2011, p. 160) highlights that educational institutions have a misguided "tendency to treat interest as something purely private, without intrinsic connection with the material studied." In the context of this study, private interest was brought into the learning environment to successfully realise these learners' *Pedagogic Right* to *Participate*.

Finding 2: Learners participating in civic discourse leads to a desire for parity and fairness and enables learners to take *Agency.*

Throughout this study, the topic of conversation often veers onto themes of political powers and control. Learners express varied ideas on how control works or who has the power to make decisions, but the sub-themes of 'power', 'control' and 'civic discourse' were all created through the learner participants frequent mention of, and desire to realise, parity. These learners seemed to feel an innate sense of 'unfairness', as if they were on an uneven playing field. At first, the learner participants were shy to talk about such topics and when they started to do so, their comments were spoken quietly or were cut short. I reflect that this may have been because they saw me as part of the 'system' or as someone who sits outside of their experiences and therefore would not appreciate or agree with their views. However, as the meetings progress and the trust between us develops, they start to grow in confidence and become more vocal. Learner participant, David, reflects:

> "Because me, going to a school in Tower Hamlets compared to someone going to Eton. Completely different. Even that there are courses there that don't even exist for me. I have zero access to them, even if I wanted to."
>
> (David, *Focus Group 4B*)

David uses the institution of Eton to exhibit how he feels about Britain's educational system and the lack of parity he has experienced through his own schooling. Later in the same interview, David returns to use Eton as a symbol of an unspoken but restrictive hierarchy, as he shares:

> "Seven of our Prime ministers, all went to Eton college, or something like that. And I just wanted to highlight how the elite are taught to be the elite. They're just people who've been put through the process to get there."
>
> (David, *Focus Group 4B*)

Learners also shared views on how power structures and hierarchies that exist in education, apparently for the benefit of learners, have the adverse effect of marginalising and alienating those who are unable to sufficiently show their ability early in the academic year. Learner Participant, BN, talking from his own experiences brings up the hierarchical concept of class sets, a system which he believes has negatively impacted his entire experience of education:

> "I think as you're in the lower class you don't want to embarrass yourself because you already know that your working ability is not as high as the other sets."
>
> (BN, *Focus Group 1B*)

Other learner participants raised similar points and again, their opinions are mixed with anger and a distinct sense that they have been mistreated. Perhaps the most striking came from learner participant, Billy, who likens his thoughts on power, control and the politics synonymous to Britain's education system to a song by a rapper named Lil' Baby, which features several references to police brutality. Billy shares these lyrics from the song, in particular:

> "Been going on for too long to get even, throw us in cages like dogs and hyenas. We just some products of our environment, how are they gonna blame us?"

> (*The Bigger Picture* by Lil' Baby, 2020)

Billy shares that he finds this song, and these lyrics in particular, inspiring and easy to relate to, as he shares:

> "Throughout the song, 'The Bigger Picture' written by rapper Lil' Baby, he uses language to talk about police brutality throughout the United States and more specifically where he's from, Atlanta."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 2B*)

As my fear that Billy has experienced police brutality himself is rising, he assures me that thankfully he has no personal experience of this, but surprises me by saying that he relates Lil' Baby's lyrics in this song to his own experiences of studying language in education. Billy feels more than let down by the Britain's education system and the political powers at play within it, he feels angry. He goes on to highlight:

> "It's relatable. But not relatable in the way he's talking about it, police brutality, but relatable in terms of school, because no one wants to be there. But it kind of is like, obviously not as severe, but it's kind of like a prison. You're forced to go there. You can't leave, you're trapped in there."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 2B*)

These comments that centre around power and control, are mixed with anger and a sense of being wronged which leads learner participants to call for more parity and fairness. This became a sub-theme created by one of my Multiple Coders. Furthermore, what we see through Billy's comments here is a *Fusion of Horizons* (Gadamer 2014). A link which is more fully explored as we discuss theme 4. Learner participant, David, reflects that Britain's educational system lacks parity and calls for education to be a more unifying experience, as opposed to one which divides us:

"But some of us are dealt a shorter straw and we're just chucked in whatever's easiest, and cheapest, if you know what I mean? Which I understand, but it's bad for the future of our country. We are one, we should be one regardless."

(David, *Focus Group 4B*)

Ideas of power and control are expressed through other avenues as well, some outside of learners' immediate lived experiences. During a language task in which learners are invited to bring in an image that means something to them or that inspires them to share their thoughts, learner participant, Timothy, shares a picture taken in the USA in 1954. The image was a photograph of children of different cultural heritage playing together on the day that the Supreme Court abolished Segregation. Timothy fuses his own life experiences with those of a child in this picture, named Charles:

"Imagine me, a young Black man of Caribbean descent, telling Charles that my two best friends were white, and I never thought anything of it. Now imagine not being allowed to form those friendships simply because of the colour of your skin. So much was taken from him, and he may have never fully understood why."

(Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Aside from the virtuous, empathetic and meaningful manner in which Timothy is able to relate to and write about this image, what really stands out to me here is how articulately he expresses his opinion. The clarity with which he writes here shows a vast development in comparison to earlier written works Timothy produced. This is further exhibited as he continues:

"The harsh reality is that there are forces dictating our relationships, our rights, and even our perceptions of freedom. History often repeats itself, with those in power orchestrating events and shaping narratives in ways we don't fully understand. This image ultimately left me with one question: How much of our lives do we truly choose, and how much is chosen for us?"

(Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

I notice the clear and unmissable development in Timothy's writing and in a later semi-structured interview, I ask Timothy if he could explain how it felt to be able to confidently articulate and share his feelings. Timothy reflects:

> "I'm gonna use a word that I don't really like and I don't use often. But again, it's the first word that's come to mind-liberating. Yeah. Because for me personally, there's nothing worse than not being able to communicate or get across the point that I'm trying to make, you get what I mean?"

(Timothy, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

Through participation in and with aesthetic experience and through active engagement in civic discourse, Timothy is beginning to encounter and realise an emancipatory aspect to his education. Learners showing an increased ability to articulate themselves is a recurring theme across the accounts of many research participants. Their spoken and written language is clearly developing throughout the time we had spent together in this study. By encouraging these learners to talk about their experiences, this directly influenced how they thought about their experiences and in turn, over time, this influenced how they spoke or wrote about their experiences. The condition of Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation* is *Civic Discourse* and the learner comments and written work above resonate with the concept of *Civic Discourse* and place it within the very nucleus of *Participation*. But further to this, we are seeing and continue to see as the interviews progress, these learners taking *Agency* and ownership of their education and their possible futures. These learners start to show a sense of hope and imagination as they start to imagine different futures for themselves and, in the context of this study, this leads to action. They start to believe that they can have positive futures, so they start to act in a way so as to work towards achieving their aspirations. Learner participant, David, starts to articulate how the choices he makes matter. He also anticipates that the impact he plans to make will come through thought and action, as he shares:

> "Well, as a human living in the present-day, I am holding the power to affect the future history-timeline. My effect will be inevitable just because I exist (at no fault of my own) and my effect will be via thought and action."

(David, *Learner Writing Task 2*)

Here we see David feeling empowered and ready to exercise *Agency* in his own right. He now has a sense that his future is in his own hands and that through considered thought and action he is able to create for himself a better path to a more optimistic and aspirational future. Furthermore, in David's comments, I hear echoes and see practical examples of Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *phronesis* (practical wisdom); where a person with supreme moral intellect is able to apply sound practical wisdom with virtuous deliberation (Carr 1995).

In a different interview, the same research participant brings up an article he had read on rising university fees:

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"And increasing it recently, we were paying about 20p to the
pound. It's gone up to about 80p to the pound for the students,
something stupid like that. Why are you making it harder for the
general people of your country, being the leaders? Why are
you suppressing as opposed to empowering?"

(David, *Focus Group 4B*)

Again, these comments present us with a confident and proactive David who wants
to be heard and have his voice play a part in the key debates that will directly impact
his own future. We also see the desire for parity and the push for justice coming
through, again. Furthermore, David's comments suggest that he considers university
as a viable and potential route for himself, for the first time. A notion that for the first
time in his life became a fixed aspiration for this learner (and one he would go on to
achieve). As discussed previously, David starts to imagine a better future for himself.
He therefore starts to express his aspirations and act in such a way so as to help him
to begin to take steps towards realising his vision. In short David begins to *exercise
Agency*.

In a separate interview, learner participant, Timothy, discusses the anti-war
sentiments of John Lennon's song 'Happy Xmas (War is Over)'. He links Lennon's
lyrics to the modern world and considers the wars currently being fought in Europe
and in the Middle-East. He starts to consider the futility of conflict, as he reflects:

"And now we look back and say 'Ah, maybe he did have a
point'. Well, 40 years too late, sort of thing, you get what I
mean? And again, it obviously doesn't mean that there's no
hope and we're all doomed because we all know that's not the
case, but it's like what is it gonna take for people really to wake
up and say 'we can't stand for certain things', you get what I
mean?"

(Timothy, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

Mixed in with Timothy's despair and the fact that these conflicts appear to him to be
so needless, there are also expressions of hope, moral strength and *Agency*.
Timothy no longer sees these world events as happening outside of him in a
situation in which he is powerless. But now he rather sees himself as a part of this
world – as an active agent in that world. He is both in the world and with the world
(Freire 1970). He is under no illusion that he is individually able to put an end to the
conflicts. Nevertheless, he realises and takes ownership of the fact that he is a part
of something much bigger. He calls for people to wake up and demand that they
won't stand for certain things. He is empowered and ready and prepared to
transform thought into action. Once again, this resonates with the form of knowledge
that Aristotle describes as *phronesis* (384-322 BC) whilst also exhibiting the
conditions necessary to realise Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation*.

In summary, data from learner comments, learner work, learner sourced images and
learner observation suggests that when learners are actively engaged and

participate in civic discourse they develop an awareness of the importance of inclusion, equity, justice and parity in education. In turn, this leads to learners being able to more articulately communicate their thoughts and take positive action, or *Agency*. Findings from the same data sets also resonate with Bernstein's *Pedagogic Device* which places a great deal of emphasis on enacting the *Pedagogic Right* of *Participation*. This data also echoes the form of knowledge which Aristotle (384-322 BC) describes as *phronesis,* as when learners combine considered thought with practical action, this enables them to individually and collectively exercise *Agency*. To this point, Greene (1995) draws attention to how a core aim of any educational programme must be to strive to, "build a community of persons who have a feeling of agency, who are ready to speak for themselves" (Greene 1995, P.42).

5.2.4 Theme 4: Energy/ Heightened Vitality

Finding 1: Aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention can unlock learners' imagination and lead to a sense of Heightened Vitality in the classroom.

Exploration of various forms of aesthetic experience is at the very heart of this study and has been the from the outset. As both a teacher and a researcher, I look to aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention, which I have employed in an attempt to re-engage disenfranchised learners, in the study of the acquisition and development of English language. Eisner (2002) notes that we, as human beings, start learning the moment we are born, through our senses and through experience. Through touch, sight and smell, we start to form valuable but ever evolving different kinds, or forms, of knowledge and ideas about our world around us. Although as we grow our understanding of culture and environment develops, we continue to use all of our senses and experience, even the subtlest of experience, to shape our perception of what our socio-cultural world and the environment in which it operates means to us. Eisner (2002, p. 1) states that, "We humans give simultaneously both a personal and a cultural imprint to what we experience; the relation between the two is inextricable". Throughout this study, I work to create the necessary conditions to put aesthetic experiences to work in supporting the on-going and inevitable learning process akin to the experiences of my learners. To this end I employ aesthetic experience (Dewey 2005, Eisner 2002, and Greene 1995) alongside Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device* as a way to enable and encourage learners to make connections with and across their socio-cultural worlds through language and their experiences of education.

To begin with, I ask learners if they could ever remember engaging in music, song lyrics, film, images or poetry in a way that had inspired learning, previously. I got little back from most participants from this question aside from a few memories of lessons that had stayed with learners for one reason or another. For example, learner participant, Timothy, shares a memory from his school years where during an English class, a movie clip had been used:

"We spent a few minutes watching this movie clip and we're all laughing. It was funny, and like action. And then after we watched it, without the teacher even saying anything we were just talking about the clip and just discussing it amongst ourselves. And then had a task, just from that."

(Timothy, *Focus Group 1A*)

As we further explore pedagogy with and through aesthetic experiences in this study, learners begin to draw upon their own experiences as a method of communicating with the art form. Richard, a learner participant who had struggled for years to find a way to meaningfully engage with the learning content of the GCSE English Language curriculum, shares this reflection of using his own language choice and lived experiences as a source of inspiration. He writes:

"Yeah, I could probably write a whole, probably not a whole story, but a whole few paragraphs about it and how it kind of conjoined with my life, or intertwined, so yeah."

(Richard, *Focus Group 2D*)

Here, we start to see signs that these learners are gaining access to expressing their experiences and discussing and representing these experiences for themselves and for each other. Data from this study suggest that these learners had repeatedly been denied access to their *Pedagogic Rights* and that this was something they needed in supporting their education and in their acquisition and development of English Language. The absence of these *Pedagogic Rights* is something that these students are now aware of and also something they now actively seek. The ability to relate the learning content of the GCSE English Language Curriculum to their own lives mattered to these learners when they were at school. It still matters to them now.

In a later meeting, I ask Richard to reflect on how it felt to complete a writing task I had set when he was able to bring language from his own world into the learning process. He shares:

"Kind of exciting because I'm just writing and I don't have to worry about anything, like it's just coming to my head and I'm just writing. It's kind of exciting and fun at the same time."

(Richard, *Focus Group 3D*)

Richard is finally able to write without unnecessary constraints as he is able to write about themes which mean something to him and which he can relate to his own lived experience. This is a recurring theme across the accounts of the experiences of many research participants as they are all eager to share with both me and their peers, how they can see elements of their life in the art-based prompt/ aesthetic experience they had selected to help them to express their experience. In a separate meeting, learner participant, Timothy, reflects on using aesthetic experience in the form of music and song lyrics as a way to engage in the study of language:

"I might go home and I might put on a song or put on an artist that I like, and I'm listening to the song, and obviously enjoying the music, but also listening to the words and I feel like that relates more to me than most of the stuff I might be learning in English or whatever it is."

(Timothy, *Focus Group 2B*)

As with Richard's comment above, Timothy puts the emphasis on how through music, he is able to relate to words in a way that he has so far been unable to in English Language lessons. As a part of this study, learner participants Billy and David both did some writing about a song titled 'Leslie' by the London-based rapper, Dave. Both learners saw this experience as more than just listening to a song. Through the lyrics, they both see an entire story unfolding in their mind's eye. A story that they are enthused to talk and write about after the fact. Billy (Focus Group 5B) comments, "It was a good song and then it makes you think a lot. Because it literally is a story. Yeah, I think music is a good way to express things." In a later meeting, I asked Billy to reflect on how he felt carrying out a writing task using such music as inspiration. He shares:

"I was engaged the whole time because I enjoyed the sound of the song like the music, the ad libs, the rapper, the beat, the flow, everything. And then I was also engaged because of the lyrics, specifically how they caught my ear."

(Billy, *Focus Group 6A*)

During the same conversation about the same song, David shares, "This song, Leslie, and the idea of a song that tells you a story, I really, really love it." David's choice of words clearly shows a high level of engagement, energy and a distinct sense of Dewey's (2011) *Heightened Vitality.* David continues, "Because you're painting the picture and creating your own images and you're watching a movie." Through this song David encountered a range of learning experiences and although the song was the trigger for these experiences, the images and the movie that followed are all of David's own creation. Through this aesthetic experience, David is able to create his own understanding of what the song means to him. He is able to express his experiences and form his own representation of the lyrics, in his mind. Eisner (2002) tells us that:

"Concepts are distilled images in any sensory form or combination of forms that are used to represent the particulars of experience. With concepts we can do two things that may very well be unique to our species: we can imagine possibilities we have not encountered, and we can try to create, in the public sphere, the new possibilities we have imagined in the private precincts of our consciousness."

(Eisner 2002, p. 3)

The aesthetic experiences we explore within this study 'speak' to the learner participants. Art forms are created to do just that. Whether it be music, song lyrics, image or poetry, within the art we find expressions of experience and as human beings, our natural instinct is to talk about these experiences and make sense of them with others. But what my learner participants start to realise is that they could 'think' and they could think deeply, critically and well – with each other and for themselves. They could form reasoned, interesting and insightful interpretations from these aesthetic experiences and form new understandings of themselves and their respective worlds out loud and together. This resonates with Gadamer's (2014) concept of a *Fusion of Horizons*. Furthermore, Eisner (2002) foregrounds how an arts-based curriculum can assist learners in making connections, sharing perspectives and establishing symbiotic relationships which mutual enrichment:

> "We develop, in part, by responding to the contributions of others, and in turn we provide others with material to which they respond. The relationship, at its best, is symbiotic. Thus, the social contribution of the educational process is to make it possible for individuals to create symbiotic relationships with others through the development of their distinctive and complementary abilities and in doing so to enrich one another's lives".

> (Eisner 2002, p. 7)

I start to see evidence of Eisner's symbiotic relationship form amongst my learner participants. David (Focus Group 2B) remarks on a comment made by another learner participant and reflects, "He said it and I was like 'Wow. Okay, I get what you're saying there'. Because I've made my own personal connection." My learner participants are moving past the initial stages of working with aesthetic experiences, during which they are simply enjoying bringing their own music and their own language into their education to express their experiences and thoughts. Learner participants in the study are now connecting with and learning from me and from each other on a deeper level. They are reconnecting with the process of learning through experience. Through these experiences they are creating art themselves, whether that art be in literary form in written texts or through distilled visual, aural images etc. In the process they are creating Eisner's vision of a symbiotic relationship. In engaging with and re-creating the art form through their own interpretation and understanding of the artefact and by connecting these new forms of understanding to their own unique lived experience, they change and deepen their understanding of both. Furthermore, they engage in open discussion with people they trust and want to be with in a place where they feel safe, included and respected as a unique person – a place in which they can be authentically present in themselves – a place where they can, and do use their imaginations. Dewey (2005, p. 19) states, "Experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ."

Experimentation with aesthetic experiences through music, visual and aural image, song lyrics, poems and stories is used throughout this study regularly, not only to

create opportunities for learners to engage with language but also to encourage them to create connections with each other. Learner participant, Billy, suggests the use of image for learning purposes during a Focus Group meeting:

> "I reckon pictures would also work, because I think everyone has their own specific ways of learning better and some people would prefer pictures. Some people prefer music, some people prefer movies. I think they're all inclusive and as long as it's relevant content, then it could definitely be used."

> (Billy, *Focus Group 7A*)

Once again, we see the importance of the learning content being relevant to the lives of the learner participants. To achieve this, I ask learners to bring an image to a focus group meeting with them. We discussed the images and then I asked the learner participants to complete a writing task using their chosen images as prompts. Learner participant, David, brought with him some images which he created himself (see Appendix Item 7). David has taken several photographs of a little patch of grass surrounded by a housing estate. David has grown up on this housing estate and the little patch of grass represents a safe haven to him. Somewhere he walks his dog and meets his friends. Also, somewhere he sprinkles wildflower seeds as he loves to see this patch of grass bloom to life in the Spring before the local council cut the grass short for the summer. David shares:

> "When you feel an emotion through an image, like when you feel an emotion any time, it's personal. Again, it's not just because the images are of my patch of grass that I really like, it's just you can only relate to stuff personally through personal experience."

> (David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

Like Billy's comment above, David asserts that his pictures of the patch of grass may not seem to be much to other people but because he can relate so many personal experiences and memories to this particular location, he feels strong emotions towards the image and therefore feels he is able to discuss and write about the image, confidently and with meaning. Whilst writing about this same patch of grass after our meeting, David (Learner Writing Task 3) insightfully reflects, "It may just be a small patch of grass but the Mona Lisa was just a painting until it resonated and meant something to someone". David is showing a sense of place with his patch of grass. The space speaks to him. He belongs there. He is peaceful there. For David, this place sparks memories of moments in his life. The image of the space is serving the purpose of evoking those memories and images in his mind. Through his writing, the image comes to life. He is seeing and experiencing this space. He is giving it a voice. For me, this is Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality* in action in an educational setting.

I ask David (Semi-Structured Interview 2) how it feels to really be able to relate to the learning content on a personal level and to be able to share that with others, he

reflects, "A sudden realisation or the connection of two dots. This is how it makes me feel... a bit of a 'Whoa…'." Furthermore, when reflecting on working with images and using visuals as a way of engaging with language and forming expression, David enthusiastically comments, "I love that so much. That was brilliant. That was brilliant. I really enjoyed that."

Another learner participant, Timothy, shares two separate images (see Appendix Item 8). The first was a picture of John Lennon's blood-stained glasses, after he had been murdered. An image his wife, Yoko Ono, released to show the horrors of gun violence. The second image he shares is a picture of children of different cultural heritage backgrounds playing together after segregation in schools in the USA was abolished in 1954. For Timothy, these images represent more than a pleasing or an interesting visual image, they speak to him and evoke an emotional response (Barone and Eisner 2012). Timothy (Learner Writing Task 3) writes, "This photo captivated me because of the powerful emotions it evoked immediately". The word, 'captivated' shows that Timothy is experiencing a strong, and potentially perception (or mind) altering (Eisner 2002), response to this image. When discussing the image of John Lennon's glasses, Timothy uses the word "haunting" to describe the emotion the picture is eliciting within him before going on to discuss the shocking statistics of US gun violence and how the significance of this image has deepened for him as his perspective changes and he forms a deeper understanding through critical thinking. He poetically shares:

> "This new perspective deepened the image's significance for me—it's as though their blood cries out from the ground just as John's blood cried out to the world."

> (Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3)*

When using aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device, we, as educators, can never be sure of how our learners will respond. A teacher cannot (and arguably should not) teach a "correct" response to engagement with artistic artefact or expression. But therein lies the potential power that aesthetic experiences have in unlocking new perspectives, understandings, and even new worlds for our learners. Here, Timothy is thinking aesthetically. Timothy is 'haunted' by this image. The image keeps coming back to him because of its, as Timothy tells us, "raw depiction of our shared human condition". We are seeing Eisner's (2002) concept of distilled images in action. The image keeps coming back to 'haunt' Timothy. But Eisner tells us that the distilled image is a concept, therefore it's the concept that keeps coming back to Timothy and through this, he moves way beyond the image as he shapes his perspective on his world, his place in the world and his possible future in his world. Once again here, we underscore the importance of the *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* in our learner's education but moreover, we see this learner experiencing Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality* and the clear links between Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality*.

Lerner participant, David, powerfully captures the very essence of using aesthetic experience to realise imagination and a sense of *Heightened Vitality* in learners and how these learning experiences enabled these students to access their *Pedagogic*

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Rights, on this occasion through a language task completed for this study. He reflects:

> "The Tasks and questions Mark posed to us never had a correct answer, it was about the way in which I perceived it so in turn made it a lot easier for me to express where my brain goes, whether that was written or verbal. Upon completing tasks he would give us the opportunity to say why we gave our answers and would leave room for open conversation and an opportunity to share thoughts and opinions on the subject at hand which more often than not ended in me feeling comfortable, happy, intrigued and content in my thoughts, maybe even a little pride too."

(David, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Across all learner participants who engaged in aesthetic experience to enhance their study of language in this thesis, I can identify a sense of *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005), a sense of wide-awakeness (Greene 1995). To reiterate, I am not using aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device in this study to teach or train students to make a particular response, share a particular idea, or to find a particular way of looking at something. The music or images we engage with in this study do not have a desired response or outcome. In this study, engaging in aesthetic experience elicits a response from the learner, but the response is always unique to each individual learner. Seeing other people creating their own responses and seeing other people's differing responses is a celebration of difference in ways seeing and accepting and valuing difference. In other words, students realise that it is not only okay but also good to be different. This takes us back to the critical incident shared in the text box at the start of this chapter where learner participant, David, engages with the views of a prominent right-wing commentator. Education through aesthetic experience can be emancipatory. However, David's mind is also opened to less than virtuous ideas through aesthetic experience. The central point here, is that when David talks about this with the group who had also had an emancipatory experience of education through this study, he starts to see the flaws in the political argument that he had thought seemed plausible in the beginning. That took courage and it happened because David's mind was open to different perspectives. As discussed above, another important factor of influence here is that David is able to share his thoughts, experiences and ideas in open and democratic discussion where argument construction and thinking can be brought, "… out into the public world where ethical judgement can get at it" (Dewey cited in Geertz 2000, p. 21).

Data from learner observation, learner comments, learner images and learner writing tasks coalesce where they reveal how aesthetic experience, when purposefully employed as a pedagogic intervention, can unlock learners' imagination which leads to a sense of *Heightened Vitality* which, when shared in a spirit of *Communitas,* can create conditions in which students are able to think for themselves and with each other in circumstances where competing concepts, theories, ideas, perceptions and prejudices can be held up to scrutiny in the light of reason and evidence in open and democratic discussion.

Finding 2: Aesthetic experience can encourage learners to share interpretations of themselves, their worlds and their possible futures which can lead to an enhanced perception and new and unique learning opportunities.

As discussed above in Finding 1 of this theme, this study shows some remarkable results of using aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention. Finding 1 discusses how using aesthetic experience in this way can lead to a sense of *Heightened Vitality* in learners as they engage in open and democratic discussion regarding competing concepts, theories, ideas, perceptions and prejudices, both within and outside of their lives in education. However, another finding emerges from this theme where the focus is firmly upon how aesthetic experience can encourage learners to share their interpretations of themselves or their worlds.

The foundation of this finding is established in the same way as in Finding 1; learners showing a new sense of energy and vitality and a need to collaborate or connect with each other, through the use of aesthetic experience. Learner participant, David, reflects:

> "I can't describe it other than a personal resonation and when something's personal It's different. It's like it's a feeling of euphoria. It's like, Wow, I've been amazed and I want to share this information now. Because I want to go tell my friend, like 'Look read this'."

(David, *Focus Group 2B*)

Once again, we see the same sense of a *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005) and new levels of energy begin to manifest themselves in David's words. However, it is important to note that something else is also happening. The learner participants are beginning to form different interpretations of themselves and the things that are happening around them. In a focus group meeting, David brings up the topic of language and, more specifically, how some people are judged on the way they use language:

> "If you're in a room, loads of people and suits talking formally, I know that's a very basic example, but it can make you feel so uncomfortable and unable to express yourself. But if I knew how to mingle with them, it wouldn't be a problem. And like we've been saying earlier, comprehending and understanding, I'm saying the same thing and having the same expression, the same opinion, just differently".

(David, *Focus Group 4B*)

For the first time in this study, David is seeing himself from outside of his own perspective in a world view where he shares a perspective or a reflection on how he has felt in the past about the way he uses language, specifically when in a less familiar setting. David also recognises that the quality or content of what he is saying

in these situations may be of no difference to the quality or content of what others are saying but the way in which he naturally expresses himself sometimes comes with a less favourable judgement. In a later semi-structured Interview when only David and I are present, David continues with his interpretation of himself in these environments and comments:

> "Because we're social creatures. So, all you're doing is seeking approval all the time, even if you don't realise it, and to a certain degree, everyone will say I don't care what anyone else thinks but that's just ego talking because you do… you just do. It's wired in your brain, but I would say that the validation and approval means more from certain people than others."

<div align="right">(David, Semi-Structured Interview 2)</div>

David's interpretation of himself and understanding of how he behaves in different socio-cultural situations is evolving. David is honest and transparent as he acknowledges and shares that the opinions of others do matter to him. When engaging in an aesthetic experience in the form of an image of a photograph of a policeman chasing what appears at first to be a criminal, Timothy (Focus Group 7B) reflects that making snap judgements when confronted by images like this one means, " … that we're more bad as human beings than we choose to recognise". Through engagement in this study and contact with aesthetic experience, Timothy goes on to reflect "I have found myself being very conscious". Here, this learner participant is analysing the way in which he interprets himself and his own thought process and is willing to share these interpretations with the group.

Learner participant, Spud, engages in a discussion about why we have to study certain content in our education and why we have to a follow a set standard of rules and structure in education, as he shares:

> "Yeah, because that's how it works in real life, right? In real life, you have to obviously have to follow a certain set of rules, or you'll get fired, but you can make mistakes".

<div align="right">(Spud, Focus Group 1B)</div>

Spud compares the world of education to 'real life' and the life of full-time work as he reveals how he sees a certain set of rules being a consistent factor throughout the different stages of life. Some of these comments may not seem to be ground-breaking, but through aesthetic experience, learners are sharing their perceptions and interpretations of the world and once these perceptions are shared, there are opportunities for personal growth and learning experiences through and with others by having these interpretations challenged and/ or built upon as they are met with other perspectives. Comments such as Spud's, above, lead other learner participants to offer perspectives, as David, shares, "There has to be a hierarchy. So there has to be leaders." Perspectives are discussed and learning opportunities that require learners to think critically, present themselves.

To provide another example of this, I return to learner participant, Timothy, and his use of the John Lennon song 'Happy Xmas (War is Over)'. Through meaningful engagement in aesthetic experience, Timothy (Focus Group 6B) feels confident enough to share his perspective on the conflict currently being fought between Russia and Ukraine, as he reflects, "How many of these people are fighting even right now? How many actually know what they're doing or why they're actually doing it?". Here, Timothy interprets the war in Europe from his own perspective but once again opens up a space for dialogue and discussions. Learning opportunities created by the learner which can lead to meaningful and personal growth.

Learner participant, David, while discussing the images he created of the patch of grass which sits at the bottom of the housing estate he lives in, shares his interpretation of modern London housing:

> "They build beehives now. That's what I call them, I call tower blocks beehives because you've got someone living there, you've got someone living there and you've got someone living there, all around you. And what they call a green space now is absolutely pathetic. It's like this little tiny patch of grass at the bottom. Imagine everyone wanted to come out of their block and sunbathe on the grass. It is physically impossible to get two towels on it."

> (David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

David sharing his opinion on London housing and his perception that developers are not mindful of the quality of living afforded to future residents once again offers us as educators an insightful lens to view inside David's world, potentially enabling us to connect with David on a deeper educational level but also, David invites his fellow research participants into the discussion so they too can share their opinions and reflections about the places where they live. David goes on to interpret the meaning of a song he was discussing with regards to the community in which he lives.

> "I feel like he appealed to his audience, definitely and I don't want to be stereotypical but the lower-class places are where this kind of disturbance happens most often because everyone's lost out here."

> (David, *Focus Group 5B*)

Once again, David's interpretation of living in London in one of the more challenging socio-economic parts of the city, and his dystopian depiction of his community as being 'lost', offer educators valuable insights into our learners' worlds but also create opportunities for other learners to share or form their own unique interpretations of themselves and their worlds. Opportunities which, in my experience of working in education, are few and far between as many Study Programmes have an innate tendency to treat something purely private or personal to our learners as separate and not intrinsically connected with Study Programme material (Dewey, 2011).

Through this research study and through the use of the purposeful employment of aesthetic experiences as a pedagogic device, these learner participants have had access to their *Pedagogic Rights* and to democratic discussion of their social-cultural lives inside an educational environment for what might be the first time in their lives. In the context of this study, this has led to learner participants expressing themselves in open, honest and meaningful ways which have enriched the educational process, embraced the emotional experience of learning and led to purposeful discussions, connections and learning opportunities between learners with their peers and with myself. Learner participant, David (Learner Writing Task 3), highlights, "This research project has really given me a medium to think and express with complete freedom which you can't seem to do anywhere else."

Data from learner comments, learner observation and learner writing tasks show that the use of aesthetic experience as a purposeful pedagogic device can encourage learners to share interpretations of themselves, their worlds and both their imaginings and hopes for their possible futures which can lead to new and unique learning opportunities.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Fusion of Horizons

Finding 1: Through the purposeful use of aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device, learners are able to fuse their horizons with the horizons of others. This leads to transformative encounters and the broadening, altering and making of their minds (Eisner 2002) whilst also breaking down boundaries learners may have encountered in their education previously.

The codes and sub-themes which sit beneath this theme are all closely linked to the theme of Energy/ *Heightened Vitality.* So much so that many of them bounced from one theme to the other or continue to sit somewhat awkwardly between the two. Therefore, this theme also has the use of aesthetic experience as its nucleus. However, the difference here is that through the purposeful use of aesthetic experience, we start to see examples of learners fusing their own lived experience with the lived experience of others, be that through the experiences and expressions of other learner participants and/ or through the experiences and expressions of other writers, or artists. As with the previous theme, the genesis of this phenomenon appears to originate in the initial need for the learning material to be meaningful in relation to the lived experiences of learners in order to resonate with the socio-cultural lives of the learners. In the context of this study, learners were able to 'see' their own lives through music almost instantly. Learners participant, Billy (Focus Group 6A), when discussing a song he brought in to share with the group, comments, "There's a lot of emotion in it and every lyric he says is from the heart like he means everything he says". More than simply connecting with the song, here Billy is connecting with the emotion and the lived experience of the artist. The fact that the artist appears to mean the words they are saying resonates with Billy's experience and therefore, although it might not directly be Billy's own experience, he is able to see enough of himself in the lyrics to be able to fuse his horizon (Gadamer 2014) with that of the musician. As we explore in Theme 3, Finding 2, Billy is able to 'see' his own unique experience of education through a rap song by the musician Lil' Baby, even though the song was about police brutality and not about education at

all. To Billy, this song resonates with his personal experience of education as the lyrics enabled him access, not only to Lil' Baby's world, but also access to the 'educational violence' or 'educational brutality" he experiences in his own world, through a different lens. To return to Theme 3, briefly, Billy tells us that "It's relatable. But not relatable in the way he's talking about it".

Learner participant, David, shows that a fusion of horizons is not limited to relating to another viewpoint through song. David reflects on a book he read as part of a reading task I had set my learner participants, as he shares:

> "It's just a quote that resonated with me because of the whole concept of the book and this, like kind of sums it up, and it's 'Man has all power to act, but his power ends with the act committed' (*sic*)."

> (David, *Focus Group 2B*)

Through the book David was reading, and through the quote he shares in particular, David is able to fuse his own viewpoint with the viewpoint of the author (Gadamer 2014). What David is experiencing here is beautifully captured by Greene (1995) as she draws inspiration from Sartre:

> "Writer and reader both are responsible for the universe brought into being through the act of reading. For Sartre, that means a universe supported by the joint effort of two freedoms- the reader's and the writer's."

> (Greene 1995, p. 92)

As Greene points out, through engagement with the art form, in this case a book, a new universe is brought into being. A universe independent of the writer's or the reader's, as it is a representation of both intentions and both interpretations. By reading this book, David has fused his horizon with that of the reader and created a new universe in which he can form his own understanding of his identity. Greene (1995, p. 92) calls this "futuring". The act of engaging in a new perspective to move beyond what is already there into something new. Greene (1995, p. 92) highlights that the aim of this is to "create identity in the light of what might be." To revisit Theme 2, Finding 1, David's experiences resonate with this sentiment deeply as he shares, "Everyone can relate to something, if you compare it to a personal experience". Not being familiar with Gadamer's concept of a *Fusion of Horizons*, David (Semi-Structured Interview 2) defines this feeling in his own unique, and no less meaningful way, "it's a realisation and the connection of two dots, is the way I see it."

Another example of this can be found through learner participant, Timothy, as he shares the emotional experience he had when listening to a song by rap artist, Dave. Timothy (Focus Group 5B) reflects, "you're really going into your mind's eye listening to the song. I mean you really have to think about what's being said, it paints a picture in your mind regardless." Again, we see echoes of the distilled images

aesthetic experience creates in our minds, sparking imagination and *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2011) as explored in Theme 4, but Timothy goes onto show that whilst listening to that song, he was able to fuse the way he felt with the words of the artist, as he shares:

> "I think what he was trying to portray and what he was trying to get through and what I feel listening to the song, I think everything that I felt was embodied in that song and rightfully so."

> (Timothy, *Focus Group 5B*)

Timothy feels that his emotions are "embodied" by the artist, as if the song is a representation of what he was feeling in that moment. Timothy also adds "rightfully so", as if he feels a sense of justification that his feelings are valid and this song confirms that he is not alone as he is able to fuse with another mind. Also, as with David, we see Timothy fusing with the viewpoint of another through aesthetic experience to co-create a new universe, one that belongs to two freedoms, as he seeks to create his identity in this universe of new possibilities (Greene 1995). This is where we start to see transformative encounters take place. The power that these experiences have on these learners is not be underestimated. Timothy is in deep thought about the feelings he experienced when listening to this song as he reflects, "I listened to it once and I was like, woah. I had to let it sink in". Aesthetic experience moves beyond a fun or engaging lesson activity and into an encounter with an art form that has the potential to be transformational. Experiences which Greene (1995, p. 94) highlights, enable us to, "look from the other side of the looking glass, to begin to feel those multiple realities or provinces of meaning that mark lived experience in the world."

Other research participants have similar experiences of fusing with the viewpoint of a musician and finding new worlds from their interpretations. Learner participant, Billy, shares an experience he had after one of our research meetings when he went home and put some music on, as he reflects:

> "When I was listening to that song through my speaker and then I heard that line and I was like, I never even heard that the first time. I heard it and I was 'wow' like, the wordplay is really good."
> (Billy, *Focus Group 6A*)

Through fusing with the meaning of this song, Billy is able to find new meaning in the words which he had not made a connection with before. He is having an aesthetic experience, one which has the power to transform him. An experience which Greene (1995, p. 104) describes as, "a coming together of the composer's stream of consciousness with the listener's". However, for learner participants in this study, experiences of fusing with horizons or finding Greene's (1995) *provinces of meaning* are not limited to interactions with books, music or song lyrics. Learner participant, Timothy, reflects on how he felt when he first saw the image of John Lennon's blood-stained glasses, that he brought in to discuss with the group:

"So, I remember when I first saw the photo, it actually kind of made me uncomfortable. Looking ahead knowing what it represents, especially knowing what they both stood for and I guess because she's still alive now, stands for as well, I don't know if irony is the right word, but the irony of it is… I don't know man, it's sad and it may be uncomfortable to look at, but you know what, it's real and this is the reality."

(Timothy, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

Although the image was shocking for Timothy, as I'm sure it would be to most regardless of whether they were a fan of Lennon's music or not, he still finds a certain pleasure in engaging with the image. This is not a dark pleasure, but the pleasure we all feel when we encounter art that bursts into our lives and really 'speaks' to us. Greene (1995) defines this as a consciousness of wonder:

"At once, and strangely, viewers are left with an expanded vision, with a consciousness of wonder and the pleasure only attainable when living beings lend their lives to works of art and bring the works into being in their own experience."

(Greene 1995, p. 102)

Timothy's comments above suggest that he is experiencing this consciousness of wonder. He lends himself to this image and in return he feels the pleasure of seeing the art through his own lived experience. Through this encounter, his notion of identity and what he sees as his future identity, can transform. Timothy (Focus Group 5B) himself encouraged others in one of our meetings to, "Broaden your horizon. Open up your ears."

Once these learner participants experience a *Fusion of Horizons* (Gadamer 2014) through engaging with aesthetic experience, I notice that they gradually become more open to each other's viewpoint and as the study progressed, they become more comfortable sharing ideas and more adept at learning from each other. The fusing of horizons is happening in the group meetings with or without the aesthetic experience as a trigger. In a semi-structured Interview, I ask learner participant, Timothy, to reflect on a group discussion we had recently. He shares that, "Ah, I love that feeling. Yeah. Yeah. different mindsets, different perspectives. Even stuff that I don't necessarily agree with or whatever." Timothy is clearly enjoying using the research meetings as a place to share opinions and fuse perspectives. Billy, in a separate meeting, echoes Timothy's recognition of the importance of learning from each other as he shares, "Yeah. I do also believe that other people's opinions do help influence your opinion as well because you can combat their opinions and also agree." Learner participant David shares his reflection on the same theme:

"When I'm having conversations, when I'm talking to people, I like to think that I've got good people skills, and when I'm connecting with people per se and they're telling me an

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> experience, I compare it to something that would have given
> me the same emotional reaction so I can empathise."

<p align="right">(David, Focus Group 4B)</p>

Here, David neatly sums up how Gadamer's (2014) *Fusion of Horizons* is a process of forming our own identity and understanding of the world through contact with others. Greene (1995, p. 197) reminds us that "individuality is constituted by membership." Throughout this study, it is the individuality of each research participant that shines the brightest but it is also only through connection with others and the community of the participants that each bulb of individuality is able to flourish brightly.

A final point to make on this theme is the learners' ability to engage with a concept or some learning material which may have at one point, seemed out of reach. To re-visit Chapter 2 briefly, none of us think on a horizon that is completely unique and therefore, we are all capable of engaging with a range of learning content, if we are able to make a connection between that learning content, and our own lived experience (Zimmerman 2015). It is through a *Fusion of Horizons* (Gadamer 2014) that the learner participants who took part in this study show that they are capable of engaging with different types of learning content if they are can see how that content resonates with their own lives and/ or lived experiences. In an early meeting (Focus Group 2B), I attempt to make some connection between learner participant David and the works of William Shakespeare. As has been discussed, through David's experiences of learning the English Language in formal education, he has come to see Shakespeare as the antithesis of everything that is good about language. I encourage David to see Romeo and Juliet not as a type of language that is difficult to access, but as a story of two families who are at war and a love story between two people on different sides of the conflict. I encourage him to relate the families who have a grievance to any similar examples he may have known through his own lived experience or if not, to a similar topic that he might have seen played out on television. My success was limited at first but David did at least reflect that, "If someone showed me that in school and there was a teacher articulate enough to break it down in such a way, I think that would be so helpful". In a later semi-Structured Interview, David brought up our discussion on Shakespeare as he had clearly been doing some thinking about it. This time he shares:

> "And at the same time as you building your language skills,
> learning about these similar stories to Romeo and Juliet,
> different families, and whatnot, it could be anything, you are
> learning about real world situations and things that actually
> happen which is educational. And resourceful at the same
> time."

<p align="right">(David, Semi-Structured Interview 1)</p>

Here we see that David's long-standing dislike of the works of Shakespeare is showing signs of fading as he has clearly gone away and thought about our conversation. He makes a connection between the Montague/ Capulet conflict and

an experience that made more sense to him as per his own lived experience and, in doing this, he becomes more able to fuse his horizon with the viewpoint of William Shakespeare and recreate the work of Romeo and Juliet in his own light, in a way that makes sense to him. Now, David has created a new universe inside his mind. A universe co-created between himself and William Shakespeare, both writer and reader. As Greene (1995, p. 102) highlights previously, David is bringing the work of Shakespeare, "into being in their own experience." We also have reason to hope that in future, David will not feel the exclusion, intimidation or disconnect with language forms that may not seem compatible with him at first sight, as he reflects:

> "And I feel like you could do that with anything, and not truly understand an individual's mindset or what they're going through, but I find it really useful to think of something that would give me that emotional reaction and compare it to what mine would be like so you can get on their level and connect."

> (David, *Focus Group 4B)*

Also, we see here through the comments of David and the comments made by other learner participants previously, the work that Gadamer's (2014) *Fusion of Horizons*, combined with the purposeful employment of aesthetic experience as a *Pedagogic Device*, can do in the breaking down of Bernstein's (1996) *Boundaries* and in enabling students to begin to access their *Pedagogic Rights.* In creating new versions of themselves by fusing their horizons with the horizons and viewpoints of others, these learners are no longer defined by or shackled to their past experiences of education. They are now able to imagine new and exciting futures for themselves. As when learner participant, Billy, discusses his experiences of sharing views with others in this study, he also highlights how he has created a new outlook on what the English Language means to him:

> "Throughout the meetings I have understood other people's viewpoint on English language. More importantly I discovered my view on English language GCSE, this is that learning is more significant through images than words."

> (Billy, *Learner Writing Task 3)*

In the context of this study, data from learner observation, learner writing tasks and learner comments show that using aesthetic experience as a purposeful *Pedagogic Device* can enable learners to fuse their horizons with the horizons of others in ways which can lead to transformative encounters and the broadening of their minds. This resonates closely with the works of Gadamer (2014) and Greene (1995), however it also underscores the intrinsic link between Gadamer's (2014) concept of a *Fusion of Horizons* and Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights* and *Pedagogic Device* by illustrating the work that aesthetic experience can do in breaking down Bernstein's (1996) *boundaries*, allowing learners to create new identities in which they are no longer defined by or imprisoned by their past experiences. Furthermore, this finding supports the findings in other themes in this study, that suggest using aesthetic experience as a purposeful pedagogic intervention (or *Pedagogic Device)* enables

and encourages learners to access to their *Pedagogic Rights* in practical, meaningful and powerful educative ways

5.2.6 Theme 6: Disillusionment/ Oppression

Finding 1: For many learners from particular socio-cultural backgrounds, education is an oppressive and diminishing experience, as opposed to an emancipatory one.

From the very outset of the process of collecting data for this research study, learner comments in focus groups and semi-structured interviews echo the themes of diminishment, isolation, frustration, fatigue and even oppression and 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1977) when they speak about their experiences of learning language in education. The extent of learner participants' discontent is evident throughout the study. However, later in the study, comments evolve from discussing what was, to what might be.

A sub-theme titled 'Frustration' was one of the most commonly spotted codes across all data sets in this study and many of the comments related to learners' experiences of sitting the English Language GCSE exam. Learner participant, MI, shares:

> "If you're making a mistake but you don't know what mistake you've done. How can you improve? Let's say you said write a side of A4 and gave me a load of criteria, let's say about six/ seven criteria, and I've done them all and you say 'oh, you failed'. What criteria did I not meet? What criteria did I miss out?"

> (MI, *Focus Group 1B*)

MI is clearly frustrated with the result of his GCSE exam but moreover, the fact that he did not get a breakdown of where he dropped marks leaves him feeling deflated and confused. Learner participant, Spud (Focus Group 1B), is also keen to talk about his experiences of sitting the paper-based exams, as he reflects, "The exam is very, very boring and very stressful and some people just give up and just sleep through the exam". I am aware that some might interpret a learner choosing to sleep through their exam as a learner who lacks motivation and is intent of self-sabotage. However, getting to know these learner participants, as I have done through this research study, comments and acts such as these as verbal and physical manifestations of feeling marginalised, excluded and diminished for years in education and stem from a need to escape a demeaning, diminishing and damaging experience in which confidence and hope are absent. Learners who choose to sleep through exams may be viewed as expressing the ultimate protest against meaningless exam criteria that fails to recognise that these learners are being denied their *Pedagogic Rights* by the very criteria, curriculum content and assessment instruments through which their learning, achievements and grasp of the English Language are being measured in examinations. Another exam-based comment loaded with frustration and exacerbation comes from learner participant, David, who shares:

> "I read that question and left the exam hall resulting in my
> English GCSE grade being an X. In today's society, having no
> GCSEs deems you illiterate and unfit for the professional
> workplace".

<div align="right">(David, Learner Writing Task 3)</div>

Again, we see an act of self-sabotage and a bid to escape a demeaning, diminishing and damaging experience from a learner who left the exam room accepting his fate of getting an unmarked grade in his English Language GCSE exam. As above, knowing David's ability to use language proficiently, as I do, I see this act as a cry for help or a plea to authority figures to re-think the instrumental, socio-economic class-biased, linear, constrictive and instrumental way we permit learners to use and apply their skill with the English language. However, this comment from David goes beyond his immediate frustration of trying to exhibit his skill with language in what he feels to be a very linear way, to also reflect his feelings of inadequacy and the deep metaphorical scar he carries, inflicted on him by the finality of the English Language paper-based exam system. Comments such as these keep coming up as our meetings progress. Returning to learner participant, Spud, he reflects on the immense pressure he feels in the kind of environment synonymous with a GCSE paper-based exam:

> "I think also there's the pressure like if you want time in your
> GCSE, because you go into a massive hall and there's just a
> timer. That adds pressure to you. So, you being under pressure
> and having to write under that stress and stuff, that doesn't, that
> doesn't really help you."

<div align="right">(Spud, Focus Group 1B)</div>

The aspect of added time pressure and a feeling of being intimidated by the exam is also mentioned by learner participant, Richard (Focus Group 2D), as he shares, "Some people are more faster than others, in that sense, some people just speed through things while some people are just quite slow". The element of pressure and stress was once more emphasised by David (Focus Group 4B) who reflects, "All of my GCSE exams stressed me out, like really bad". Finally, learner participant, Richard reflects on how all of the work he has put into studying language in education comes down to this one high-stakes, 'penalty shoot-out' moment in an exam hall as he remembers, "I don't know, it just comes to exams right? I just struggled a lot".

However, comments of frustration and disillusionment were not by any means limited to learner recollections of exams. Another frequent sub-theme identified by me and my Multiple Coders concerned being put into sets while at school. Learner participant, Spud (Focus Group 1B), shares, "I was in set five and I've never been really good at English". Learners relating their ability to use the English language to the set to which they were labelled and consigned to in school was discussed by multiple participants and it was apparent that this pigeon-holing or branding of learners has had a long-lasting and detrimental effect on both their confidence in

expressing themselves and the way they approach the study of language as they move from school and into FE. Learner participant, BN, recalls:

> "Kind of makes you feel, kind of doubt my ability more. It's like they're saying, they've obviously put me in the set for a reason, so it stops me working to the best of my ability".

<div align="right">(BN, Focus Group 1B)</div>

Clearly for BN and other learner participants, being branded with a low set number continues to prohibit his ability to believe that he is capable of using language effectively. This echoes back to my own experience, shared in Chapter 1, of being labelled as "not academic" in my own school years. There is a sense of fragility to many, if not all learners as they endeavour to grasp the mechanisations of the educational system they find themselves in at a young age. The impressions educators and those in positions of power bestow on learners at this young age are both long-lasting and character forming. This can be hugely beneficial when learners have positive early experiences of education but on the other side of coin, we have learners such as BN (branded as "non-academic", "not bright", "slow" or "failures") whose experiences come with a burden and a sense of self-doubt which breeds a distinct lack of confidence which they carry with them throughout their whole experience of education (and possibly for the rest of their lives), because their early experiences of learning taught them that they were less capable, not good enough and that they did not fit the correct mould. The experiences shared but these learner participants resonate with the works of Bourne (2003) which foreground how the concept of 'ability sets' in education limits or restricts some learners in accessing and engaging in valuable learning content:

> "Where the underlying ideology of the pedagogy includes the concept of fixed levels of ability, classroom groupings are not neutral, but tend to be constructed as 'ability groups', offering different students different levels of access to valued areas of the curriculum."

<div align="right">(Bourne 2003, p. 504)</div>

Bourne highlights the detrimental and pernicious impact that being cast in a set according to (what is wrongly assumed to be innate) ability can have upon learners alongside a deeply unjust system that systemically offers some learners more access to ideas and concepts of value, than others. Bourne (2003, p. 505), goes on to illustrate how these sets continue throughout learners' experience of education and inevitably shape learners' outcomes, "In the United Kingdom, the outcomes envisaged are differential, forming an inevitable hierarchy of individual success, from the 'brightest' to the 'slowest'."

As the meetings with learner participants progress, the focus of their frustration and disappointment moves more and more towards a topic we have encountered in other themes, their ability to relate to the learning content. What really comes into sharp focus is how these learners feel a total lack of presence and representation, both in

the curriculum material they are asked to study in class and in the exam content. To have your existence rendered invisible and your experiences reduced to a state of deficit by a system of education is highly unlikely to bring out the best in any of us. Learner participant, Billy, shares this recollection of sitting an English exam which he felt confident about, until he saw the exam text:

> "I felt that there was a lot of knowledge that was not relevant. Like, the exam was just on bikes or something, just irrelevant nothing that anyone has any interest in. So, when you're reading the extract it was just a bunch of different information with no meaning."

(Billy, *Focus Group 1C*)

Through further discussion with Billy, I was able to find out that the focal point of this particular exam text was of a lady who had spent her summer cycling and camping in France. Billy found this text impenetrable and was not able to relate any of his life experiences to the story of the camping expedition explored in this exam text. Because of this, not only did he leave the exam room without feeling able to exhibit his own unique skill with language, but he also left that room feeling alienated and deprived of the right to study the English Language in general. When I hear Billy's story of his exam experience I reflect on the many other learners to whom I teach English Language in FE. Middle-class themes such as spending a summer cycling and camping in Europe, as appealing and interesting as they may be to some, would be immensely difficult for my learners to comprehend and meaningfully engage with. Of course, none of this is to say that there is anything inherently 'wrong' with that text. For learners who have grown up with those kinds of summer holiday experiences, I'm sure the text evokes memories, smells, sounds and tastes that would enable them to connect with the text on a range of levels. But for many of my learners, some of whom have barely left the London Borough in which they live, let alone travelled Europe, this text feels like a barrier to their ability to showcase the talent they undoubtably have. Texts such as these then become another hurdle to jump as these learners have to work twice as hard to find meaning in a text that other learners from a more fortunate socio-economic origin might comprehend with ease, putting my learners and others like them at a distinct disadvantage before they even step foot in the exam room. Of course, the kind of experience Billy shares here has the potential to stay with him for a lifetime, doing unmeasurable damage to him as a learner and as a member of society. Learners like Billy who are astute enough pick up on the subliminal messages implicit in such experiences may become disillusioned by their own way of making sense of the world. They may become alienated by societal norms that make them feel excluded, inferior or irrelevant and this may impact how they view their own place in society in a myriad of damaging ways. Greene (1995, p. 111) highlights that, "Many of the alienated or marginalized are made to feel distrustful of their own voices, their own ways of making sense."

Learner participants share other stories, similar to Billy's, about both the exam content and the curricula they have encountered in English Language classes. Learner participant, Timothy, reflects:

> "I remember we used to read a lot of books. We used to read a lot of books in English, and I just didn't learn that way, because I didn't like the books. I had no interest in the books. I put no effort in. No effort in literature or anything like that, I just didn't enjoy it."

> (Timothy, *Focus Group 1A*)

Again, the key issue here for Timothy is not the fact that he was asked to read, it was the content of the books he was asked to read that left him feeling excluded and disengaged. Interestingly, as highlighted by one of my Multiple Coders, most learner participants almost automatically referred to education using the word 'they' and often used the word 'force' or 'forced' when they spoke about their experiences of studying language. For example, learner participant, Billy (Focus Group 1C) shares, "I feel like in exams you've got to force, like, I don't know how to explain it but like… well use words that you will never say normally." Again, we see a learner faced with the dilemma of adapting his own voice, influenced by the rich cultural environment in which he was raised, to fit a more familiar and 'acceptable' tone. Freire (1970, p. 61) asserts that any situation which denies a person their right to speak their word is an act of "dehumanising aggression". Words such as 'force' carry connotations of oppression and exclusion of the kind discussed through the words of Freire in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 shares the results of a task I asked my learners to complete in our first research meeting and it's important that I re-share those same results here. The task invited learner participants to sum up their experiences of studying the English Language in education in as few words as possible. The words used by my learners, as seen in Figure 4, paint a dark picture.

I thought it was irrelevant and had no interest in what i was writing about, where as writing about something i have somewhat interest in was alot more enjoyable.

Alienated

Discriminated against

Frustrated because I couldn't relate and found the classes boring. I would constantly tune out and not focus or pay attention

pointless

Isolated

Felt like it was pointless and a waste of time because I was writing just for the sake of the exam and not because i have an interest in what I was writing about

irrelevant

intimidated, unmotivated, bored, complete lack of interest, fatigued and frustrated

Figure 4. The results from a research task where learner participants were invited to sum up their experiences of studying the English Language in formal education

Learners using words such as isolated, pointless and even discriminated against to describe the emotions they feel when reflecting on their time in education takes us so far from the emancipatory ideal of education that we strive for in practice. This is a stark warning of the depth of the damage done to young people in the one environment in society in which they should feel safe and equal to their peers. In a Learner Writing Task, David reflects on how things could have been different for him in education, if only he had been given the opportunity to explore language and show his skill with language in a different way, as he shares:

> "If I had the opportunity to show my literacy and understanding of language through tasks and questions like I have within Marks' research, I am positive my journey to where I am today would have been a lot easier and I would have been further on in my career already".

> (David, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Here, we see learner thoughts turning away from what has been to reflections of what could have been, or even hopes for what is not yet but might be for future learners. This becomes a more common thread of this particular finding towards the latter stages of the study. Furthermore, learners become more cynical about the ethos of educational organisations and the structure of education in Britain, in general. Or at least this signals that they are more comfortable in sharing their cynicism with me. In learner participant Timothy's final writing task, he shares several ideas that are key to this finding. First, he displays a sense of frustration and disillusionment with what education appears to him to represent, as he shares, "There's a sense that what could have been a place of creativity, growth, and freedom has instead become a tightly controlled, grades-driven structure". An insightful comment that shows how clearly educators pass the pressures they feel in securing a particular achievement rate down onto their learners. Timothy continues, "Education has become more about ticking boxes than fostering a love for knowledge." As this learner continues on this thread, his anger at how badly he feels let down by his experience of education becomes ever more evident. The oppressive nature of some experiences in education come ever closer to the fore as we hear echoes of Freire (1970) in Timothy's warning that, "The harsh reality is that there are forces dictating our relationships, our rights, even our perceptions of freedom." Timothy ends this part of his essay by eloquently and assertively stating that:

> "There are countless capable young people who feel undervalued and struggle to progress in life simply because they don't meet certain academic criteria on paper. If they were given a real chance within the education system, it would become clear just how capable they are—perhaps even more so than those who meet the criteria but lack passion or engagement."

> (Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

Timothy's poignant and impassioned expression above paints a picture of a learner who feels confident and articulate enough to speak out against the powers who control his education and how the current model of language education does not serve him. But this comment is not just a response to his feelings of being let down. There is a profound meaning and valuable truth in these comments which we should not put down to simple frustration. Bernstein (2000) talks about the '*Trick of the School*', in which all learners are told that they are equal and that on the surface, schools make it appear that all are given access to equal opportunities. However, whether it be through the implementation of damaging 'ability sets', linear curricula, archaic assessment methods, financial advantage, or even in some instances teacher prejudice against how some learners from certain socio-cultural backgrounds express themselves, the "trick of the school" is laid bare to expose vast inequalities within our education system. Bourne (2003) shares a Case Study of a learner named Tuk who is clearly favoured by the teacher. Tuk's responses to questions fit neatly with the teacher's expectations and therefore there is little work for the teacher to do in in terms of adjusting their own interpretations to see how different responses may be of equal value and therefore incorporating other ways of understanding into the learning process. Bourne's Case Study goes on to reveal how other learners start to receive less attention from the teacher and an invisible curriculum barrier begins to form between particular learners and their access to the learning content. Bourne highlights this, as follows:

> "Differences in this sort of positioning in interactions with children were regular. With one unfortunate child, with whose work the teacher rarely engaged, the teacher maintained a standing posture beside her as if 'passing by', bending only slightly and not establishing eye contact with her, thus at times meeting other children's eyes and so permitting more interruptions. This child later began to truant regularly from school. In such subtle ways is educational failure created."

> (Bourne 2003, p. 504)

I would assume that this particular teacher would strongly deny feeling any prejudice towards certain learners based on their ability. But their actions, their body language, their tone, the limited time they choose to spend discussing the learning content with this unfortunate learner did potentially irreparable damage. The learner starts to truant because they feel marginalised and inadequate, as though they do not belong or do not deserve education and of course the moment they do this, they are seen as the problem, whereas of course they are just the symptom of a much wider problem. Just as with my learner participants who tell stories of marking the exam paper with an X and leaving, or falling asleep during the exam, they become easy targets and are branded as a 'problem' student or as 'bad' learners. Unless we recognise the deep-rooted injustices, ideologies and the loaded dice at play within our education system, hundreds of thousands more learners will experience the same prejudices in education that were highlighted both through Bourne's (2003) Case Study and through this study. Furthermore, Bernstein's (2000) *Trick of the School,* illustrated through Bourne's Case Study, above, is not something that can only be revealed through extensive research in this area. My learner participants,

although of course unaware of Bernstein's concept, showed an acute awareness of how they had experienced inequality and prejudice in education. Learner participant, David (Focus Group 4B) asks the rhetorical question, "Why are you suppressing as opposed to empowering?" David, genuinely perplexed as to why education should serve some in a more preferential way to others, shows a sense of anger when reflecting on his lived experience of education but also shows how he sees through the façade of equality in education. David goes on to reflect:

> "But some of us are dealt a shorter straw and we're just
> chucked in whatever's easiest, and cheapest, if you know what
> I mean? Which I understand, but it's bad for the future of our
> country. We are one, we should be one regardless. Any human
> has the exact same capacity from being born so if you give
> them all the same opportunity regardless if you're Boris
> Johnson's son or council estate Karen's son, if you go through
> the same route, there's no reason why everyone can't come
> out… if you know what I'm saying? Ah, it does my head in".

(David, *Focus Group 4B*)

Remarkably, however, the learner participants in this study had not given up hope for more enriching and emancipatory experiences in education. Through this study and through access to their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996), these learners are able to move beyond the *Boundaries* identified by Bernstein (1996), as explored in Chapter 2. The learner voice has played a central role throughout this study from the beginning and learners have found new ways to thrive in education through their shared voice and inter-subjectivity. Experiences of education in this study have become a collective undertaking (Bourne 2003) and learners no longer feel restricted by the boundaries of their past experiences of education as they look forward into bright and new imaginations of their futures. Through collaboration, learner's in this study have established what Bourne (2003, p. 504) calls a "negotiation of meaning", as they collectively come to better understand their own words and worlds. To this end, learner participant, Timothy, shares what an emancipatory education means to him but not before once more sharing his frustration and anger at the GCSE style pen and paper examinations and the negative connotations which follow learners from school to FE if they do not meet the sought-after Grade 4, first time around:

> "How you perform in those exams often creates a butterfly
> effect that can shape the rest of your life. We're told that grades
> don't define us, yet we're barred from advancing to A Levels
> unless we meet specific benchmarks. This contradiction needs
> to be taken more seriously. Education should be about
> unlocking potential, not limiting it. A one-size-fits-all approach
> doesn't work for everyone, and we need to reform the system
> to better accommodate different learning styles and abilities, so
> that more people can thrive rather than fall through the cracks."

(Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

In summary, data from learner writing tasks and learner comments resonate with Freire's (1970) concept of *Oppression* and show that for many learners from particular socio-cultural backgrounds, education is an oppressive and diminishing experience, as opposed to an emancipatory one, but the boundaries they experience in education can be removed when learners are empowered to use their own voice through the purposeful employment of aesthetic experience as a *Pedagogic Device* in enabling learners to begin to access their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) individually, as well as through collaboration with their peers. This enables learners to identify, share and learn from each other through their subjective and inter-subjective perspectives on their worlds.

5.2.7 Theme 7: Communitas

Finding 1: A safe space for learners to share perspectives can lead to learners gaining a sense of induction into the wider collective. This creates a sense of wanting to relate to each other, wanting to relate to education and learners exhibiting *Praxis* through inter-subjectivity or *Communitas.*

The final theme of *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996) was previously titled Praxis in this study and started life in this research as a sub-theme of *Inclusion.* Eventually, *Communitas* became a theme of its own as there are so many meaningful reactions that elicit from the collective experience I share with my learner participants. To align all of the varied outcomes that relate to *Communitas* within the theme of Inclusion felt like a simplified way to capture my learners' experiences of taking part in this study and as this has been a priority throughout, I continue to endeavour to let my learners' words and ideas paint the picture of the findings of this research. The genesis of this theme, which is a thread that runs through most findings, is how my learners interact with aesthetic experiences collectively, as they form inter-subjective views which, "inspire political or socially conscious action" (Leavy 2009, p. 82). Here, Leavy emphasises the important work that arts-based research can do in awakening a sense of action, collaboration and *Communitas* in learners. What Leavy (2009) refers to as inspiring conscious action, Greene (1995, p. 28) defines as, "to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected". For the purposes of this study, I draw from both Leavy and Greene by affirming that when *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996) is recognised in our learners, the previously unseen or unheard become the very source of expression and conscious action.

In the context of this study, the first signs of learners exhibiting behaviours aligned to the expression and conscious action discussed above, was a natural drive and desire to start connecting with others, both inside and outside of the focus groups. Learner participant, Street (Focus Group 2D), after sharing an aesthetic experience with a fellow research participant, reflects, "It makes me feel involved. Like, there's someone else that's going through the same thing. Or similar. Like, they feel the same way." For Street, just knowing that he was able to open up and find a meaningful connection with a peer is a breakthrough. Similarly, after reading something in which he found meaning, perhaps something previously unseen, research participant, David (Focus Group 2B), shares, "Because I want to go tell my friend like, "Look read this. Like Do you get what it means? Do you get the

connection?" It's just, it's exciting". This internal desire to share learning and/ or ideas with others became apparent in early interviews with learners and was consistent across different focus groups. However, the as meetings progressed, the focus starts to shift to a broader understanding of sharing, a view which encouraged learners to look beyond their own lived experience. Learner participant, Timothy, shares:

> "And I like that, seeing different people's perspectives or just seeing different perspectives and different understandings and stuff in general. I do like that feeling in general, I do like that. I do like that because it's nice to have a good world-view. Yeah."

> (Timothy, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

Here, we see Timothy showing signs of the awakening of the unheard and unseen as discussed through the works of Leavy (2009) and Greene (1995), above. Timothy wants to reach past his own perspectives, he is showing a desire to connect with others in the name of enriching his own understanding of the world and its perceived possibilities and limitations. To redefine his world-view. Learner participant, David (Focus Group 6B), also starts to look beyond his own immediate experiences in his desire to connect to others as he shares, "You know when you tell someone a story or you give someone advice and they take your advice that's an amazing, amazing feeling." The feeling that David describes here may very well be the same feeling of energy and *Heightened Vitality* that was explored in Theme 4 but it is also a clear sign of a desire for *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996), returning to Bourne (2003, p. 499) who defines Bernstein's *Communitas* as "a collective undertaking".

Learner reflections also start to incorporate what it is to be educated, as they begin to grapple with ideas and concepts that go far beyond the initial intentions of our group discussions. Here, learner participant, Billy, reflects on what it really is to be engaged:

> "Being engaged is being focused on something but to be engaged you've also got to be focused and enjoy it in some way. Otherwise, you won't be as engaged if you're not enjoying it as much. So, you've got to kind of balance out the focus with the enjoyment and the want to be engaged".

> (Billy, *Focus Group 6A*)

Billy goes on to share that what compels him to continue to strive for a better outcome in his education and what this study has helped him to find is meaningful connections with others: "I found it better in the group because I could agree with their points as well, and they'll lead me on to another point. So, I found that helpful".

Consideration of the social climate and conditions in which these learners live were also discussed by participants as they collectively formed their inter-subjective opinions on the unseen or unheard and took conscious action in articulating their feelings. After we had completed a task using aesthetic experience in the form of an

image of someone being chased by a uniformed police officer, learner participant, Timothy, wrote

> "We witness brokenness all around us but refuse to take responsibility. We are no different. At the very least, the image forced me to pause and reflect. The tragedy it captures reflects a much larger, uncomfortable truth about the world we live in- a truth we often choose to ignore".

(Timothy, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

The idea of social responsibility and a collective care for others and interest in their actions sparks a sense of *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996) in the learner participants. As with social issues, political issues were also addressed as these learners think about how the political situations of other countries emphasise the need for forward thinking future leaders, as David shares:

> "Because we've got wars going on in other countries and we need future thinkers to acknowledge and learn what this Society is going to do next, we're breeding the next society and it's all with thought and expression".

(David, *Focus Group 6B*)

What I really didn't expect, and did not set out to find in this study, was how adept and how easily the learner participants took to thinking beyond themselves to consider more complex and philosophical concepts. The emergence of such concepts was absolutely nothing to do with my guidance in Focus Groups or Semi-Structured Interviews. My questions were language focused but the power of aesthetic experience allowed these learners access to new worlds, through and with each other. This was most apparent in participants Timothy, David and Billy, who spent the most amount of time in the study. In one particular meeting, David (Focus Group 7B) shares, "I've taken a huge interest in philosophy in general and I seem to have a genuine concern for all of humanity". David's interest in philosophy is an awakening of the previously unseen and unheard (Greene) through Bourne's (2003) "collective undertaking". In this way, *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996) is enabling learners to access a new level of thinking. David goes on to reflect:

> "I personally feel like I'm starting a little ripple. Or I'm a part of the ripple of the natural evolution of what we're becoming as a species if you're looking at it on the outside. Because if it's happening to me and my friend next to me, or someone that I've explained it to has managed to comprehend it, it's happening."

(David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

David is expressing the fact that he exists and therefore, his actions, words and thoughts matter and make a difference. Note David's assertion that if he and his

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friend are experiencing something, then it is happening. Through aesthetic experience and the *Communitas*, or collective undertaking, he shares with his peers, David now recognises how his voice and his actions have a ripple effect, therefore they can impact others, therefore they matter. We see further examples of David thinking beyond the 'here and now' and himself, as he realises an external perspective and starts to see himself as one of many, an induction into the wider collective:

> "I feel like, as a child, you're kind of just existing unconsciously. It's so normal that you don't even know it's happening. You're just passing through day by day and then you get a bit older and you learn about other cultures and complete other ways of living and that we've got access to the knowledge of evolution and how we came to be and you get that external view outside of your own mind and your own worries and just outside of your own existence and looking at yourself as a member of your species."

> (David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

In this way, learners start to exhibit behaviour akin to another code that sits within this theme, that of *Praxis*. Continuing with the consistent theme of togetherness, or *Communitas*, David starts to consider action that will lead to a worthwhile existence, not just for him but for others, too. He reflects:

> "You're here with me and we could do great one day, we could do great and not even just for ourselves, like be wealthy and smart and happy, also for continuing the bettering of our species."

> (David, *Semi-Structured Interview 2*)

David's definition of doing well by considering the betterment of our species once again resonates with Bernstein's (1996) *Communitas* and Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality*, but David's comments also resonate with the sub-theme of *Praxis* and Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *phronesis*, applying sound practical wisdom with virtuous deliberation (Carr 1995). As meetings progress, learners continue to impress me with their ability to consider philosophical concepts about their world with *Praxis* and *Phronesis* (Aristotle 384-322 BC). Learner participant, David, continues to reflect that:

> "I don't think there's anything more fulfilling than doing something good for someone else. In the sense that, not like giving someone money but having a real impact on someone."

> (David, *Focus Group 6B*)

Learner participant, Billy, echoes the ethos of David's comment above as he attempts to articulate his views on the importance of such high values as respect and tolerance:

> "I just think just being respectful to people. I don't know how to explain it but I don't think it is a law but just treating people with respect. If everyone just abides by that then everything and everyone would just get along better and there'll be less crime in general and less violence on the street and just everything."

(Billy, *Focus Group 7A*)

As with David's comments, Billy is now able to imagine a future for himself and a future world that he would like to live in. Through this vision he considers others, a world where respect is paramount. Similarly, learner participant, Timothy (Learner Writing Task 3), shares his perspective on the incredibly important role that educators play in shaping young learners' outlooks on their lives and their worlds, "To love or to hate isn't just instinctual; it's something we're taught. These lessons, absorbed at a young age, shape our worldview and the people we become". Again, we see learners reaching beyond the study and into new, unchartered but fertile grounds of thought. Multiple other examples of learners exhibiting their desire for a better, more compassionate and understanding world can be found throughout the data sets.

Taking into account all of the morally sound, beautifully and powerfully articulated learner comments above, it is important to remember that these are all English Language GCSE resit learners and therefore they did not achieve a Grade 4 in an English Language GCSE pen and paper exam at their first, sometimes second, sometimes third attempt. It is easy for me personally to forget that at times as I sit in on Focus Group meetings and listen to these learners discuss issues of importance to them in an ever-more articulate and conscientious manner. Of course, thought and expression in any form is language and language is, and always has been, the central focus of this study. As such, in a later writing task towards the end of the data collection process, I ask learners to reflect on whether their thoughts on language had changed in any way, throughout this study. Learner responses are positive and suggest that they had indeed adopted a more positive perspective on both what language means to them and the study of language in education. Perhaps the most profound response came from David, who writes this lengthy reflection:

> "The album cover I would compare my thoughts to would be Pink Floyds' Dark Side of The Moon. This is because growing up in my adolescence I had never put any thought into language and would have considered it pretty linear, like the white light that enters the prism; used only to get a single message across to someone or communicate what you want and think. However, growing up and becoming more mature I have developed quite the interest in language and words. Language is the foundation of everything that humanity does. Language is communication, expression, it's how moments and memories are shared, without language we would still be average primates. I have come to realise that language and the

words that we use are actually what shapes our environment, relationships, and future."

(David, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

David using the metaphor of *Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon* album cover to summarise the change in his attitude towards language creates a striking image of hope and optimism. Furthermore, the irony that this in itself invites myself and others into a new aesthetic experience, is not lost. David goes on to share, "That is what the multiple colours of light represents to me on the other side of the prism on Pink Floyds' album cover. A multitude of ways to use language".

It is important to note that although the example shared by David is indeed all his own language and the thoughts born of his own mind, it is through *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996), a collective undertaking (Bourne 2003), new provinces of meaning (Greene 1995) and a shared sense of togetherness that David thrives throughout this study. The collective experience breathes light and life into his response and the data sets collected for this study show a multitude of examples of learners realising their bond with language, with the world and with each other through experiencing the same world in different ways.

Therefore, learner writing tasks, learner comments, and learner observation all coalesce to show that using aesthetic experience and open dialogue to create a safe space for learners to share perspectives can lead to learners gaining a sense of induction into a wider collective, creates a sense of wanting to relate to each other, wanting to relate to education and learners exhibiting *Praxis* in and through *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996).

5.3 Teacher Reflections

"When learning connects to their lives, students respond positively"

(Teacher A)

In this section of Chapter 5 the focus is on the data collected from the two teacher participants in this study. These practitioners are asked to share their reflections of teaching on a GCSE English Language programme in FE so as to gain a different perspective on the problems being explored in this study. I purposely did not intertwine the findings from teacher participants with the findings of learner participants in the previous section of this chapter, even though many of the findings overlap in one way or another. My intention of reviewing these data sets separately is by no means to belittle or disregard the imperative nature and importance of the data collected from teacher participants. My intention for sharing findings in this way is to maintain an ambition that sits at the very heart of this research, which is to let the learner voice take the most prominent role in this study and use the data collected from learners to ultimately tell the story, paint the picture and define the findings through their words and their worlds.

Furthermore, data sets collected from teachers are far smaller than that of learners. However, these data sets are valuable nevertheless and they do serve to bring a new perspective and shed new light on the problem being examined and therefore, this next section of Chapter 5 is dedicated to exploring the findings from teacher reflections.

These data sets follow the same process of reflexive thematic analysis as the data collected from learner participants. The only difference with these data sets is that they were not co-analysed with the help of Multiple Coders. The codes, sub-themes and themes that emerged through this data are all of my own interpretation. Eventually, these data sets are broken up into two main themes. These themes are:

1. Disillusionment/ Identity
2. Inclusive Teaching/ A need for Change

5.3.1 Theme 1: Disillusionment/ Identity

Finding 1: Learners in FE feel disillusioned by the learning content of GCSE English Language curricula directly because the learning content fails to represent them, their lived experience or their identity.

Much the same as the early learner data, one of the most prominent findings from teacher data was how these practitioners feel a sense of exacerbation and defeat by how disillusioned and disenfranchised their learners are. These teachers speak of the yearly uphill battle they face when a new group of learners are assigned to them for GCSE resits. Their first task, through a subtle mixture of persuasion and kindness, is to encourage these learners to enter the classroom and not give up before the first lesson has even started. Teacher B shares, "Initially, many learners wonder what the point is, 'Why am I doing English? I don't need to know metaphors if I want to be an electrician!'" This is certainly an initial response to the prospect of studying language for another academic year that I have witnessed first-hand in many learners across the last decade of teaching in FE. Although Teacher A shares a similar picture, it comes with a hint of hope that there are mixed emotions and some learners do feel a sense of hope at another attempt at resitting their English Language GCSE, as they reflect that learners, "experience mixed emotions, including frustration or discouragement at re-sitting a qualification they have not yet achieved, as well as hope and determination to improve their prospects". Again, I can relate my own experiences of teaching learners on an English Language GCSE resit programme to these reflections. However, Teacher A goes on to share:

> "Mixed emotions can be exacerbated for learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds or those accustomed to whole-class teaching pedagogies that differ from the UK's democratic and participatory education approach, favouring participation, collaboration, and group work."

> (Teacher A)

As the learner data sets also demonstrate, students from more multi-cultural origins or those with life experiences that differ from what might be considered by some to be typically British, find themselves with additional barriers to surmount as they strive to find the considerable resilience required when in the churn of the English Language resit cycle of FE. Teacher A goes on to highlight:

> "Intellectual self-doubt and insecurity are common experiences for many learners, as they have either lost or never developed positive learner identities due to deficit ideologies and reductive notions of cultural communities and being constructed as objects in need of remediation and control."

(Teacher A)

Interestingly, the mention of control over how some restrictive educational curricula demand learner identities be formed or shaped by a very particular mould resonates with much of the findings from the learner data sets. Exploring the extent of this needless but damaging dichotomy between the lives of our learners and the English Language GCSE curriculum further, Teacher B reflects:

> "Students have mentioned numerous times that they can't relate to some of the topics presented in the GCSE. Rather famously, the first GCSE English Language paper for AQA following the COVID pandemic focused on the ideas of travel and holidays. Our learners had just spent two years in lockdown, and even then, many came from households that have never been able to afford a holiday. The concept was alien to them, and they struggled to write meaningful answers. This trend has continued. The Pearson's Nov '24 exam period asked learners to read and write about libraries; many of our learners have never been gifted a book, let alone used a local library."

(Teacher B)

These comments from Teacher B directly reflect the comments made by learner participant, Billy, as discussed through analysis of Theme 6, Finding 1 from the learner data. Just as Billy tells us of his own personal frustration and anger at preparing for an English Language exam only to be confronted by a text on a camping holiday in France that felt confusing and irrelevant to him, Teacher B shares their own frustration from the other side of a similar experience. As mentioned previously, teachers share that their first challenge is to encourage learners not to quit the academic year before they've even entered the classroom. Then having to prepare learners for such monolithic and linear learning content only serves to establish further hurdles for teachers to leap as they race to keep their learners engaged in the study of language. Both practitioners who took part in this study shared multiple examples of being met by these unhelpful hurdles and both consider the root of the problem to be the fact that when learners are not given ample opportunity to 'see' their own life experiences in the learning content, the language

they are being asked to study becomes an external entity that is in direct opposition to their identity. Teacher A shares:

> "The standard curriculum may lack representation of diverse learners, particularly regarding cultural and social experiences and can sometimes feel like a one-size-fits-all that doesn't quite fit everyone."

(Teacher A)

Again, the link between the epidemic of learner disengagement with the continued study of language in FE, across both vocational and academic pathways, and the lack of representation available for learners from certain socio-cultural/ diverse backgrounds in language curricula is apparent. Teacher A goes on to highlight that, "This may inadvertently privilege dominant cultural narratives and create a sense of exclusion for learners from non-dominant backgrounds". Cultural ideologies embedded in learning and assessment content can only negatively impact learners who do not neatly align with these cultural views and these experiences of education can be damaging and actually not educational at all. These ignored and marginalised learners become, as Teacher A states above, excluded from the learning content and the only way to change this educational narrative is to put these very learners in the centre of the frame and hear their voice, as Greene (1995, p. 11) asserts, "Young learners have to be noticed, it is now being realised; they have to be consulted; they have to question why." These learners must be noticed and at the very least, these learners must have their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) enacted. Adams (2024), writing for The Guardian newspaper acknowledges that:

> "Our country would be a fairer and more productive place if we targeted more education resources to those pupils who have been held back by the rising levels of inequality we are now experiencing."

(Adams. Online, October 2024)

Data from teacher reflections resonates directly with the works of Freire (1970) to show that disillusionment and disenfranchisement in learners comes directly from failing to recognise the varied, rich and diverse identities which learners bring with them into their education.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Inclusive Teaching/ A need for Change

Finding 1: Teachers foster a range of inclusive teaching methods through aesthetic experience to engage learners but the need for a more structural reform in learning and assessment content is evident.

As with the data from learner participants, teacher reflections progressed from initial frustration to a more positive space in which they shared the innovative and inclusive pedagogic practices they incorporate in order to engage and enhance their learners. Teacher A shares that although language curricula can often feel "rigid" and

"assessment-driven" with "limited opportunities for creativity and culturally responsive teaching", for the most part, practitioners respond positively to this challenge as they highlight that:

> "Teachers often create engaging resources, sometimes collaboratively, and share via social media. I think this demonstrates our desire for a more flexible framework that would allow us to adapt content to learners' diverse needs and lived experiences."

(Teacher A)

Teachers working resiliently and collaboratively to adapt a curriculum that does little to provide purposeful learning opportunities for students is not a rare occurrence and something that I, again, can relate to from personal experience. Crossing over with Theme 1, Finding 1 from the teacher data sets, the issue with learner engagement is often linked to a lack of relevance between the learning content and the learners' lives but teacher participants share that the same learners can, and do respond positively in language lessons when the learning content is adapted to better align with the socio-cultural environments in which they live. Teacher A shares:

> "When learning connects to their lives, students respond positively. Unfortunately, the content seems alien and intimidating to many learners unless adapted to feel personal and meaningful."

(Teacher A)

Data sets collected from teachers for this research study show how instinctively these practitioners turn to aesthetic experience as a way to access a new level of engagement in the classroom and as a way to allow learners to bring their own lived experiences into their education and create a sense of inclusion. Teacher B shares:

> "Most of the learners at our college come from rather deprived backgrounds and so don't really engage with books. They do, however, engage in stories in many other media, such as song, films, and video games. As such, I use them very regularly to make the curriculum more relevant to the lives our students lead."

(Teacher B)

Similarly, Teacher A also turns to aesthetic experience to carefully navigate both learner and curricula expectations, as they reflect:

> "I included music, song lyrics, and poetry in my lessons, with
> positive responses from learners. When I brought J. Cole's and
> Tupac's lyrics into the classroom, the learners were intrigued.
> They weren't just learning anymore - they were feeling and
> connecting and some even wrote their lyrics."

(Teacher A)

Here, Teacher A shares a class activity which very closely reflects the Learner Writing Tasks I set my learner participants, as explored in the previous section of this chapter. I am unsure whether Teacher A selected the works of rappers J. Cole and Tupac Shakur themselves or whether they were learner suggestions but this practitioner experienced a shift in their learners akin to the reaction this kind of task generated in my learner participants. We hear words such as "intrigued", "feeling" and "connecting" when the learning material is discussed. Teacher A reflects how some learners even felt inspired enough to write their own lyrics. Reactions far removed from the alienation and intimidation that Teacher A reflected on previously when their learners were met with less inclusive content. Teacher A continues to explore their use of aesthetic experiences and mentioned using Somali poetry as a method of engaging learners in the study of language through their own cultural origins and they cite that, "a diverse cultural text (…) validated learners' identities and promoted a sense of belonging and engagement". Teacher A goes on to share that, in their experience, using culturally diverse texts:

> "… enables learners to critically negotiate their identities and
> freedom by providing an avenue for them to embody and reflect
> on their lived experiences, aligning their individual selfhood with
> broader cultural and social narratives."

(Teacher A)

Teacher B shares their own experiences of looking beyond the suggested curriculum texts and material from past exam papers in an attempt to better represent their learners' educational needs and enact their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996). Still in the realm of aesthetic experience, this practitioner takes a slightly different but certainly no less creative route to fostering a more dynamic learning environment, as they share:

> "I personally use gamification quite a lot, particularly in using
> table top roleplaying games (such as Dungeons and Dragons).
> I have found this to be effective, particularly with the creative
> writing elements of the curriculum."

(Teacher B)

Teacher B goes on to discuss how allowing learners the freedom to explore their identities in a more inventive and fiction-based manner, opened up new avenues of personal exploration in their learners' language education. In this instance, learners creating their own fictional characters removes all external ideologies and cultural

expectations by re-creating a new sense of reality in the learning environment. A new sense of reality where learners can be whoever or whatever they want to be as they explore language (and perhaps themselves) from an entirely new lens. For both teacher participants, the narrative returns to the theme of power and, in particular, how this notion of power in education directly relates to some learners feeling more represented than others. Teacher A reflects how introducing a broader range of language into a learning environment can serve the purpose of bridging the gap between the language of the GCSE curriculum and the language of our learners' socio-cultural experiences, as they share, "Explicitly addressing language's socio-cultural and political dimensions can empower learners to question dominant narratives and feel represented in the curriculum".

However, notions of power were explored more fully through discussions about the yearly summative language assessment of paper-based exams. Interestingly, both teacher participants were keen to discuss their discontent with our current method of assessing our learner's ability to use language and emphasised our need, structurally, to look at alternative methods of defining a learners' ability to use, or show skill with language. Teacher B shares:

> "Personally, I don't believe that the English Language GCSE criteria is fit for purpose. While I do believe that the skills within (such as analysis and evaluation) are very important for many aspects of life, I don't feel that examination is the correct way to determine whether or not students have mastered these skills. (…) learners can show aptitude for skills every day in an academic year, but one bad day in an exam hall suddenly labels them a failure. I don't imagine that there is a quick fix, but I strongly believe that exams are not representative of how young people utilise skills through life."

> (Teacher B)

Teacher B's insistence that we look beyond paper-based exams and towards more holistic methods of gauging how a learner interacts with language is a conversation I have heard and been a part of countless times in various staff rooms over the past decade. I tend to liken the process of paper-based exams to that of a penalty shoot-out at the end of a game of football. A footballer may play well, score a goal, assist their teammates and work tirelessly for the entire game, but if that same player misses their crucial penalty in a shoot-out situation, supporters and those in the media (unfairly) label them a failure. Metaphorically speaking, I have seen the same course of events play out for my learners. I have had learners who have attended every session, produced some fantastic creative writing, exhibited a strong ability to evaluate texts, analyse writer's intentions, identify and use language features and successfully compare writer's viewpoints and opinions. However, on the day when it counts, for whatever reason, they stepped up and missed their penalty. Therefore, they are labelled as inadequate and deemed unable to effectively understand and use language. Teacher A also felt the need to draw attention to the assessment method of paper-based exams, as they share:

> "Paper-based exams may not effectively capture learners'
> language abilities as the rigid paper formats do not align with
> multimodal approaches to meaning-making, which many
> learners find accessible and engaging and might disadvantage
> students with diverse learning needs."

<div align="right">(Teacher A)</div>

Once again, words such as "rigid" foreground the lack of freedom, autonomy and diversity inherent to a process as formal and linear as sitting a paper-based exam. Of course, language is an art form, each and every manner of using language reflects a unique conception of the world (Bachtin 2000). To assess something as fluid and as instinctive as language in this way raises concerns for both teacher participants. However, both teacher participants also share opinions on alternative assessment methods which may allow their learners more scope to exhibit their ability to use language. Teacher A highlights:

> "Using multimodal and alternative assessment methods, such
> as video essays, collaborative projects, portfolio-based
> assessments, or project work within their vocational subject,
> could provide more authentic demonstrations of language use,
> better reflect students' skills in real-world contexts, and align
> assessment methods with the diverse ways learners process
> and present information."

<div align="right">(Teacher A)</div>

At the forefront of these suggestions put forward by Teacher A is their desire for more "authentic demonstrations" of their learners' skill. Techer A recognises the need for a more diverse approach to assessment and a closer alignment of language education to real-world contexts. Teacher B further emphasises the need to look at alternate assessment methods but also recognises the difficult job that examiners have, as they share:

> "I am also mindful of the task that examiners have; to create an
> exam series that tens of thousands of people can all sit
> simultaneously and have a similar chance of achieving a grade
> in. Perhaps this helps highlight that exams for English are not
> fit for purpose."

<div align="right">(Teacher B)</div>

Offering alternative ideas to the problem highlighted above, Teacher B goes on to reflect:

"Giving learners a chance to do coursework where they can research their own topics, discussing language and literacies that are important and impactful for them, would be far more beneficial!"

(Teacher B)

The idea of coursework is mentioned several times by both teacher participants. Their desire that the hard work and good quality writing that their learners produce throughout the academic year should count towards their final grade is abundantly clear. Teacher B ends by stating that graded coursework projects would provide, "a truer reflection of a learner's work and ability, rather than basing their future opportunities on how they perform on one or two exam days". Teacher B logically and rationally is able to reflect on the current situation but also look for fairer alternatives. Alternative assessment methods put forward by both teacher participants are designed to incorporate our current environment but look beyond it to a more inclusive future, in the quest for a transformative pedagogy. Greene (1995) reflects:

"Therefore, our transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation".

(Greene 1995, p. 92)

Words that are neatly echoed by Teacher A as they share, "As educators, we must demonstrate commitment to integrating learners' identities into lessons, promoting collaboration, and evolving teaching methods".

Data from teacher comments shows that teachers take it upon themselves to look beyond the curriculum to foster a range of inclusive teaching methods through aesthetic experience to engage learners and enact what I describe and discuss in this thesis, namely Bernstein's (1996) *Pedagogic Rights.* Thereby, these teachers are able to also see glimpses of Dewey's (2005) *Heighted Vitality*. However, as admirable and creative as the efforts of these teachers, and many others like them are, the need for a more structural reform in learning and assessment content is evident.

5.4 The Power of Using Aesthetic Experiences

"I know what I think and feel but I rarely have the chance to openly think, clarify and expand on my thoughts"

(David, Learner Writing Task 3)

To conclude Chapter 5 and the various findings from the data sets collected for this study, returning to aesthetic experiences and the power that they can elicit as a

pedagogic intervention, is necessary. As highlighted throughout discussions on findings from learner data, aesthetic experiences have played a pivotal role in this study. I wish to emphasise again that what I'm offering through this study is not a recipe for how to teach language to learners in FE, but simply an example of how I enabled my learner participants to access their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996). As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Bernstein does not offer many concrete methods of how to enact his *Pedagogic Rights* but instead, leaves us educators with a conceptual framework to apply in contexts as we see fit, according to the situatedness of our practice. That is what I have tried to do in this study whilst also capturing the learner participants' varied responses and my hope is that this study shows what can happen if we give learners the opportunity to see the world differently than how they saw the world before. Data from this study suggest that aesthetic experience can unlock these pedagogic interventions.

Through the use of music, song lyrics and image, I am able to bring the imagination of my learner participants to the forefront of language education. Aesthetic experience demands or expects no set response. Instead, learners bring a range a responses and reactions, as per how their unique imaginations interpret the experience. An initial challenge of this study is to build the appropriate environment and the conditions to support my learners in fully and openly sharing their unique responses to the different aesthetic experiences they encountered. I reiterate that there is no set guide or recipe for how to successfully create this space. Each group of learners will be different and trust takes patience and time to build. As Greene (1995) highlights:

> "Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognise together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make inter-subjective sense."

(Greene 1995, p. 39)

However, once this community, or more aptly in the context of this study, this sense of *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996), was established, learners were able to use their imagination to create subjective and inter-subjective worlds in which they shared their learning, their language and their understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Through aesthetic experience and the releasing of their imaginations (Greene 1995), learners are able to fuse their horizons (Gadamer 2014) with both each other and various artists and/ or musicians, enact their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1995) and realise a distinct sense of *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2011). Aesthetic experience, whether in the form of song, image or written word, creates distilled images (Barone and Eisner 2012) in the mind's eye of the learner, which gave life and colour to the learning process, gave these learners the means to think and reflect, and helped them to see the world from new perspectives. These learners were able to see an idea or a concept behind the art, share a conversation about it and learn from each other.

Chapter 5 starts with a Case Study of learner participant, David, and it is to David that I return to provide a summary of the learner experience of taking part in this research study. David shares:

> "The research that Mark has pursued and the way in which he has conducted it has really had quite an effect on me. I know what I think and feel but I rarely have the chance to openly think, clarify and expand on my thoughts".

(David, *Learner Writing Task 3*)

David has a naturally inquisitive nature and would have experienced a range of emotions from the various aesthetic experiences he encountered in his life prior to taking part in this study. However, through this study, David has the dedicated time and space necessary for him to make sense of these experiences, the time to share his thoughts and feelings with his peers, grow from learning their perspectives and encounter an emancipatory (Freire 1970) experience of education. As explored through the Case Study which opens Chapter 5, David's mind was opened through aesthetic experience and on one occasion, this led to him engaging with less than virtuous/ democratic ideals. However, although aesthetic experience led him down that path, it was also directly because his mind was open through aesthetic experience that he was able to see and comprehend new and different perspectives and ultimately, change his mind. As educators, we must not shy away from these kinds of unexpected avenues as we strive to create a better educational environment for our learners. In fact, creating this environment should remain our most urgent priority. Greene (1995) reflects:

> "We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share."

(Greene 1995, p. 1)

What is really striking about the bravery David exhibited through his ability to change his mind, and in fact through his participation in this study, is that his outlook on what education means to him has evolved. David, like the other learner participants, is no longer defined by his past experiences of education and the boundaries (Bernstein 1996) which restricted him. He now looks ahead to a bright, new and exciting future, through and with education. The final words David shares with this study come at the end of his final writing task (Learner Writing Task 3), as he reflects, "Therefore, to conclude, this has been an amazing experience and I'm sad to see it end". David wanted our Focus Group and Semi-Structured Interview meetings to continue as he had grown to use these meetings as a pedagogical space for him to grow, share ideas and learn about himself and his world through subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. His mind is awake to education. Findings from Theme 7 discuss how David uses the metaphor of *Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon* album cover to describe how his views on language have changed throughout this study and how he

now sees language as a prism of many colours with endless possibilities, as opposed to a linear white line with one rather hollow purpose. David talks about how he is now able to better navigate his world through his use of language. For David, language has become a weapon in his arsenal as opposed to something he feels self-conscious about in formal settings.

To summarise Chapter 5, and the various explorations of both learner and teacher data, below is an extensive list of all themes and findings elicited from the data sets collected for this study:

Theme 1: Understanding/ Enhancement

Finding 1: Engagement in individual and collective aesthetic experience, evokes critical thinking; increases learner confidence; enhances perception and releases imagination regarding the realisation of new possibilities for the future, not only in the pursuit of personal goals and self-interest but also in the interests of the greater good.

Finding 2: The individual and collective 'lived through' nature of learners' experiences of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* in engagement with aesthetic experience, strengthens their capacity to release imagination and 'to think' deeply, carefully, critically for themselves for longer and beyond the walls of the classroom.

Theme 2: Inclusion/ Right to be Heard

Finding 1: Learners 'living through' the experience of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* to be *Included* in their study programme and having their voice heard, enables them to be authentically "present" in the classroom with others, increasing their sense of belonging (having a right to be there) and feelings of enjoyment in their education in a spirit of *Communitas.*

Theme 3: Political/ Participation/ Agency

Finding 1: Allowing learners to actively participate in selecting curriculum content dissolves the dichotomy of learner's lives inside and outside of education (Dewey 2011).

Finding 2: Learners participating in civic discourse leads to a desire for parity and fairness and enables learners to take *Agency.*

Theme 4: Energy/ Heightened Vitality

Finding 1: Aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention can unlock learners' imagination and lead to a sense of Heightened Vitality in the classroom.

Finding 2: Aesthetic experience can encourage learners to share interpretations of themselves, their worlds and their possible futures which can lead to an enhanced perception and new and unique learning opportunities.

Theme 5: Fusion of Horizons

Finding 1: Through the purposeful use of aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device, learners are able to fuse their horizons with the horizons of others. This leads to transformative encounters and the broadening, altering and making of their minds (Eisner 2002) whilst also breaking down boundaries learners may have encountered in their education previously.

Theme 6: Disillusionment/ Oppression

Finding 1: For many learners from particular socio-cultural backgrounds, education is an oppressive and diminishing experience, as opposed to an emancipatory one.

Theme 7: Communitas

Finding 1: A safe space for learners to share perspectives can lead to learners gaining a sense of induction into the wider collective. This creates a sense of wanting to relate to each other, wanting to relate to education and learners exhibiting *Praxis* through inter-subjectivity or *Communitas.*

Teacher Data

Theme 1: Disillusionment/ Identity

Finding 1: Learners in FE feel disillusioned by the learning content of GCSE English Language curricula directly because the learning content fails to represent them, their lived experience or their identity.

Theme 2: Inclusive Teaching/ A need for Change

Finding 1: Teachers foster a range of inclusive teaching methods through aesthetic experience to engage learners but the need for a more structural reform in learning and assessment content is evident.

As we move into Chapter 6, recommendations based on the findings outlined above are explored and discussed in detail, using these findings as a basis for suggested developments in language education in FE. If Chapter 5 serves as the representation of what this research study has found in practice, Chapter 6 illustrates how, in the context of this study, we may look at approaching language education in FE from alternative pathways.

Looking Ahead
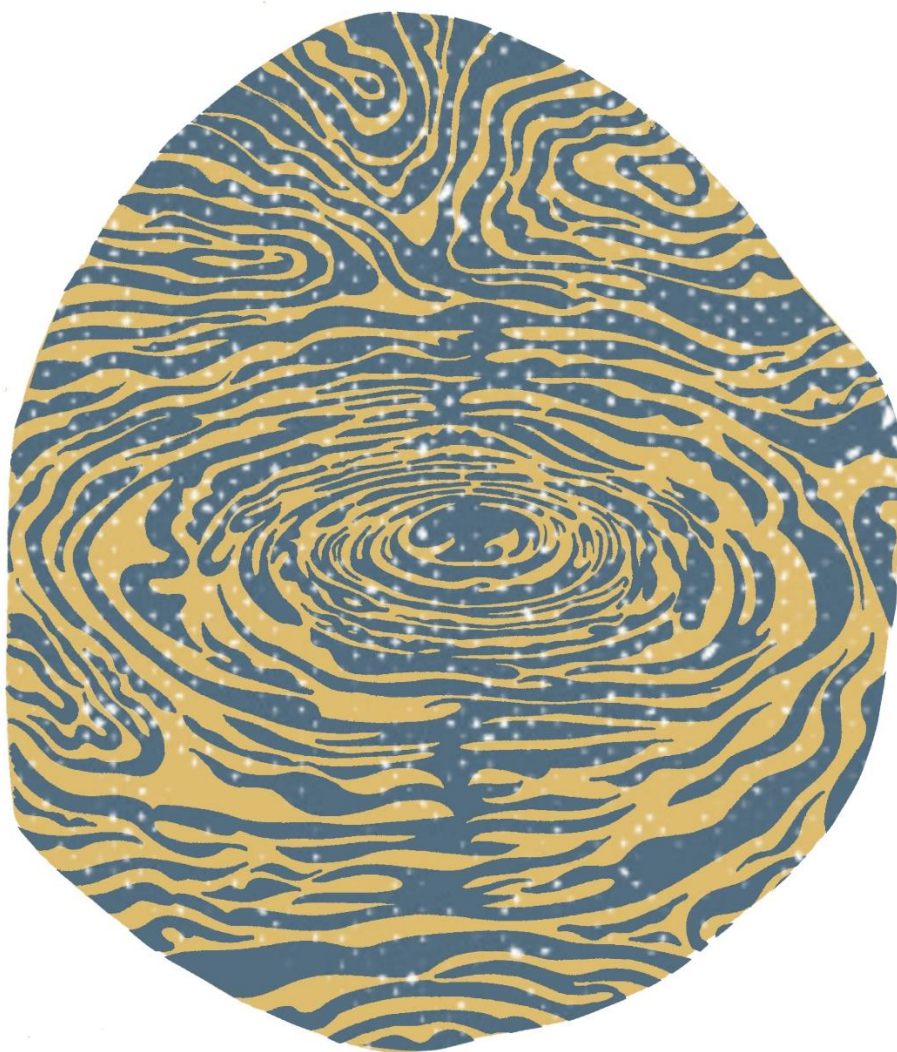
Chapter 6: Looking Ahead

The final chapter of this thesis explores the recommendations and suggested next steps which should be considered, based on the findings from the data collected for this research study. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of all of the 12 findings which stood out in the data, across both learner and teacher data sets. Chapter 5 serves as a space for the data to paint the overall picture of this study. Learner and teacher experiences are placed front and centre as they define this study through their own unique and valuable accounts of experience. Chapter 6 looks ahead to what might be, and uses the findings from the rich and diverse data sets to recommend how educators, policy professionals and curriculum designers might re-think the current curriculum model framing the acquisition and development of GCSE English Language in FE contexts. The intention here is to offer an invitation to a conversation surrounding how all of the above stakeholders might work together towards the realisation in practice of a new pedagogy of hope and inclusion in language education.

6.1 Using Aesthetic Experience in Language Acquisition & Development

"Every streetlight reveals the picture in reverse"

(*Nightswimming* by R.E.M, 1992)

A recommendation for teachers and curriculum designers:

This song lyric, written by Michael Stipe of R.E.M, brings to my mind the unique and individualised nature of aesthetic experience. For Stipe, looking at a series of streetlights flashing past his car window reveals to him the various pictures of a night which he holds in a special part of his memory. To others who were with him, the streetlights may be irrelevant to their memory of the night but clearly for Stipe, they evoke the distilled images of that night in motion and in action as he replays the scenes in his memory and shares them through his song. Just in the same way in which these seemingly unimportant streetlights speak to Stipe, the learner participants in this study reveal their own unique experiences of working with aesthetic experiences which evoke emotion, understanding, personal growth and subjective and inter-subjective opinion sharing and discussion. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5, learner participants in this study, as they grow in their trust in me and in the process, reveal more about themselves, their language, their lived experiences, their frustrations and their aspirations, through bringing their own examples of aesthetic experience into the design and content of the curriculum framing their own education. In the same way, but in a way unique to myself, this thesis is an aesthetic experience, in its own right. The playlist of this thesis (see Appendix Item 9) maps the various song lyrics which are used as headers and sources of inspiration for each chapter and chapter sub-section, as they allow me to see the story of this

research study in a particular light and therefore, breathe a certain life-force and energy into the pages, which would otherwise be lacking. The same is true for the spot illustrations which sit on the front cover and accompany the introduction to each chapter, throughout the thesis. These illustrations were very kindly created specifically for this thesis by my partner after we discussed what each chapter of the thesis means in its essence. Again, for me these illustrations serve to bring light, new perspectives and life onto the pages of this thesis and as such, present me with my own exploration of an aesthetic experience. Of course, for others the song lyrics and/ or illustrations may seem unimportant or unnecessary but therein lies the great power of aesthetic experience; we can never know exactly how each of us see and experience the world we interact with but through aesthetic experience, our unique perspectives and experiences are brought into full view and can be shared.

It is this notion, this concept of individual expressions of experience leading to collective growth, the exploration of worlds and the broadening of minds, which aesthetic experience has brought to the fore in this study, whilst in the process revealing the power of aesthetic experience when employed as a pedagogic intervention. Greene (1995) reflects:

> "In my view, the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation".

> (Greene 1995, p. 23)

Greene's vision of a collaborative search that educators carry out alongside learners speaks to the emancipatory experience of education (Freire 1970) which Chapter 5 explores more fully. In the context of this study, the answer to how we might achieve the educational ideal that Greene speaks of is 'grounded' (in the widest possible sense of the word) in aesthetic experience.

Data from this study support the claim that the benefits of using aesthetic experience with my learner participants are multiple. In the first instance, data suggest that aesthetic experience assists learners in seeing beyond the immediacy of their routine experiences of education, to date. In my experience of teaching in FE for over a decade, learners are rarely asked for their opinion or asked how they feel about the curriculum content and how they would like to engage with it. Rather, it is assumed that learners should be satisfied with and be grateful for the tried and tested, age-old texts that constitute the curricula they are required to consume week in, week out in English Language GCSE lessons. Quite often, these are the very same texts they were asked to read in school. However, my experiences of both teaching and of conducting this research stand to show that on the rare occasions that learners are asked for their opinions on the quality of the learning content, they are quick to respond that they are quite deeply unhappy. Aesthetic experience removes the rigidity of the present-day English Language curricula and can offer both teachers and learners opportunities to step outside of the constraints of what some learners see as irrelevant learning material, into a space where the learning

content relates directly to the socio-cultural lived experiences of the learners in the classroom. Data from this study show that for this to happen, learners must be consulted as to the learning content/ language sources which are used as the focus of study. Although in this study I explore aesthetic experience using artefacts of my own choosing to some success, the real spark of energy and the most explicit examples of *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005) are evident when learners are discussing the language of their own worlds, through song lyrics and images which carry a specific meaning to them, much like Stipe's streetlights. This is because their imaginations have been set free. Greene (1995, p. 28) highlights that, "the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected".

Once my learner participants move through this initial phase, interacting with language in energetic and enthusiastic ways, a further benefit of aesthetic experience reveals itself. This benefit is an awakening of an inner self, a coming to the fore of consciousness, or what Rogers (1961, p. 353) describes as an "existential moment". In the context of this study, a catalyst for the realisation of such existential moments appear to find their origins in regular embodied engagement in and with aesthetic experiences which evoke individual, imaginative, collaborative and cooperative responses from students.

This involves a person seeing themselves in a wider landscape, seeing their social position through the wider political and social lens of their environment. This "existential moment" goes beyond Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality*, because it is bigger than the person experiencing it. It is a sense of heightened vitality but it is also a person experiencing a heightened consciousness and a heightened sense of social responsibility. The emphasis upon and the commitment to *Praxis* here is much greater. Findings from Chapter 5 illustrate how, in the context of this study, all learner participants are able to realise this existential moment through aesthetic experience to some extent, but perhaps most striking are the experiences of David. David encountered this existential moment at both ends of the political spectrum. Once when he explores the rocky ground of right-wing media. And again, when he shows a democratic, open and expansive attitude to learning from his peers and changing his mind. And finally, when he comes to the realisation that to him, language is a prism where each different colour represents a new opportunity to better navigate his world. We now see a David who is alive to experience and is able to see the world in new ways, as Rogers (1961) remarks:

> "… instead of perceiving in predetermined categories ("trees are green," "college education is good," "modern art is silly") the individual is aware of this existential moment as it is, thus being alive to many experiences which fall outside the usual categories (this tree is lavender; this college education is damaging: this modern sculpture has a powerful effect on me)."
>
> (Rogers 1961, p. 353)

David and his fellow learner participants are now empowered to see the world through their own lenses and have the confidence to share their worlds with each other, remaining open to new ideas and the diverse experiences of others. They recognise that ambiguity is not something to be feared or avoided, but it is to be embraced. As Rogers (1961, p. 353) comments, being open to experience, "means a lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses. It means a tolerance for ambiguity where ambiguity exists."

A final point on aesthetic experience to make as I explore the first recommendation of this study, is that employing aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device is something which requires the creation of a number of pedagogic conditions in an educational environment. It is far from predictable, let alone certain, that learners will exhibit the kinds of reactions shown by the learner participants in this study on their first encounter with aesthetic experience. It is also naïve and unrealistic to assume that the right pedagogic conditions for the experience will/ must be in place from the outset. Greene (1995, p. 125) highlights that, "Aesthetic experiences require conscious participation in a work". This comment resonates with the findings of this study and establishing an open and inclusive educational environment is key and it takes time. This is explored more fully in the third section of this chapter.

Findings from this study suggest that positioning and embedding aesthetic experience at the heart of language education can serve as a method of re-engaging disenfranchised learners in the study of language and allowing learners access to their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996), potentially leading to both *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005) and *Existential Moments* (Rogers 1961). Data from this study indicate that through aesthetic experience, learners are able to meaningfully engage in the study of language and use the language of their socio-cultural worlds to create a sense of togetherness as well as to explore different and new avenues of personal growth. For these reasons, the findings of this study suggest that using aesthetic experience in language education is to be recommended, especially for learners in FE who are re-sitting a GCSE study programme after having been repeatedly diminished rather than enhanced by their experiences of learning a language while at school.

As illustrated in the teacher data collected for this study, individual educators and innovative practitioners are already turning to aesthetic experience to foster a more inclusive and enriching learning environment. However, **a recommendation of this research** is that aesthetic experience should be positioned and embedded in the heart of language acquisition and development activities on both English Language Study Programmes and other curricula. I have worked in FE since the year 2013 and since then, English Language curricula have been the same or have undergone only very minor amendments. I find it difficult to justify that any curriculum can stay current, relevant and appropriate enough to meet the needs and requirements of learners without any change in curriculum content across such a timeframe. However, there are, of course, deep-rooted, long-standing and enduring values, qualities of mind and character that have for centuries stood as the hallmarks of what we mean when we speak of "good education".

Benjamin's (1975) captivating story of the *Sabre-Tooth Curriculum* is useful in framing this argument. This is a story of a stone-age curriculum which teaches learners to catch fish with their bare hands and scare away tigers with fire. As time passes, fish cease to appear in the rivers and tigers no longer pose a threat to the local community and the call for a curriculum reform arises to ensure that learners are taught relevant, context specific, practical skills. This call for reform meets staunch resistance from The Traditionalists (Benjamin 1975) who insist that the current curriculum content should remain forever as it teaches character-building, tradition and discipline. Of course, to a certain extent both of the opposing forces in Benjamin's (1975) story are correct. Curricula should reflect the social needs of the community of learners it is designed for, but maintain the values and conditions which provide learners with access to a meaningful and emancipatory experience of education. In the context of this study, what needs to change is the rigid and fixed nature of the GCSE English Language curriculum. This does not mean the removing or replacing of any particular text or texts, but rather the widening of the scope of opportunity for new languages and literacies to find their way into language acquisition and development curricula, as per the social and cultural needs and experiences of our learners. What needs to stay the same are the enduring educational principles of *Enhancement, Inclusion* and *Participation* (Bernstein 1996) and the creation of educational spaces where learners can freely explore themselves and their worlds in safe and new provinces of thought (Greene 1995). Findings from this study suggest that this is an education which starts with experience and a spirit of cooperation and collaboration with others, where each member of the community is uniquely valued and respected as a person. It is through experience that a spark can ignite. A spark which can draw that which is buried within the learner to the surface and lead to *Communitas* (Bernstein 1996), Confidence and *Agency.*

Amidst discourses surrounding the nature of enduring educational values and curriculum reform, Eisner (2002) highlights the need for regular curricula review and a recognition of the situatedness of the programme of study:

> "They should not be regarded as contracts or prescriptions that override local judgments. My argument is an argument not for mindlessness but for a recognition of the virtues of diversity and of the need for curriculum planners and teachers to be sensitive to local circumstances and individual efforts."

> (Eisner 2002, p. 173)

Findings from this study suggest that providing space in curricula where learners can encounter and immerse themselves in aesthetic experience in ways which evoke, value and celebrate the literacies of any group of learners' socio-cultural worlds is the bedrock of what we mean when we speak of "good education". This involves ensuring that a language education realises and enacts learners' *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) while at the same time dismantling the elitist ideologies and dissolving the prejudices that currently sit at the heart of English Language

pedagogy and curricula. In the context of this study, barriers and boundaries based on elitist world views and prejudices only serve to alienate, diminish, damage and disengage learners by preventing them from reconnecting with language acquisition and development in FE. Any curriculum goes far beyond a set of arbitrary learning materials. The GSCE English Language curriculum that forms the focus of this study also shapes the ethos of the Study Programme of which it is a part. The ethos of the institution delivering that programme, instead of beginning with a definition of education construed in terms of an emancipatory experience, reduces language acquisition and development to a diet of "ashes and sawdust" (Pullman 2003, p. 15).

Once more, Eisner (2002, p.148) returns us to the issue that when policy professionals and theorists define a curriculum, "… they are also defining the forms of thinking that are likely to be promoted in the school. They are, in effect, laying out an agenda for the development of mind." Therefore, findings from this study point to the urgent need for a cross-curriculum reform in language education in FE in England, which values and prioritises the development of the learners' minds and celebrates the diverse languages that learners put to work to express experience in and through aesthetic experience.

6.2 Moving Away from Paper-Based Exams Towards More Expressive Forms of Assessment

"How long will we make do? Maybe it's time to break on through"

(*Don't Say Nothing* by Patti Smith, 1997)

A recommendation for curriculum designers and policy makers:

Findings from this study highlight a widespread and troubling problem around how competence with language is assessed in education, (most often in the form of) pen and paper-based exams. Data sets gathered from both teachers and learners in this study focus attention on the myriad of issues surrounding the assessment of the different forms of knowledge involved in language acquisition and development, in this way. Firstly, teacher participants in this study repeatedly voice serious concerns over how restrictive pen and paper-based examinations are in relation to language acquisition and the development of language. This restriction works in two ways. Firstly, teachers report feeling constrained by how creative an educator is permitted to be with the learning material on an English Language Study Programme before their creativity means they are straying too far away from the exam requirements and therefore, putting their learners at a disadvantage. Secondly, teacher participants also voice concerns that the assessment processes inherent to pen and paper-based exams may not offer learners sufficient opportunity to express their ability to use language well and in a variety of contexts. Findings from this study show that by focusing so heavily on having a very set, penalty shoot-out style, high-stakes method for assessing a learner's ability to use language, policy professionals and Awarding Bodies are elevating some social classes, cultures and forms of language as being

"superior" and relegating others to an "inferior" or even a "deficit" status. In other words, valuing neatly presentable data above genuine opportunities for exploration and personal growth for learners in the acquisition and development of language. Greene reflects:

> "Standards, assessment, outcomes, and achievement: these concepts are the currency of educational discussion today. What ought sixteen-year-olds be expected to know, whoever they are, wherever they are?"

> (Greene 1995, p. 9)

Greene's comment highlights the magnitude of the decisions that policy professionals face when contemplating issues surrounding assessment in educational contexts. However, Greene's comment also speaks of the futility of attempting to define exactly how each and every sixteen-year-old across the country, are expected to equally and fairly exhibit their skill in using language to write, analyse, compare, compel and communicate by using a pre-selected text (which may have no social connection to the learner whatsoever) in providing evidence of their learning and command of their language in the course of completing a pen and paper-based exam. It is a contention of this thesis, that the medium of educational assessment in the form of pen and paper-based examinations, is in effect, preventing significant numbers of GCSE English Language learners from providing evidence of their learning and their command of the English language. In other words, it is the instrument of assessment that is the deeper problem.

Looking beyond the concerns raised through teacher data, learner participants raise potentially more serious questions about how the current exam structure can impact the way a learner feels about their cultural identity, their socio-cultural language and the validity of their lived experience. Re-visiting Chapter 5 briefly, I recall the story told by learner participant, Billy, of his experiences on a particular exam day. Billy arrived on time for his exam with a feeling of quiet confidence, which was shattered almost as soon as the exam started as Billy was faced with finding meaning and an outlet for his imagination through a text which told the story of a lady spending her summer leisurely cycling through and camping in France. For Billy, this exam text not only feels deeply alien to him, it also leads him to doubt and question the worthiness and value of his own lived experiences. The text does not demand that Billy has spent a summer in France to be able to understand it but it certainly does favour those who have been lucky enough to have had such experiences.

Across data sets from all learner participants, the first question that leaps off the page is: why is my knowledge of English Language being assessed in this way? As discussed in Chapter 5, some learners still carry the deep psychological scars inflicted upon them by exam experiences that did not go to plan. Scars that may stay with them for the rest of their lives. As such and as the findings of this research support, the following recommendations are offered in the hope that they might act as a stimulus for a discussion on the reform of the English Language GCSE assessment structure at some point in the near future.

The first recommendation of this thesis assumes that pen and paper-based exams are here to stay and that future cohorts of learners are required to use this assessment method to provide evidence of their ability to use language, well. If this is the case, findings from this study suggest that at the very least, there should be some choice in the text which learners are expected to use as a source of inspiration. This could be achieved in two ways. The first, and less favourable, would be for Awarding Bodies to release several text themes before the exam season and allow learners' ample time to select the theme of the text they wish to engage with in the exam. Themes could include classic literature, sport, music, social media, education, fashion etc. Although I do not see this as an adequate response to the problem raised by this research, it is a pragmatic one in that there would at least be some sense of autonomy and individuality which may serve to enact some form of equity and placate some of the feelings of exclusion many learners report experiencing. The second and more favourable method that might be employed is to work towards achieving more choice and freedom within the rigid pen and paper-based exam structure. This could require asking all teachers to use local discretion to select the text(s) which their group of learners will encounter on exam day. The text(s) would not be shared with learners before the exam and teachers would have to complete some sort of approval process with exam boards but this would allow teachers to select a text theme which their learners have successfully engaged with previously and therefore open up more opportunities for a meaningful interaction with the text during the exam.

Of course, the decision that all learners use the very same text is a decision that has been made with fairness in mind. However, findings from this study suggest that it is fairness itself that is lost in this process. This discussion of the restrictive and exclusive nature of using one text for all learners, regardless of lived experiences or socio-cultural understandings of the world reminds me of a conversation I had recently with a colleague as we discussed the structure of the summative paper-based assessment method of the GCSE English Language Study Programme. During our discussion, we likened our current mode of assessing language to a process of ranking every actor in the world in order of their talent by asking them all to do their best impersonation of Al Capone. Some will thrive in this challenge as they may have played Capone or a similar character before, or they may have lived experiences of being around such characters in real-life, which they can draw from to bring Al Capone to life. Others who do not have such experiences, acted or real, will do less well and will ultimately rank low on the list and be considered below par actors. Therefore, the actor who can portray Elvis Presley, for example, better than anyone else in the world will be written off as incompetent because their Al Capone was not up to scratch. If each one of us has our own sense of identity which determines how we react and respond to our surroundings, how we speak, act and position ourselves in social environments, then each of us uses language in our own unique to way to express our identity. Therefore, if through our individual identities we each use language in different and unique ways, then attempting to find one single text which allows all learners sitting an English Language GCSE paper, equal

and fair opportunity to relate to that text in a meaningful way which allows them to showcase their ability to use language effectively, appears to be futile.

Therefore, as the findings of this study indicate, as well as the various issues raised previously, I do not consider the recommendations offered above to be long-lasting solutions to the issues raised through this research around the use of pen and paper-based exams. Although these recommendations may improve the situation for some learners, many of the issues around using a pen and paper-based method of assessment in language education would remain. **A further recommendation is now offered** which attempts to find a more long-term and far-reaching solution to this issue. This is a move away from pen and paper-based exams entirely, towards more expressive forms of assessment.

As a **precursor to this recommendation**, it may be worth considering the fact that the act of writing is a creative pursuit. As such, it is my belief that the assessment of such a creative act should more closely mirror assessment methods inherently used in other creative subjects, such as Art and Design. Art students are not expected to sit in an exam hall and answer questions about art methods and/ or artists, they are asked to create something as per a brief, organise their time accordingly, research the most suitable methods and materials to use and in essence, exhibit their individual and unique skill as an artist. When discussing meaningful assessment methods, Eisner (2003, p. 232) argues that the importance of assessment is to harness, "the ability to make effective judgments about the creation and organisation of qualities in the service of feeling and imagination". As a language teacher, I read written work created by my learners on a weekly basis and what draws me in and compels me as a reader is their ability to display a feeling on the page, to let their imagination take me into their story, to show a sign of the unrealised and untapped potential that each and every learner has inside them. In my view, Eisner's attention to feeling and imagination are suitable criteria to measure the quality of a creative piece of work, and a written text is just that.

Of course, if we were to take a step away from pen and paper-based exams, the need for a comprehensive and rounded assessment of language remains. As the data collected and analysed in this study suggest**, a recommendation of this research** is that policymakers consider moving away from pen and paper-based exams as a method of assessing a learner's ability to use language, in favour of a project-based approach to assessment in which learners could represent and express experience and language in their own and different ways.

This project could multi-modal and consist of multiple sections, such as research, report writing, language analysis, language comparison and creativity. Learners could select their own language source as the basis for the project (which could include language from their socio-cultural lives) and then carry out research into the history, or the roots, of that type of language, write a report on why they chose that language and what that specific piece of literature means to them, analyse how and why that particular language differs from other types of language, find comparisons between that language and other types of language and finally, write a creative piece

using their selected text as inspiration. The assessment could be carried out in stages, under appropriate assessment conditions and under the supervision of the teacher. A move away from pen and paper-based exams does not mean a compromise in assessment integrity. However, what this type of holistic and rounded assessment could elicit from learners is a genuine interest in their language assessment project, a feeling of *Enhancement, Inclusion* and meaningful *Participation* (Bernstein 1996) in their language assessment, a sense of *Heightened Vitality* (Dewey 2005) as they exhibit their skills with language and perhaps even glimpses of the *Existential Moments* (Rogers 1961) discussed previously, as they delve into and explore language from their own worlds and create new ways of seeing and sharing that language with others. A project-based, multi-modal assessment method such as this could stimulate learners by allowing them to represent an experience that they have had or an experience which means something to them. Furthermore, allowing learners this choice and the freedom to bring their own language into assessment practices would bring aesthetic experiences seamlessly in English Language assessment processes, opening up new avenues of self-discovery, personal growth and exploration within the assessment, itself.

A crucial point to note here is that most of the current English Language GCSE assessment objectives could remain. As Teacher B astutely points out in Chapter 5, the issue does not sit with what the Awarding Body wants learners to do, but rather how they expect them to do it. Learners could use both explicit and implicit language, analyse and evaluate language, write creatively for a certain audience, and so on. In fact, a project-based approach to assessment would allow learners many new opportunities to exhibit these skills more coherently and more comprehensively.

However, I am aware that this would be a considerable task and one which would encounter new problems of its own. For example, although many teachers do already embed the use of aesthetic experience in their practice to engage their learners, not all teachers would know how, or have the confidence to do this in an educationally sound or systematic way. As such, a step towards a new approach to language assessment, as outlined above, would mean initial and continued CPD for teachers around how to put aesthetic experience to work to bring the learners' lived experience to life within the classroom.

Although other, potentially unexpected, problems may lie in wait if we were to move away from pen and paper-based exams towards more creative project-based assessment methods, data from this study suggest that we not only should consider this change, but we should act. Merleau-Ponty (1969, p. 136) reflects that, "choice and action alone cut us loose from our anchorage." A sentiment which should inspire us educators to embrace action as we strive to embed a greater level of choice and inclusivity in our learners' experiences of studying language in FE.

Understandably, the change that is suggested here may frighten some simply because of the sheer magnitude of the task and the potential logistical issues which would coincide if we were to explore this further and implement change. Of course,

change on the scale suggested would take time and an incremental approach which is piloted in a microcosm would be recommended to look at how different forms of assessment would look in practice. **However, a multi-modal, project-based approach to language acquisition and development assessment practices** would open up opportunities for learners to express themselves in language assessments in ways which do not currently exist. This approach would also allow assessors/ teachers to employ a comparative judgement (Smith 2020) approach to assessment whereby a wider range of learner work can be considered when assessing a learners' ability to use language, based on different views and perspectives to build a more nuanced and subtle analysis of why a piece of work is good and how good work can look different. The aim here is to find forms of assessment that are more trustworthy, credible, fair and accessible than current approaches and it may benefit a number of stakeholders to look at new assessment methods in this field as we explore the kinds of knowledge we want learners to know and consider the best ways to assess that knowledge. Importantly, findings from this study suggest that current pen and paper-based assessment methods are artificial in that they restrict both teachers and learners by neglecting others forms of knowledge, revealing only one way a learner can use language and therefore ignoring the many other meaningful contributions a learner may offer. For example, the rich, thoughtful and meaning contributions learner participants made to this study whilst exhibiting their own individual and collective skill with language are currently lost in the tunnel-visioned approach to assessment synonymous with an English Language Study Programme.

To conclude this recommendation, this research study lays bare the need to move away from pen and paper-based exams which use what learners, and some teachers, see as dreary and uninspiring texts which learners from particular socio-cultural environments consistently encounter difficulty engaging with, and take a step toward a more rounded, forward-thinking and multi-faceted project-based method in assessing competence in using language. Data from this study underscore the value of using aesthetic experience in ways which can breathe life into English Language assessment methods in order to evoke and to "inspire political or socially conscious action" (Leavy 2009, p. 82) which in turn would work towards realising the emancipatory experience of education which all learners should have an equal right to access. For as long as I have worked in education, both teachers and learners alike have complained about the rigidity and lack of diversity in the English Language pen and paper-based exam. Taking inspiration from the Patti Smith (1997) lyric which introduces this section of Chapter 6, it is now time to stop making do with our current practices and time to break on through to new ground in the name of creating fairer and more meaningful experiences for our learners. The scale of this issue is vast and, in some cases, represents the colonisation of the English Language in education and in assessment by a particular, elitist and an already highly privileged social class. As such, urgent and imaginative reform is recommended.

6.3 Elevating the Learner Voice in Creating Democratic and Open Learning Environments

"You can't start a fire. You can't start a fire without a spark"

(*Dancing in the Dark* by Bruce Springsteen, 1984)

A recommendation for teachers and curriculum designers:

This **penultimate recommendation** of this study focuses in on the imperative nature of bringing the learner voice into their education, more meaningfully. This recommendation is not a call for more learner voice surveys, as undoubtedly important as they are, but rather a call for the learner voice to play an active and meaningful part in both deciding curriculum content and pedagogy and in creating the conditions to support a fertile learning environment in which purposeful learning activities can take place.

From the early conversations with the learner participants in this study, a strong aversion to writing is palpable. Each learner has their own reasons for being reluctant to put pen to paper but a combination of being repeatedly told they are not good enough, and continually being asked to write about something in which they have little interest, has left these learners with a distain for expressing themselves through the written word. An obstacle faced persistently in this study, especially in the early stages, involves finding a way to get these learners to write meaningfully and in a way in which they can find some happiness and/ or enjoyment. As discussed previously, this thesis is not designed to be a recipe or a guide for others to follow. It is offered as an account of the first step I took in attempting to re-engage these learners with the written word which was through talk. In the context of this study, data suggest that oracy plays a key role in finding a route into the evocation of learner expression through the dark and overgrown forest of their discontent with their experiences of language education while at school. Throughout early focus group and semi-structured interview meetings, there has been no expectation or requirement for learners to write. Through conversation alone, we have been able to cover a range of both nebulas and pertinent social issues during which learners are able to express themselves, share ideas, compare perspectives and ultimately, learn from each other through oracy. As the learners in this research study become more comfortable and confident in their ability to engage with a range of topics in an environment where they are not judged but are respected, their reluctance to write fades away and their ability to express themselves through the written word flourishes. A common legend of Greek Mythology is that Homer could not write, but instead he conveyed the deeply evocative meanings of his poetry through oracy. Whether this is historically the case or not, it provokes deliberation on the underestimated power of oracy that we so often overlook or ignore in language acquisition and development activities**. As such, the first recommendation in this section of Chapter 6 is that in FE, oracy needs to come before literacy.** Oracy helps learners to feel at ease as they start to express themselves and this in turn starts opening up spaces where young people can talk, and to engage in

conversations which encourage them to think, discover new perspectives, learn more from, and about each other, as they become persons in their own right (Rogers 1961).

The learner voice is a central factor in building the ethos, the conditions and the environment regarding what it feels like to take part in this study, and it has been from the very outset. I work alongside each and every research participant to co-create the necessary conditions for us all to feel relaxed in a safe space where sharing through creativity is encouraged. Of course, how these conditions are created will be different from one place to another, one classroom to another and one learner to another. Again, there is no set recipe offered in this study for the creation of the ideal conditions in which creativity and freedom of expression can bloom. However, Rogers (1961, p. 357-358) suggests that any educational environment wishing to create the conditions necessary for freedom of thought and for opportunities for meaningful growth for their learners, must have two key components in place: psychological safety and psychological freedom.

Rogers (1961, p. 357) defines psychological safety as, "Accepting the individual as of unconditional worth". This is to recognise that every single learner brings with them their own strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges but regardless of how each of these factors present themselves, their worth is unconditional and their need to feel valued in their education is unquestionable. As educators, we must see the potential in each learner and work alongside them to allow them to bring to the surface what their previous experiences of education may have forced them to bury deep within them. Rogers (1961) also highlights that we should work to create an educational environment where external examination or evaluation is absent:

> "When we cease to form judgments of the other individual from our own locus of evaluation, we are fostering creativity. For the individual to find himself in an atmosphere where he is not being evaluated, not being measured by some external standard, is enormously freeing. Evaluation is always a threat."

> (Rogers 1961, p. 357)

Data from this study illustrate how the learner participants in this study did relax into the creative process and how in those conditions they feel free to express themselves without the looming sense of 'being weighed up in the balance and found wanting', or of a sense of dread over some sort of end point assessment or external examination. As such, learners in this study show that without the shadow of a fixed, expected and determined outcome, they are free to create the kinds of works, explored in detail in Chapter 5, which enable them to see themselves, their futures and their worlds differently to how they did at the very start of this study.

Furthermore, an education worthy of its name requires and encourages learners to bring their own lived experiences, thoughts and feelings into the learning environment. Data from this study support the claim that as educators, it is our responsibility to show the empathy, respect and understanding to learners that make

this possible. Learners will not fully open themselves to the learning process if there is a chance they will be bullied or mocked when doing so. Rogers (1961), whilst making a final point about the importance of providing learners with psychological safety, remarks:

> "… if I understand you empathically, see you and what you are feeling and doing from your point of view, enter your private world and see it as it appears to you — and still accept you — then this is safety indeed."

<div align="right">(Rogers 1961, p. 358)</div>

Once we have worked to achieve conditions to support a psychologically safe environment for our learners, we must work to provide Rogers' (1961) second component: psychological freedom. Rogers defines psychological freedom as:

> "When a teacher, parent, therapist, or other facilitating person permits the individual a complete freedom of symbolic expression, creativity is fostered. This permissiveness gives the individual complete freedom to think, to feel, to be, whatever is most inward within himself."

<div align="right">(Rogers 1961, p. 358)</div>

A key aspect of psychological freedom is symbolic expression. This involves a learner expressing their internal experiences, emotions, feelings or impulses through various symbolic means, such as through language, painting, the spoken or the written word. Complete psychological freedom does not mean a learner belittling or exhibiting threatening behaviour towards another person in the name of expression. As with all forms of expression, there are social boundaries which are not crossed (Rogers 1961). However, when it comes to expression in a symbolic sense, these boundaries fade as the learner starts to embrace their freedom. For Rogers (1961), symbolic expression is the essence of psychological freedom.

What Rogers (1961, p. 359) presents us with here is an "orderly way of thinking about the creative process". What this study shows is how I use Rogers' concepts of psychological safety and psychological freedom and work alongside the learner to create a fertile and democratic learning environment in which learners can feel safe, valued and free to express themselves.

As I bring this recommendation to a close, I am mindful to share another recent experience I had with a colleague working in FE. This colleague had been brought into the college in which I work as a Consultant to advise on the quality of education. They quickly became known for repeating the same phrase to various teachers with whom they had contact, this phrase was 'Don't smile until Christmas'. Of course, what this phrase implies is that we teachers must let our learners know who is boss during the first term of the academic year, don't give them an inch, run a tight ship etc. I'm certain that this colleague was completely well-meaning but I could not help but be dismayed by either their apparent complete lack of understanding, or

complete lack of interest in the educational journey our learners had been on before they found their way into our classrooms. Many of the learners I teach in FE have been diminished, excluded and often discriminated against by the very educational system which they look to for help in achieving a better future for themselves. They have metaphorically been pushed from pillar to post, downgraded by being placed in demeaning class-sets and told they are not cut out for certain subjects, the very last thing they need is a teacher who refuses to smile at them through fear of losing control of the learning environment. What this approach to working with learners may also do, is subliminally tell the learner to keep their thoughts to themselves. The teacher is in charge and won't be questioned. The learner voice is diminished again. To me, the very act of repressing such a natural and warm human expression of a smile strikes me as counterintuitive to everything we should strive to achieve for our learners, as educators. Learners in this research study are now able to find new ways of engaging with education, they are able to imagine and actively pursue new futures for themselves, they are able to feel a sense of self-worth as a learner and as a person. I did smile at them. I did show them compassion. I did show them empathy and I did treat them as equals as I worked to enact their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996), in practice.

Education should be about igniting a spark and lighting of a fire within our learners. To borrow from the lyric which opens this section of the chapter, to light a fire we need a spark. Findings from this study suggest that the spark can emanate from conditions in a learning environment and a set of learning materials which have been co-created by educators and learners in a safe space of trust, respect and democracy. **As such, this study recommends using Rogers' (1961) concepts of psychological safety and psychological freedom in working alongside learners to achieve an emancipatory experience of education (Freire 1970).**

6.4 Placing a Greater Emphasis on Arts-Based Learning in Language Education

"Words are flowing out like endless rain into a paper cup, they slither wildly as they slip away across the universe"

(*Across the Universe* by The Beatles, 1969)

A recommendation for teachers, curriculum designers and policy makers:

Lennon's lyric above makes me think of the final set of writing tasks completed by learner participants in this study. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, early interviews show a complete lack of willingness or interest in writing amongst learners but later interviews and later writing tasks bring to light examples of learners writing of their own free will, learners producing impressive standards of written work and learners writing creatively as a form of expression. Metaphorically speaking, these learners' words are indeed flowing like rain into a paper cup.

The final recommendation of this thesis is one which may overlap with some of the previous recommendations in places, but it is deserving of being considered in its own light. **This recommendation concerns how arts-based learning acquisition and development activities should play a more prominent role in a GCSE English Language study programme in FE.**

As discussed previously in this chapter, writing is a creative endeavour. Yet, commonly in education, English as a subject tends to get grouped together and thought of in a similar way to maths, as opposed to other creative subjects. The sense of being inducted into a wider collective, the broadening of minds and the personal growth which is observed in the data sets of this study by myself and my Multiple Coders, all leads back to the learner participants having exposure to an artform in some way, whether that be an external artform which already exists in the world or one which they created themselves for the purposes of this research. An example of this comes from learner participant, David, who shares several photographs of the patch of grass outside the housing estate in which he lives (see Appendix Item 7). These photographs are snapshots of David's lived experience and the images mean something to him on a deep and personal level. However, when David brings these images to the focus group meeting, the artefact takes on a new meaning as others shed new light and new perspectives on David's world. The images cease to be 'things' and become a shared and meaningful experience. Revisiting Chapter 5 briefly, Dewey (2005, p. 19) states, "Experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ". From this experience, not just David but all learner participants in the focus group take pen to paper and create. Their shared experience of interacting with David's images is the germ and the writing they create constitutes new art in the world. The art, whether it be written or spoken word, image, poetry, film or other, is the vehicle, the heuristic to rich and stimulating learning experiences. Barone & Eisner (2012, p. 9) reflect that, "arts are vehicles designed to reveal what someone can feel about some aspects of life."

The findings from this study highlight the potential for what aesthetic experiences and arts-based learning activities can do in enacting learners' *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) and bringing into being a sense of Dewey's (2005) *Heightened Vitality* in learners. This helps to make evident the need for a greater focus on embracing creativity in the teaching, learning and assessment of language acquisition and development in GCSE English Language Study Programmes and other activities in FE. Rogers (1961) defines creativity as:

> "… the emergence in action of a novel relational product,
> growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one
> hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of
> his life on the other."

(Rogers 1961, p. 350)

What really strikes me about this definition of creativity is Rogers' emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual interacting with the events, people and circumstances

happening around them. From the start of this study, a key focus has been upon encouraging learners to feel comfortable in using more socially-situated literacies in an educational environment. Although at the very outset of this study, I was keen to explore the use of the language of learners' socio-cultural worlds in learning activities, at that point I was not at all sure if/ how that would manifest itself in a natural and free-flowing way. However, what I have learned through this study, is that access to creative endeavour evokes and encourages the expression of learners' socio-cultural literacies. This allows learners to access and express their own unique world views through their experiences of language education. This, in turn, brings other learner's words and worlds to the fore. In this way, language education becomes a collaborative, creative learning experience. Leavy (2009, p. 67), in her discussion of the use of poetry as a learning activity, notes how, "… this method of representation can capture a unique aspect of the human condition, thereby expanding our understanding of social reality." Data from this study underscore how engaging in creative pursuits through language acquisition and development activities introduces and allows the social literacies of different learners to come to the fore in the learning process, thereby celebrating and embracing learners' diverse lived experiences while also enhancing and extending individual and collective understandings of reality. As already discussed, the work of Bragg (2004) is helpful in offering a chronology of the dynamic nature of the development of the English language. In "*The Adventure of English*" (2004) Bragg maps the history of how different literacies interact, combine and become one as the English language has developed over centuries and new forms of literacy come forward to replace older ones.

Data from this study suggest that a greater emphasis on aesthetic experience, the arts and creativity could also be employed as correctives to counter some of the more oppressive factors currently embedded in our English Language GCSE curriculum. In the course of this study I have learned that educational encounters with creativity can encourage learners to think deeply, differently and for themselves, and in the process help to remove some of the more arbitrary beliefs around 'right' or 'wrong' uses of English in language education, embracing more socially-situated literacies as learners re-tell their life experiences through symbolic expression (Roger 1961). Findings from this study show that embracing creativity in language acquisition and development activities helps to develop the confidence of learners as they learn how to be their authentic selves both inside and outside of their educational lives. Data from this study support the claim that creativity opens doors to experiences which can encourage learners to grow, question, share and learn from one another. Data from this study also indicate that the creative process starts in oracy and grows in writing. Greene (1995, p. 108) makes an incisive point where she argues that, "Learning to write is a matter of learning to shatter the silences, of making meaning, of learning to learn."

Making meaning and learning to learn involves learners taking ownership and a sense of pride in their education. Through having access to and exercising their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) they are encouraged to give "voice" to and begin to define what education means to them. Chapter 1 of this thesis discusses and

explores the Punk movement of 1970s New York. It details how Punk musician Richard Hell's (1982) song 'Blank Generation' was written to show Punk as an artform which anyone can define the meaning of, and therefore, anyone can feel a part of as they attach their own identity to the movement. Findings from this study also suggest that learners in FE must be given the time and space to define and express what a language education means to them if they are to be able to feel that they can make an authentic contribution to the learning process. For me or anyone else to tell a learner what an education in language should mean to them would make as much sense as telling the learner what their identity is/ how to express their existence. A learner's experience is their own. The decision about how to express their experience is their own, too. My experiences of conducting this study have helped me to see that it is through embracing creativity, arts-based learning and aesthetic experience in language acquisition and development activities that we can enable and encourage learners to begin to address the question of what language, and a language education, means to them.

I have also learned that in order to re-engage learners with the study and use of English language, the teacher needs to be prepared to begin over again in order to re-assess their learners and their learners' specific needs, and shape their pedagogic practices accordingly. This requires teachers to bring the socio-cultural literacies of learners into educative practices to create new dialogues and new perspectives (Greene 1995). This involves the releasing of the imaginations of teachers and learners in re-inventing a pedagogy which allows the experience of education to reflect the lives and experiences of learners in an ever-changing world. Instead of seeing this task as ambiguous and daunting, it is my hope that this study can stand as evidence that if teachers, education leaders and policy professionals can work together to embrace this challenge, then a dedication to collective inquiry and open-minded reflection might not only be possible but also accepted as one of the most valuable attributes a teacher can possess.

A final recommendation of this research study is that placing a greater emphasis on arts-based learning and aesthetic experience in language education can unlock creativity in learners. Creativity can then be used as a resource in seeing the prejudices and elitist ideologies that exist in Britain's language education curricula for what they are and surmounting them by laying the ground for an open, democratic and vibrant learning environment in which learners can see themselves and their worlds in new ways by accessing and enacting their *Pedagogic Rights* (Bernstein 1996) in "lived through' experience.

6.5 An Invitation to a Conversation

"There's a blaze of light in every word"

(*Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen, 1984)

As I approach the end this thesis, I offer an invitation to all stakeholders in the policy professional and FE Community to collectively explore how we can move towards more multi-modal and project-based approaches to the learning and assessment of language in FE. This exploration also extends to how we can embed the use of aesthetic experience and arts-based learning opportunities in language acquisition and development activities in ways which will enhance the experience of education for both practitioners and learners. The findings and recommendations of this study are not limited to GCSE English Language Study Programmes. They apply to the development of language across all vocational areas in FE. As such, this invitation is not solely extended to those who plan, design and/ or teach on GCSE English Language Study Programmes, but is open to all forward-thinking individuals and/ or groups who have a desire to re-think our approach to language education, in general. This is no small task and will certainly require imagination and a leap of faith from those willing to take part. However, considering the scale of the problem which this study explores, it may be a leap worth taking. This thesis is not offered as a simple or "quick-fix" solution to the problem that it explores. However, through future collaboration and connection, I hope that the findings and recommendations presented in this thesis may serve as helpful starting points for change.

To frame this invitation with clarity, I offer below a list of the findings and recommendations of this study. For ease of reference, these findings are presented again below in Table 2, to more clearly illustrate how each finding/ group of findings contribute to each recommendation. Through displaying the findings and recommendations in this way, I hope to show how, in the context of the data collected for this study, the problem being explored can be broken down into sections from which pragmatic action can arise.

Findings:

Learner Data

Theme 1: Understanding/ Enhancement

Finding 1: Engagement in individual and collective aesthetic experience, evokes critical thinking; increases learner confidence; enhances perception and releases imagination regarding the realisation of new possibilities for the future, not only in the pursuit of personal goals and self-interest but also in the interests of the greater good

Finding 2: The individual and collective 'lived through' nature of learners' experiences of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* in engagement with aesthetic experience, strengthens their capacity to release imagination and 'to think' deeply, carefully, critically for themselves for longer and beyond the walls of the classroom.

Theme 2: Inclusion/ Right to be Heard

Finding 1: Learners 'living through' the experience of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* to be *Included* in their study programme and having their voice heard, enables them to be authentically "present" in the classroom with others, increasing their

sense of belonging (having a right to be there) and feelings of enjoyment in their education in a spirit of *Communitas.*

Theme 3: Political/ Participation/ Agency

Finding 1: Allowing learners to actively participate in selecting curriculum content dissolves the dichotomy of learner's lives inside and outside of education (Dewey 2011).

Finding 2: Learners participating in civic discourse leads to a desire for parity and fairness and enables learners to take *Agency*

Theme 4: Energy/ Heightened Vitality

Finding 1: Aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention can unlock learners' imagination and lead to a sense of Heightened Vitality in the classroom.

Finding 2: Aesthetic experience can encourage learners to share interpretations of themselves, their worlds and their possible futures which can lead to an enhanced perception and new and unique learning opportunities.

Theme 5: Fusion of Horizons

Finding 1: Through the purposeful use of aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device, learners are able to fuse their horizons with the horizons of others. This leads to transformative encounters and the broadening, altering and making of their minds (Eisner 2002) whilst also breaking down boundaries learners may have encountered in their education previously.

Theme 6: Disillusionment/ Oppression

Finding 1: For many learners from particular socio-cultural backgrounds, education is an oppressive and diminishing experience, as opposed to an emancipatory one.

Theme 7: Communitas

Finding 1: A safe space for learners to share perspectives can lead to learners gaining a sense of induction into the wider collective. This creates a sense of wanting to relate to each other, wanting to relate to education and learners exhibiting *Praxis* through inter-subjectivity or *Communitas.*

Teacher Data

Theme 1: Disillusionment/ Identity

Finding 1: Learners in FE feel disillusioned by the learning content of GCSE English Language curricula directly because the learning content fails to represent them, their lived experience or their identity.

Theme 2: Inclusive Teaching/ A need for Change

Finding 1: Teachers foster a range of inclusive teaching methods through aesthetic experience to engage learners but the need for a more structural reform in learning and assessment content is evident.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Using Aesthetic Experience in Language Acquisition & Development

Recommendation 2: Moving Away from Paper-Based Exams Towards More Expressive Forms of Assessment

Recommendation 3: Elevating the Learner Voice in Creating Democratic and Open Learning Environments

Recommendation 4: Placing a Greater Emphasis on Arts-Based Learning in Language Education

Table 2. A list of all findings from this study aligned to the four key recommendations discussed in Chapter 6

Findings	Recommendation
Engagement in individual and collective aesthetic experience, evokes critical thinking; increases learner confidence; enhances perception and releases imagination regarding the realisation of new possibilities for the future, not only in the pursuit of personal goals and self-interest but also in the interests of the greater good Aesthetic experience as a pedagogic intervention can unlock learners' imagination and lead to a sense of Heightened Vitality in the classroom Aesthetic experience can encourage learners to share interpretations of themselves, their worlds and their possible futures which can lead to an enhanced perception and new and unique learning opportunities Through the purposeful use of aesthetic experience as a pedagogic device, learners are able to fuse their horizons with the horizons of others. This leads to transformative encounters and the broadening, altering and making of their minds (Eisner 2002) whilst also breaking down boundaries learners may have encountered in their education previously	Using Aesthetic Experience in Language Acquisition & Development

For many learners from particular socio-cultural backgrounds, education is an oppressive and diminishing experience, as opposed to an emancipatory one Learners in FE feel disillusioned by the learning content of GCSE English Language curricula directly because the learning content fails to represent them, their lived experience or their identity	Moving Away from Paper-Based Exams Towards More Expressive Forms of Assessment
Learners 'living through' the experience of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* to be *Included* in their study programme and having their voice heard, enables them to be authentically "present" in the classroom with others, increasing their sense of belonging (having a right to be there) and feelings of enjoyment in their education in a spirit of *Communitas* Allowing learners to actively participate in selecting curriculum content dissolves the dichotomy of learner's lives inside and outside of education (Dewey 2011) Learners participating in civic discourse leads to a desire for parity and fairness and enables learners to take *Agency*	Elevating the Learner Voice in Creating Democratic and Open Learning Environments
The individual and collective 'lived through' nature of learners' experiences of accessing their *Pedagogic Right* of *Enhancement* in engagement with aesthetic experience, strengthens their capacity to release imagination and 'to think' deeply, carefully, critically for themselves for longer and beyond the walls of the classroom A safe space for learners to share perspectives can lead to learners gaining a sense of induction into the wider collective. This creates a sense of wanting to relate to each other, wanting to relate to education and learners exhibiting *Praxis* through inter-subjectivity or *Communitas* Teachers foster a range of inclusive teaching methods through aesthetic experience to engage learners but the need for a more structural reform in learning and assessment content is evident	Placing a Greater Emphasis on Arts-Based Learning in Language Education

The most fitting way to bring this thesis to a close, leads me to a final discussion on the imperative nature of remaining open to new experiences. As human beings we tend towards more constructive social acts when we are open to experience (Rogers 1961). In the context of this study, the emphasis for all educators must be that we remain open to evoking and celebrating the language of our learners. This means that we must never dismiss or diminish any form of socio-cultural or socially-situated language or literacies that our learners offer us in the learning process. To do so would be to commit 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1977) and would add to the harm and diminishment that many GCSE English Language re-sit students have already experienced through language acquisition and development activities in their education. Diminishing learners and their language only serves to exacerbate the 'boundaries' and barriers (Bernstein 1996) that prevent learners from moving into new and exciting future relationships with language, with each other and with the individual and collective landscapes and worlds in which they exist. Every linguistic contribution a learner makes may be the one which sparks their imagination and brings them into a new life full of enriching experiences both in and outside of education. I conclude this thesis by arguing that all of the language and literacies our learners share with us in the learning process are alive in and with their own lived experiences. To put it another way, experience is a source of rich, unlimited and untapped potential. It is ripe for expression. It is art in germ (Dewey 2005). Or as musician Leonard Cohen (1984) more poetically comments, "There's a blaze of light in every word".

Appendices

7.1 Appendix Item 1: Research Information and Consent Form example

Participation Consent Form

Study title: Runnin' & Swimmin' against a tide of social and cultural prejudice in education: Reuniting the vocational and the academic in the study of language

Participant code: _____

• 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 have the right to remove any contributions I make towards this study at any stage up until 6 months prior to the submission date.

• 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., 2 weeks after attending the testing session.

• I agree that any information shared by other members of the Focus Group in this study is confidential.

Signed:

_____

Print name:

_____

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

Date: _____

Witnessed by:

_____

Print name:

_____

Date: _____

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Runnin' & Swimmin' against a tide of social and cultural prejudice in education: Reuniting the vocational and the academic in the study of language

What is the purpose of the study? Focusing primarily on how curriculum theory directly impacts learning, this research study aims to explore learners' genuine experiences of studying GCSE English at a Further Education (FE) college in London. This is to better understand why disengagement with formal modes of the study of language is so common, and to analyse whether engagement can be increased by introducing more socially-situated literacies into language activities.

Who can take part in the study? This study will look to recruit between 6-8 FE learners who are currently undertaking their English GCSE resits. In addition to this, up to 4 teachers on the English GCSE programme will be interviewed.

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 2 weeks of participation and providing me with your participant code. The participant code will be given to you after you have consented to take part in the study. If you decide to withdraw during the study or in the subsequent 2-week period, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study.

What will happen to me if I take part? Taking part in this study will entail monthly meetings in that are designed to allow participants to share their views of studying English GCSEs in FE, and several language activities that will not form part of your GCSE study programme, but rather used as extra-curricular activities to ascertain how participants respond to language activities when they have more say in choosing the content of the language involved. Also, there will be solo interviews with students to discuss the outcomes of the language tasks mentioned above.

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? The benefits of taking part in this study could range from a greater awareness of the types of language used in the GCSE English curriculum to a wider sense of engagement with language in both social and educational environments. Furthermore, this study will ask you to consider why the English GCSE curriculum uses a particular type of language, thus informing participants on how different modes of language are perceived in different social and professional settings.

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? Yes. All data will be stored safely, confidentially and anonymously (BERA, 2018:21) in a password protected environment in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. No names or personal details will be included or, where necessary, pseudonyms will be used

What will happen to the results of the research study? The results of this study will primarily be shared through the Sunderland University's SUNCETT Research programme. If suitable, the results may also be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in peer reviewed academic journals.

Who is organising and funding the research? This research is organised through Sunderland University's SUNCETT team and has been funded by the Education & Training Foundation (ETF). Although this research has been funded by the ETF, the Foundation has in no way influenced the conduct of the research or its outcomes.

Who has reviewed the study? The University of Sunderland Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved the study.

7.2   Appendix Item 2: A timeline of research methods used in this study

Research Meetings Schedule

Research Method	November 2022	December 2022	February 2023	April 2023	June 2023	August 2023	October 2023	December 2023	January 2024	February 2024
Focus Groups										
Pedagogic Intervention Writing Tasks										
Semi-Structured Interviews										
Field Notes										
Illustrative Case Study										

Figure 5. A timeline of research methods used in this study

7.3   Appendix Item 3: Focus Group Information sheet for participants

Focus Group Information Sheet

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide guidance for research participants as to the structure and intention of our Focus Group meetings.

The Focus Group meetings present us with an opportunity to get together as a collective to discuss language in a safe and non-judgmental environment. All contributions to Focus Group discussions are valuable and the honest and open views of all participants are respected. As with any open and safe space, any views that may be harmful or offensive to others will not be tolerated.

Focus Group discussions will be led and facilitated by the researcher but participants can lead to the conversation as and when appropriate and take the conversation into different areas/ topics as different ideas present themselves.

The intention of these meetings is to discuss how we use language in our lives both inside and outside of education and to share our views on how language shapes the way we experience education and the world around us in both positive and/ or negative ways.

Focus Group meetings will be scheduled at a time most suitable for the participants and participants are free to cancel or leave a meeting whenever they like.

7.4   Appendix Item 4: Final Spider Diagram containing all codes found by myself and the Multiple Coders

Figure 6. Final Spider Diagram containing all codes found by myself and the Multiple Coders

7.5   Appendix Item 5: Initial Spider Diagram
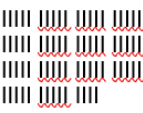

Figure 7. Initial Spider Diagram

7.6 Appendix Item 6: Sample pages from the Data Frequency Table

Initial Data Coding & Frequency Table

Codes	Words/ Phrases used by Participants	Frequency	Location/ Source
C1	Frustrated **MI (FG 1B):** What we've learned about, the books, didn't even come up. We would learn about something which we need to learn, but it's nothing to do with the exam. **Richard (FG 1B):** Because of the way they taught. They taught us different ways. I'm like, can I stick with this way? And they were like, no this way would help you with your English exam. And yeah now I just kept doubting myself. **David (Writing Task):** I personally left school without any GCSEs and the reason for this (in my head) was the fact that i couldn't express on paper "How RoMEO PorTRAyeD hiS LoVe FoR JuliET" **MI (FG 1B):** If you're making a mistake but you don't know what mistake you've done. How can you improve? Let's say you said write a side of A4 and gave me a load of criteria, let's say about six/ seven criteria, and I've done them all and you say 'oh, you failed'. What criteria did I not meet? What criteria did I miss out? **Spud (FG 1B):** The exam is very, very boring and very stressful and some people just give up and just sleep through the exam.	IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII II	Interviews with David, Timothy, MI, Spud, BN, Billy, Street & Richard Learner writing tasks
C14	Learners expressing feeling of being excluded **David (FG1A):** So when everyone's being tested to write about Romeo and Juliet, collectively, I don't want to participate in that. **David (FG 5B):** I remember being, I must have been 11 in year six and I've done something so minor and this Man opened his eyes and was screaming in my face, like as naughty as you are as a kid, you've got to understand that that is impressionable for life. That will affect someone for a long long time. I know that's a very niche example, but there's so many things. I don't feel like teachers are vetted hard enough to be able to take on such a big, big responsibility, i.e. rearing children, the future generation of an entire country. **Billy (FG 6A):** No I don't think so. No. Nothing's really as relevant, personally, to anyone I think, in language or in the work we do. **Timothy (SSI 1):** But if it's not really available or useful to everyone you can feel left out or could be choked up by that pressure and a lot of people, when we were young, we're stressing a lot about the exams and GCSEs and stuff.	IIIII IIIII IIIII IIII	Interviews with David, Timothy, MI, Spud, BN, Billy, Street & Richard
C15	Pointless **David (FG 1A):** There's just no point in even trying. You know? **MI (FG 1B):** It was out of date (regarding English GCSE curriculum content) **Spud (FG 1B):** You studied for five years for something, you're never going to see in your life again.	IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII III	Interviews with David, Timothy, MI, Spud, BN & Billy

C30	Fusing with a different perspective **David (FG 2B):** It's just a quote that resonated with me because of the whole concept of the book and this, like kind of sums it up, and it's "Man has all power to act, but his power ends with the act committed." **David (FG 2B):** It was a personal… what's the word… a personal understanding. You know when you learn a new skill and you pick up a little knack, and it's your knack, and you're really good at it. It's like a personal resonation. Like I've had a personal connection to this quote. **Street (FG 2D):** I think that's a very good quote. And I can relate to it as well. **Timothy (FG 5B):** I think what he was trying to portray and what he was trying to get through and what I feel listening to the song, I think everything that I felt was embodied in that song and rightfully so. **Billy (FG 6A):** There's a lot of emotion in it and every lyric he says is from the heart like he means everything he says. **David (SSI 2):** So when it happens it's indescribable not indescribable like 'Oh wow', just like you can't describe it because it's happening but If I	IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIIII IIII	Interviews with David, Timothy, Billy, Richard & Street Learner writing tasks

C32	Aesthetic experiences **Timothy (FG 1A):** We spent a few minutes watching this movie clip and we're all laughing. It was funny, and like action. And then after we watched it, without the teacher even saying anything we were just talking about the clip and just discussing it amongst ourselves. And then had a task, just from that. **Timothy (Learner Writing Task 3):** This photo captivated me because of the powerful emotions it evoked immediately. **Richard (FG 2D):** Yeah, I could probably write a whole, probably not a whole story, but a whole few paragraphs about it and how it kind of conjoined with my life, or intertwined,so yeah. **Billy (FG 1C):** I thought literature was a lot easier because it was a lot more poetic and that kind of links to music, where it's a lot easier to remember things, and it's more interesting. **Timothy (FG 2B):** But then I might go home and I might put on a song or put on an artist that I like, and I'm listening to the song, and obviously enjoying the music, but also listening to the words and I feel like that relates more to me than most of the stuff I might be learning in English or whatever it is. **Billy (FG 5B):** It was a good song and then it makes you think a lot. Because it literally is a story. Yeah, I think music is a good way to express things.	IIIII II	Interviews with David, Timothy, Billy, Richard & Street Learner writing tasks

Figure 8. Sample pages from the Data Frequency Table

7.7 Appendix Item 7: Examples of images produced by learner participant, David

Figure 9. Examples of images produced by learner participant, David

## 7.8 Appendix Item 8: Examples of images produced by learner participant, Timothy (Ono 2019 and Cravens 1954)

Figure 10. Examples of images produced by learner participant, Timothy

7.9 Appendix Item 9: The playlist of songs used as inspiration for this thesis, in order of appearance.

1. *Friction* by Television
2. *Going, Going,* Gone by Richard Hell and The Voidoids
3. *Blank Generation* by Richard Hell and the Voidoids
4. *The Hard Way* by The Kinks
5. *She* by Green Day
6. *Bastards of the Young* by The Replacements
7. *Beginning to See the Light* by The Velvet Underground
8. *Working Class Hero* by John Lennon
9. *Empty Cans* by The Streets
10. *Reality* by David Bowie
11. *Stand* by R.E.M
12. *People's Faces* by Kae Tempest
13. *Puzzles* by The Yardbirds
14. *For a Dancer* by Jackson Browne
15. *Prove It* by Television
16. *Reflections* by Ty Segall
17. *Nightswimming* by R.E.M
18. *Don't Say Nothing* by Patti Smith
19. *Dancing in the Dark* by Bruce Springsteen
20. *Across the Universe* by The Beatles
21. *Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen

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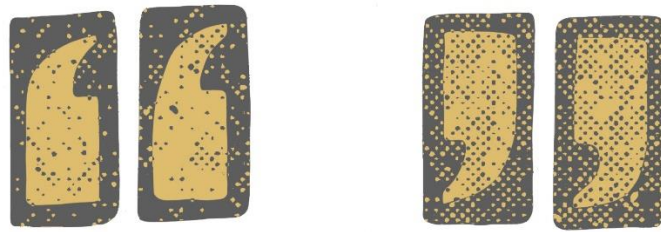
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